



“5 Truths for Transformational Leaders: How Nonprofit Organizations Thrive, Grow, and Make a Profound Difference”

By Ed Mishrell

Change-Makers Nonprofit Book Club

October 2023

Virtual Book Club Meeting Summary

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Summary

Melanie Lambert opened this month's book club virtual meeting welcoming Kelli and providing a brief overview of the discussion. Nonprofit and Business Consulting Experiences Melanie and Kelli had a detailed discussion about their experiences in nonprofit and business consulting. Melanie showed her enthusiasm for using Amazon's book club for nonprofit professionals and shared her expertise in nonprofit fundraising and grant writing. Kelli, who recently started her own business after experiencing burnout in her previous role in healthcare, shared her journey from being a sales representative in a senior living community to starting her own business. Both women expressed their desire to learn and grow together and discussed potential grant writing opportunities.

Leaders and Mission: A Fanatical Focus

Melanie and Kelli discussed the content of a this month's book selection, focusing first on the concept of leaders being fanatical about their mission. Melanie highlighted how the author built upon each truth in the book, and the two women shared personal experiences from their past and present roles to illustrate the importance of this trait in leaders. They also touched on the topic of how leaders can create barriers with excessive rules and processes that don't align with the mission.



Passion & Attitude in Leadership Discussed

Melanie and Kelli discussed the importance of passion and attitude in employees, particularly in leadership roles. They reflected on their past experiences, with Melanie noting how the lack of passion in some colleagues affected the organization's culture. Kelli agreed, emphasizing her own

preference for hiring for attitude over experience or qualifications. They also touched upon the challenges of portraying passion in job applications and the potential for women to be too self-critical when assessing their own leadership skills.

Leadership Challenges and Staff Issues

Melanie and Kelli discussed the challenges of leadership, particularly in making necessary changes and addressing staff issues. Melanie shared her experience of being hesitant to make a difficult decision early in her tenure as an executive director, despite recognizing the need for it. Both agreed on the difficulty of balancing being a new leader and needing to make immediate changes, while also wanting to avoid being perceived as overly harsh or confrontational. They acknowledged the discomfort of having to potentially remove someone from a role, but also noted the importance of documenting attempts at remediation and providing opportunities for growth.

Vigilance, Skill Development, and Ruthless Leadership

Melanie and Kelli discussed the importance of vigilance and addressing issues within an organization to prevent them from becoming the status quo. They highlighted the potential pitfalls of relying on past methods, especially in fundraising, and the need for transformational leaders to develop the skills and knowledge of their team members. Melanie also emphasized the importance of ruthless leadership, not in the sense of being brutal, but rather in prioritizing the mission above all else. Both agreed on the need for continuous improvement and stepping out of comfort zones to achieve this.

Strategy and Storytelling in Nonprofit Fundraising

Melanie and Kelli discussed the importance of having a clear strategy for grant writing and fundraising in the nonprofit sector. Melanie emphasized the need for a compelling story about the



organization's impact, differentiating between strategy and strategic plan. She shared her experience from Emory University's successful 1 billion dollar campaign, highlighting the importance of consistent internal and external communication. Both Melanie and Kelli stressed the significance of differentiation and execution in the nonprofit sector, as well as the importance of data in justifying an organization's existence and communicating strategy to the entire staff. Melanie cautioned against

focusing on the functional aspects of achieving a goal over the ultimate impact. Finally, they discussed the challenges of securing grant funding, emphasizing the importance of framing funding needs in terms of their impact on the community.

Transformational Leadership and Feedback Culture

Melanie and Kelli discussed the importance of transformational leadership and the role of 360-degree feedback in an organization's growth. Melanie emphasized the need for openness to feedback, being vulnerable, and focusing on the organization's mission rather than personal ego. She shared her experience of wanting more frequent communication and clearer expectations from her supervisors. Kelli agreed, highlighting the importance of taking ego out of the feedback process. They both stressed that constructive feedback should be seen as positive for the organization and not focused on the individual.

Transformational Leaders as a Professional Specialty: Challenges and Solutions

Melanie and Kelli discussed the role of transformational leaders in higher education and the challenges they face. Melanie shared her experience with interim leaders who were able to successfully transform the organization, but often moved on once their task was complete. She also highlighted the importance of competitive salaries and benefits for employees in the current competitive job market. The conversation ended with a mention of the book's chapter on future trends and challenges, including the impact of the pandemic on workforce challenges and the changing definition of work.

Investing in Staff and Diversity

Melanie and Kelli discussed the importance of investing in professional development and the value of leaders who encourage staff to grow and learn. Melanie noted that some leaders fear investing in



professional development will lead to their best employees leaving for better opportunities, while others see it as a way to improve the organization and benefit the community. They also emphasized the need for nonprofits to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion in their organizations and boards, as it can impact funding opportunities and overall effectiveness. Melanie advocated for a culture that nurtures and empowers staff, and Kelli agreed, highlighting the need to pay entry-level employees a living wage.

Nonprofit Leadership Challenges and Solutions

Melanie and Kelli discussed the challenges and opportunities of running nonprofit organizations. Melanie emphasized the importance of paying nonprofit staff fairly to attract and retain passionate, dedicated employees, and the need for nonprofits to collaborate with other organizations for effective impact. Kelli agreed, suggesting that the adoption of for-profit leadership styles could help nonprofits navigate increasing competition and efficiency demands. Melanie ended by considering the potential influence of the book on nonprofit leadership, and Kelli agreed to share her thoughts on it after finishing it.

Next Steps

Melanie will share the recording of the conversation on Just Write Grants' YouTube channel, and she will share the details of the next book discussion through Just Write Grants' e-newsletter, website, and social media platform. Book club members can purchase the next book selection, "The Little Book of Gold: Fundraising for Small (and Very Small) Nonprofits"* by Erik Hanberg by clicking here: <https://amzn.to/3tB8sgF>

**As an Amazon affiliate, Melanie Lambert receives a small commission for any associated sales from this link.*