



Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits

Reviewed by John Blundell

What's the best book you've ever read on nonprofit management? Having been with trade associations and educational charities for over 30 years now, I am often asked that question.

Well I now have a brand new answer, namely *Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits* by Leslie R. Crutchfield and Heather McLeod Grant, published by Jossey-Bass.

Leslie and Heather have solid nonprofit

experience. Heather was also with McKinsey and Company, and this whole book is a project of the Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship at Duke University in North Carolina. Leslie is with Ashoka, a group I have long much admired.

The authors began by selecting a dozen top-performing nonprofits. The book is long on methodology, and it is hard to dispute any of it. Out of their research came this stellar group. I will not list their names (as most will



not be known to you) but rather their fields: hunger relief (two organizations fell in this category); federal and state budget analysis; national service, youth leadership; environment; museums, science education; housing; conservative public policy; Hispanic interests; housing and economic development; education reform; and youth leadership, housing, and job training.

Those labels are not completely satisfactory, but they'll have to do given space constraints.

SO, WHAT DID I LEARN?

I read page 18 again and again. It is the page that summarizes six myths of nonprofit management:

1. Perfect Management: “Some management is necessary, but it is not *sufficient* to explain ... high levels of impact.”

2. Brand-Name Awareness: “A few hardly focus on marketing at all.”

3. A Breakthrough New Idea: Tweaking an old idea is often just as good as the big new one.

4. Textbook Mission Statements: “Most of them are too busy living it” to be endlessly rewriting mission statements.

5. High Ratings on Conventional Metrics: Rating agencies can measure overhead but not impact. Hear, hear!

6. Large Budgets: Size and impact do not correlate. How true! So there are the myths.

NOW FOR THE SIX BEST PRACTICES:

1. Advocate and Serve: If you start as an advocacy group, you will add services and vice versa; and there are synergies, so the more you do of both, the greater the total impact.

2. Make Markets Work: How wonderful to read these words in a nonprofit text! Self interest trumps altruism. It's more than that.

3. Inspire Evangelists: Volunteers and donors are more than cheap labor and a source of money. They can be made into evangelists.

4. Nurture Nonprofit Networks: Really high-impact groups build networks, advance their whole field (not just their niche), and see so-called competitors as allies who are to be helped. If only I could bottle up this section alone and beat some people over the head with it. There are some naïve people who just do not understand this point and have an ultimately futile and, in the meantime, highly damaging mental model.

5. Master the Art of Adaptation: “[L]isten, learn and modify ... based on external cues”

6. Share Leadership: “[S]hare power in order to be a stronger force for good ... distribute leadership ... cultivate a strong second-in-command, build enduring executive teams with long tenure, and develop highly engaged boards”

On the face of it, some of this could be quickly described as banal. But the richness of this book lies in chapters 2 through 7, which examine these six themes with wonderful illustrations from all the top 12 performers.

Chapters 8 and 9 cover “Sustaining Impact” and “Putting It into Practice”; the latter contains “What to Do” lists that will keep your staff and board arguing to positive effect all day and all night.

This book struck a lot of chords for me. Obviously one does not agree with all it says, but so much of it was so good that it goes to the “must tell all my mates to read it” bracket and scores overall A++.

Now if you want to know the best book on fundraising, try *Relationship Fundraising: A Donor-Based Approach to the Business of Raising Money* by Ken Burnett.

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