

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Makeover of a Thank You Letter

By **Rachel Muir, CFRE**



Does your donor ‘thank you’ need a makeover?



According to Penelope Burk’s annual donor survey, 90% of donors say that the thank you letter is the single most important and influential communication they ever receive from the nonprofits they support. In research conducted by Professor Adrian Sargent, donors have a higher recall of the thank you letter than the appeal that generated the gift.

How does your thank you letter stack up? This quick guide to [the dos and don’ts of writing thank yous donors will cherish](#) can help.

The world of nonprofit communications is littered with boring, bland, utterly beige thank-you letters void of any emotion. Reading them is as exciting as watching paint dry.

They often commit these mistakes:

- Starting with the words “Thank you”
- Sounding like a robot instead of being warm and personable
- Using jargon, acronyms, or statistics
- Being void of emotion and immersive storytelling
- Bragging about the role/work of the nonprofit and portraying the donor as the middleman who makes it possible
- Only thanking the donor for their gift—not reflecting back to the donor the kind of generous person they are

On the following page is an example of a Habitat for Humanity thank you letter committing many of these mistakes.



Thank you letter

BEFORE MAKEOVER

Only thanking the donor for their gift—not reflecting back to the donor the kind of generous person they are

7/2/2023

Julie Jones
5678 Liberty Lane
Dallas, Texas 75001

Starting with the words “Thank you”

Dear Julie,

Thank you for your very generous gift of \$500 received on July 2nd, 2023. We consider it a privilege to be able to evolve to meet the growing needs of our community. We look forward to continuing to utilize affordable housing solutions to help empower those we serve. We are so thankful for your continued support of Habitat Crater Island.

Bragging about the role/work of the nonprofit and portraying the donor as the middleman who makes it possible

This year we continue to provide much needed services to families through new construction, transitional housing and critical home repairs. Having a decent affordable place to live is a critical part of helping families to build a better future. In turn these families then help create a more stable community. We are committed to continuing to serve the growing housing needs in Crater Island.

“The rung of a ladder was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold a man’s foot long enough to enable him to put the other somewhat higher.”

-Thomas Huxley

Being void of emotion and immersive storytelling

We are able to serve families because of the support of donors like you. Thank you for investing in the future of Crater Island through Habitat and for being the rung on a ladder for the families we assist.

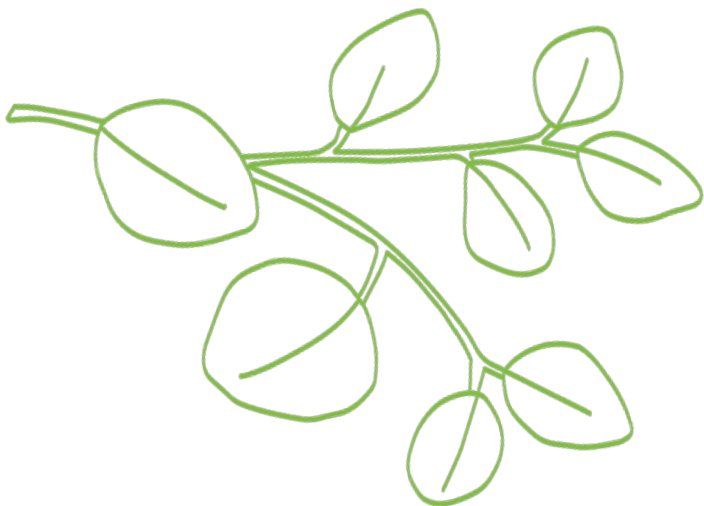
In Habitat Partnership,

Jane Doe
Executive Director

Habitat for Humanity Crater Island is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit, tax-exempt organization, Federal Tax ID #12-3456789. No goods or services were provided in return for this donation. Please keep this written acknowledgment of your donation for your personal records.

What's wrong with this thank you letter?

- When you run this thank you letter through [Bloomerang's free communications audit tool](#) it reveals that "we" words are used nine times and "you" words only seven times. Ideally, you should use twice as many "you" words as "we" words
- Lacks emotion
- Void of any storytelling of who the donor helped
- Very organizational-centric; this letter literally starts three sentences off with the word "We"
- For example, "**We** consider it a privilege to be able to evolve to meet the growing needs of our community **We** look forward to continuing to utilize affordable housing solutions to help empower those we serve **We** are committed to continuing to serve the growing housing needs in Crater Island"
- Doesn't set any expectations of when the donor will hear from them next
- The organization takes credit for doing the work, and the donor is just the middleman who funds it
- Lacks any invitation to get more involved
- Small font
- No photo of the person helped



Thank you letter

AFTER MAKEOVER



How could this letter look if it was rewritten?

Opens with immersive storytelling that puts the donor in the middle of a client's daily life and struggles

Dear Julie,

→ One day everything was fine for Odessa. She had a life, a plan, a house, and a loving husband.

The next day she was a widow with no income and no home.

Odessa was able to rent a single room in a home but wasn't allowed to use the kitchen and had to cook all her meals in a microwave in her bedroom and vacate her room if her landlord had guests.

Thanks to you, today she has a home of her own!

Includes a photo of a client smiling and looking directly at the camera

Because of your kind heart, families all over Crater Island are finding homes and hope.

Your kindness and support are giving Odessa financial literacy classes helping her build her future.



Gives the donor the credit for the client's transformation

→ Because of you, home ownership is finally within her grasp!

On behalf of Odessa and the families we serve in Crater Island, we thank you for your generous donation of \$500 we received on July 10, 2023.

Your gift is transforming lives. We look forward to keeping you updated on all the ways you are making a difference through our monthly newsletter.

Leverages the PS with a special invite

Thank you for building homes, and hope for Odessa. We couldn't do it without you!

→ P.S. Please call me at (214) 459-222 if you'd like to stop by a build to meet other amazing clients and volunteers just like Odessa and see your donation at work!

For the love of families,

Jane Doe
Executive Director

The rewrite uses "you" words 10 times and "we" words just four times

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What was changed in the rewrite?

It now opens with immersive storytelling that puts the donor in the middle of a client's daily life and struggles. It includes a photo of a client smiling and looking directly at the camera. It gives the donor the credit for the client's transformation. When run through the [Bloomerang free communications audit tool](#), the rewrite uses "you" words 10 times and "we" words just four times. The importance of expressing genuine heartfelt gratitude in a thank-you letter cannot be underscored enough. Finally, it leverages the PS with a special invite and mention of when the donor will hear from the organization next.

Want more help making sure your communication pieces delight your donor? Bookmark the [Bloomerang communications audit tool](#) and download [the dos and don'ts of writing thank you's donors will cherish](#).



About the author



Rachel Muir, CFRE

Rachel has worked every side of the Rubik’s cube that is the nonprofit sector. When she was 26 Rachel Muir launched Girlstart, a non-profit empowering girls in math, science, engineering and technology in the living room of her apartment with \$500 and a credit card. Several years later she had raised over 10 million and was featured on Oprah, CNN, and the Today show. Today Rachel delivers workshops and offers a monthly membership, [League of Extraordinary Fundraisers](#), transforming people into confident, successful fundraisers. Learn more about Rachel at www.rachelmuir.com.

Create a world inspired by giving



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Donor Management

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