

What, Exactly, Does “Transparency” Mean?

The word “transparency” has become so overused – and misused – in the nonprofit sector that it’s often unclear what the word means. Some believe transparency is met through completion of the IRS Form 990; others want transparency to include disclosure of who supports an organization and how decisions are made. The definition of transparency often depends on who is using the word and who that person believes are the key audiences of information.



Sharing What Matters describes a study on transparency conducted by the Center for Effective Philanthropy (free online at <http://research.effectivephilanthropy.org/sharing-what-matters-foundation-transparency>). The study asked foundation and grantee CEOs:

What do you think transparency means?

Who are the audiences for your transparency efforts?

Then the study compared the responses to websites to see what information is actually shared publicly. Here are the study results:

Foundation CEOs believe transparency means clarity, openness, and honesty in sharing the goals and strategies – and often the decision-making process – of the foundation. Grantee CEOs concur.

The primary audiences for sharing information, according to foundation CEOs, are grantees and prospective grantees. Community foundation CEOs add donors to those audiences.

The majority of foundation CEOs acknowledge that sharing the impact of their work would be beneficial. However, only some of the most heavily-resourced foundations do so. Many foundations don’t even evaluate grant programs – a major lapse in the sharing of important information.

Many foundations exclude key audiences, such as communities and clients served, in their information-sharing efforts.

The study exposes a gap between the values expressed about transparency and how transparency is implemented in regard to the public, at least via websites.

Understanding foundations’ views on transparency can help nonprofit leaders learn how to communicate with foundations in order to work with them better. This study thus has much to tell us. 

–reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Your Attitudes Matter

Gender stereotypes foster discrimination and add stress to the workplace. We’re also deprived of great leadership when we buy into the idea that only those with “masculine” characteristics make good leaders. Both men and women can become better leaders by debunking stereotypes and tapping into both the “masculine” and “feminine” sides of their natures.

The subtitle of *Breaking through Bias* (Bibliomotion.com) is “Communication Techniques for Women to Succeed at Work,” but this shrewd book covers much more than that. It will help men as well as women overcome their prejudices, add diversity to their organizations, and learn to communicate more effectively. Some specifics:

Figure out your own biases. Before you can cope with other people’s stereotypes, you need to know your own. Take the Implicit Association Test (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>).

Understand the extent of your feminine and masculine traits by taking the Bern Sex Role Inventory at <http://garote.bdmonkeys.net/bsri.html>. The results will show which traits you need to strengthen – your agentic (or stereotypically masculine) characteristics (such as being competitive, aggressive, proactive, loud, and risk-taking) or your communal (stereotypically feminine) traits (such as being nurturing, kind, sympathetic, warm, and friendly). When you’re able to use both sets of traits, as appropriate, you likely won’t be judged as being either “too soft” or “too hard.”

Learn what type of self-monitor you are with the Self-Monitoring Scale (<http://personality-testing.info/tests/SMS>). High self-monitors adjust their behavior in response to their environment, while low self-monitors tend to rely on the same behaviors in all contexts. Improve your level of self-monitoring by studying how others react to you in different contexts and testing out different communication styles. 

From Hopelessness to a Life of Meaning & Service

In a fascinating new autobiography, *Moppin’ Floors to CEO* (authorhouse.com), Dennis Miller reveals the attributes that propelled him to success: hard work, loyalty, thirst for learning, and a fierce belief that he could make his goals happen. Now the executive director for the Center for Excellence: Leadership, Governance, and Philanthropy at Fairleigh Dickinson University, he is a motivational speaker, leadership coach, and strategic advisor to hundreds of nonprofit organizations.

Miller (dennis@dennismiller.com) is also the author of three books that provide wisdom and guidance for nonprofit organizations: *The Nonprofit Board Therapist*, *The Four Pillars of Successful Nonprofit Leadership*, and *The Power of Strategic Alignment*. All his books (available at authorhouse.com) emphasize the importance of vision, passion, relationship-building, and the ability to learn from your failures, overcome obstacles, and persevere. 

The Divided Mind

Many people have pointed out that we all have both logical and illogical sides to our brains. Jonathan Haidt adds a creative twist in *The Righteous Mind* (Pantheon Books, pantheon.knopfdoubleday.com) by asking us to visualize the mind as a person riding an elephant. The elephant represents the emotional, unconscious, intuitive part of the brain, and the rider is our reasoning.

The elephant metaphor is a good one, because it makes clear that the irrational mind is much more powerful than the conscious mind. Experts estimate that 99% of mental processes occur outside our awareness. This fact has clear implications for our lives and relationships.

Make the best use of both parts of your brain with these tips:

Appeal to people's instinctive side when trying to change their reasoning. We all tend to base our decisions on emotions, not rational thought. Only after you've connected emotionally will others listen to your message.

Find ways to convince your rider and elephant to work together as much as possible. To do so, you must always be aware of the elephant. Recognize the power of your intuition, but don't let it run wild. You can use reason to nudge and guide but not control the intuitive elephant.

Don't expect individuals to use truth-seeking reasoning on their own. We're all good at finding evidence to support the position we already hold, which we most likely arrived at intuitively.

Understand the stubbornness of everyone's unconscious biases. Don't fight against them, which will only increase resistance. Much as you may disagree with them, treat people's deep-seated beliefs with respect. Otherwise, they'll feel defensive and you'll have no chance of building a constructive relationship.

Be aware of your own unconscious biases, and make an effort to see beyond them. Take a close look at how you make judgments, and do all you can to bring your rational mind into play. Widen your mind by exposing yourself to many different types of people and hearing what they have to say. Be especially mindful whenever you're making important decisions about others. When hiring people, for example, it's helpful to use objective interview and assessment forms to avoid unwarranted leaps to judgment.

Pay attention to all the non-verbal clues that are much more important than the words people use. Notice how people hold their bodies, how long they make eye contact with you, the gestures they use, their tone of voice. All these clues can tell you how people really feel, which may be very different from what they say.

Work to counteract a natural and misguided sense of optimism when you schedule projects. Research shows that our unconscious minds invariably think every project will take less time (and money) than it actually does. If it's important that something be delivered on time and on budget, build in some wiggle room. (Many of the smartest leaders routinely add 20% more time and money to their estimates than they believe a project will take, and even then, they say, they're not always on target.)

Use education to open people's minds and help them understand how the brain works. Form a book group across all layers of your organization, and ask people to read and discuss books such as *Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior* and *The Invisible Gorilla*, which describe countless experiments showing that we're all puny riders at the mercy of our giant elephants. 

Are You a Learning Leader?

The most successful leaders are life-long learners. To see if you qualify, answer these questions:

Are you constantly learning new things with a sense of excitement?

Do you search for new sources of learning, beyond the obvious?

As the years have passed, has your learning become broader rather than more limited? Are you a generalist rather than being too narrowly specialized?

Do you make it easy for people to learn things in informal, self-directed ways?

Is each person you meet a fount of new perspectives for you?

Do you approach everything with the mindset of a beginner rather than that of an expert?

Are you engaged in a systematic pattern of gathering information related to your goals?

Is asking for feedback a regular part of every day for you?

Do you seek out knowledge beyond your professional area?

Are you curious about everyone and everything around you?

Do you like to learn things for no reason other than the good feeling you get from exercising your brain?

Is your system for learning diverse? Is it both formal and informal? Does it include books, media, classes, travel, conferences, webinars, teams, and interviews with interesting people?

Do you reserve part of each day for reflection and consolidation of new learning?

Are you always asking yourself how what you learn in one part of your life relates to other dimensions of your world?

Do you deepen your own understanding by teaching others what you're learning? 

— adapted from sideroad.com and successtosignificance.com



How Well Are Charity Regulators Doing?

There have been dramatic changes in charity law in the last quarter century. *Regulating Charities: The Inside Story* (Taylor & Francis, taylorandfrancis.com) provides an important look at the experiments and trends that have influenced national regulations. Exploring the effectiveness of tools used by regulators, it compares charity regulation in England, Wales, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. In some of these nations, regulation is quite recent.

An increase in the study of the nonprofit sector helped give rise to charity regulation since the 1980s, along with changes in government focus on the role of nonprofits. The nations observed in this book take one of two tracks to charity regulation: an appreciative approach to maintain the trust and confidence of the sector, or an accountability approach based on control of those who would (or do) take advantage of charitable status.

The histories of regulation demonstrate the risks and uncertainties charities face when regime changes shift the emphasis from one regulatory track to the other. Charity regulation is also influenced by international relations or, perhaps more accurately, by responses to international circumstances such as the threat of terrorism.

Knowing how and why we got to where we are will help us understand what to expect as we proceed. The strategies used in different nations will influence future approaches. “Trust and confidence” proponents may find themselves regressing into “command and control” regulators as the sector’s credibility declines due to for-profit firms encroaching into charity, tax subsidies being rolled back, and technology allowing ever greater participation and demand for transparency. What’s important is that, in all cases, sector influence and advocacy are vital factors in how charity is regulated, and that highlights our need to be knowledgeable about regulation. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Charitable Giving in the United States Annual Report on Philanthropy

Donations to charitable causes reached an estimated \$390.05 billion in 2016, a 1.4% increase over 2015 numbers, adjusted for inflation.

Giving from individuals	72%	\$281.86 B
Giving through bequests	8%	\$30.36B
Giving from foundations (represents independent, operating, and community foundations)	15%	\$59.28B
Giving from corporations	5%	\$18.55B

(NOTE: 88% of all giving was from individuals + bequests + family foundations, per the Benefactor Group.)

GIVING BY SUBSECTOR

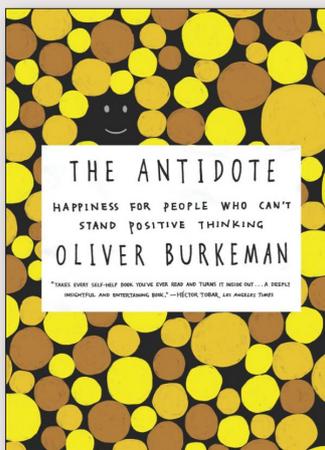
Religion:	32%
Education:	15%
Human services:	12%
Foundations:	10%
Public-society benefit:	8%
Health:	7%
International affairs:	6%
Arts/culture/humanities:	5%
Environment/animals:	3%
Foundation grants to individuals	2%

Giving USA’s annual report is based on econometric studies using tax data, government estimates for economic indicators, and information from other research institutions. Giving USA is a publication of the Giving USA Foundation and is researched and written by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. The Foundation was established by the Giving Institute (formerly the American Association of Fund Raising Counsel) to advance research and education in philanthropy. 

—prepared by CoreStrategies for Nonprofits, Inc., corestrategies4nonprofits.com

Beyond Happiness

If positive thinking really helps people become happy and productive, why are so many people reading the latest motivational books and still feeling dissatisfied? Why does the self-help movement go through short-lived fads (such as “seven habits,” or “get anything you want”) rather than offering breakthroughs? Why does the pursuit of “happiness” often make us feel worse? Trying too hard to be happy can be counterproductive, because it focuses on things going right for one individual. The antidote, according to Oliver Burkeman, is acceptance that there is more to life than just “me.”



We live in a complex society that presents much outside influence and uncertainty. The self-help movement spends an inordinate effort trying to suppress mystery in a futile attempt at control. Better to adapt to, even embrace, the uncertainty of our world, writes Burkeman. Instead of the pursuit of predictability – an illusive quest –

maybe feeling comfortable with the diversity, interdependence, and ambiguity of our environment is healthier.

The mystics of many religions direct us along a path in which personal fulfillment is not the goal; the individual is a part of the interconnectedness of a larger system and the spiritual path lies in acceptance of a systemic outlook. In *The Antidote: Happiness for People Who Can't Stand Positive Thinking* (www.faber.co.uk), Burkeman explores aspects of Stoicism, Buddhism, and memento mori to demonstrate how letting go of the ego may be the path to contentment.

Community and spirituality have important implications for nonprofit organizations. Most people working in nonprofits find that helping others (or ourselves as part of a community in which we are but one player) is more rewarding than satisfying our own egos' desire. Recognition of communal life and our spiritual capabilities is productive for our clients and for us as workers and volunteers.

The Antidote guides us toward a more rewarding life, offering steps toward understanding the spiritual aspect of nonprofit work. *The Antidote* will help us become more satisfied than the pursuit of personal happiness will ever do. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Building a Sense of Team

Most teams don't perform as well as they could. That's not the fault of the teams themselves but the way they're created and managed. Use these tips to assure a smoothly functioning team.

Be sure team members concur about who's on the team, what their goals are, and where they're headed. In surveys, surprisingly few team members agreed on the answers to these important aspects of their work.

Create a diverse group of people to allow for a variety of viewpoints and lively debate. It's vital to have at least a few members who will challenge the tendency to want too much homogeneity. Harmonious teams don't accomplish as much as teams that are unafraid to air their differences.

Keep your team small. Five to nine people is a good size. If teams get any larger, you'll lose the cohesion that makes them so valuable.

Don't keep changing the composition of your team. It's OK to add a new member occasionally, but teams are most productive after they've been together for a while.

Make certain there's a team leader who's willing to put in the time and effort necessary to manage the team and steer its direction.

Have team members compose a list of ground rules to follow, and assure that they're enforced. Examples of helpful rules: Be punctual to all team meetings. Don't interrupt when someone is talking. Give all members an equal chance to express their opinions. Respect everyone in the group.

Understand the difference between the overall sense of team you feel as part of your organization and the focused team you must build to accomplish specific goals.

Give team members freedom to accomplish their goals, but also clarify their boundaries. Define limits such as monetary and time resources at the beginning of the project. 

—adapted from *Managing Successful Teams* (koganpage.com) and *The Art of Coaching Teams* (wiley.com)

Guide Explains Nonprofits' Rights when Protecting Immigrant Clients

Amid heightened immigration enforcement, a new guide released by New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI.org) outlines nonprofits' legal rights when helping immigrant clients.

This resource is particularly important because nonprofits often receive sensitive and personal information that could be requested by ICE. “ICE's incursion into these spaces is unprecedented, unpredictable, and deeply consequential, causing many immigrants to withdraw from organizations that provide them and their families with important care and support,” says Kevin Curnin, partner at Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP. “We hope that this guide will empower service providers by informing them of their rights and obligations, while also dispelling doubts in our immigrant communities so they are not denied services they should receive – and at the very least letting them know that their struggles are ours too.”

A copy of the guide, is available at <http://www.nylpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/FINAL-2017-Nonprofits-Guidance-Regarding-Immigration-Enforcement.pdf>.