



## Who is a Nonprofit Leader, Really?

The big boss may have a fancy title, a corner office and the final say, but none of these things automatically command the respect and admiration of a team. The traits of a real leader are much harder to come by, and much more valuable.

### **They are the people who...**

#### **Make big waves with limited resources**

The best leaders are innovative, resourceful and unintimidated by the unique challenges of the nonprofit world. Not only can they manage their budgets responsibly, they have an eye on the next financial opportunity for the organization — whether it's a donor prospect or a lucrative sponsorship. Their mastery of the financial side of the business makes their team members feel secure and optimistic for the future.

#### **Step up in times of crisis**

When the public image of the organization is at stake, the real leaders are easy to spot. They don't panic and they don't shut down. They open up to sage advice from people who understand the situation and develop an action plan that makes sense.

#### **Back up their knowledge with experience**

Great nonprofit leaders can fundraise with the best of them, negotiate contracts and manage complex budgets. They have a strong network of contacts in the community and know exactly when to call on them. They understand the ins and outs of working with a board of directors and harnessing the skills and resources of its members.

#### **Attract people to the mission**

Effective leaders are like shepherds for their cause — they bring people in. The ease with which they communicate the purpose of their organization to a powerful donor, a prospective hire, a parent on the sidelines of a soccer game or a person in need is second nature to them because they're doing it day in and day out.

## **Understand people**

Emotional intelligence is often one of the most under-appreciated qualities of a candidate for a high-level position. A CEO who looks perfect on paper but doesn't pay attention to what makes people tick — or lacks the interest to find out — will only be goading, not leading.

## **Listen**

Good leaders put stock in the opinions of team members at all levels. Not only do they encourage people to speak up, they approach people and ask them to weigh in on big-picture strategies. This is a great way to both spot new talent and test out a new idea in its infancy. Effective leadership is collaborative, and effective leaders are curious and open-minded. They don't want to be surrounded by "yes" people, but rather by the smartest and most innovative people they can find.

## **Make the right calls**

Good judgment is paramount when it comes to leadership. If someone has a history of making informed and sensible decisions, he or she will quickly gain trust and admiration. Questionable or hasty decisions that put the mission in danger are hard for people to forget.

## **Open doors and knock down barriers**

The traditional office was a top-down affair, set up so that junior staff members supported their managers and bosses. Today, that dynamic is changing. The most effective leaders hire people who are well-suited for the role, and then they get out of the way. They ask themselves questions like these:

What new growth opportunity can I offer Sally this year?

What would make her work life easier?

What resources can I find to help her do her job better?

An effective leader takes personal responsibility for making the team feel fulfilled, productive and motivated.

## **Define success — and don't stop until they reach it**

Leaders don't wait to be told where they need to take the organization. They already have the ideas, the dreams and the road map for how to get there. They deftly manage the expectations of stakeholders while setting their own agendas and getting their team on board.

<https://www.missionbox.com/article/134/qualities-of-great-leaders-effective-nonprofit-leadership>