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NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP

— THE FULCRUM POINT —

AN OPINION ARTICLE

The Greatest Asset of Any Organization Is Its People

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The Greatest Asset Is Already on Your Payroll

The Fulcrum Point – An Opinion Article

Nonprofit leaders spend enormous amounts of time thinking about strategy.

We develop strategic plans. We refine programs. We pursue funding. We invest in technology. We build brands. We measure outcomes. We worry about sustainability, growth, governance, facilities, and the countless other variables required to build a successful organization.

All of these things matter.

But none of them matter as much as the people doing the work.

The greatest asset of any nonprofit organization is its people. It is a simple truth, repeated so often that it risks becoming a cliché. Yet our actions frequently suggest that we have forgotten it.

A brilliant strategic plan cannot execute itself. A compelling mission cannot advance itself. Technology cannot create culture. Programs do not build relationships. Budgets do not inspire people. Organizations do not innovate, persevere, collaborate, solve problems, or care deeply about the people they serve.

People do.

And that means leadership must begin with a fundamental recognition: **our ability to accomplish the mission is directly connected to our ability to attract, develop, support, challenge, and retain great people.**

Too often, nonprofits reverse that equation.

We become so focused on the mission that we neglect the people responsible for advancing it. We ask employees to do more with less. We tolerate unhealthy



workloads because the work is important. We under-invest in professional development because resources are scarce. We postpone difficult personnel decisions. We allow talented people to operate without the tools, clarity, encouragement, or leadership they need to thrive.

Then we wonder why good people leave.

Mission does not excuse poor leadership.

In fact, mission should demand better leadership.

If we believe deeply in the importance of the work, then we should be equally serious about investing in the people entrusted with doing it.

That investment is not simply about compensation, although compensation matters. It means creating an environment where people understand what is expected of them, have opportunities to grow, receive meaningful feedback, are recognized for excellent work, have the resources necessary to succeed, and know their contributions matter.

It also means remembering that investing in people is not separate from investing in programs.

People are the program.

Every donor relationship, every client interaction, every innovative idea, every partnership, every successful event, every compelling story, every operational improvement, and every breakthrough begins somewhere with a human being.

Strategy tells us where we are going.

Programs translate mission into action.



But people make both possible.

The strongest nonprofit leaders understand this and treat talent as a strategic priority rather than an administrative function. They develop people before they desperately need someone to step into a larger role. They build leadership capacity throughout the organization. They create cultures where talented people want to stay, contribute, grow, and lead.

They also recognize something even more important.

People are not merely resources to be deployed in pursuit of the mission. They are human beings whose talents, ambitions, ideas, experiences, and potential deserve thoughtful stewardship.

Leadership is therefore not simply about getting more from people. It is about helping people become more.

Imagine what would happen if every nonprofit leader looked at their organization tomorrow and asked a different set of questions:

Are our people stronger because they work here?

Are we developing them as intentionally as we develop our programs?

Are we investing in talent with the same seriousness that we invest in strategy?

Are we creating an organization where exceptional people can do exceptional work?

And if our best people walked out the door tomorrow, how much of our strategy would walk out with them?



Buildings can be replaced. Technology can be upgraded. Strategic plans can be rewritten. Programs can be redesigned.

Exceptional people are much harder to replace.

So before we search for the next strategy, initiative, technology, or program that will transform our organizations, perhaps we should recognize the transformative asset already sitting around our tables.

Our people.

Take care of them. Challenge them. Develop them. Listen to them. Invest in them. Give them opportunities to lead.

Because when we strengthen our people, we strengthen everything else.

The mission may be why the organization exists. But people are how the mission moves forward.

For more information about Fulcrum Nonprofit Leadership, please visit our website at www.fulcrumleader.com or reach out to us directly via email at hello@fulcrumleader.com.