

The Best Leaders Are Change Agents

Use this checklist to be sure you're prepared for the changes to come.

By Carol S. Ritter

Life in the nonprofit world has drastically changed over the last decade, and the upheaval is continuing. Nonprofit leaders can't expect success unless they confront change directly, becoming agents of change.

So, are you a changemaker? As a leader today, being a change agent isn't only necessary; it's critical. But before you can say, "I'm a change agent," you need to have a few things in place.

Checklist for Success

Use the following as a checklist to be sure you have the essential ingredients in place so that you can spark change in your organization:

Your board members must believe that growth doesn't occur without change – and act on that belief.

You must have partners who share your vision and bring you new supporters and new dollars.

You need a results driven growth plan with a timeline for success and a strong networking component.

You must give lots of value to the community. And you must communicate in a way that makes your value crystal clear.

Steps to Take

If you're weak on any of the checklist items, try taking one or more of the following recommendations. Start by picking just one, and move forward slowly but surely.

Hold a board retreat. That's the best way to help your board members understand how important growing is to the future of your organization. An annual board retreat will help assure that you have a board dedicated to growth.

Encourage your board members to attend networking events. Be sure they have a clear, concise (no more than 30 seconds) response when someone asks, "What does your organization do?"

Build relationships with the leaders in your community.

Spend time attaining and measuring results, real results. Communicate those results clearly to all your stakeholders.

Arrange for board members to speak publicly to spread the word about your organization. Again, arm them with a clear, brief description of who you are, what you stand for, and how you impact the lives of others.

Communicate using many different channels, both offline and online, in ways that reflect the preferences of your stakeholders.

Become the Change

Change agents understand the difference between managing people and leading them. Managers handle, direct, and control operations. Change agents lead by inspiring and influencing.

As the leader of an organization, can you let go and encourage your teammates to do what they do well? Are you willing to let them fail in that process? Are you there to help them reach their goals without criticism?

Your utmost responsibility as a leader is to serve your board. When you make your board members genuinely feel important and match the task with the skill, they will perform.

Not much is for sure in this ever changing world. But you can count on this: If you and your board are dedicated to change, you'll see more money, better results, and more supporters attracted to your cause. 

Carol S. Ritter (tellkids@aol.com, caroltalks.com) is a professional speaker, coach, and consultant on nonprofit and educational leadership.

Teaming Up for Change

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How Do Leaders of Nonprofit Partnerships Foster Collaboration? (Vol. 22, No. 3)

Match Your Change Strategy to Your Organization's Maturity (Vol. 21, No. 5)

How to Assess and Improve Your Board's Performance (Vol. 24, No. 1)

Transforming Your Organization from the Inside Out (Vol. 25, No. 4)

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