

Reflections on Consulting in the Nonprofit World

As a nonprofit consultant, my mantra has long been the declaration, “We can do better.” At once a promise and a challenge to the nonprofits with which I work, I believe that it’s always possible to improve, to find ways to be more efficient and effective.

My tagline, *Enabling Nonprofits to Thrive*, is a window into my purpose as a professional and my central goal for every organization that I support. A thriving nonprofit sector is vital for the health of a community and, collectively, for society at large. Organizations of all sizes not only serve the needs of many, they raise hope in the world. Nonprofits demonstrate daily that solutions do exist to intractable problems and that decency and generosity exist in human nature to an encouraging, sometimes extraordinary, degree.

In advising and shepherding nonprofits, I apply my core beliefs that striving and thriving are the twin engines that propel an organization and without which no organization can ascend.

Blending Beliefs and Practical Experience

In approach, I draw from the diverse experience that has shaped my career. As a former educator, I understand learning is a process that builds by steps and layers. As a teacher of children with special needs in a New York City-wide program, I honed my ability to prioritize goals — to recognize what must be achieved first and then next in order for individuals (and organizations) to advance.

I’ve learned the importance of “place” — that being sensitive to community mores is key to productive relationships.

Lessons from my classroom years are never far from mind when I work with nonprofits. Whether analyzing an organization’s match of mission and services, establishing governance or leadership models, instituting new fundraising strategies — whatever the need — learning or unlearning frequently factors in the mix. My educator genes are at the root of my affinity for coaching and facilitating as a consultant, as well as my desire for knowledge and information on developments and trends that impact nonprofits.

In transitioning from teaching, my initial experience was with planning fundraising and profile-expanding events for nonprofits around metro New York. Those roles taught me how to maximize the value of an event before, during and post festivities. That close-up proximity to signature occasions for organizations also provided insight into the powerful hold of the familiar and why letting go, even when a formula no longer works for an organization, is difficult. It takes understanding the people and reasoning that came before — and, sometimes, plenty of finessing — to introduce a new concept and see it through to success.

Sharing Knowledge and Advocating for Change

Giving is the watchword within the nonprofit world. Donors give their support, organizations give their services and nonprofit professionals give their expertise. As a professional, as well as dedicated networker and resource “junkie,” I’m committed to sharing what I know. I aim to fill my blogs and social media links and tweets with substantive thinking.

I’m also a passionate advocate online, in print and in person for ideas — and change — that I consider critical for nonprofits today. My top five:

- Greater diversity — age, race, ethnicity, gender — within nonprofit boards in particular, as well as staffs;
- Nonprofit leaders who are better prepared and comfortable wearing the many hats that small and mid-sized nonprofits require;
- Building partnerships and relationships with donors to develop and secure their loyalty;
- Greater understanding that donors are motivated and inspired by the cause a nonprofit serves and give *through*, not *to*, an organization to further that cause;
- More nonprofits with a digital strategy, board members on social media and fundraising that maximizes the vast potential of the online universe.

I believe that we all learn from others. I have my nonprofit “gurus” whose resources I faithfully read and workshops I eagerly attend. From my experience, gathering sound ideas and applying them in clear and concrete ways is how “doing better” becomes the norm for a nonprofit.

I strive to enable nonprofits to thrive — and I’m deeply proud of it.

