



Here Comes Your 21st-Century Workforce!

It's time to prepare yourself for a whole new genre of workers.

BY BRUCE GLASRUD

As your organization rises to meet the demands of the early 21st century, one of your most pivotal challenges will be to accommodate to your workers. Yes, *you* will need to accommodate to *them*—not the other way around!

We're not talking only about diversity. Yes, our workforce is becoming more culturally diverse. (And you ain't seen nothin' yet!) But the biggest change won't be in who does the work. The real change will be in how they work.

And we're not talking only about Generation X, either. While Gen Xers will indeed interject their habits on the workplace, other forces will emerge and combine to change the face of nonprofit work for both Gen Xers and Baby-Boomers.

For years, nonprofit managers have been copying the organizational attributes of the corporate sector. Even for the smallest nonprofit, this has meant emulating the pyramidal hierarchy common to industrial models. Yet, just when many nonprofits have modeled an organizational structure similar to their corporate cousins, the game is changing.

Employees and Outsourcing and SWAT Teams, Oh My!

Following the industrial model has led most nonprofits through the usual steps: a founder or executive director to start, then clerical and bookkeeping help, then program staff, then grantwriters and fundraisers to keep it all going and growing. Of course, staffing overhead is the single greatest programmatic expense of

any nonprofit. For many, it is also the single greatest area of inefficiency.

Many future-looking nonprofits are handling these workplace problems by finding ways to outsource some of the work. While nonprofits often outsource their fundraising and grantwriting functions, they seldom think of doing the same thing with other jobs. Program and service functions are almost solely delivered by employed specialists of various sorts: social workers, counselors, educators, program directors, and operations managers. Although sometimes augmented by volunteers, these folks are employees on the payroll with all the related HR baggage. Is this the most efficient use of nonprofit funds? How about outsourcing some of those jobs as well?

Whether you're inclined to try outsourcing or not, let's look at some factors that may impel you in that direction:

The Dejobbed World

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cerned. Nonprofit employees are accustomed to being “downsized” when a grant or other funding doesn’t materialize. Many nonprofit careerists have been quite nomadic, hopping from job to job on a regular basis. The emerging economy will make for an itinerant lifestyle for an increasing number of folks in both nonprofit and corporate sectors. Indicators suggest that we’re moving toward a more “piece-work” economy. The 21st-century economy will put much of its work—traditionally undertaken by employees—out for “bid” by independent contractors.

The result will be a unique mix of ways to staff your organization and accomplish your mission. But it will also require you to view the whole idea of “staff” in a different way.

First, let loose of the idea of seeking “employees” as your sole source of workers. When you put out an advertisement for folks to deliver the services of your organization, independent contractors will increasingly be the ones who will answer the call. These may be individuals, loosely organized groups of friends and acquaintances, or organizations with their own employees. Those “employees” may, in turn, be independent contractors for the larger entity. They will essentially “bid” to deliver your service, not to become your employee.

You will of course decide who wins your contract, based on the price and the reputation of the bidders.

Increasingly, your workforce will come to you as ready-made teams of contractors. Initially, these teams will be made up of people who were former employees together—perhaps even at your nonprofit before the last “downsizing” put them out on the street. They could also be made up of people who have gotten to know each other through professional contacts in the nonprofit and corporate sectors. Either of these personnel types will come to the table having already formed a true team with predetermined workstyle compatibility and pre-identified strengths and weak-

nesses. They have done this in a manner that no executive director could ever hope to match, because they did it themselves.

Naturally, there are some downsides to these ready-made teams. There will be teams of “aces” and teams of “dweebs.” Yet, most will strive to have every member of the team high-functioning and high-producing. When artificially determined inside of traditional organizational boundaries, the team concept has grossly failed. It will succeed on a much greater scale with self-organized contractors.

As mercenary as these new workers sound, they will still exhibit a high level of fervor toward accomplishing

Are You Ready for the New Workforce?

- Have you abandoned the hierarchical model for your organization?
- Are you prepared to share leadership?
- Are you flexible in your view of work arrangements?
- Are you comfortable with hiring short-term teams of workers rather than a regular employee to deliver a service?
- Is your management structure participatory rather than autocratic?
- Do you embrace work options such as outsourcing?
- Are you able to release workers to their creativity, trusting them to reach your goals without your supervision?
- Are you prepared to use contracts rather than job descriptions?
- Are you collaborative and team-oriented in your relationships?
- Do you relish the new perspectives that come with diverse cultures, ages, backgrounds, and lifestyles?
- Do you relate to workers more like a coach and mentor than a commander?
- Do you believe workers should have the power to make decisions and to act on what they decide?
- Are you prepared to treat your own employees more like independent contractors?

If you can’t say “yes” to these questions, you’d better start making some changes to prepare yourself for the new workforce!



your mission. Some contractor teams will be strictly profit-oriented to be sure. Others may regularly switch between work in the corporate and nonprofit sectors. Many will contain some of the same type of people you used to like to hire as employees because of their sincerity and passion for your mission. In fact, there will be teams of program specialists available who will be experts in a certain type of nonprofit mission or service.

Cause-Oriented Independents

Many individuals and teams in the new independent contractor workforce will have a high degree of commitment toward a certain type of mission. Teams may coalesce around environmental issues, social justice, cultural causes, or the arts.

These contract teams will include program specialists, marketing wizards, logistical experts, and other combinations of members expressly geared toward being an "A-Team" in a particular program area common to your cause. However, these fellow travelers will not necessarily accept your vision or even your methods. Instead, many will come to you as "pros" who will expertly guide you toward ways to accomplish your mission. They may in fact be under contract to you and also to several other

organizations with similar missions. As independent contractors, they will still seek to customize programs to your organization and deliver services to your specification. But they won't be under your supervision once you've agreed on the terms of the contract.

Some nonprofit executives and boards may have a difficult time in adjusting to this service delivery paradigm. Yet, isn't it similar to the way nonprofits have always outsourced fundraising?

Lean, Mean, Mission Machines

Some teams may contract to provide their services to you over a fairly long term. Others will act as a sort of SWAT team of program consultants. These troubleshooters will quickly come into your organization, do their thing, and then hand the fixed-up program over to you and your staff. Or, the hand-off may go to yet another team!

Out of the Frying Pan?

Whether or not you want to use contract services, you won't be able to escape their impact. The forces leading people to become independent contractors will impel your regular employees to a similar independent mindset. They too will insist on freedom to act and participation in decision-making. Nonprofit work will increasingly be based not on the old "job description" but on a document that looks much like a contract for services. Nonprofits will thereby realize a workforce that is actually more engaged in their work than ever before. The gains in increased creativity, learning, and flexibility from these new arrangements will take many nonprofits into the fast track of service delivery. In turn, the real winners will be the recipients of those programs and services.

Nonprofits are one of the fastest growing segments of our emerging bold new economy. To be able to grow and serve the community, nonprofit executives must realign their thinking about the economies of service delivery and who shall deliver those services. For many nonprofits, it will be a matter of efficiency. For others, it will be a matter of survival.

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These publications are available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' *Resource Center Catalog*, included in this issue, or contact the Society at 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (800-424-7367).

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