

Sharing Leadership - Strategies for Nonprofit EDs and Boards

How can nonprofit Boards and executive staff share leadership responsibilities? This July 2019 educational workshop presented three models for sharing leadership, all from smaller nonprofits that have been in operation more than 20 years.

- **Board Chair/ED Shared Leadership** - Abraham Tetenbaum and Donna Wood-Babcock are Founder/ Board Chair and ED respectively of Enrichment Works, which for 20 years has offered theatre productions with educational objectives (from bullying to animal welfare) to students in schools throughout Southern California. When a dramatic change in funding occurred a few years ago, the two leaders built up the organization from the resulting crisis - working in every aspect as a two-person team. Each leader also helped educate the other - and Abraham Tetenbaum, a playwright and former executive of several cultural organizations, says that the active collaboration typical of the theatre world helped prepare him for working in a more collaborative mode. This indicates that sharing leadership is more likely to succeed in nonprofits that already have a collaborative culture.
- **Co-ED Shared Leadership** - Paul Hahn and David Riherd have for 25 years been co-EDs of Wildlife Learning Center, an animal refuge and educational program which has worked with hundreds of schools in Los Angeles. The two biologists share all aspects of leadership, including working with staff, board and funders. Their success indicates that a shared leadership model is more likely to succeed if there is good communication, shared goals, and willingness to disagree and still move ahead.
- **Executive Committee Shared Leadership** - Eileen Barnett was a long-time member of the six-person leadership group running the Musical Theatre Guild, which for more than 20 years has presented "lost and forgotten treasures of American musical theatre" in staged concert readings. The Executive Committee is elected each year from the members of this theatre company, all actors in musical theatre. Thus the group has no artistic director or executive director. The long-term success of this approach to shared leadership comes in part from the care the group uses to select members who want to be part of a team, and all are committed to the Executive Committee's process in part because they have little control over their work opportunities as actors.

The workshop included a brief discussion of the science behind effective leadership sharing and collaboration approaches for both individuals and organizations, by VNR ED Dr. Thomas Backer. Handouts attached to this summary present a brief review of that science, and also leadership development resources for nonprofits from local, regional and national sources. The workshop was the launch event for the VNR Leadership Initiative, which is described in an attached handout.

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