

“Social-Emotional Care for Women in Nonprofits”

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Women leaders are a minority group that has a unique perspective in the nonprofit sector. Because of the helping nature of the industry, it's not surprising that almost fifty percent of Nonprofit Executive Directors are female and 73% of nonprofit employees are women.

Women have a more powerful presence in the nonprofit sector than other business sector in America. However, even with impressive numbers of employment in nonprofits, women still face many of the same challenges of inequality from the for-profit sector. Women often find themselves with limited representation in leadership, even though the numbers prove that they are actively leading organizations and carry much of the work.

Chancellor of Texas Women's University, Carine M. Feyten, outlines this issue in her article, [Women Are Valuable Leaders In Times Of Health Crisis](#). “Even outside the front lines of ERs and ICUs, professions staffed primarily by women bear the brunt of adapting to the challenges associated with this disease — and are reacting remarkably quickly to come up with new modes of work and community building,” she said.

COVID-19 has amplified the needs of service communities and has expanded the missions of many nonprofit organizations which rely on philanthropy and public support to thrive. Women nonprofit leaders are feeling extreme pressure as they frantically try to stretch organization resources to support communities in need.

When race is factored into the equation, African-American women face more layered challenges as nonprofit leaders than their white counterparts. “In tandem with having fewer financial resources, black women-led organizations are often serving the most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations with the least amount of funding,” Ayoka Wiles, a senior director of programs and innovation at [Cool Culture](#), a nonprofit in New York, said in her article for [NonProfit PRO](#).

The ripple effects of this pandemic are not limited to the symptoms of Coronavirus itself, and that places extra urgency on nonprofits to deliver relief. However, with no definite end point in sight, the emotional burden on nonprofit workers and their leaders is mounting.

Social-Emotional Learning and Awareness

Women often feel they must take on every role; often struggling to balance careers, motherhood, home management, and their personal needs and relationships. Now more than ever, women in nonprofit organizations are feeling the pressure, unable to realign priorities when the needs of many are on their shoulders.

As organizations step up to the plate, leaders and workers must not become depleted by the added pressures of the pandemic. Focusing on some competencies of emotional and social learning can support those on the front lines of service and allow for resilience to press toward post-pandemic times. How can social-emotional learning lend itself to your leadership? Let us first look at self-awareness. This is one's ability to understand your thoughts and feelings and connect them to your behaviors.

Acknowledge How You're Feeling

Be aware of how you feel about the circumstance of the pandemic and how they are affecting your organization and leadership. You may do this through quiet meditation or personal reflection. Understand that there may be layers of stress that you are managing. Some stress may be “normal,” while some may be intensified by the pandemic and its fallout.

Give Yourself Credit and Focus on Growth

Take stock of decisions you have made and their outcomes. Celebrate your successes and assess what changes can help you moving forward. Pat yourself on the back for small wins- they build confidence for you to move your organization forward. Even small victories and baby steps move you toward growth, so don't overlook any progress you've made. Give yourself the same grace and advice you would give someone seeking help from your organization. We're all navigating a new normal that has left us shaken, but you can't pour from an empty cup, so have compassion for yourself.

Practice Self-Care and Put Yourself First Sometimes

Self-management is a leader's ability to regulate their emotions and actions in a variety of environments. As leaders called to mission-oriented work, we often spend our energy working toward meeting the needs of others. Putting yourself before others can often feel selfish to those who labor in helping professions. During this time of increased need, you must be intentional about keeping your emotional and physical needs a priority.

Don't Underestimate Your Stress

One of the primary tenants of self-management is stress management. This health concept is important enough that the CDC has a section of its website [dedicated to tools and tips on managing stress](#) during the pandemic. Just as you schedule staff meetings or take time to respond to emails, self-care should be a mandatory part of your schedule. Your self-care could be being intentional about keeping an uninterrupted lunch hour every day or being strict about your daily 30-minute walk. Evaluate what self-care tools keep you balanced and better able to execute the responsibilities for your organization. Do not neglect personal health appointments during this time and be open and honest with your healthcare provider about all your concerns. Nonprofit leaders can only embody their leadership roles if their needs are fully met. Audre Lorde wrote, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

Share the Workload

As you care for yourself, be confident that you are contributing to the strength and mission of your company. Successful business, especially nonprofit, is all about relationships. Competency in the area of relationship skills allows leaders to create and maintain healthy relationships, and derive positive meaning from these relationships. Support from others is essential, especially during challenging events. First, recognize that to be a resilient leader, one must engage the whole team. Avoid holding the world only on your shoulders in the name of leadership. Through fully engaging your staff, you not only share the workload, you support the leadership growth of your team. This can help nonprofit executives to prioritize, manage what's most important, create more reasonable workloads, and reduce stress.

Reach Out for Support from Your Peers

One of the most untapped relationship resources for leaders is peer support. Connecting to other non-profit leaders can provide you with the ear of others who can empathize with challenges unique to your sector or service specialty. Co-leaders in the sector can share emotional support and even resources to

enhance your organization's reach. Forbes magazine cites ten reasons to join a CEO support group; during stressful times, the greatest tenant is that these support groups provide a safe haven CEOs would be hard-pressed to find anywhere else. Creating, renewing, and/or maintaining personal support networks with other nonprofit leaders is essential to the current time, and will carry you into the future ebbs and flows of your sector.

The pandemic has changed the landscape of the nonprofit sector and the old normal will probably not return. The pandemic has strained even the strongest organizations and shined a light on the gendered and racial inequalities that plague our mission-driven companies. Most of our leaders can proudly say that through sacrifice and flexibility, services are continuing to be offered to communities.

As mission-driven CEOs, you must move into the future with clarity and understanding of how we arrived at this point and what can propel us into a more stable future. Resiliency does not happen through luck or happenstance, but with an intentional plan. Hopefully, the world will not face another global pandemic in our lifetime, but our ability to recuperate after dark days will have exponential benefits in the uncertain future.