

# Be a Nonprofit-Sector Disruptor: Keys to Creating a Positive Future

You can transform the world with these shifts.

By *Shelley Armato*

**E**veryone has the potential to be a nonprofit-sector disruptor. They're the people who transform the world – who shake up the status quo and launch massive change.

The challenge is that too many people are comfortable and complacent with where they are. They've settled into the pattern of reacting to disruptions rather than causing them. Think about how the nonprofit world has changed over the years.

**Who initiated** the biggest changes?

**Who were** the disruptors? Were they the people who sat on the sidelines? Or the ones who took bold action?

Contrary to popular belief, having access to large amounts of money isn't what makes someone an agent of change. Money alone isn't what makes change happen. In reality, tenacity and courage are more important than funds.

Never blame others or outside circumstances for limiting your ability to enact change. By using the internal resources you already have, you can take action today.

If you're ready to lead the nonprofit sector to new heights, here are the keys that will help shift your mindset so you can be the disruptor others react to.

## Get Comfortable with Change

Disruption is all about change. All organizations that survive long-term have changed over the years. Whether they added new services, catered to a different market, or totally reinvented themselves, they had the courage to morph in some way.

Unfortunately, many people get stuck in the vision of what their organization was in the past rather than what it could be in the future. This mindset forces them to always be reactive to the disruptions others make. They are never the disruptors themselves because they're too tied to the past.

To transform the nonprofit sector, you have to be future-oriented and ready to shift course at a moment's notice. If you're not nimble, you'll never be the leader. Remember that everything is different today than it was just a few years ago, and that has to include you and your organization.



## Look for Common Challenges

If you want to be a disruptor, you need to always be looking to solve challenges. Problem-solving must become a way of life, not just something you do when times are tough.

Look around and ask yourself:

**What challenges are others** in the nonprofit sector facing?

**What can I do differently** and better than the others?

Realize that if you think something is challenging or in need of change, chances are that others think that too.

Ask your customers and employees what changes they wish would transpire. Then really listen to their answers. Insight leads to change.

## Research Everything

In order to find the problems and the solutions, you need to know what's going on in the nonprofit world at all times. Research solutions that others have tried to introduce. Take note of what worked and what didn't.

Sometimes disruption isn't about inventing a new wheel; it's about making the existing solutions better. Often, even a tenth of a degree improvement can make immense progress.

Additionally, do research for your emotional wellness, because when you're emotionally healthy, you can take on anything. Broaden your research to encompass all aspects of yourself, your organization's stakeholders, and the nonprofit sector as a whole.

## Be Resilient

Being a disruptor means being resilient in your ability to solve problems. To build your resilience, refrain from asking disempowering questions like "How am I going to do this?" A better question is "Why am I going to do this?"

"Why" leads to "When," and then "When" becomes "How." With your "why" and "when" already mapped out, the "how" becomes much easier and you're more apt to take that first step.

Along the way, you'll run into roadblocks and rejection. That's okay. Learn from any setbacks and then harness your resilience to bounce back and keep going.

One important step is to decide ahead of time what type of challenges will disrupt you emotionally. This way, when you face a challenge, you can determine if you're making decisions emotionally or if you simply need to look at a situation differently. From that capacity you can take monumental action.

## Find the Eagles in Your Life


The people around you can either lift you up or pull you down. We all have people in our lives who love hearing our problems and then telling us all the things we shouldn't

do. But if you let these people dictate your decisions, you'll never be a disruptor.

Instead, you have to find the eagles. During storms, eagles sail higher because they know the crosswinds will help them gain altitude. In other words, during challenges they rise. Those are the kind of people you want in your inner circle.

Realize that the eagles in your life don't have to be your friends. They can be coaches or mentors you hire or only see in a professional capacity. Ultimately, their goal is to help you soar. When you rely on your eagles for support and advice, you can see problems in a new light and come up with solutions that will transform your world.

## Be the Change

Regardless of your past successes or failures, you can initiate enormous change. So why settle for always reacting to the disruptions that others enact? Have the courage to take action. Be the disruptor that leads the nonprofit sector to new heights – and your organization to even greater success. 

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**The Best Leaders Are Change Agents** (Vol. 34, No. 1)

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