

The approaches suggested here do not require significant time or resources. The steps and tools are relatively self-explanatory. The approaches are written by the point of view of leaders but can be applied by their staff as well. Nonprofit leaders can visit crenyc.org to explore consulting engagements on any of the suggested approaches.



Circle of Challenge: Five Key Challenges of Nonprofit Leaders

From *Meeting the Job Challenges of Nonprofit Leaders: A Fieldbook of Strategies and Actions* by Jean Lobell, Mohan Sikka, and Pavitra Menon, published by the Center for Creative Leadership, 2014

The leadership development literature has surfaced the layers and complexity of challenges that nonprofit leaders face on a day-to-day basis. CRE's robust experience with leadership and organizational development supports these findings. We have witnessed the issues nonprofit leaders grapple with to remain effective and keep their organizations sustainable.

These challenges are a combination of leadership and management issues. The leadership issues revolve around driving change, aligning programs with mission, thinking generatively, creating a desired culture, developing strategic partnerships, and understanding one's impact on others. The management issues revolve around getting results, developing tactical solutions, supervising individuals and teams, and managing resources.

We then grouped these leadership and management issues into **five key challenges**:



SUPERVISION

Role complexity

- Reframing**
- Differentiate between "being on the dance floor" and "standing on the balcony"
 - Making room for others to learn by trying (and failing)
 - Pause for role and task clarity

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Make time for staff observation
 - Change from a directive to a coaching orientation, with transparency
 - Make time for proactive planning and role clarification

Managing individual performance

- Reframing**
- Broaden perspective about staff engagement to include fostering high performance
 - Redefine "holding staff accountable" as a responsibility owed to staff

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Align mission with departmental goals than translate to individual goals and objectives
 - Be consistent about assessing progress toward goals and expectations

Professional boundaries

- Reframing**
- Shift from avoiding emotions to honoring the whole person
 - Empower rather than rescue
 - Believe that self-care is a starting point for service to others

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Establish clinical supervision as a protocol for staff and volunteers involved in client-intensive roles
 - Develop more effective managerial styles
 - Establish clear protocols around working hours and client contact

SELF

Use of influence and power

- Reframing**
- Acknowledge that even collaborating programs or teams are different
 - Build upstream support for shared goals
 - Make room for trust building
 - Shift from a popularity to a consistency stance

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Build support for your approach from key stakeholders
 - Make room for frank conversation about what's possible in any relationship, including areas of agreement and disagreement
 - Prioritize relationship and team-building activities to increase trust
 - Use supervision and team meetings to set a consistent tone

Personal impact and effectiveness

- Reframing**
- Make room for a variety of styles depending on the performer and situation
 - Accept shared responsibility for low morale
 - Realize that assessment and pause are precursors to moving strongly ahead

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Use "situational leadership"
 - Make room for openness and direct feedback
 - Create structure and pause for team-building

Burnout

- Reframing**
- Recognize that being overwhelmed is a choice
 - Embrace the porous work-home-life boundaries
 - Make space for the inevitability of challenging moments
 - Embrace leisure and recreation as a necessary ingredient of productivity

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Make weekly planning a habit
 - Make time for breaks in a long day
 - Adapt working environment to human needs, where possible
 - Find a buddy for the moments when stress reaches a red-flag level
 - Make time for, and commit to, vacations where you are unreachable

Dilemma of multiple roles

- Reframing**
- Shift definition of responsiveness from an "open door" stance to having impact
 - Accept that it's okay to say "no"
 - Recognize that there are other quality providers

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Establish partnerships
 - Communicate with stakeholders

Managing diverse stakeholders

- Reframing**
- Reconnect multiple and even competing programs goals to a shared mission
 - Move from tensions to creativity in diversity
 - View multiple interests as opportunities rather than threats

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Clarify the mission of the organization and stay on message
 - Develop culture and platforms to harness diversity
 - Build the organization's capacity for outreach, marketing, and PR

Managing differences

- Reframing**
- Shift from a "hodge-podge" perspective to finding common ground
 - Move from efforts for uniformity to mining the richness of diversity

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Convene all relevant parties
 - Make time to learn more about strategies for managing differences

STAFFING

Recruitment and retention

- Reframing**
- Move from a reactive to a strategic stance
 - Shift assessment criteria for hiring
 - Appreciate that retention strategies start on Day One

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Conduct a mini strategic recruitment assessment
 - Develop a more comprehensive screening and interview protocol
 - Make sure onboarding and ongoing support systems for new hires are in place to integrate them into the organization effectively

Work demands vs. staff capacity

- Reframing**
- Shift from focus on staff expansion to work containment & skills enhancement
 - Recognize the impact of rewards differs from person to person

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Pilot the idea of work containment and skills enhancement
 - Determine staff's "employee value proposition"

Rewards and recognition

- Reframing**
- Move from financial rewards to recognition
 - Understand that sharing leadership is a form of recognition
 - View staff development as a reward and an investment in the organization

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Recognize what constitutes value for staff
 - Offer authentic (not automatic) praise and thanks for jobs well done
 - Maximize the team's individual abilities
 - Explore staff development beyond mandated technical training

SCOPE AND SCALE

Program complexity

- Reframing**
- Move from complexity to priorities
 - Make room for confusion and uncertainty
 - Shift from a builder to an architect stance

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Establish priorities
 - Make room for planning, not just execution
 - Embrace unexpected opportunities with high potential payoff
 - Identify tasks to delegate and staff who are ready to take on more responsibility

Suboptimal infrastructure

- Reframing**
- Shift from siloed roles to shared responsibilities
 - Move from sophisticated processes to "good enough" protocols
 - View the absence of systems as a chance to innovate

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Establish a cross-functional team to determine a workable solution
 - Utilize professional services in the open marketplace or share back-office functions when it's impractical to build internal capacity for support functions

Managing program and organizational performance

- Reframing**
- Distinguish outputs (product, services, or facilities that result from an organization's or project's activities) from outcomes (the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that occur as a result from the project or services)
 - Embrace the notion that programs that don't get to outcomes may need to change, relocate, or close

- 1-2-3 Steps**
- Connect the dots between program activities and outcomes
 - Explore coalition-building
 - Plan for the contingency of orderly divestment

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