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A unique mix of recent events has led me to think more about nonprofits and their various **states of readiness** when faced with important changes. Whether the decision is to retire, dissolve a nonprofit or provide services across state lines, timing may indeed be everything. Too often, partnership explorations represent extreme points on the readiness continuum - excellence or the complete absence of preparation and logic. As I wrote last summer, if one partner is vibrant and another is imploding, success is unlikely. This newsletter addresses some of the factors that go into creating a "ready" environment for aligning more closely with another human services organization.

Readiness - What Is It?

A nonprofit is in a **state of readiness** when it is prepared to respond to mission-enhancing opportunities with immediate action. It is ready when it shows evidence of solid, healthy systems and can respond promptly and thoroughly to demands. The organization must retain the dexterity to commit adequate resources to whatever endeavor it undertakes.

At a deeper level, assessing readiness can lead to a more realistic view of a group's developmental level. An organization that is operating in one of the earlier stages of development may not be a strong partner at this time. For example, it may first need to focus on performance evaluation or board development before initiating conversations with other leaders.

Mission Consistency

Services should reflect mission, a statement that seems to require no comment. But in recent years especially, it has been tempting to seek new dollars, some of which have nothing to do with core services. If program decisions are not coherent with the mission, they may result in staff hires of short duration, fuzzy outcomes or heightened client expectations that cannot be met. Lacking effective service delivery, the organization is probably not focused enough to effectively partner.

Strategic Plan

A strategic plan is black and white evidence of aspirations, direction and accountability, a snapshot of what the organization has to work with and where it is going next. A thoughtful potential partner would expect to review the plan early in discussions. In the absence of such a document, an organization's commitment to serious planning might be questioned. While some cultural issues are harder to measure, this is an instant check mark on the readiness list.

Succession Plan

Another concrete check mark relates to succession. A succession plan, covering all key positions, serves as an insurance policy. Last fall, when a dear CEO friend died suddenly, the agency continued to operate effectively because it had planned well for emergencies. This type of document reflects the kind of mature organizational thinking that makes partnership discussions more promising.

Board Engagement

Board engagement is another sign of organizational health and readiness. Too often, board members are just going through the motions because they have not been properly oriented or lack meaningful tasks. I've had the joy of working with some phenomenal board members in recent years and they share one overriding quality: they are emotionally present and engaged. A partner will compare bylaws and other evidence of your board development processes. For example, the absence of term limits may result in stale perspectives around the table.

Good Systems

Is your infrastructure in shape? If you know it is not, identify the areas for improvement and create written plans for addressing the concerns. The value of good administrative and compliance systems will be immediately clear during alliance discussions, especially if the other organization has strong ones. If policies and procedures are outdated or nonexistent, that readiness gap will concern any potential partner and may well be the issue that stops further discussions.

People

Hopefully, your staff and volunteers are prepared to support a partnership exploration. This begins with the director's willingness to delegate and follow through as people apply their skills. Readiness demands not just good people, but their placement in the right position. Recruitment, onboarding and evaluation strategies reflect how seriously a nonprofit values its key resource. When one organization thrives with a highly competent staff and the other tolerates an ineffective, unprepared workforce, a collaboration rarely moves forward.

Partnership Experience

Your history of working with other nonprofits is also a factor in measuring partnership readiness. If you worked informally with another agency or provided joint services, you have some sense of how attractive you are to other organizations. You also know how well you share during the process. With the funders requiring more and more collaboration, a group that has a bad reputation or has not joined with others at all is not an ideal candidate for a new partnership exploration. It also means that discussions may be frustrating for everyone concerned.

Culture and Wellness

Culture is the way an organization operates or wishes to operate; it serves as a reflection of beliefs. Many factors comprise nonprofit culture, including trust levels, values and perceptions, feelings, personalities and styles, power, rewards and punishments, and leadership and supervisory styles. Assessing this readiness factor requires intuition and observation in addition to any evaluation instruments that may be used. We know what it feels like to walk in the door of a good nonprofit and we know how upsetting and dispiriting it can be to enter a bad one. If the culture does not promote learning, professional behavior and high standards for client services, a healthier nonprofit will not be interested in pursuing joint endeavors.

Taken together, these readiness issues serve as a **guideline for improvement--getting to** a stronger position that encourages partnerships and affords creative options for clients.

Best wishes,



Workshop Announcement

Project Management Workshop

Marta's popular Successful Project Management workshop will be offered on
Tuesday, March 25th from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
at Interact for Health
3805 Edwards Road, Suite 500,
Cincinnati, OH 45209

This workshop will be offered again on September 16, 2014
Register online at [Workshop Registration](#)

Client Spotlight JVS Career Services

As most of you know, Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) combined its publicly funded programs with Easter Seals Work Resource Center to become Easter Seals Tri-State in mid-2012. At that time, JVS Career Services was formed to carry on the career search services that JVS has provided since 1940. Thanks to the heart and expertise of longtime leader Peter Bloch, an outstanding board and the professionalism of a dedicated, compassionate staff, more than 150 clients have found jobs earning wages totaling more than \$4.5 million over the past 18 months.

JVS Career Services is now poised to create an expanded presence as it prepares, connects and empowers clients in pursuing their career objectives. One of the organization's great strengths is its growing network of employers and career catalysts that assists job seekers in their searches. Networking volunteers share their time and inside connections to assist job seekers in accessing hidden job opportunities. JVS Career Services credits its volunteers for the many successes of its clients.

JVS Career Services is fortunate to have Kim Slaton as its Acting CEO. Kim has been with the organization for almost a decade providing career consultation to hundreds of job seekers. Along with her previous nonprofit management experience, she brings the drive, enthusiasm and skill sets for continued success.

As the recently retired Peter frequently says, "Onward and upward." Clearly this applies to JVS Career Services as it extends its reach into the Jewish community and beyond.

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