


The Power of We

The simple word “we” can have an enormous reach. Just compare the following:

- “I want this done by tomorrow” vs. “Can we get this done by tomorrow?”
- “I need it by 2:00” vs. “If we work together, can we finish it by 2:00?”
- “What are you going to do about it?” vs. “How can we solve this?”

We acknowledges that teams are built on cooperation. Every ongoing work relationship should be viewed as a team, according to *The Teamwork Chronicles* by Steven H. Carney (powerofwe.com).

Carney suggests the term “coordinator” rather than manager or leader because it captures the important role of facilitating relationships. Here are some situations in which you can use “we” thinking and speaking to resolve issues:

- **If a team member is uncooperative:** “Do you have some time? I’d like to get your input and discuss your work with the team to see what ideas we can come up with.”
- **If your team is dysfunctional:** “I’m wondering if the team thinks we could function better than we’re doing. Can we consider some possible improvements?”
- **If someone’s message is unclear:** “Can we talk? I’ve considered this project information, and I’d like some additional clarification.”
- **If a team member is uncommunicative:** “Do you have time for coffee? I’m concerned about your comfort with the current team situation. I’d like to hear your views and see what we can figure out.” 


Helping You through Hiring

In nonprofit organizations, finding the right people is critical because organizations rely heavily on staff members’ knowledge and abilities. *Mastering the Art of Recruiting* (Praeger Publishing, www.abc-clio.com/Praeger.aspx) examines an optimal way of hiring key people.

For such a short book (145 pages), it is chock full of information. Author Michael Travis arranges the details of the hiring process in a logical, to-the-point way. He also explores three common mistakes:

1. **Many people make up their minds** on a candidate before checking references. Thus, they don’t do a thorough, in-depth job of challenging their preconceptions.
2. **Most organizations don’t interview enough candidates.** (Ten or more are necessary, though this may require you to hire an outside recruiter to help you – something that Travis recommends.)
3. **Too many of us think that uncovering negative things is bad.** Nothing could be further from the truth. You need to know the weaknesses as well as the strengths of anyone you hire.

We often feel we don’t have the time to go step-by-step through a detailed hiring process. Travis makes clear that the cost of incomplete candidate screening is far greater than the cost of thorough searches.

Recruiting, hiring, and onboarding (to ensure a constructive transition into the organizational culture) affect your organization’s ability to do what it intends to do. This book is an excellent guide to doing it well. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler


Act Your Way into Leadership

Leadership training typically emphasizes contemplation before acting. Yet we learn best by doing, evaluating, adjusting, and doing again. In *Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader* (Harvard Business Review Press, www.hbr.org), Herminia Ibarra argues for leaders to go beyond the borders of their own group, reach out, and “plunge into new projects and activities, interact with different kinds of people, and experiment with unfamiliar ways of getting things done.”

Stepping up to leadership roles begins by changing the parameters of work. When we find opportunities to work on projects outside our comfort zones in tasks that challenge us, we become more attuned to our organization’s environment. This first step changes our way of thinking about what a leader is and does.

Ibarra is a proponent for acting like the leader you want to become; if you act like a leader, you will eventually adopt leadership behaviors that will come naturally. For instance, introverts can be temporarily extraverted when it is appropriate to achieve their goals. The more they take on these characteristics, the more comfortable they become with switching between behaviors. So it is, says Ibarra, with other behaviors. We can observe others and take on their characteristics, transforming how we think of ourselves. Even though we adopt the behaviors of others, we are still unique in how we arrange them and blend them with our own characteristics.

Good leaders rely on the right network of professional relationships. After all, networking is the key to sustainable systems. Strength of the network isn’t necessarily determined by numbers; rather, a strong network branches out beyond the comforting ties of colleagues and friends to connect with people who can help us see our work and our value to it differently. Ibarra offers a variety of ways to expand a network, such as:

- **Favor active rather than passive** networking opportunities. For example, don’t just show up for events; organize them, or speak at them.
- **Use social media** to broadcast your interests and cast a wider net to people who share those interests.
- **Attend a conference** you’ve never before attended. Meet at least three new people. Follow up with them afterward.
- **To initiate a relationship with someone, ask** for a simple favor. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Going to War with Your Inner Robot

To change your behavior, you must understand the habitual activities that operate automatically, robotically, and often irrationally outside your normal awareness. Then you need someone to nudge you through the discomfort of transformational change. In *The Auto-Self: The Key to Creating Star Performers and to Becoming a Star Yourself*, such people are called transformation guides. In *Waking Up Happy: A Handbook of Change with Memoirs of Recovery and Hope*, they're called "Waking Up Happy Buddies." Whatever you call them, they're key to lasting, meaningful change.

Perhaps the best approach is to get together with one or more people who want to make changes in *their* lives. They can keep you on track with your goals while you do the same for them. For example, if you want to quit smoking, and your friend wants to stop eating junk food, you can bolster each other, doing similar exercises and then getting together on a regular basis to discuss results.

Here are some of the most important characteristics of good guides:

- **They're committed to helping you make change** in your life for *your* reasons, not theirs.
- **They're willing to guide you** until you complete your transformation, a process that will take months – perhaps as long as a year. They will meet with you regularly – face-to-face, on the phone, on video chat. (Fifteen minutes twice a week is better than one longer session because of more frequent support.) The most important factors for success are frequency of meetings and duration of the relationship.
- **They have empathy for the discomfort** of change and the fortitude to withstand your inevitable pushback while escorting you through the habit-changing process.
- **They're not associated with the behaviors** you want to change. (If you want to quit smoking, they don't smoke!)
- **They read and study the techniques** of positive change (using books such as *Waking Up Happy* (WakingUpHappy.co) and *The Auto-Self* (Auto-Self.com)).

Craft a Story that Inspires

Telling people what to do isn't the best way to convince them. A much better idea: Tell them a story.

In *Lead with a Story* (American Management Association, amanet.org), Paul Smith describes some ways to use storytelling to best advantage:

- **Let people get to know you** by telling stories that support the image you want them to have of you. Three kinds of stories will help secure a good reputation for yourself:
 - **"I'm not who you think I am" stories** will fend off any preconceived notions people may have about you.
 - **"A little about me" narratives** share something personal and increase people's feelings of connection to you.
 - **"Why I work here" stories** explain why you chose this path and why you're passionate about what you do. They encourage people to support your vision.
- **Make it easy for your customers to tell their stories.** Put up a story box. Create a Web site page for stories. Then retell those stories to your staff and board members.
- **Ask people who know your organization to help you find powerful, habit-changing metaphors.** Suppose you need a short, simple way to win people's support for a new computer system. Ask people who know both systems, "If our old and new computer systems were cars, what kind would they be?" You'll get some great ideas. For example, someone may describe your old system as a 15-year-old Honda and your new one as a brand new Porsche. In your memos and discussions, you can talk about trading in the 15-year-old Honda and upgrading to the Porsche. Such images can help win enthusiasm for change.
- **Ask your employees for stories.** As you walk around the office, ask people, "Got any good stories?" Or hold a contest for the best stories about your organization. Then share those tales widely.

Help Create More Diverse Leaders

Why are so many nonprofit organizations led by people who are white and staffed by people of color? What impact does this reality have on the ability to create more diverse decision-makers? Steve Scheier, author of *Do More Good. Better* (scheiergroup.com/the-book), says that these issues are linked and they exist to the detriment of all. Here are ways you can empower valuable yet overlooked talent start down the path to leadership:

- **Examine your biases** about who should be making what decisions in your organization and how these biases affect the way decisions currently get made.
- **Take inventory of who has power and who doesn't** in your organization, and why.
- **Allow employees to speak up and advocate** for the decisions they want to make or support.
- **Reinforce a culture** that drives decision-making responsibility down to the most appropriate person within your organization.
- **Give people at lower levels the opportunity** to make decisions that affect their jobs.
- **Clarify which decisions** each person is expected and authorized to make.



The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling

When conversations go wrong, there are three things you can do to make things better: (1) Do less telling. (2) Do more listening. (3) Do more asking in the form of humble inquiry.

Humble inquiry, as Edgar H. Schein explains in his insightful book *Humble Inquiry* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, www.bkconnection.com), differs from other forms of inquiry (such as confrontational or diagnostic inquiry) in that it maximizes your curiosity and interest in the other person and minimizes bias and preconceptions. You access your ignorance and ask for information in the least threatening way. Examples:

- “What’s going on?”
- “Can you give me an example?”
- “Go on . . .”

A question such as “How do you feel about that?” endeavors to take control of the conversation and steer it in a certain direction, so it doesn’t qualify as humble inquiry. Neither does “How are you?” because it’s culturally scripted to elicit, “Fine.”

If you’re the boss and sincerely want others to be open with you, then humble inquiry is essential. The results will be better conversations and better relationships.



Need Sustainable Income?

7 Nonprofit Income Streams (CharityChannel.com) details income streams your organization can use, along with strategies to make the most of each. The more different ones you take advantage of, the more sustainable your organization will be.

- 1. Mission income:** income from customers who pay to receive a mission-related service or product (such as ticket sales for your theater production).
- 2. Individual giving:** gifts from individuals, including major gifts, annual gifts, and planned giving (bequests, trusts, and so on).
- 3. Government funding:** grants, contracts, earmarks, public-private partnerships, and other income from local, state, and federal governments.
- 4. Gifts from grantmakers:** grant money from foundations and other entities, such as United Ways, Rotary Clubs, and Junior Leagues.
- 5. Corporate support:** money from businesses, which usually takes the form of grants, cause marketing, and sponsorships.
- 6. Unrelated business income:** earned-income opportunities not directly related to your mission, such as room rentals, beverage sales, and the like.
- 7. In-kind donations:** gifts of goods or services such as meeting rooms, food, or used office furniture. It’s important to include these gifts when you plan your income, because you can often obtain in-kind donations that free up cash for other necessities.



The True Leadership Challenge in a World that Changes Faster Every Day

Many people struggle to understand the concept of continuous improvement. It hasn’t been emphasized much in the nonprofit sector, but even in the for-profit sector, where it has been a fundamental tenet for decades, many leaders find their well-intentioned efforts derailed. In *How to Succeed with Continuous Improvement* (succeedwithci.com), Joakim Ahlström explains how to make continuous improvement work in the real world.

Successful organizations, he tells us, have the ability to adapt and improve as one entity. Acting as one requires thinking as one. And that requires a strong organizational culture.

In strong organizational cultures, people instinctively react properly to change. We find proof of this at IKEA, the Walt Disney Company – known for hiring individuals whose behaviors align with the company’s values – and Toyota, whose agility helped them reclaim the title of the world’s largest automaker only seven months after two huge setbacks – an earthquake disrupting production and a historic recall. Most attempts to copy the desired traits of these companies fail; only 2% of improvement initiatives inspired by Toyota achieved expected results, according to an *Industry Week* survey.

The reason? We copy what we see and miss the point. We see systems, structures, and tools but not the culture developed by leaders in the organization. Here’s how to develop the culture you need to continuously improve in a complex and volatile world:

1. Understand what culture really is and accept that you are the number one vehicle for culture. Culture is your collective self-image – what you and others in your organization think about yourselves in relation to the world. Changing culture means changing your collective thinking. You do that by synchronizing what people in your organization *spontaneously* talk about. As a leader you’re one of the favorite topics of conversation. Take advantage of it!

2. Create stories that bring your values to life. When IKEA founder Ingvar Kamprad visits his stores, he takes the free-of-charge IKEA-bus. Walking through a store he once lay flat on the floor to read a price tag to demonstrate that it was badly placed. Cost consciousness, always adopting the customers’ perspective, and representing and serving “the many people” are values that will always remain parts of the IKEA culture.

3. Drive out fear. Fear makes people focus on looking good rather than doing what’s right. When Toyota CEO Akio Toyoda told Congress he took “full responsibility” for the defects in the company’s cars, the message to his colleagues was clear: At Toyota you never hide problems and always take responsibility for the ones you see. That cultural trait is the basis for eliminating waste from all processes in the company and that’s what gave Toyota the agility to recover as quickly as it did.

For more on managing your culture, see these *Nonprofit World* articles (www.NonprofitWorld.org/members): “Organizational Culture: It’s in the Walk, Not Just the Talk” (Vol. 29, No. 6) and “How to Change the World by Changing Your Culture” (Vol. 31, No. 2).



Why Talent Is Overrated

It's not just talent we tend to overrate; we also give too much weight to the importance of hard work, intelligence, experience, innate potential, and a good memory. None of these things predicts success, research shows.

So what does? Deliberate practice makes all the difference, says Geoff Colvin in *Talent Is Overrated* (www.geoffcolvin.com/books/talent-is-overrated).

Deliberate practice is characterized by several crucial elements:


- **It is designed specifically to improve performance**, often with the help of a coach or guide.
- **It can be repeated a lot**, with feedback continuously available. A teacher, coach, or mentor is vital to hold you accountable, motivate you, and provide crucial feedback.
- **It's highly demanding mentally**. Deliberate practice is an effort of focus and concentration.
- **It isn't much fun**. You must seek out what you don't do well and keep trying to make yourself better. After each repetition, you must force yourself to see – or have others tell you – what's still not right. Then you must repeat the most painful parts of what you've just done.

Difficult as deliberate practice is, it's the only sure way to reach new pinnacles of performance.

Imagine, for example, that your goal is to become an expert on some aspect of your job or your organization. Deliberate practice requires you to read everything you can find on the subject, interview people both in and outside your organization, and ask questions to glean new perspectives.

As you add to your knowledge, you won't just amass information. You'll build a mental model of how your field functions as a system.

This is one of the defining benefits of deliberate practice. It leads to highly developed mental models of your area of expertise. And the existence of such mental models is the greatest predictor of an effective organization.

High-achieving organizations value this kind of deliberate practice. They support people's desire for education, growth, and development. They provide the feedback that's so integral to success. They design a culture of constant learning. Rather than seeking out the most talented, smart, or experienced people, they hire those who are most eager to learn, grow, and keep practicing in a continual, deliberate way until they're the best they can be. 

laughter alert

YOU WRITE THE CAPTION CONTEST

Thanks to all of you who entered the contest. You'll have another chance to win with a new cartoon in our next issue. We're glad to see you all have a solid sense of humor! Keep laughing! And keep sending us your nonprofit jokes, riddles, observations, humorous anecdotes, and the funny experiences that occur every day in the nonprofit sector. Please send to Jill@NonprofitWorld.org with "Laughter Alert" in the subject line.

The cartoonists' original caption is below:



"I found them on the side of the road, they said they would love to help out our charity drive."

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and the winner is....



"The good news is we have a thorough background report for each of our new recruits."

The winner of this issue's *Nonprofit World's* cartoon contest is **Lisa Stevenson**, MBA, CPA, of Stevenson, CPA, LLC, nonprofit accounting specialists (stevensoncpallc.com), who submitted the caption for the cartoon above. (The cartoon on the left is the cartoonist's original caption.)

Congratulations, Lisa! As the winner, Lisa will receive a card deck of "52 Ways to Motivate Your Board and Volunteers" from Carol Weisman (carol@boardbuilders.com), founder of Board Builders (www.boardbuilders.com).

Thanks to all of you who entered the contest. You'll have another chance to win with a new cartoon in our next issue.