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Article 51 – “Warriors and Wizards – Which One Are You?”

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Are you a ‘Warrior’ or a ‘Wizard’? Or would you be described as a ‘Caregiver’ or ‘Analyst.’ People who work in the nonprofit sector are often seen as caregivers, much like educators, social workers, doctors and nurses. An analyst may describe someone working in insurance or the financial industry, while warriors and wizards may connote images of an entrepreneur, fighter pilot or athlete. Authors Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal use these terms as a way of understanding organizations and leadership. Although some of these words may create a certain image that you are drawn to while others may repel you, Bolman and Deal suggest that to be a good leader, you must learn how to take on different behavioral characteristics and perform different roles in any given situation.

That is the lesson 60 local nonprofit leaders learned during the first class of the Leadership Success Academy, a training in governance and leadership for nonprofit board members. This board leadership boot camp is a program of the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys, underwritten by a grant from the Marion Stevens Fund. Now in its third year, over 130 people from 56 nonprofit organizations and groups have attended. The participants are judges, attorneys, business owners, retired corporate executives, entrepreneurs, and professionals who have voluntarily agreed to serve as a board member of a nonprofit organization and participate in the class in order to improve their understanding of nonprofit governance and leadership.

The first session of the Academy focuses on leadership. The Bolman and Deal leadership model is just one tool used in the Academy to help build effective board leadership. According to Bolman and Deal’s four frame model, a leader must decide which approach or combination of approaches would work best in any particular situation. Similar to well-known personality profiles and situational leadership models, the message is that each of us has a preferred style that we favor which influences our interpretation of situations and subsequent approach. The model suggests that leaders display leadership behaviors in one of the four types of frameworks, but the style can either be effective or ineffective depending upon the chosen behavior and situation.

Although the leadership assessment and model may have been new for many in the class, most felt the concept seemed like common sense. At the same time, a majority were surprised by their personal leadership style analysis, how strongly their behavior impacts how they approach certain situations, and how difficult it is to change. The point of the learning is that we need to understand ourselves, to be conscious of this at all times, and to be aware of the limitations in favoring our style over others’ as there is no one style that is better or right all the time.

Just like individuals, an organization can also have a dominant framework and the climate of an organization is directly related to the leadership style of the board. It is important for boards to understand how their individual style impacts the organizational climate. “Everything you do as a leader will affect the climate of the organization.” A good leader understands that organizational events can be interpreted in a variety of ways and the way to succeed is to consider the multitude of ways of seeing any given issue from different perspectives.

A key issue of the Academy is that leadership is a never ending process of “self-study, education, training and experience.” Good leaders continually study to improve their leadership skills and knowledge. “Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent.” Too often nonprofit boards become managers rather than developing vision and strategies and motivating and inspiring people to want to achieve higher goals. Two key elements leadership boards should be focused on are trust and creating shared values in order to encourage ethical behavior.

Leadership guru Warren Bennis acknowledges the complexity of leadership, “I used to think that running an organization was equivalent to conducting a symphony orchestra. But I don’t think that’s quite it; it’s more like jazz. There is more improvisation.” Just like jazz musicians rely on training and interpreting cues from each other, volunteers need to understand the concepts of leadership and principles of nonprofit management while working together to further the mission of a nonprofit organization. These volunteers participating in the Academy in order to better serve their organizations are to be commended. We are fortunate to have the support of the Marion Stevens Fund and for recognizing the value of having strong leadership in the nonprofit sector.

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