

THE UPSIDE FOR PLANNED GIVING IN A PANDEMIC AND BEYOND

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THE REMINDERS OF VULNERABILITY AND DEATH DURING THE PANDEMIC ARE UBIQUITOUS

Media coverage of the pandemic has been non-stop, and this has at times been combined with violent imagery of social upheaval highlighting the chaos spawned by both protests and the responses to them.

GETTING PEOPLE TO PLAN THEIR ESTATE IS (TRADITIONALLY) HARD

- It takes time.
- It costs money.
- But also importantly, people don't like to think about dying.
- Now everyone (except those who believe the pandemic is a hoax) has been forced to contemplate death for over a year.
- 1 in 3 Americans has lost a loved one to Covid-19

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED PLANNED GIVING

Planned Gift Officers were timid about asking at the beginning of the pandemic.

Feared looking opportunistic or insensitive.

Early email campaigns experienced backlash from a vocal minority.

Normal donor interaction was severely disrupted.

MORTALITY SALIENCE

- What is it? A measure of a person's awareness that they **will** die.
- Not a scale from zero to ten.
- Young people are not mortality salient (they think they are invincible).
- Scientists speak more in terms of increased or induced mortality salience.
- COVID-19 is the largest mortality salience inducing event of our lifetime.
- At this point almost everyone in the population knows someone who has been hospitalized or has passed away.

PEOPLE ARE MORE AWARE OF DEATH



What does it mean for estate planning?



Obviously, a lot more estate planning.



Online estate planning is way up, and estate planning attorneys are running against capacity as well.

HEALTH RESPONSES TO MORTALITY SALIENCE

- Health conducive behavior
 - Masks
 - Social Distancing
 - Sanitizing
 - Staying in
- Avoidance
 - Refusal to wear mask
 - Denial that pandemic exists
 - Refusal to social distance
 - Business as usual

TERROR MANAGEMENT THEORY

- Proposes that all humans subscribe to some form of cultural worldview, a system of thoughts and beliefs that provide the world and our lives with a lasting sense of meaning.
- Cultural worldviews buffer us from fearful preoccupation with our own impermanence, vulnerability, and mortality.
- The pandemic has made it far more difficult for us to manage the terror of death

MORTALITY SALIENCE IS HEIGHTENED, TERROR MANAGEMENT RESPONDS

NEGATIVE EFFECTS

- Increases in anti-social behavior
- Increased anxiety and pathological responses to threats
- Increased substance abuse
- Poor diet and exercise regimens
- Denial of the threat
- Polarization of political positions
- Increased prejudices

POSITIVE EFFECTS

- Increases in pro-social behavior
- Volunteerism is up
- Donations to charities are up
- People are enhancing their close personal relationships
- People adapt to the new normal and thrive

POSITIVE IMPACTS OF TERROR MANAGEMENT

“The awareness of mortality can motivate people to enhance their physical health and prioritize growth-oriented goals; live up to positive standards and beliefs; build supportive relationships and encourage the development of peaceful, **charitable communities..**”

People generally run from thoughts of death, but when forced to consider death, once that instinct has passed, they start to think about the world after they are gone, their families, and their **legacies**.

WHEN DEATH IS
GOOD FOR LIFE:
CONSIDERING THE
POSITIVE
TRAJECTORIES OF
TERROR
MANAGEMENT
THEORY; JUHL, VAIL,
ARNDT,
VESS, ROUTLEDGE,
RUTJENS, 2012

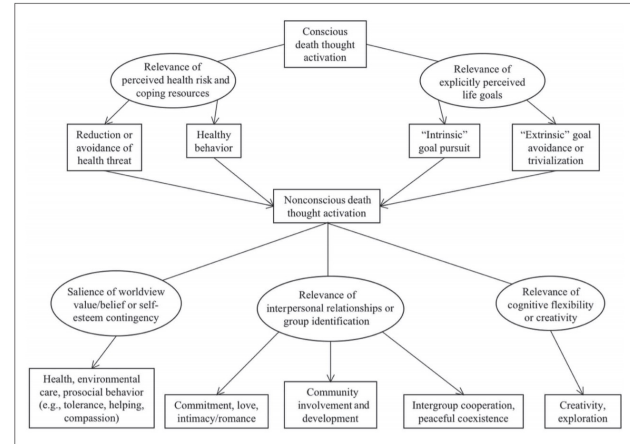



Figure 1. A preliminary, heuristic model of positive terror management.

CAN INCREASED MORTALITY SALIENCE LEAD TO AN INCREASE IN PLANNED GIVING?

Of course. It already has. Attorneys, organizations, and online platforms are all reporting large increases in new bequests since the pandemic started. The true impact has yet to be recorded, but all signs point to 2020 being a banner year for planned giving.



PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO DONATE WHEN REMINDED OF THEIR OWN MORTALITY

- University of British Columbia Sauder School of Business Study published July 2020, Authors Katherine White, Darren Dahl, Lea Dunn.
- Research done before the pandemic.
- How do people respond to request for a donation after inducing mortality salience.

STUDY 1
MORTALITY
SALIENCE
AND REAL
DONATION
BEHAVIOR

- Tested whether under conditions where self-transcendence is possible (such as when the item is connected to the self), mortality salience will lead to increased donation compared to a non-mortality salience condition
- Demonstrates that mortality salience leads to increased actual donations of owned products (i.e., books), but only when the possession is linked to the self via the act of signing the book

PEOPLE IN THE STUDY 1 WERE ASKED TO BRING A BOOK

Group 1

- Asked to consider a typical day in their own life

Group 2

- Asked to contemplate their own death
- This group was 30% more likely to donate their book to charity when offered the chance to write an inscription and sign it.

STUDY 2 MORTALITY SALIENCE AND A DESIRE FOR TRANSCENDENCE

- Posits that with mortality salience we should see that consumers will be more likely to connect the self to the possession by choosing to donate with an inscription.
- Given the option to write in (or not) a personal belonging they were giving to charity, those with the mortality salience condition were much more likely to write and inscription.

STUDY 3 MORTALITY SALIENCE DONATION INTENTION

- Tested whether donation of an item connected to the self was more likely to be donated under a mortality salience condition
- When mortality salience is activated, a person is much more likely to donate an item that is connected to the self, AND mortality salience may have activated a desire for transcendence, which once satiated, resulted in greater perceived transcendence

FOLLOW UP STUDY ON MONETARY DONATIONS

The scientists tested whether one's monetary donation would lead to the identification of the donor's name in a public, permanent place, such that transcendence might be possible via a somewhat lasting connection to one's name.

When the donation resulted in the inclusion of one's name in a public space (vs. no inclusion of name), monetary donations increased under when mortality salience was induced. Thus, transcendence seems to be able to spur monetary donations.

PROFESSOR
KATHERINE WHITE

*“More people are thinking about the idea of symbolic immortality
and where possessions will go when they pass on.”*

*“Anything you can do to connect the self to something that’s more lasting
will help, it could be something like a plaque or a mural or a somewhat
permanently displayed list of donors”*

PROFESSOR
DARREN DAHL

*“For many people, that mortality salience is much higher right now, for better
or worse. People are just much more aware of how fragile life can be.”*

*If a possession is somehow linked to your identity and you pass it on
to others, it could have the ability to **transcend** the self.*

APPLICATION

Organizations should emphasize a connection to something that lives on past the life of the donor.

Legacy society inclusion should be highlighted and encouraged.

Examples of planned gifts that have materialized and been used in positive ways for the organization should be shared with potential donors now more than ever.

HOW LONG WILL THESE EFFECTS LAST

- We are still a long way from back to normal, and there is risk of resurgence.
- But these effects last much longer. The psychological effect on individuals is not dissimilar to war. The trauma doesn't magically disappear when it is over.
- Planned giving as an industry should benefit for many years to come.

HOW TO USE THIS TO IMPROVE YOUR WORK

AN ACTION PLAN FOR PLANNED GIVING PROFESSIONALS

Leverage the insights uncovered in this paper to activate your donor community.



1.

Don't shy away from making the ask.

Update messaging to include appeals to leaving a legacy and making a lasting impact both now and in the future. People are thinking about it already. Don't be afraid to ask.

2.

Spotlight donors.

Identify inspirational and relatable donors in your legacy program. Tell their stories in your literature.

3.

Showcase impact.

Tell the stories of specific instances where tangible results and palpable impact were achieved, in terms of people in need or societal wins.

4.

Provide tangible totems.

Etch the donor's name in stone, or something similar. Investments such as names on plaques, bricks, murals, or, at the very least, on an online legacy program page, can aid in a person's sense of transference beyond their lifetime.

5.

Make it easy. Provide ways for donors to leave your organization in their estate plan.

Q&A

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ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

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Thank you!

