



☐ The Value and Pitfalls of Experience

Is experience really the best teacher? Not as often as we might think, according to a thought-provoking book by James G. March. *The Ambiguities of Experience* (Cornell University Press, cornellpress.cornell.edu) explores how experience can benefit—and hold back—organizations.

Experience may lead to improvement in repetitive tasks, but in complex relationships experience isn't reliable for learning and often becomes a justification for stuck behavior, March tells us. As a learning tool, experience serves us best when combined with formal learning. Drawing on a variety of perspectives and even hypothetical scenarios is more useful than lessons from one example or viewpoint. This short, intelligent book can help you understand when it's useful to rely on your past experiences, when it's not, and how best to use experience to attain organizational goals. ☐

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

☐ How to Be Efficiently Green

Greening your office not only slows global warming—very important in itself—but also reduces your costs and enhances your reputation with funders, clients, and staff. *Greening Your Office* (Chelsea Green Publishing, www.chelseagreen.com) offers valuable tips, such as the suggestion to buy local flowers for celebrations because most flowers are shipped long distances, wasting energy in transportation. The 86-page guide is small enough to carry around, making it easy to audit your office for energy and waste reduction while walking through it. ☐

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

☐ Give Your Board the Right Amount of Information

The IRS has made it clear that nonprofit boards must live up to the highest standards of governance. Executives must provide their boards with enough financial (and other) information for them to make good decisions—but not such an overwhelming amount of data that they get bogged down in details. Here's how to ensure that all board members receive the right amount of information to govern the organization:

- **Brainstorm** with board members to determine what type of information they want to receive.
- **Identify** key metrics to assess the organization's performance against its mission statement and strategic plan.
- **Inform** the board on budget versus actual revenues and expenses as well as budget versus actual capital expenditures and debt payments.
- **Give** the board adequate financial information to support decisions such as whether to add programs or acquire property.
- **Develop** a one to two page "dashboard" of key financial and operational metrics with information on the most relevant indicators.
- **Furnish** the board with information on programs and activities to ensure that members have an adequate knowledge of the organization's current financial state and its expected future financial state.
 - **Be sure** your board has an audit committee, and give that committee more detailed financial reports, while summarizing information for the full board.
 - **Provide** monitoring information so that the board can provide adequate oversight.

These "best practices" come from a report, "Focused Financial Information Helps Not-for-profit Board Members Govern More Effectively," prepared by Grant Thornton, LLP, www.grantthornton.com. Also see "Reporting Financial Information to the Board" at www.snpo.org/members. ☐

☐ More Bang for Your Buck

Nancy Lublin, CEO of Do Something and founder of Dress with Success, knows firsthand how much a nonprofit can accomplish with very little money. In *Zilch* (Penguin Books.us.penguin.com) she describes how to do more with your board, brand, story, and finances. To get the most from your staff, she shares tips like these:

- **Hire and promote people based on their passion for your cause.** The highest form of passion is spreading the word and inspiring others about your vision.
- **Review people, not just their jobs.** During performance reviews, ask staff members how their personal lives are going, what they want to learn more about, and what their goals are.
- **Tap the energy of young people.** To harness their creativity, recognize what they long for and are often denied—real responsibility. Give them critical tasks to challenge their ingenuity.
- **Be inventive about promotions.** Reward workers by promoting them to jobs with new titles and new responsibilities, even if you have to create those jobs. The promotion needn't come with a higher salary as long as it's meaningful to the employee.
- **Broadcast your reasons for promoting people.** Send out memos describing exactly what people did to deserve their new jobs. In this way, you reinforce the importance of passion and alert everyone that this is a key reason people are rewarded. ☐



▣ Turning Social Responsibility into Value Creation

Corporate social responsibility has gone mainstream. There's a growing understanding among businesses that social responsibility will help them operate sustainably and establish trust with customers. *Innovative CSR: From Risk Management to Value Creation*, edited by Céline Louche, Samuel O. Idowu, and Walter Leal Filho (Greenleaf Publishing, Ltd., www.greenleaf-publishing.com) is part of an effort to use corporate social responsibility (or CSR) to create value for businesses, nonprofits, and society.

Corporate social responsibility, in the context of this book, includes environmentally sound practices, community participation, and workplace health and safety. Response to global warming has encouraged businesses to incorporate better environmental practices into their core strategies, while high-speed networking has done the same for the treatment of workers and neighbors.

As businesses explore ways to be more socially responsible, nonprofits can help them. We can share our networks and educate them about the value of ethical concerns and the interconnectedness of business and society. We can work hand-in-hand to come up with innovative ideas to meet society's needs. This book gives enlightening examples, tucked into an academic exploration of corporate social responsibility, of how this is already being done. ▣

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

▣ Reach for Forgiveness

If you're having trouble forgiving someone, try this five-step process, called REACH: **1. Remembrance:** Recall the hurt, objectively. **2. Empathy:** Look at what happened from the perpetrator's point of view. **3. Altruism:** Give the gift of forgiveness to the person who hurt you. **4. Commitment:** Commit yourself to forgive publicly. Write a certificate of forgiveness, a letter to the offender, a poem or song. These are all contracts that lead to the final step. **5. Holding on to forgiveness:** Memories will recur, but don't wallow in them. Remind yourself that you have forgiven, and read the documents you composed.

What transforms this process from New-Age self-help to science is that there are at least eight controlled-outcome studies measuring the effects of procedures like this one. In one Stanford study, people either took a forgiveness workshop or were assigned to a control group who simply filled out an assessment. The result: The group that took the workshop reported less anger, less stress, more optimism, better health, and greater happiness than the control group, and the results were sizeable. What makes this process relevant is that you must ban vengeful thoughts in order to free yourself to innovate, lead, and inspire others. ▣

—adapted from *Authentic Happiness*
(Free Press, www.freepress.com)

▣ Collaborate to Achieve Social Change

Although the number of nonprofits continues to grow, the problems they set out to resolve don't seem to diminish. Too many organizations have lost sight of social change and social justice as goals. Professionalism unintentionally leads to a focus on fixing the individual rather than tackling structural problems. In *The Power of Collaborative Solutions* (Jossey-Bass, www.josseybass.com), Tom Wolff skillfully relates how communities can overcome those obstacles and find systemic, long-lasting solutions.

Doing so begins by building trust and confidence through small victories. Collaboration is essential to promote equal opportunity, active citizens, inclusion of marginalized groups, and respect for all cultures. As one reads Wolff's examples of how people learn to rely on each other to accomplish big results in some of our country's most under served communities, it gradually becomes clear how valuable this book is.

Wolff's inspiring examples are punctuated with clear, sound advice. He gives us simple collaborative steps to achieve goals that at first appear unattainable. The real accomplishment is when people in these nearly forgotten communities learn to work together.

The Power of Collaborative Solutions is an excellent guide to building community and achieving social change rather than relying on band-aid approaches. It's a book that must be read by anyone inspired to make a difference.

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Use Spiritual Principles to Find New Directions

Notice how creative new ideas open up when you use these four spiritual principles as drivers for your work:

- **Appreciation.** Instead of focusing on removing people's deficits, approach people with a deep appreciation of their strengths.
- **Interdependence.** Acknowledge the profound interconnectedness of all beings and systems. Train yourself to see how tugging at one issue creates rippling changes. Then use the strength of this interconnection to collaborate and create meaningful change.
- **Acceptance.** Embrace the essential value of all people. Examine your role in furthering or helping to eliminate racism and cultural incompetence.
- **Compassion.** Listen to what people tell you about their lives, and work shoulder to shoulder with them to enhance their capabilities. Understand that all people have the ability to fix their own problems. ▣



How Happy Are You, and What Can You Do about It?

Your level of happiness—how you greet the world and confront obstacles—affects the way you and others get things done at work. Research points to ways you can raise your happiness quotient:

External Factors that Lead to Long-Term Happiness:

To lastingly raise your level of happiness by changing the external circumstances of your life, you should do the following:

- Live in a wealthy democracy rather than an impoverished dictatorship (a strong effect).
- Get married (a robust effect, but perhaps not causal).
- Avoid negative events and negative emotion (only a moderate effect).
- Acquire a rich social network (a robust effect, but perhaps not causal).
- Get religion (a moderate effect).

Even if you could change all these factors (clearly a difficult task), it wouldn't do much for you. Together, they account for only 8-15% of the variance in happiness.

External Factors that *DON'T* Make You Lastingly Happy:

- Money. Once your country's gross national product exceeds \$8,000 per person, added wealth brings no further life satisfaction.
- Your health, race, or educational level.
- A pleasant, sunny climate. Indeed, the regions with the happiest people (Switzerland, Iceland, the Scandinavian countries) all have cold climates with long, dark winters.
- Short-lived pleasures such as food, wine, backrubs, or sunbathing. They can give you momentary enjoyment but not lasting happiness.

Internal Factors that Lead to Long-Term Happiness:

Since external circumstances don't affect happiness much, it's better to turn your attention to your inner environment. Here are ways to make an enduring difference in your happiness by changing yourself:

- Don't dwell on the past or worry about the future. Focus on what you can control, and let go of what you can't.
- Understand your signature strengths (assess yourself at www.authentic happiness.org), and use them in your work. Research has identified 24 strengths that are valued in almost every culture in the

world: curiosity, love of learning, critical thinking, ingenuity, emotional intelligence, perspective, bravery, perseverance, integrity, kindness, loving, loyalty, fairness, leadership, self-control, prudence, humility, appreciation of beauty, gratitude, optimism, sense of purpose, mercy, humor, and enthusiasm. Whichever of these strengths characterize you, spend time building them rather than trying to improve your weaknesses.

- Practice mindful meditation or yoga, slowing down your thoughts and your breathing.
- Choose gratification over pleasure. In the nightly choice between reading a book (a gratification) and watching a TV sitcom (a pleasure), we often choose the latter—although surveys show that the average mood while watching TV sitcoms is mild depression. Pleasure is a powerful motivator, but it builds nothing for the future. Gratification isn't always pleasant, but it's rewarding. Gratifications challenge and absorb us, put us "in the flow" so that time vanishes. Whether it's painting, rock-climbing, or listening to someone's troubles, find gratifications that deeply involve you.
- Learn to forgive. Resentment and desire for revenge will deflate your overall happiness (see "Reach for Forgiveness" on page 26.)
- Give of yourself to others, again making use of your signature strengths.
- Build your optimism by recognizing and then disputing pessimistic thoughts. Learned optimism is a proven method of searching for evidence to counter negative beliefs.
- Formulate a philosophy that adds meaning to your life by answering the questions of why you are alive and what life and death mean to you.
- Cultivate a feeling of being successful, whatever "success" means to you. Sometimes money is a by-product of doing what you love, but those who think money equals happiness become disappointed later in life when they discover it isn't true.
- Thank people verbally, in letters, in Post-it notes, in as many ways as you can, as often as you can.



—adapted from
The Geography of Bliss (www.hatchettebookgroupusa.com),
Authentic Happiness (www.freepress.com), and *Gross National Happiness* (www.perseusbooks.com)



continued on page 28



Top 10 Fundraising Trends

A study by Blackbaud (www.blackbaud.com) has identified the hottest issues for raising funds in the coming years:

1. Donor pools will change. Constituents once composed mostly of baby boomers now include millennials and generation thumb (another term for Generation Y, in an allusion to their proficiency in using their thumbs in tech-related ways). To attract these generations, you need to view donors as partners and speak their language, leveraging social media and cutting-edge technologies.

Chasing generation thumb and proving value are vital issues.

2. Proving value will be crucial. You'll have to show you're making a difference, using radical transparency to make it clear where funds are going.

3. Fundraisers must acquire an entrepreneurial spirit. The best nonprofits will become experts on techniques such as location-based initiatives and crowd sourcing.

You need to view donors as partners and speak their language,

4. Social media will play a greater role in engagement. Mobile devices, the Internet, and social networks provide platforms for fundraisers to quickly organize a community of interest around a cause. Over the past few years, social networks have taken off; they're now becoming location-based, and in the future other capabilities will make them even more useful.

5. Peer-to-peer fundraising will grow. Because of the ubiquity of mobile devices and social networks, supporters will reach out to friends and family to raise

funds on behalf of nonprofits. This peer-to-peer contact may ultimately become the most popular fundraising initiative in the years to come.

6. Donor stewardship will become even more important. As the world economy continues to struggle, keeping donors informed and happy becomes a greater priority. Your organization will need to change along with the technology and generations to stay part of the conversation and remain relevant.

7. Increased government regulations will have a greater impact. The trend is toward more taxes for nonprofits as various levels of government look for new revenue streams. Nonprofits need to be fully aware of possible changes in legislation and work to make their voice heard.

8. You'll need to move from a broad donor management system to a single supporter database. This shift will facilitate life-long relationships, requiring accurate, easily accessible data, and will lead to more, larger gifts and more effective events.

9. Relationships will still rule. Despite all the excitement over new technologies and networking applications, don't forget the importance of personal relationships with donors. Because of all the ways people can "virtually" interact, having a good personal relationship is a unique differentiator.

10. Finding the right balance of online and offline presence is critical. You need to plan for online growth while maintaining your offline presence. You have to be tech savvy, stay current with social media, and keep up with the expectations of a new generation of donors. □

Peer-to-peer fundraising may become the most popular fundraising initiative in the years to come.

Writing Grant Proposals that Get Results

Proposal writing is a common part of fundraising, but that doesn't mean preparing an effective proposal is easy. Competition for gifts is stiff, so a proposal must gain the attention of funders. That means you must tell your story clearly and direct it to the funder's interests.

The best way to approach proposal writing is to break it into steps. *The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing* (www.foundationcenter.org) looks at the task one section at a time. To learn what funders look for, the author, Jane Geever, interviewed a wide

range of grantmakers, both foundation and corporate, small and large, old and new, with staff and without.

The Foundation Center's experience with foundations provides a powerful process for grant writing. The book guides you through the best ways to research foundations and cultivate funders. It details what you should (and shouldn't) include to make a compelling story. It's excellent for those fairly new to proposal writing, and, because it isn't too long, serves also as a good review for veteran preparers. □

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler