

Background Information

United Way and other nonprofit organizations are facing a generosity crisis in America. According to Dietz and Grimm (2023), donations from individuals dropped by more than 10% after inflation and that has led to one of the steepest declines in contributions in recent decades. The percentage of people donating to charity has declined steadily since the early 2000s. With nonprofits facing funding issues, they are having to find different strategies to make budget. Each United Way is a separate 501(c)(3) with their own governing board of directors made up of local community members who volunteer their time. Each United Way area office is part of a larger global network led by United Way Worldwide. The President and CEO of United Way Worldwide has the responsibility of providing support and guidance to the area offices. This allows local United Way offices to meet the needs of their local community while receiving support for a larger organization.

Leadership Theory and Styles

Transformational leadership is a style that inspires followers into action by appealing to their moral values (Yukl & Gardner, 2020, p. 215). Throughout the speech I call on the area offices to remember the mission of meeting the needs of our communities. This is intended to motivate the area offices to analyze their strategies of raising money and to challenge them to think of creative ways to fundraise.

According to Bass & Avilo (1994), there are four dimensions to transformational leadership. The first is **individualized consideration**. Erdurmazli (2024), defines individualized consideration as the interest in followers' concerns and the desire help them overcome their challenges. This is observed in the speech when I reiterate that United Way Worldwide is here to help the area offices strategize ways to grow funding. The second is **idealized influence** (Bass & Avilo, 1994) or becoming a role model for the constituents. To become a role model you must display admirable behaviors that followers aspire to emulate. In the speech, I display vulnerability and validate the feelings of uncertainty while also expressing my confidence in the team's abilities to meet fundraising goals. This balance of honesty and encouragement are imperative to building trust. Erdurmazli (2024), defines **inspirational motivation** as the way in which leaders put forward attractive and inspiring visions. I reiterate United Way's vision of

creating a world where everyone in the community is thriving. The final dimension to transformational leadership is **intellectual stimulation** which is the capacity to take risks and ask for subordinates' ideas for novel solutions (Erdurmazli, 2024). This is evident in the request for feedback via the survey and the ability to engage in a message board for solutions.

In addition to transformational leadership, the speech also reflects psychological empowerment or empowering leadership. Yukl and Gardner (2020) list that the four defining elements of psychological empowerment are meaning, self-determination, self-efficacy, and impact (p. 98).

Revisiting the mission and the data around the helpline requests gives members **meaning** to their work. I provide **impact** by reporting the 100 million meals that were delivered due to the partnership with Door Dash. According to Richard and Edward (2025), the first step to creating **self-determination** or motivation is to support the three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Allowing area offices to strategize how they will raise funds fosters autonomy over their processes. To reinforce competence with the area offices, I restate my confidence in them to meet the needs of their communities. Finally, I display relatedness by conveying that the area offices are not alone to solve this problem.

According to Bandura, the four main sources of **self-efficacy** are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Lopez-Garrido, 2025). I highlight mastery experiences when I say "I have watched you go out of your way to pursue grants and to ask our investors tough questions." I use verbal persuasion when I say "Our vision is a world where every person in every community is thriving. I truly appreciate your efforts to continue to support our communities." And finally I use emotional arousal when I validate the feelings of anxiety and mention that we are going through these "turbulent times". I mold those negative emotions when I mention that the "At United Way our mission is to meet the needs of our community, and I am fortunate to be able to witness you all doing this at your area offices."

In conclusion, empowering leadership encourages psychological empowerment within the team. I do this by cultivating a sense of meaning and impact within the speech. I foster self-determination and self-efficacy to help area offices feel empowered to solve problems. I used transformational leadership to help the team remember the mission and inspire them to make the necessary changes. and psychological empowerment to lead the members of United Way Worldwide towards a culture of fostering impactful relationships and fundraising.

Script

Hello United Way Change Makers,

My name is Kristi Kelley, and I am honored to be the CEO of United Way Worldwide. I am thankful you are taking the time today to hear this vital message.

We are currently experiencing a donor crisis in North America and many of our area offices are struggling to stay afloat. I have had critical conversations with several of you, and I understand the hesitation and anxiety that you all may be feeling regarding our funds. Some private investors are holding onto their money due to the uncertainty around the economy and the impending tariff situation. You are not alone during these turbulent times.

At United Way our mission is to meet the needs of our community, and I am fortunate to be able to witness you all doing this at your area offices. I have watched you go out of your way to pursue grants and to ask our investors tough questions. I truly appreciate your efforts to continue to support our communities.

Our private investors may feel hesitant to donate but their support is needed now more than ever. While they may feel the fear of giving at the moment, we must show them that the community has an even bigger need for support. We had 16.8 million 211 Helpline requests in 2024. This amounted to 32 calls, texts, or chats per minute. I predict that number to rise even more as the economy continues to slow its growth. We can help investors answer the call to action. Based on the input from the surveys in Quarter 1 and the conversations with targeted focus groups, we have seen the need for more marketing resources to support your funding strategies. We plan to help by investing in marketing campaigns and providing content for you to help get our message into the right hands.

You know your local investors and your community. You have created strong relationships with your stakeholders. What works for United Way of New York, may not be what works for United Way of Los Angeles. I am confident that you will be able to grow your funding.

Our vision is a world where every person in every community is thriving, and this is even more critical today.

Last year we had 2.5 million referrals for food assistance, and with a strategic partnership with Door Dash, we were able to provide 100 million meals for people in need. This is due to your commitment to help the community and dedication to the local door dash partnerships that you foster.

We've heard from focus groups that many area offices feel disconnected from the larger strategy, and we want to change that. We've created a conversation board where you can post the strategies that have worked well for your team, so we can learn from each other and build on what's already working.

We will be sending out our Quarter 3 survey to continue to gather feedback on how we can improve our support. In mid-August, we'll review the feedback and work with the strategy committee to continue to guide the next steps.

Please let me reiterate that you are not alone. Just like you meet the needs of your community, we strive to meet the needs of our area offices. United is the way we create lasting change.

Thank you

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