



Coaching for Nonprofit Leaders: Investing in your Organization's Biggest Asset

Communities depend on nonprofits to bring about social and environmental justice, improve our quality of life, and provide for those in need. Leading the organizations tasked with such important responsibilities is a major challenge, requiring great skill and immense capacity for learning and change. Nonprofit Leadership Coaching is a relatively new but proven strategy for increasing nonprofit executives' leadership skills, encouraging ongoing learning, and promoting organizational sustainability.

Coaching works at a deeper level than consulting or training by focusing on leaders' capacity to meet the competing demands of setting and maintaining vision, managing staff, working with the board, fundraising and fiscal management. Each coaching relationship is designed to help a leader address those issues most important to him or her.

Coaching helps leaders to be more strategic and reflective, moving their organizations to function from a sense of possibility and power, which leads to more effective leaders and healthier communities.

Coaching can help leaders find enduring solutions to significant challenges in the Social Sector including:

- **Burnout:** retain your passion and commitment and get the support and perspective you need and deserve
- **Board-staff relationships:** get clarity about roles and relationships, function as a team, and enjoy board meetings again
- **Vision:** remember why you committed to your mission and continue to inspire staff, volunteers and donors.
- **Staff turnover:** retain your top staff and hire the best people for the job
- **Staff/board development:** **Consciously work to** develop new leaders' management skills.
- **Funding:** **enhance the organization's fundraising capacity and financial stability**

What is Coaching for Nonprofit Leaders?

Coaching is a professional partnership that provides leaders with structure and support for learning, visioning, goal-setting and accountability for greater success in meeting your organization's mission. Similar to coaching Olympic athletes, a coach challenges and supports leaders to achieve higher levels of performance by expanding their capacity to take effective action. Coaching usually happens in 30-60 minute sessions, either in person or over the phone, several times per month.

Coaches create a process of inquiry and support leaders in determining their own solutions. They provide tools and ask strategic questions that focus on the "process" with which you approach your life and work, moving you toward long-term change and perspective. Some coaches will also have "content" expertise and can help their clients strategize and provide resources for very specific issues (for example, fundraising expertise).

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Coaching for nonprofit leaders is a proven strategy:

Nonprofits and Foundations with a commitment to excellence and lasting impact benefit greatly from coaching, as demonstrated in CompassPoint Nonprofit Services' report on the results of Executive Coaching in the San Francisco Bay Area. A longitudinal evaluation by Harder + Company studied 25 executive directors who worked one-on-one with executive coaches, and reported significant improvement in four key areas:

Leadership

- Increased confidence in exercising leadership
- Improved ability to connect with the organization's vision
- Increased confidence in leading the organization toward fulfilling the vision

Management

- Increased task completion and productivity
- Improved personnel management skills
- Better relationships with staff and Board of Directors (e.g., communication skills)

Organizational Impact, with marked improvement in:

- Organization's fundraising capacity & financial stability
- Organizational effectiveness including communication & teamwork

Impact on ED Job Satisfaction, Tenure & Turnover

- Coaching helped reduce stress and burnout
- Overall job satisfaction increased
- Level of dedication to working in Social Sector re-affirmed

A 2006 study commissioned by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations found that supporting and funding coaching for nonprofit leaders is an effective and underutilized strategy for strengthening the capacity of nonprofits to meet their missions.

Philanthropic Support for Coaching in the Social Sector

Based in part on these ground-breaking studies, as well as the proven success of coaching in the corporate world, the Kellogg Foundation recently granted \$500,000 for the Coaching and Philanthropy Project, which has also received funding from the David and Lucile Packard and James Irvine Foundations. CompassPoint is managing the project. Grantmakers for Effective Organizations funded a research project and report - Coaching as a Tool for Building Leadership and Effective Organizations in the Nonprofit Sector. Researchers found that 42% of foundations surveyed provide their grantees funds for coaching, and 71% of foundations surveyed described themselves as either "interested" or "very interested" in learning more about coaching. Given that one of the goals for the Coaching and Philanthropy Project is to help foundations understand how coaching fits as a strategy for leadership development and organizational effectiveness, there is good reason to expect that support for leadership coaching will increase greatly in the coming years.

For more information on Coaching for Nonprofit Leaders in the Seattle Area, please contact Executive Service Corps of Washington's coaching program at www.escwa.org, Jill Sheldon at www.openroadcoaching.com and Angela Powell at www.imagodesign.net.