



Marta Brockmeyer, Ph.D. Project Pointers

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POISED FOR PARTNERSHIP



As many of you know, I tend to be an optimist who focuses on improvement and the power of groups to do good. But recent months have been a challenge in the midst of our disheartening political environment. Just when I thought I might not be able to dig out and return to my normal faith in the electorate, our civic poet appeared to save me.

The publication of *Born to Run*, Bruce Springsteen's transcendent memoir, could not have come at a better time. In startlingly honest and beautiful language, the author discusses not only his journey, but ours. He writes of the country's gifts and limitations as well as his own. I particularly recommend the book to my behavioral health colleagues because of his powerful descriptions of his depression and the therapy process. I was deeply moved by the musician's will to live a more fully realized life while inspiring others. As his chapters unfolded, the many parallels between Springsteen's strengths and the characteristics of our best human services professionals emerged.

TURNING POINT



Strength and Character

Walk down the halls of any effective human services agency and experience the qualities that make it sing. Board, staff, volunteers, leadership team, CEO...moving in the same direction as they implement a strategic plan to improve the lives of clients. They exhibit the same "can do" attitude that flows through the new book, including the following seven qualities:

1. Clarity and Focus

We live in a noisy, confusing world with many distractions and pleas for our attention. It can be easy for an organization to experience mission drift while trying to expand funding options and balancing way too many balls. And staff members may find clarity elusive some days. To help address this, the nonprofit's culture must include and value intentional thinking. This often means asking tough questions when departments or individuals are moving off course and understanding exactly who your clients are.

2. **Determination**

Even with limited infrastructures, staff shortages, or outdated IT equipment, the work goes on. You. Do. Not. Quit. Short setbacks are just that, as you plot new ways to address frustrations and deliver quality client services. This quality can be misinterpreted as stubbornness, but you know it is simply the realization of commitment.

3. **Willingness to Change**

Recording star or social worker, people tend to work within familiar patterns. Some of these habits and annual tasks should be repeated, of course. But an occasional reassessment can be energizing and promote the necessary changes that the employee and organization may need. Many of these changes are imposed, especially those attached to funding shifts, but longevity requires this type of nimble spirit. Related to this is one's ability to admit mistakes, change course and move on.

4. **Passion**

People typically pursue nonprofit careers because of a burning desire to help others. It is always sad to meet a nonprofit colleague who has little enthusiasm for her work. This may be caused by many personal and professional factors, but I always wonder how the lack of passion impacts the staff and clients. And, of course, wonder if the organization will support her continuation in the field. Agencies cannot thrive without passion, the lifeblood that drives the mission. The returns from human services work are rarely financial, but translating passion into reality brings its own rewards.

5. **Ability to Take Risks**

An organization's history of risk-taking serves as one measure of its health. At some point during most merger negotiations, this becomes the topic of discussion. I usually remind the group that they will never have the full universe of desired information and must simply make an informed leap of faith in terms of moving forward with another organization. This moment causes anxiety for some, but others are relieved to know that their thorough assessments and intuition are valid predictors. It is highly unlikely that any human services organization can sustain itself without this strength.

6. **Compassion**

One of the most moving aspects of *Born to Run* was reading about the author's innate compassion and how it shaped his leadership skills and approach to life. It certainly may be easier to rely on logic or convenience and turn off your emotions when supporting a client. But during a period of heightened accountability and regulations, compassion still drives your work and clients know when it is missing.

7. **Commitment to Lifelong Learning**

Our most strategic organizations tend to set and follow high standards for employment and retention. This commitment includes an adherence to credentialing and accreditation requirements. But these formal measures do not completely capture the heart of lifelong learning, the insatiable desire for knowledge that expands skills. This type of learning is driven by passion and the art of creating one's craft.

VIEWPOINT: IN MY EXPERIENCE



Thanks to those who submitted questions - here are a few recent ones:

Q. Why do we need voting guidelines if this is a collaborative effort?

A. I always hope and assume that groups exploring a partnership will move forward in a spirit of cooperation. Ideally, all decisions will be made by consensus -- and most are. However, inevitably, the moment arrives when a vote must be taken on some issue. At the first meeting, it is a good idea to agree to guidelines for what constitutes a quorum, who votes, the number of votes required to make a decision and any other factors that impact governance. These guidelines should be established before they are needed, not in the middle of a controversial discussion. I can safely say that I have never worked on any partnership project that did not benefit from this first step, although major decisions are rarely made without unanimity.



Q. Why is this taking so long?

A. This question arises with surprising frequency even though the conditions leading to it vary. It is not unusual for someone with corporate merger experience to feel frustrated by the pace of a nonprofit merger exploration. Even with a skilled facilitator who moves things along quickly, the *process requires time* and few shortcuts will appear. In some cases, one partner's board culture may not foster slower, in-depth planning conversations. But the main issue is the sheer complexity of what has to be gathered and analyzed, combined with a high level of attention given to staff feelings and equity for clients.

Q. Who manages all of the documents and other information?

A. A partnership exploration requires a dedicated administrative point person. Often, neither organization can spare a staff member. Or they do not have someone with the right personality and skill set. In these cases, the addition of an independent administrative services consultant can make a huge difference for participants who struggle to keep up with everything. If an internal person fills this dedicated role, it is essential that some regular duties are shifted elsewhere. I have seen merger groups flounder because a staff member could not manage the committee duties on top of regular administrative tasks.

Questions? Let me know and I'll include them (anonymously) in an upcoming newsletter.

TALKING POINTS



"Your work has been an important part of what we have been able to accomplish over the past few years. We are lucky to have you as a partner."

-- Foundation CEO

End Point

As an old English major, I am a sucker for active verbs and gorgeous writing. I am inspired even more by good people who join with others to create thundering change. Bruce Springsteen's memoir serves as a reminder that one person's voice, particularly in concert with others, can help shape our community and I encourage you to read it. I am sending my best wishes for a glorious autumn and "may your hope give us hope."



Thanks for all you do,

Marta

WORKSHOP REMINDER



Marta's popular Project Management Basics workshop will be offered in March and September in 2017. This workshop receives consistently high marks from participants.

Project Management Basics

March 21, 2017 and September 19, 2017
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. at Interact for Health
3805 Edwards Road, Suite 500
Cincinnati, OH 45209

[Course Outline](#)

WORKSHOP REGISTRATION

Workshops on Site

For convenience and increased participation, you may prefer an in-house workshop. When a larger number of employees share concepts, language and tools, projects move along more smoothly. In some cases, a series of customized follow-up activities complement the foundational workshop. Evaluations from recent on-site trainings have been enthusiastic. Please contact Marta for more information about in-house, customized training.



CAIN - Churches Active in Northside

Churches Active In Northside is an award winning, community-based nonprofit that provides nutritious food, crisis assistance, resources, and compassion in a way that respects human dignity and builds a more vibrant community. CAIN is an oasis in the Northside food desert, building community and extending compassionate care and hospitality for its most vulnerable neighbors in need of food, shelter and other essentials.

CAIN currently impacts the lives of over 500 households in the Northside neighborhood each month through three core ministries:

Rainbow Choice Food Pantry offers both day and evening hours to increase access to healthy, high-quality food for food-insecure families and to provide stabilization services.

Phil's Place is a free community weekly dinner that provides food, fosters a sense of belonging and builds community.

Grace Place offers temporary shelter to women and children. This summer, CAIN piloted a project with the Interfaith Hospitality Network to respond to the annual increase in family homelessness in the summer.

CAIN is also a vital community partner in the weekly Northside Farmers Market, the annual Fourth of July Festivities and Apple Street Market, a full service cooperative grocery store. CAIN is a model for churches working together across denominational lines and alongside businesses, community organizations, and other service providers. Soon the Annette Liebing Hospitality House, "Annette's Place," will become a permanent extension of services.

CAIN is actively seeking partners for its work. To learn more about CAIN, please visit their [website](#) or contact CAIN's Executive Director, MiMi Chamberlin by [email](#) or 513-591-2246, ext. 3.



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