

CAPACITY THROUGH LEADERSHIP: Are We Strengthening the People Behind the Mission?

Marc Misiurewicz



In an article published by the **Rochester Business Journal** on March 6, 2026, Marc Misiurewicz, Founder and CEO of Empreinte Consulting, explores a critical question facing the nonprofit sector: Are we investing enough in the leaders behind the mission?

In *Capacity Through Leadership: Are We Strengthening the People Behind the Mission?*, Marc examines how leadership capacity directly affects organizational sustainability, culture, fundraising, and long-term impact. Drawing on insights from Tricia Williams, the article highlights key leadership qualities—self-awareness, accountability, resilience, communication, and the ability to develop others—that help nonprofit organizations navigate increasing complexity while strengthening their ability to serve the community.

Nonprofits are asked to solve some of our community's most complex challenges. They address housing instability, food insecurity, workforce development, behavioral health, education gaps, and countless other needs. Expectations are high. Resources are tight. Accountability is constant.

In this environment, strategy matters. Funding matters. Partnerships matter. But none of them succeed without leadership. Not leadership as a title. Leadership as capacity.

In the nonprofit sector, we often promote strong program managers into executive roles without investing in leadership development. We recruit passionate board members but do not equip them to govern effectively. We expect executive directors to be visionary fundraisers, financial managers, communicators, culture-builders, and crisis navigators simultaneously. Then we wonder why burnout and turnover remain high.

We spend significant time discussing what effective leadership truly requires in today's environment. Recently, in a team conversation about leadership development, my colleague Tricia Williams articulated several principles that reinforced what we see across the sector: nonprofits do not struggle because their missions lack merit. They struggle when leadership capacity does not match organizational complexity.

The First Principle is Self-Awareness

Tricia shared that self-awareness is the foundation of effective leadership. In nonprofit environments, where resources are constrained and emotions often run high, this quality is critical. Leaders who understand their strengths, blind spots, and communication style make more measured decisions. They seek feedback. They adjust. Leaders who lack self-awareness can unintentionally create friction with

staff or boards, particularly in moments of stress. When funding is reduced or a program underperforms, defensiveness compounds the problem. Reflection moves it forward.

The Second Principle is Accountability

Nonprofits operate under public trust. Funders, donors, and the communities served expect transparency and results. Effective leaders model accountability at the top. They take responsibility for outcomes rather than attributing shortfalls solely to external conditions. This posture shapes culture. When executive leaders own their decisions, staff are more likely to do the same. That consistency builds credibility with boards and funders alike.

Resilience is Equally Important

Nonprofits today face shifting government funding, competitive

grant environments, and increasing demand for services. Leaders set the emotional tone during these periods. If anxiety dominates, instability spreads. If steadiness is modeled, teams remain focused on solutions. Resilience in nonprofit leadership does not mean minimizing hardship. It means responding strategically rather than reactively.

Communication Also Determines Effectiveness

In many nonprofits, staff wear multiple hats. Roles evolve quickly. Clarity prevents confusion. Leaders must consistently articulate not only what the organization is doing, but why it matters. When staff connect daily tasks to mission impact, engagement strengthens. Boards also benefit from clear communication. Executive leaders who provide transparent updates, realistic projections, and candid assessments create stronger governance relationships. That alignment is essential in times of financial constraint.

Perhaps the Most Important Principle is Multiplication

Nonprofits cannot scale impact if leadership remains centralized. Tricia emphasized that strong leaders develop other leaders. This is particularly relevant in organizations where succession planning is often informal or overlooked. When executive directors mentor program leaders, empower department heads, and build bench strength, the organization becomes less

vulnerable to disruption. Without that investment, transitions can destabilize entire agencies.

Across the nonprofit sector, we frequently see organizations underinvest in leadership development. Funds are directed to programs, as they should be. Yet infrastructure and professional development are treated as secondary. Executive coaching, board training, and management development are postponed or eliminated during budget tightening.

The irony is clear. We expect high performance while limiting investment in the very people responsible for delivering it. Leadership development is not overhead. It is infrastructure. It influences retention. Talented professionals remain in organizations where they feel supported and developed. It affects fundraising. Donors invest in confident, credible leadership. It shapes culture. Teams thrive under leaders who communicate clearly and model accountability.

It ultimately determines sustainability. The nonprofit sector is mission-driven by design. That passion is one of its greatest strengths. But passion alone cannot substitute for leadership discipline. Self-awareness, accountability, resilience, communication, and intentional development of others are not optional traits. They are competencies that must be cultivated.

Boards play a critical role in this shift. Governance bodies should evaluate not only program outcomes and

financial metrics, but also leadership capacity. They should ask: Are we supporting our executive director with the tools needed to lead effectively? Are we investing in management development for emerging leaders? Are we building succession plans that protect mission continuity?

Funders also have influence. Capacity-building grants and leadership investments generate long-term return for the sector. When philanthropy supports infrastructure alongside programs, impact strengthens.

Nonprofits are the engine of community change. If we want them to operate effectively in increasingly complex environments, we must treat leadership as a strategic priority, not an afterthought.

Leadership leaves a mark on every organization. It can create clarity or confusion. Stability or volatility. Growth or stagnation. If we want sustainable impact, we must build leadership capacity intentionally and consistently. Strategy alone will not carry us forward.

People will.

And investing in those people is one of the most mission-aligned decisions a nonprofit can make.

Maximize your impact with trusted nonprofit advisors.



**EMPREINTE
CONSULTING**

ROCHESTER, NY
(585) 551-1234

FORT MYERS, FL
(239) 789-4706

NAPLES, FL
(239) 330-2591

info@empreinteconsulting.com
EMPREINTECONSULTING.COM

FOLLOW US
  