

A Master Plan for Your Organization

This new approach to strategic planning will start producing results immediately.

By Terrence Fernsler

The Seven Realities of Nonprofit Organizations

Boards want to be great, but they're challenged in their role because of these seven realities:

- 1. Nonprofit board members have limited time to give.** Research shows that the average board member spends 11.5 hours a year at board meetings – not quite enough time to change the world.
- 2. The board hires, fires, and supervises the executive,** yet the executive is often the functional authority.
- 3. At an average size of 16, the board is often too large** to accomplish objectives.
- 4. The board's composition is often too haphazard** to support effective governance.
- 5. Very few organizations meet the ideal of 100% fundraising** by board members.
- 6. Nearly 15% of a board retires each year,** leading to a lack of continuity.
- 7. Most executive directors have five or less years of experience** and are learning “on the job.”

While these realities may seem daunting, you need to keep them in mind as you make organizational plans. Simply understanding these realities — and doing all you can to mitigate them — will give you a strategic advantage and put you several steps closer to realizing your vision.

Results Now for Nonprofits: Purpose, Strategy, Operations, and Governance.
By Mark Light. Hardcover. 296 pages.
John Wiley & Sons (wiley.com).

Although leading a nonprofit organization is challenging, most leaders enjoy a high sense of satisfaction in their work. Where else can we find work with a bigger purpose than ourselves? This book offers a capacity building tool to help overcome inevitable problems and lead a more sustainable organization.

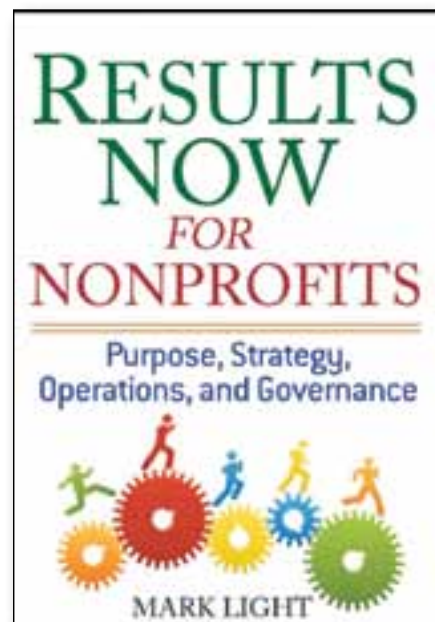
The *Results Now* process is a quick and practical way to plan how to accomplish your organization's mission. It's an ongoing strategy of looking ahead while adapting to the constant changes of the environment around you. It's planning without going overboard or being rigid.

The *Results Now* master plan revolves around purpose. Why an organization takes particular actions touches three main types of planning:


- **Strategic planning** answers the question of where the organization will go tomorrow and includes its vision, lines of business, and strategic measures.
- **The operating plan** responds to what gets done today and involves goal-setting and budgeting.
- **The governance plan** looks at delegation and accountability — who does what and when it happens.

Mark Light explains each of the key components in detail: purpose, strategy, operations, and governance. He clarifies

“Where else can we find work with a bigger purpose than ourselves?”



terminology (such as vision), priorities (such as what to measure), and roles, especially those of board and staff. He does so in light of today's practicalities, not yesterday's ideals, and in light of what he calls the seven realities of nonprofit organizations.

The *Results Now* plan should be the centerpiece of board meetings, refreshed periodically as a part of regular day-to-day operations. It's a sensible plan that can be easily implemented and monitored, a foundation for building the capacity of your organization in today's hectic world and, as a result, improving benefits in a lasting way. 

Terrence Fernsler has been a nonprofit professional for over 30 years and is currently a candidate for a Master's in Nonprofit Leadership degree at Seattle University.