Gaining New Perspectives through Service Learning

Don't let the title of this book fool you; the subtitle is more telling. *Promoting Health and Wellness in Underserved Communities: Multidisciplinary Perspectives Through Service Learning* is a collection of reports about service learning experiences. Service learning involves academic courses that meet community needs while developing students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills

The cases in this book (edited by Anabel Pelham and Elizabeth Sills, published by Stylus Publishing LLC, styluspub.com) deal with public health because this field has an especially long history of service learning. However, there are lessons here for all organizations working with students to meet community needs. The first case in the book, for example, offers fascinating insights about making connections across generations. The views of young students and senior clients about other generations were skewed going into the project, but learning how to communicate with each other broke down intergenerational misconceptions.

The reports explain common problems within service learning projects and ways obstacles have been—or could be—overcome. Highlighting the virtue of teamwork, an entrepreneurial spirit in solving problems, and the importance of interdisciplinary practice, they demonstrate the benefits not only to education but to community building as well.

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Why We Deny the Obvious — and What to Do about It

In *Willful Blindness*, Margaret Heffernan describes how our brains can deceive us if we're not careful. Here's how to keep from sabotaging ourselves:

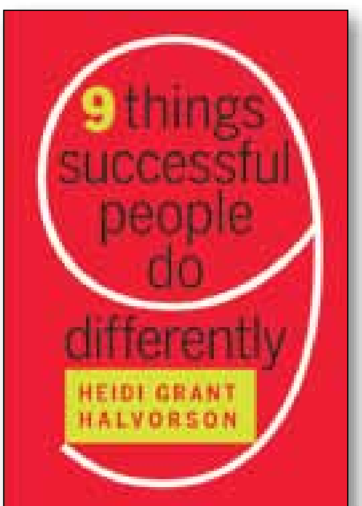
- **Pay attention.** Our brains are programmed to ignore what we don't want or expect to see. Shake things up. Have staff members rotate jobs. Arrange for board members to sit in on other organizations' boards. Provide educational opportunities to keep people on their toes.
- **Introduce diversity to your staff and board.** It's natural to want to be with people like you, but doing so can make you dangerously complacent. Bernie Madoff was able to perpetrate such a giant fraud because he and his investors were so like-minded and felt so comfortable with each other that no one bothered to look closely at what he was doing. Lack of diversity can reduce conflict—but without conflict, it's easy to ignore threats.
- **Make it clear that you want people to tell you the truth,** even if it's a hard truth. Studies find that most employees feel unable to tell their bosses about ideas for improvement or concerns about serious organizational problems. Create feedback systems, including whistleblower programs, to make it easy for people to speak up.
- **Appoint someone to be a devil's advocate in meetings**—someone whose job is to call out challenges, identify holes, and express concerns.
- **Require people to take annual vacations.** Train them in jobs other than their own so they can take over for one another periodically. Spread financial oversight among as many people as possible. For example, the person who records cash receipts shouldn't be the one who takes the money to the bank. Rotate duties so people are constantly checking each other's work. Our brains are wired to trust, so we need strong control systems to protect ourselves.
- **Bring in coaches, consultants, and other outsiders** who can see with fresh eyes and aren't afraid to voice the truth.
- **Hold leaderless meetings.** The desire to please a leader can eliminate a huge array of options.
- **Keep history alive.** Tell stories about your organization's triumphs and disasters, errors and lessons learned. Such honest retelling of the past will keep you from repeating mistakes, help you spot trends, and make reoccurring patterns more obvious.
- **Err on the side of having people work less hours** rather than more. Studies show that the first four hours of work are the most productive. After that, the higher brain functions we use to make decisions become less and less effective, and we start making mistakes. Be sure workers have plenty of breaks. Discourage them from working overtime and, if they must, give them time off afterwards to rejuvenate. "A tired worker tends to perform like an unskilled worker," according to a University of California Berkeley study.
- **Discourage multitasking.** Our brains trick us into thinking we can do more than one thing at a time, but we can't. Trying to do so merely increases error and poor judgment.
- **Don't over-emphasize targets.** When people are focused on achieving a target at any cost, they can tune out other considerations such as ethics, legality, and safety.
- **Admit that you and your colleagues aren't immune** to tricks of the brain that lead to tunnel vision, error, and fraud. Use as many safeguards as possible to protect yourself from the blind spots that can derail you.

Habits of Success

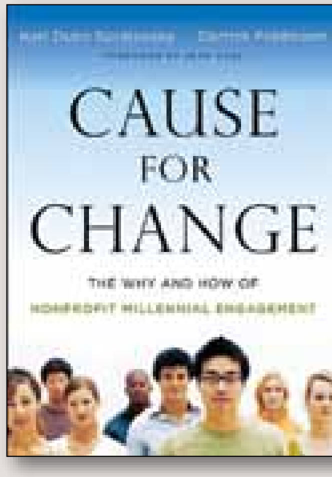
Why do some people succeed while others fail? Research has pinpointed practices that cultivate success. Here are a few:

- **Be a realistic optimist.** Positive thinking is important to sustain motivation and reach your goals. But there's a big difference between believing you'll succeed and believing you'll succeed *easily.* Realistic optimists understand that they need to make things happen rather than waiting for opportunities simply to appear. They not only visualize success; they work toward it, one step at a time.
- **Build your willpower muscle** by regularly doing things you'd rather not do. Practicing ways to resist temptation and stick things out when you'd rather quit is a key to achieving success. Start with small challenges, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator, and build from there. Don't overtax your self-control muscle by taking on too many challenges at once.
- **Focus on getting better** (developing ability) rather than being good (proving that you know what you're doing). When you think of what you're doing in terms of learning, mastering, and making mistakes along the way, you'll stay motivated despite setbacks. Consider the people around you as a resource, and ask for help when you need it.

—adapted from *Nine Things Successful People Do Differently* (Harvard Business Review Press)



Have You Fully Engaged the Millennials?



The millennial generation is large and influential. Millennials (those born between 1977 and 1997) are young, and their story is still unfolding. It's clear, however, that they have a powerful contribution to make. *Cause for Change: The Why and How of Nonprofit Millennial Engagement* (John Wiley & Sons, wiley.com) examines how millennials want to be engaged as constituents, volunteers, donors, and employees.

It can be dangerous to generalize about an entire generation. But there are certain commonalities that make millennials special, and looking at what drives them can help us make the most of all they have to offer.

We know that millennials (also known as Generation Y) rely more than previous generations on relationships, collaboration, and transparency. They're more tolerant, networked, and comfortable using new technology (in fact, many members of the generation are uncomfortable when they have to do without new technology). They're willing to boldly tackle our most pressing social problems.

The experiences of millennials make them more accepting of ambiguity and complexity, and less in need of control. They have a strong commitment to social justice, and they bravely face an uncertain future — together.

The millennial generation has the power to change how nonprofits function while changing communities around the world. Nonprofits can take advantage of the power of the millennial generation by understanding it better.

Here are some simple things you can do to maximize millennials' potential:

- **Give them a seat at the table.** Millennials expect to be an integral part of the organization. That goes beyond weekly staff meetings, periodic updates, and continual feedback. They want to sit in on board meetings, see financial statements, and hear directly from the organization's top leader about how things are going. They want to be part of brainstorming sessions and offer their opinions on a regular basis. Leaders should consider using online discussions, Skype, Facebook, and similar tools for ongoing communication.
- **Support risk-taking.** Millennials aren't afraid to take risks and try many methods to find one that works. They like to experiment with new program models, often seeking technology-based solutions. Taking advantage of their creative, fearless nature may mean that you need to provide new online tools. Doing so may lead to useful innovations and improvements.
- **Understand mission-life balance.** What millennials prefer is to work long hours when needed and then balance those hours by taking extra time off for personal pursuits. They often work outside the office to support the organization's mission, evangelize about the cause, and get others involved. Recognize and reward this informal work, and give them the flexibility they need. Help them experiment with new ways to market, communicate, and build an army of enthusiastic supporters. Be sure to offer them plenty of opportunities for personal and professional development.

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

How to Raise More Money

In *FUNdraising,* Jean Block (jblockinc.com) shares these and other helpful rules for fundraising success:

1. **Ask for what you want.** Don't use phrases like "Whatever you can do." Segment donors, and ask them for a specific amount based on what they gave before or what you know they're capable of giving. Consider creating a menu of amounts so donors can pick exactly what they want to give.
2. **Don't ask donors to do what you haven't done.** Institute a required annual giving policy for your board. You can't ethically ask others for money if your own board doesn't set an example.
3. **Ask in person.** The larger your request, the more important it is to meet one-on-one. Don't be afraid to ask big. Assume you'll get a "Yes," but if you get a "No," turn it into a long, fruitful conversation. Find out what you need to know to ask better next time. Ask lots of questions—about timing, budgets, funding priorities, other possible reasons for the "No." Discuss other ways you might work together, and ask for referrals to other people who might want to take advantage of the opportunity to give.

Five Ways to Avoid Hiring a Liar

Why do we so readily trust people we don't know? Studies show that when we meet someone for the first time, we usually have a slightly positive impression. We tend to look for information that supports that positive view, and ignore or discount information that conflicts with it.

We even extend that benefit of a doubt to people we're thinking of hiring. But the truth is, although we'd rather not believe it, many people lie on their resumes and in interviews. So, for the sake of our organization, we need to make a concerted effort to counteract our natural inclination to trust.

Here are five things you can do to avoid hiring a liar:

1. **Look for gaps on the resume.** Gaps are frequently used to hide negative information. The applicant hopes you won't notice the six-month gap between jobs. But now you will, and you'll inquire about it thoroughly.
2. **Insist that applicants include months as well as years of employment** when providing information. Applicants sometimes hide information by including only the years associated with a job. So, 2008-2009 could be as short as a few days or as long as 24 months.
3. **Have applicants sign a release** giving you permission to verify employment and degrees. If they refuse, hesitate, or give you excuses about why they can't or won't, they're likely hiding something.
4. **Create a questionnaire** that you use with all applicants. Using a standard set of questions will help avoid the possibility that you're unconsciously biased in favor of someone who impresses you in the interview.
5. **Get a work "sample."** As part of the interview, give the applicant a task associated with the job's responsibilities. For instance, ask a potential marketing director to brand a product.

Here's a final thought: If you have a hesitation, way back in your mind somewhere, that something's just not right—or that the applicant is too perfect—trust your instincts. Inquire more until you're completely satisfied.

—from David A. Weiman, Psy.D., PC, Weiman Consulting, weimanconsulting.com

Find Your Best Style of Asking

People like to interact with others in one of two ways: Introverts are energized by their inner lives, while extroverts are vitalized by being with others. People also gather information in two ways: Analytics focus on specific data. Intuitives prefer to look at future possibilities and big ideas. When you put those four qualities on two axes, you come up with four asking styles.

Andrea Kihlstedt, author of *Asking Styles: Harness Your Personal Fundraising Power* invites you to find your true self in the four styles of asking for money:

- **Kindred Spirits** (intuitive introverts) rely less on data and more on instinct and ideas. They connect with donors through their deep, heart-felt commitment to the cause.
- **Rainmakers** (analytic extroverts) like being with other people and using data that's concrete and specific. They have a great ability to adapt to other people's styles and use that skill to connect with donors.
- **Mission Controllers** (analytic introverts), like Rainmakers, prefer measurable data. They point their energy inward, making them more reflective, cautious, and slow to speak. They connect with donors by laying out a thorough, detailed presentation.
- **Go-getters** (intuitive extroverts) love to interact with others and are more comfortable with big ideas than detailed data. They relate to donors through charisma and high energy.

Kihlstedt provides an assessment you can take to pin down your own asking style. She goes on to detail the best way to prepare to meet with donors, based on your primary asking style.

The book is part of the "In the Trenches" series published by Charity Channel Press (charitychannel.com). These books are written by top practitioners in the nonprofit sector in a wonderfully down-to-earth, step-by-step manner and are concise, fun to read, and eminently practical.

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