

JOAN GARRY'S

GUIDE TO

Nonprofit Leadership



JOAN GARRY

WILEY

Cover photographs: (Front/Author) Joseph Moran [www.josephmoran.com]
Cover design: Wiley

Copyright © 2017 by Joan Garry. All rights reserved.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.
Published simultaneously in Canada.

Chapter cartoons by Abstract Edge, www.abstractedge.com.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 646-8600, or on the web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at www.wiley.com/go/permissions.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for damages arising therefrom.

For general information about our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

ISBN 9781119293064 (cloth); ISBN 9781119293095 (ePDF);
9781119293101 (ePub)

Printed in the United States of America.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction xiii

**Chapter 1 The Superpowers of Nonprofit
Leadership 1**

A Quiz 3

You're Not on Top of Anything 7

Power and Authority 8

What Do I *Do* with All This? 11

So What Was This Quiz Really About? 16

The Five Key Superpowers 16

The *Real* Power of Leadership 22

Chapter 2 You've Got to Get Me at Hello 25

- Tell Me About Your Organization 29
- In the Lobby—The Mission Statement 29
- In the Elevator—The Pitch 31
- Step Off the Elevator and Work the Room 33
- Doin' What Does Not Come Naturally 33
- Two More Examples for Emphasis 39
- Practice, Kid, Practice 41

Chapter 3 Co-Pilots in a Twin-Engine Plane 43

- The Ideal Board Chair Profile 46
- Recruiting the Ideal Board Chair 47
- The Five-Star Board Chair Checklist 48
- The Telltale Signs of Wrong 51
- Playing the Hand You Are Dealt 52
- Get It Right from the Start 53
- The Partnership in Action: The Devil Is in the
Details 55
- Holding the Board Accountable 64
- Here's What They Signed Up For 65
- Put It All Together and What Have
You Got? 66

Chapter 4 The Key Is Not in the Answers. It's in the Questions 69

- The Power of Deleting a Word 69
- The Power of Inquiry 71
- We're All in This Together 73
- Start at the Very Beginning 75
- A Mission Sniff Test 77
- What Success Looks Like 79
- Big Dreams, Big Challenges, and Small (No)
Budget 84
- Ten Final Words of Advice—Keep Them Handy 86

Chapter 5 You Can Do This 89

- I Just Can't 92
- Fundraising Is "Terrifying?" 93
- My Friends Will Be Mad at ME 93
- Yes You Can 94

Yes, You Will Screw It Up	97
Case Study: Girl Scouts and Those Damned Thin Mints	99
How Can the Board Take the Lead on Fundraising?	106
Building a Culture of Fundraising in Your Organization	109
Saving the Most Important Lesson for Last	111

Chapter 6 Managing the Paid and the Unpaid (Or, I Came to Change the World, Not Conduct Evaluations) 117

Managing in 3-D	119
Having a Voice in Decision Making	121
Ownership of the Work	125
The Missing Piece: Clearly Defined Roles and Goals	128
And What About the Not-Paid?	131
The Clash of the Type A's	133
Group, Team, or Family	136
Retreats Are Nonnegotiable	140
My Retreat Recipe	141
Keeping the Keepers on the Bus	146
Supervising and Evaluating the Executive Director	147
Two Things Everyone in Your Organization Wants	149

Chapter 7 When It Hits the Fan 151

How Are We Defining <i>Crisis</i> ?	155
When the Light at the End of the Tunnel Is an Oncoming Train	156
Building a Crisis Management Plan	158
So Now You Are All Set for When It Hits the Fan, Right?	161
Is a Crisis Preventable?	164
What Crisis Management Should Look Like	166
The Most Common Nonprofit Crisis: Financial Crisis and Layoffs	168
The Main Thing	172

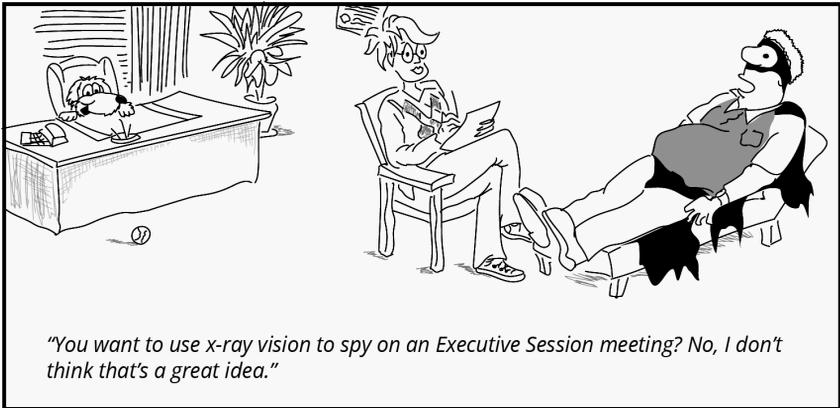
Chapter 8 Hello, I Must Be Going (Or Navigating Leadership Transitions) 177

- Scenario Number One 179
- Scenario Number Two 180
- So Are These Folks Good at Their Jobs? 181
- Board Leadership Gone Awry 185
- The Autocrat 186
- Board Chair on Steroids 188
- The Weakest Link 189
- Staff Leaders Who Aren't Leading 191
- The Five-Alarm Blaze 193
- Toast 196
- The Founder (The One Who Sticks Around Too Long) 197
- The Five-Star Staff Leader Who Calls It Quits 199
- The On-Deck Circle 204

Chapter 9 You Are the Champions 207

Bibliography 213

Index 217



Chapter 1 The Superpowers of Nonprofit Leadership

Dear Joan:

I've been with my organization for nearly eight years, most recently in a development role. My predecessor has been the voice and face of the organization for nearly 25 years and has just retired. The board has offered me the E.D. position.

This would be alien territory for me. I've been the relationship guy and I keep the trains running on time.

And the truth is I'm not exactly sure what I would be getting into. I want to give this a go but I think I need help and would like to retain you as a coach.

My goal is simple: I want to learn to behave like an executive director.

Signed,
E.D. "E.T."

“To behave like an executive director.” A very good goal for an executive director, I might add.

E.T. became a client and we teased out exactly what he meant by this.

To be a leader and not a department head. To worry about the whole organization and every stakeholder. To stare at cash flow and wonder about payroll. To take responsibility for partnering with the board so that its members can fulfill their obligations. To stand up at a gala and give an inspiring and motivating speech. To feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility for the communities you serve.

It's a hard role and a hard role to cast for. I am currently working with a board that cannot agree on the role the executive director should play (and they are already interviewing candidates!). (Can *you* say, “Cart before the horse”?)

Who should a board be looking for? What matters? In small organizations, the staff leader really *does* do it all. A person who can inspire a group with her words *and* read a balance sheet? What skills and attributes matter? Do you have them? How do you cultivate them?

And the decision is so important. In my experience, leadership transitions are *the* most destabilizing forces in a nonprofit organization. Try raising money when you are between executive directors. 'Nuff said.

What's interesting is that all these same issues and questions apply to board chairs as well. What should an organization be looking for in a board chair? (Note: the correct answer is *not* “Pray that someone raises her hand and pick her.”) How might the skills and attributes of that person complement those of the staff leader? What skills and attributes matter? How do you cultivate them?

A QUIZ

Before I give you the answer to these questions, let's try a little quiz. Are you currently a nonprofit E.D., overwhelmed by the idea that you need to be all things to all people? A board chair enthusiastic about leading the board to support the staff? Or someone who aspires to change the world and make the for-profit to nonprofit leap?

The quiz should put things into perspective and begin to reveal the superpowers.

So riddle me this, Batman and -women, it's time to pick your next board chair or executive director. Here are the finalists:

- Superman
- Spiderman
- Gumby
- Kermit the Frog

Let's dissect this, shall we? (Oh, apologies to Kermit—not a good word for frogs.)

Each of these four have amazing strengths. Perhaps at first blush, you figure any of them could be a five-star nonprofit leader.

Superman?

This guy has some serious things going for him:

- Sometimes organizations just want someone to swoop in and save the day.
- He's dripping with integrity and tells the truth.
- He is very smart.
- Would you say, "No" to him if he asked you for a donation?
- He has a fabulous outfit (I hear capes might be coming back).

Spiderman?

Lots of appeal here, too. He's human, powerful, and nerdy. He's vulnerable but strong. Some comic book fanatics say he is the single greatest superhero of them all.

- He has real humanity—vulnerabilities, guilt, and flaws.
- He's driven. Peter Parker, the man behind Spiderman, helps people because he understands the price of not doing it—he could have prevented his uncle's death.
- He grows into his power. The responsibility of leadership is not something he asks for but he accepts it and uses that responsibility to the best of his ability.

Gumby?

One of my senior staff members gave me a small Gumby figure I have right here on my desk. When I look at him, I am reminded that not everything is black and white and that being flexible is absolutely key to success in any setting. Is Gumby your man?

- He's well rounded.
- Very optimistic—would lead with an optimism that his organization could change the world.
- He's someone you want to be around—kind, warm-hearted, and generous.
- He has real humanity—vulnerabilities, guilt, and flaws.

Kermit?

Another guy with some solid skills and attributes for nonprofit leadership:

- A team builder. He can bring a diverse group together. Anyone who can get Gonzo, Fozzie, and Miss Piggy working toward a common goal has a real superpower.
- Kermit is an optimist but not a Pollyanna. He can get down sometimes too, but in the end, he has a vision and rallies the Muppets around it.
- He cares deeply about doing the right thing.
- Kermit is your go-to guy in a crisis.
- Strong planning skills.
- His ego is just the right size—he can and does admit mistakes.

Time to put the four of them to the test. Here's the kind of situation each of them may encounter. Then you get to make your choice.

You need a new board chair. The previous leader didn't want the job—might have been in the restroom during elections. Committees are dormant. The board does a decent job selling tickets to your big gala but half of them don't want to pay for a ticket themselves. The founder of the organization is a big personality and when she stepped down two years ago, she offered to join the board and your previous board chair couldn't say no. She isn't letting go of the job. Your E.D. is a good performer but the founder is driving her mad. You are worried she may be recruited away.

Who is the guy for the job? (I just grabbed a few superhero prototypes—there are lots of great women leaders out there, too.)

Superman is the command-and-control nonprofit leader. The world is quite black and white for him. He would see board members as “good guys” or “bad guys.” We know the world is not that simple. Nonprofit leadership demands both an understanding and an *appreciation* for *nuance* and the land of the *gray*. We know this type. A good leader to dig you out fast, but not the marathon guy.

Spiderman is a more empathetic, three-dimensional leader. His downfall is the challenge of many leaders—*insecurity*.

Gumby? What a nice guy. Who would not want to sit and hear about an organization from somebody like Gumby? He is a relationship builder of the highest order. But his fatal leadership flaw? He is a pleaser. Now most nonprofit leaders have some pleaser stuff going on. But if it drives you, you are done for. You have various stakeholders and pleasing everyone usually means pleasing no one. And your job isn't about pleasing. It's about serving your mission.

Okay. So I've given the answer away.

My vote goes to Kermit, hands down.

First off, Kermit would have figured out some way to give the founder a big role with no real power. Look how he manages Piggy. He would rally the troops without shaming them. He would find the key strength in each board member and bring out the best in each of them. He would not be overly bossy with the E.D.—he'd offer his support and be more like a coach. And he would help staff and board keep their eyes on the prize, never losing sight of the organization's mission and vision.

Kermit may not thrive in a hierarchical work environment but he'd be a rock star E.D. or board chair.

Kermit is not perfect and he knows it. But so key to effective leadership, it makes him a good delegator! He is all about the team and he understands the value each brings to the work. He believes in diversity. He likes to work to reach consensus but never loses sight of the end game—he is always true to the cause. He is fair and listens and he can manage high-maintenance personalities without sacrificing the work. I also think he can disagree and his team ultimately listens and respects the decision (the decision they feel was made with their input).

He understands what it takes to be a great leader in the nonprofit sector.

He understands that power comes from all around you.

He recognizes that developing core leadership *attributes* is as important as skills building.

YOU'RE NOT ON TOP OF ANYTHING

In 1997, the Coors Brewing Company approached me, as the executive director of GLAAD. They were interested in making a \$50,000 corporate sponsorship donation to our organization. As our organization was still on a financial respirator, I was interested. Very interested.

But I knew the history of Coors and the gay community—the Coors family had deep ties to the Heritage Foundation, a significant funder of organizations leading the opposition to LGBT equality. As a result, there had been a longstanding boycott in the gay community. Drink any beer you like but not Coors.

A discussion with Coors illustrated to me that the company was better on gay issues inside its organization (domestic partner benefits and other nondiscrimination policies) than many other companies that supported GLAAD.

Should I accept the sponsorship money and in so doing help rebuild the Coors brand in the gay community? The decision was mine to make.

Or was it?

In Jim Collins's monograph *From Good to Great in the Social Sector*, he makes the case that power and decision making in the nonprofit sector is different from (and messier than) how it is in the private sector.

To be a great leader, you must erase your preconceived notions of what it means to be in charge, and this starts with a standard organizational chart (see Figure 1.1).

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



STAFF

FIGURE 1.1 The basic org chart we all know and understand.

POWER AND AUTHORITY

You probably have a piece of paper that shows this kind of hierarchy. Time to recycle.

Is it factually accurate? Yup. Is it how you should look at or exert your power as a nonprofit leader? Absolutely not.

Now take a look at the chart shown in Figure 1.2.

Using the org chart in Figure 1.1, the Coors decision is easy. I make a statement about the changes at Coors, accept the donation, make payroll, and let the chips fall where they may.

In the nonprofit sector, a leader is beholden to vast and diverse stakeholders. I was hired to run GLAAD in the service of moving the needle forward on equal rights for the community I served. The bottom line matters, of course, but only to ensure that you have sufficient resources to work in the service of your mission.

In the org chart in Figure 1.2, the executive director derives power from all around her. This is why former Girl Scout E.D. Frances Hesselbein once told a reporter that she saw herself in the center and that she “was not on top of anything.”

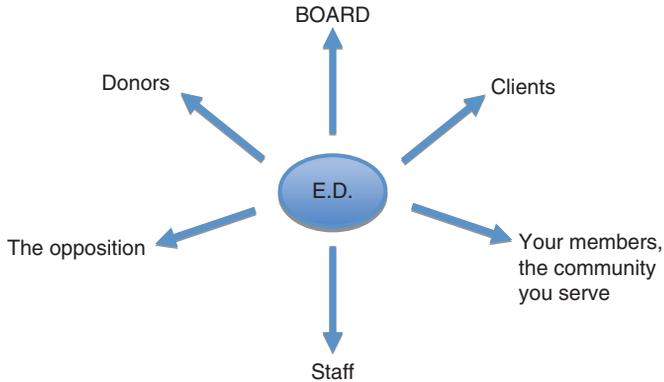


FIGURE 1.2 Picture it this way instead. The power comes from around you.

So what did this mean for the Coors decision? The voices of the stakeholder groups around me were critical. I needed to be well informed, I needed strong input from different groups, and I needed a thought partner in my board chair to kick around the pros and cons. I knew the decision was ultimately mine but I never really thought of it that way. We were all in this together.

My development director (the one I nearly killed—see the intro) was outraged and feared we would lose more money than we earned by accepting Coors’ donation. We did our due diligence and determined that would not be the case. The staff was mixed—some worried I would be eaten alive by the press (given my own corporate background) either way; others thought rejecting the money could be unfair to Coors when in fact, by corporate standards, they were leaders on gay issues.

This kind of power demands that you meet with the leaders of the Coors Boycott Committee—not to empower them but to ensure their voices are heard. We even invited them to a board meeting.

And this kind of power demands that you see the decision from all sides. We secured a meeting with the most senior people at Coors and garnered commitments from them to do more than just donate money.

And this kind of power demanded that I put myself at a national LGBT conference in which several hundred community members could share their distaste with the thought that GLAAD may make this choice. In this setting, you can be sure that I heard them. Many of them were yelling at me.

In the end, Coors became a corporate sponsor of GLAAD. Not everyone agreed but everyone had a voice. All stakeholder groups were heard and our entire process and strategy was smarter and more effective than any decision I had made on my own. This is what Jim Collins means when he talks about power in the nonprofit sector being “diffuse.” And at its best, it creates a staff that feels valued and heard, a supportive board comfortable with challenging, and a membership that sees a process rich with integrity.

So you can see how this can get messy, right? How quickly a staff can become entitled. The same goes for your clients. You want them to be engaged in the work, but to secure their opinions about decisions and policies, you must walk a fine line. If you don't, you wind up with entitled stakeholders and you wind up fighting to make decisions that are in the best interest of the entire organization.

Consider a board chair who has already made up his or her mind about the E.D. annual review process and doesn't ask for input. How valuable does the full board feel? I'm going to go with “not very.” Or how about an E.D. who has already made a big decision and asks the senior staff to weigh in? That E.D. better pray the senior staff comes up with the same decision. Then, there is the E.D. who listens to input and finds herself more indecisive than when she first asked.

Each of these scenarios makes things messier.

WHAT DO I *DO* WITH ALL THIS?

Not everyone is Kermit. And no one fits neatly into one of these four profiles. You might identify with someone outside the list (hoping there are no Darth Vaders among you).

The key is to recognize attributes that don't serve you well, and make adjustments. So for me, I think I am an "SK"—a Superman–Kermit combo. (Yes, I am now making fun of every personality profile test you've ever been subjected to at work or during a retreat.)

I am a fixer. I know this about myself. I love to save the day—that's why I love my work—I have serious Superman tendencies. They serve me well in my business, but as a nonprofit leader, not so much. I like to think I have some Kermit going on as well. Like Kermit, I like to think of myself as an orchestra conductor, bringing out the best in my tribe.

So what if you're not like Kermit?

Superman Tendencies

Thomas arrived as the new E.D. of a pretty small organization—budget size a few hundred thousand. Thomas wears a cape and not just on Halloween. He arrived at his organization to fix it; to save the day. The organization had been in disarray for some time.

Thomas started weekly staff meetings and no one came. Well, some did but most didn't. They were too busy. Thomas was angry and he threatened consequences. The following week, attendance was better, but still not great. Attitudes were even worse.

What was he missing?

Thomas made several incorrect assumptions:

- *If you tell people what to do, they will just do it.* Now that worked like a charm for me in Catholic grammar school in the

1960s, but in a nonprofit, you really need your staff to feel some sense of ownership of the decisions made. This is what they deserve in lieu of that year-end bonus that is coming like NEVER.

- *He assumed they understood*—in this case, he assumed they understood the value of a staff meeting. That's not how the previous leader managed (or didn't).

So here are the changes I suggested that he make:

- *Have a meeting about the meeting.* Send an email around. Tell folks that this meeting is to talk about how a staff meeting might be valuable to the entire group and to each staffer. Let them figure out the need themselves. And yes, everyone showed up. They built a standing agenda that was more than just reporting out, and staff meetings are now weekly and well attended.
- *Ask more questions.* Cape-wearers are fixers and they know the answers. Maybe they are arrogant or maybe just very self-assured. Thomas liked to just tell staff the answers, and direct them closely because he was clear about what needed to be done. I encouraged Thomas to ask staff members what *they* would do. Have a conversation about strategy. Guide *gently* if they are off base, and more importantly, *listen carefully*. You know, it is possible that *they are right* and you are not (I know—hard to believe).
- *Dip your toe into the world of the “gray.”* To Superman, things are black or white. There are good guys and bad guys. Things need to happen a *certain* way. You need to *try* to appreciate the gray. This might mean you have to own the fact that you are not as open-minded as you need to be. Are you a board chair ready to write off a board member who does nothing? Try having a coffee with said board member. Ask her what success looks like for her, what she needs from the chair

to be successful. Don't vote her off the island too quickly. Move from black to gray.

Spiderman Tendencies

Unlike Clark Kent, who is clearly “pretending,” Peter Parker is a 3-dimensional teenager—a nerd, an introvert, and an outsider. A sensitive soul who has experienced tragedy and loss. Spidey, on the other hand, owns his brilliance and is all about victory, but both Peter and Spidey share two key things—(1) the importance of the intersection of knowledge and power, and (2) a core value to lead a responsible life.

Kim began her job as a board chair, deeply insecure about her ability to do a good job (get in line, Kim). She was now in charge of a sizable board filled with some very high-powered folks. If you spent an hour with this group and someone asked you who the chair was, she would not be your obvious first guess. Kim was not a great public speaker and was intimidated by the resumes of those folks around the table, none of whom, by the way, were willing to step into the leadership role. But Kim knew the board needed someone dedicated, someone who loved the organization and really wanted the staff leader to succeed.

Kim's challenge was to not be overrun by the bombastic folks in the room—to establish leadership. But Kim doesn't wear a cape.

In our coaching sessions, Kim and I spoke about where her power comes from. I learned that she was deeply empathetic and had a profound and personal connection to the mission. I also learned that she was smart as hell.

The following shifts helped Kim quite a bit.

- *Be the most knowledgeable person in the room.* I'm not talking about smarts. I'm talking about the professional

aspects of the role of board chair. I begged her to buy *Robert's Rules of Order*. It is amazing how much respect a board chair can garner when managing a meeting professionally. I also encouraged her to spend time really understanding the non-profit sector and the complexities and context of the issue the organization was up against.

- *Play to your strengths.* Remember Kim's empathy? Remember her introvert tendencies? We devised a regular email from the board chair. It opened with a story about the work or something Kim had learned about the broader context of the work, reminding board members why they serve. Then she was able to call board members to action. She had put the requests into an emotional and intellectual context.

Gumby Tendencies

Pleasers cause themselves heaps of trouble. Attempting to make everyone happy inevitably backfires in nearly every situation—from a kindergarten class to a boardroom to a staff meeting.

The most important lesson I have learned about Gumby leaders is that if you can help them draw a picture of what happens as a result of pleasing, it makes them really unhappy. Gumbys respond in the moment and do not anticipate well. It's kind of like an automatic camera—"point and shoot." Trouble to the left? Let me fix it. Conflicting trouble to the right? I'll make you happy, too. But they can't look far enough down the road to see the implications.

Tina is an E.D. of a direct service organization that has a very strong client advocacy group. There had long been a push to put a member of that group on the board. Attempting to please the Client Advocacy Task Force, the E.D. brought the group into a board meeting to talk about it so the group could make the pitch. Then it was time to please the board. They loved the idea.

Meanwhile Ben, director of programs, saw the challenge from a mile away. He could see that electing the chair of the task force to the board could give that task force undue power. He saw that it would be very difficult for this person to be anything other than a representative of the task force rather than someone who could view the organization from 35,000 feet—like an effective board member must.

The outcome was not pleasing. The new board member came to advocate for clients. In and of itself, this was okay but an idea he brought to the table was not in the best interest of the organization, and the board voted it down. He quit the board and undermined the credibility and reputation of the E.D. with anyone who would listen, including fellow board members. The E.D., displeased with how she was being treated, was recruited away. A messy leadership transition ensued (more on that in Chapter 8).

Some advice for the pleasers out there.

1. *Tell your board chair (partner) that you have a bit of a blind spot.* Gasp! Am I really suggesting that you tell your board chair that you are imperfect? Yup! You are partners, remember? Ask your board chair to help you think through the implications of decisions because you need help exercising your anticipation muscle.
2. *Remember that a pleaser moves too quickly and consciously slow yourself down.* The word “yes” can come out of your mouth so fast. Please count to 10 (or 20 or more) before saying anything. Even better, practice these words: “*Let me go back to my team and talk about this. They will have an important perspective on this issue.*”
3. *Keep your eye on the mission at all times.* If you do, you will make better decisions and you will say, “No” when you need to. You will be more effective in the long run and that will be pleasing for everyone who cares about your mission.

4. *Bonus*: What not to do: *Do not look for a bad cop!* I have seen this too many times to count. A vice chair who leans into the board about their fundraising commitment. A deputy director who institutes tough new HR policies while the E.D. is out of town. This is unfair to the “bad cop” and a clear sign of an ineffective leader. If you can’t put on your “big kid pants” and make tough decisions, please reevaluate your line of work.

WHAT WAS THIS QUIZ REALLY ABOUT?

Think about what we have been talking about here. Have I mentioned anything about specific fundraising prowess? How often your board should meet? How effectively your organization measures success? Or what role the audit committee should play in the development of the annual budget?

Nope. Those are skills. I wasn’t talking about skills. I was talking about attributes. Because this is my pet peeve. Far too often, leaders are selected on the basis of skills. “*Well, David was the chair of the board of his alma mater—so he knows what the job is all about.*” Does he? Does he have the right attributes to run a meeting and attempt to build consensus, or the discipline not to roll his eyes when a fellow board member says something awfully stupid?

Attributes matter as much, if not more than skills. Attributes. Or perhaps, given the roll we are on in this chapter, we should dub them “superpowers.”

THE FIVE KEY SUPERPOWERS

Dear Joan,

I chair the E.D. search committee for our organization and we are in the final rounds with two very different

candidates. One is well known in our community and would bring gravitas to our organization. He is known to be a great fundraiser; finance and management skills are not his forte and his background in media (our sandbox) is slim. The other candidate is from corporate America, basically unknown in our sector, strong in our sandbox, known for strong management, and zero fundraising experience.

Oh, and did I mention that we may not hit payroll next week? And that we owe a quarter of a million dollars to vendors?

Whom should we hire . . . Help!

Signed, Conflicted in the Boardroom

Trust me. Any search committee could have written this. And it's not just a board dilemma.

It's universal to anyone inside or outside of an organization considering a move into leadership. Thinking about throwing your hat in the ring for a promotion at your school—you've been a teacher but never a fundraiser? Are you the COO who feels ready for the leadership gig? Are you a current board chair with no fundraising experience? Could you be an E.D. who won't admit to a soul that the balance sheet is total gibberish to you?

And it's a dilemma for current leaders, working to be the nonprofit leaders their organizations deserve.

A number of years ago, a statewide human rights organization had a similar dilemma. Hire the candidate with deep roots in the issue—well-known in the community, strong media skills, and a fundraising track record.

The other finalist—no chops in the sector. Not a fundraiser. Came from the labor movement. You know the movement where you need to get lots of people on the same page and then fight for what you believe in? A movement in which your reps have to trust you, allow you to lead—one in which relationship-building is key?

They picked the labor candidate. This candidate grabbed the reins and the organization grew in scope and impact in very short order.

How did this hire get made?

Someone on that search committee encouraged the group to consider the “chop-less” candidate through a different lens.

Attributes may in fact be the true superpowers of leadership.

Through the lens of key leadership *attributes*. And in my opinion, attributes may in fact be the true superpowers of leadership.

And yes, I have a list.

- *Conviction*: As each of you knows, nonprofit leadership is no walk in the park. Hey, why should it be? You are moving mountains. But without conviction in the real promise of the organization, no one will follow your lead. When I coach clients who have been leaders for a long time, I often ask, “*Are you as passionate about the mission of this organization as you were when you arrived?*” When I hear a pause of any sort, we talk about it. A lot.

- *Authenticity*: Real leadership demands it. So too does fundraising. Because it is the foundational attribute of trust.

Ever been to a fundraiser when the head of the school, or board chair is talking to you but not looking at you and not listening to you? Rather, she is, but to spot the next donor on her list—you know, the one who gives more than you do. Icky right? Because there is nothing genuine about your interaction. I’m guessing the leader didn’t ask you any questions about you and how you were doing.

Not authentic.

What does authenticity look like?

Working a room? Come on. I like to say that everyone is really interesting for at least three to five minutes. So engage authentically, learn something, and maybe teach something.

Authenticity looks like admitting failure. Everyone makes mistakes but a person who lives in the world authentically shares his or her mistakes, or values the role mistakes can make in becoming a more effective and productive organization.

- *Learn to Tell a Good Story:* I drive staff and board clients mad talking about this. A great leader is a great storyteller. I talk in the next chapter about this at great length, but it is absolutely critical and a key component of the coaching work I do with clients around commencement addresses and gala remarks. What kind of story? The kind of story that makes folks say, “Tell me more,” or “Let me get out my checkbook,” or “Now *that* is a story I should write about!” or “Will you come talk to my congressman?”

A great leader is a great storyteller. *Have Fun; Be Funny:* One of the reasons I started my blog (www.joangarry.com/) was that nearly every nonprofit resource was so damned serious. I get it. Saving the world is serious business. But that kind of intensity is not sustainable. You have to have a release valve. I find that behaving like an eight-year-old is often a very good strategy.

So we were in the midst of a board meeting and a quite serious discussion about the need for a greater investment in technology. Our IT director, Aasun Eble, who was indeed quite able, was in the midst of a serious and dry presentation. Seemingly out of nowhere, the slide shown in Figure 1.3 appeared.



FIGURE 1.3 You can never go wrong with pets in a board presentation.

Aasun decided we should all meet his three poodles. The room became weak with laughter. But that is not the end of the story.

From that day forward, you did not give a board presentation at a GLAAD board meeting without a picture of your pets appearing somewhere on a slide. This gimmick brought my senior staff to life for our board in a way that resonated for them. It was no longer the CFO or the director of IT. It was Kerry, the dad to two adorable kittens, Marilyn and Monroe. And it was unexpected and funny. It brought us together in a different sort of way.

- *Be Bold*: I believe that with authenticity and conviction comes a sense of fearlessness. Now I'm not suggesting that you suggest a bold, new strategy or initiative in your first week (that would be stupid, not bold). I'm suggesting that your board, your staff, and your constituents or clients deserve a leader who will make the tough calls, or come up with a new idea and try it. I'm not talking about arrogance here, nor am I talking about a leader who behaves like a lone cowboy. But remember: Didn't you step into a leadership role to *change* the status quo?

- *Be Joyful*: Related, but different from humor. This should not be that hard to feel or to project.

I have a beef with executive directors who don't see their work as a privilege. To get paid to do something that matters? To make a living making some part of the world a better place? I'm not naive; the work can be hard, painful, and sometimes feel like too steep a climb. But make no mistake. It's a joy and a privilege and the most effective nonprofit leaders see it that way and it's palpable.

Did you just read the list and remember wistfully that Dino's Pizzeria is looking for drivers.

Don't give up on me so easily.

Remember: Nobody has all these from the start.

These attributes can be developed and you can present them in your own way.

These attributes do not *replace* skills. I am just arguing that attributes are often ignored as you consider your own leadership bag of tricks. But working on cultivating these attributes can have as much, if not more, of a payoff than a class on how to read a balance sheet or to help you show off a certificate in nonprofit fundraising.

THE REAL POWER OF LEADERSHIP

I saved the most important lesson for last. Understanding how power works as a nonprofit leader is critical. Realizing that developing your core attributes in addition to skills can take your leadership game from good to great.

But never forget where the real power comes from.

It comes from the two to three sentences that you and your board slaved over and nearly wordsmithed to a pulp: your mission. What is it you do and *what is it in the service of*.

But never forget where the real power comes from . . . your mission statement is your North Star.

Your mission statement is your North Star. The big thing that matters most. Your role as a leader is to keep the organization focused on it, even when you are deciding about the centerpieces for the gala.

We'll talk more about mission statements in the next chapter but here's one quick example:

Make-A-Wish Foundation: We grant the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich the human experience with hope, strength, and joy.

As a leader of this organization, you are not only in the wish-granting business for a really sick kid (of course, that alone would be enough). But there is more to it.

Every wish *enriches the human experience*, not just of the struggling individual. Every wish lifts us all up. When we read one of that organization's stories, we feel a certain pride in what it means to be human. It brings us joy. And hope. Just like the mission statement says.

Great nonprofit leaders have certain skills, work on honing core attributes, and develop not only a real understanding of

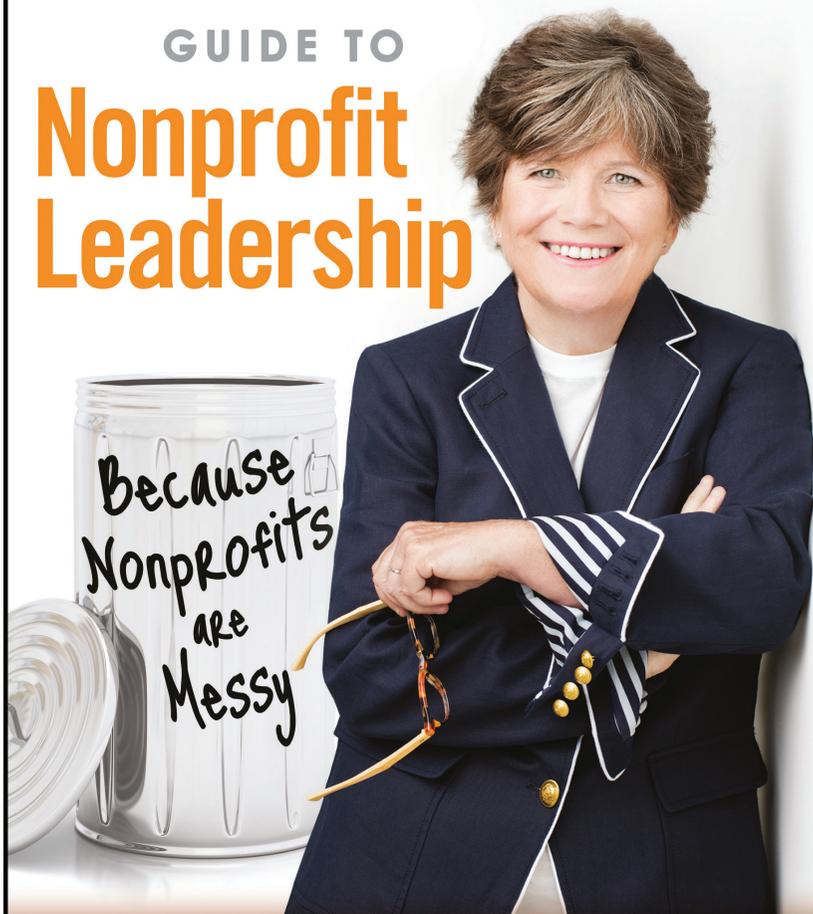
the nature of nonprofit power but an appreciation for it as well.

I don't mean to make it sound so simple or easy—it's not. Like I said, you are in the mountain-moving business—it couldn't possibly be easy. But with your mission as your beacon, it is worth every single minute.

JOAN GARRY'S

GUIDE TO

Nonprofit Leadership



JOAN GARRY

WILEY

Pre-order today at
www.nonprofitsaremessy.com
and claim your FREE bonuses!