


Creative Problem Solving

Whatever the challenge, you can resolve it by following these steps:

- 1. Define the problem.** Write it down, along with why you want to solve it and what your ultimate goal is.
- 2. Ask the following:** What's the worst that can happen? How can I find this funny? How can I turn this situation into a chance to learn something about myself?
- 3. Walk away,** and do something entirely unrelated.
- 4. Return later** to approach the problem with a playful, open mind.
- 5. Don't move on** to another problem till you've solved this one. Keep a list of problems at hand, and tackle them one at a time.
- 6. If you can't come up with a solution, bring in other people,** and brainstorm ideas. Then start again with Step 1. 


—adapted from *Liquid Leadership* (Capstone Publishing)

Feminists in Mainstream Organizations

To repair social inequity, we need people working both inside and outside bureaucratic organizations. Those working for change within these organizations can often feel isolated—by others inside the organization, who feel the change isn't important, and by those in outside organizations, who feel the mainstream organization may not be doing enough.

Those on the outside often see bureaucrats on the inside as preservers of the status quo and play down the value activist bureaucrats can bring to a movement. At the same time, insiders need outsiders to work with them if they're to succeed in reforming their institutions.

Feminists in Development Organizations (practicalaction.org), edited by Rosalind Eyben and Laura Turquet, presents ways feminist bureaucrats have brought about social change, the obstacles they've faced, and the way they've turned disadvantages into advantages to advance their agendas. While these feminists face distinct issues, the lessons in this book can apply to all of us who try to reform our institutions. All the feminist authors in this compilation of essays work or have worked inside institutional organizations, and some have also worked in "outsider" organizations and can speak to the differences.


Some people are pessimistic about the prospects of feminist bureaucrats creating pathways for institutional change—because bureaucracies aren't known as engines of social transformation. The feminist bureaucrat authors in this book understand they are contributing to institutional structure but see their work as a necessary subversion that rebuilds and restructures their institutions. Their fascinating reflections and lessons can guide all activist bureaucrats and help those of us in "outside" nonprofit organizations work with them to achieve institutional reform. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Avoiding Communication Errors

Recent studies suggest that most medical mistakes can be traced to training programs that don't teach doctors how to communicate clearly. In one study, hospital errors fell almost 40% after doctors were given communication training.

While most nonprofit organizations don't deal with life-and-death situations, they do suffer from similar miscommunication problems. Here are some communication fundamentals to keep in mind:

- **Remember the 60% rule:** Only 60% (at most!) of a message gets through the first time. So you need to say the same thing over and over, in as many different ways as possible—through stories, metaphors, analogies, jokes, examples, interactive exercises. And then repeat it. And repeat it again.
- **Be specific.** For example, rather than "We need better communication," spell out the problem and solution: "The board chair and CEO should meet at least once a month to update each other on what they're doing."
- **Before conveying an important message,** put it in writing. That will help you clarify it in your own mind. It will also give you a chance to reread it to be sure you're not omitting any key facts or making any unwarranted assumptions. Also have others read it before you send it out; they may see holes you've overlooked. It's always good to get second, third, and fourth opinions when communicating something vital.
- **Include details** on what the next steps are. For example, who is responsible for what and by when? Where can people find help if needed? Who can they contact if they have questions?
- **Ask listeners** to tell you what you've just said, using their own words.
- **Beware interruptions.** If you're interrupted in the middle of a message, make a note to return to it later and finish your thoughts.
- **Be careful with the words you use,** both to others and yourself. View obstacles not as "problems" but as "challenges." Use words like "occasionally" and "lately" rather than "always" and "never" to frame the challenge as temporary and fixable.
- **Keep records** of what's said. Too often people forget important facts or leave the organization, taking vital knowledge with them. If they're in writing, the ideas will live on.
- **Set up clear, systematic channels** of communication, making it easy for people to get the answers and resources they need. 

—adapted from *The Shallows* (published by W. W. Norton & Co., www.wwnorton.com)


Can LinkedIn Change Your World?

The butterfly effect, a tenet of chaos theory, tells us that very small actions can have extremely complex, far-reaching effects—that a butterfly flapping its wings on one continent, for example, can cause extreme weather conditions on another continent weeks later.

Lavie Margolin uses that analogy in *The LinkedIn Butterfly Effect* (www.linkedin.com/in/laviemargolin) to describe the huge impact you can make on your career and your organization's success by using LinkedIn. Use the following roadmap for your journey:


- **Strategically build your connections.** If you want to connect to someone you don't know, send an invitation explaining why you're contacting them. This will limit the possibility of receiving a "doesn't know" response from the recipient. If you get too many of these, your account will become restricted. If you're placed on restriction, send an e-mail to customer service requesting that it be lifted. When it is determined that you're not a serial spammer, the restriction will be removed and deemed a "first offense."
- **Join LinkedIn networking groups, and link to articles and information about your organization,** which will enhance your visibility and drive traffic to your organization's Web site.
- **In addition to describing your organization and mission statement in your profile,** be sure to explain what your organization is *accomplishing*.
- **Remember that adding 100 contacts on LinkedIn,** who on average know another 100 people, brings you one connection away from 10,000 people—many of whom have the potential to facilitate your organization's growth.
- **Use the "Share an Update" box** on the LinkedIn home page to tag people when you want to share an article, seek advice, or note other information.
- **Scroll through your news feed regularly.** When a contact posts an article that would be helpful to others, share it with those who could benefit. By consistently sharing quality information and adding your own insights to the posts, you'll quickly establish yourself as an expert.
- **Make use of the "Follow" capability** to receive news of other organizations and keep apprised of what's happening in your field.
- **Be proactive in viewing the profiles of others.** You can add private notes in each profile with reminders and information as to how you met and how you've interacted so far.
- **When a contact posts good news, click the "Like" button, and send a message** of congratulations. It will be noticed and appreciated.
- **Update your own status regularly.** Post not only when you need help but when you can offer help as well. Be specific about the kind of help you'd like to give.
- **Use the advanced people search to leverage your network and facilitate connections** with the people and organizations that interest you.

- **Check your LinkedIn inbox daily** to be sure you never miss important messages.

For more on using LinkedIn, see "Three Benefits & Two Risks for Nonprofit Leaders Using LinkedIn" (Vol. 31, No. 6, www.NonprofitWorld.org/members). 


Testing, Testing

It's essential to do market research on a regular basis to see which of your services are working, which aren't, and which new ones your customers are longing for. *The Nonprofit Guide to Social Enterprise* (charitychannel.com) offers an abundant mix of ideas, including:

- **Marketing can be as simple as getting out of your office,** talking with potential customers, and asking what they need, and what they want.
- **Turn the person who answers your phone** into a data collector. Keep a record of all the questions your callers ask. That's a powerful way to find out what people want and how you can better serve them.
- **Consider asking a college or university** to help you with market research. Students and interns need practical projects to complete their course work, and professors are always looking for ways to partner with nonprofits in the community. 

Too Busy for Bliss?

In study after study, meditation has been shown to enhance the brain functions needed for deep thought and wise decision-making. But that doesn't mean you have to sit for hours on a mat murmuring mantras. To find serenity among the pings of your technological devices, use these tips from *Meditation for Multitaskers* (published by Adams Media, adamsmedia.com):

- **Go outside, and take in your surroundings.** Engage all your senses and accept them without labeling them pleasant or unpleasant. You can meditate in a park or an alley filled with trash. Just slow down your internal monologue, be still for a few minutes, and merge with your environment.
- **Let play and work cross-pollinate each other.** Take your hobbies a little more seriously and your work a little more lightly. Add fun and laughter to the office while putting more of yourself into home, family, and spiritual growth. These different realms of your life will benefit each other in amazing ways.
- **Punctuate your day with intentional do-nothing breaks** (stress on the nothing).
- **Avoid taking work home.** Reserve working overtime for those big projects that come once or twice a year.
- **Practice deep breathing whenever you have a spare minute.** Remember that the word "inspiration" comes from the Latin root "spirare," breathing in. Your creativity is linked to an awareness of your breath.
- **Share these tips with your co-workers to create a productive, high-morale workplace.** 


Achieve Your Highest Goals

Do just three simple things each day, and you'll fulfill your goals. Lisa Dietlin (lmdietlin.com) has a plethora of ideas, not only in her latest book *The Power of Three* but also in previous books—*Transformational Philanthropy*, *Making a Difference: 365 Tips, Ideas, and Stories to Change Your World*, *Making a Difference II*, and *Making a Difference III*. Here are a few:

Identify community foundations in your geographic area, and set up meetings with their leaders. Once they're aware of your work, they may recommend you to donors who come to them wanting to make a difference.

Give your business card to at least one new person each day. Then make a note to follow up with that person in a day or so.

Do the thing you most don't want to do, but do it with a different attitude. Look at it as an opportunity rather than a "have to do."

Every day, "invite" or "connect" with at least one new person on social media. When you ask someone to connect with you—or respond to someone else's invitation—always include a personal note. It will make you stand out and will bestow benefits later. 

laughter alert

YOU WRITE THE CAPTION CONTEST

Submit your best caption for the cartoon below to Jill@NonprofitWorld.org. Win a prize, and have your caption featured in our next issue.



Please send us your nonprofit jokes, funny anecdotes, and humorous observations! Send to Jill@NonprofitWorld.org with "Laughter Alert" in the subject line.

What's the New Definition of Insanity?

You've heard the old definition: Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different outcome. In today's world, the new, too-prevalent insanity is doing more of the same thing over and over and expecting even better results.

If this rings a bell with you, you've got to get help. A few suggestions:

List all the things you do each day. Which of these tasks are really building your organization and generating income? Consider focusing all your time on these crucial activities. Either delegate the rest, or stop doing them completely if they're not adding value to your organization.

Build a team. Teams offer an efficient way to sustain and manage your organization's growth.


Hire a virtual assistant to handle your administrative tasks from an off-site location.

Collaborate. There are many ways you can join forces with other organizations, businesses, and individuals to create win-win situations for everyone involved.

Outsource as much as you can: information technology, social networking, content production, payroll, marketing. . . There are very few things you can't outsource.

Find a consultant who can help you with short and long term projects. Consultants can often provide an invaluable outside perspective.


For details on these tactics, see *Outsource Smart* (McGraw Hill, mcgrawhill.com). Also see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org/members:

- **Play to Your Strengths: Using Outsourcing to Manage Human Resources** (Vol. 17, No. 1)
- **Too Much to Do: Four Keys to Effective Delegating** (Vol. 26, No. 1)
- **Common Mistakes in Hiring a Consultant—and How to Avoid Them** (Vol. 30, No. 6) 

Using Data to Improve Your Organization

Organizations can regain public confidence and attract funding by using data to demonstrate their impact. So argues Sheri Chaney Jones in the provocative *Impact and Excellence* (www.wiley.com). The book combines strategic planning principles and outcome management to demonstrate how social sector organizations can change to survive in today's environment of impact measurement.

Jones explains how an organization can use data to become more productive. Morale and efficiency rise in organizations that can plainly demonstrate where they stand.

At times repetitious (in a beneficial way, because it helps learning) and a bit insistent, the book drills home the basic concepts of creating a high-performance organization through appropriate use of data. Nonprofit leaders would be wise to reflect on these principles. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler