

## Habits of Highly Effective Leaders

As a nonprofit leader, you're responsible for ensuring that your organization has the talent, skills and capabilities to affect meaningful change. It's a big task, and it takes more than just experience and motivation to succeed. A track record of relevant accomplishments is important, as is a passion for your organization's mission, but without sound personal and professional leadership habits, these qualities mean very little.

Nonprofit HR connected with highly effective nonprofit leaders from around the country to find out what habits set them apart from other leaders. The more of these habits you can foster in yourself, the more likely you are to excel in a leadership role within the sector.

### HABIT 1: PLACE A HIGH VALUE ON EDUCATION

"There will always be new ideas, new opportunities and new information that we can benefit from. Try not to take anything personally – seek critical feedback, receive feedback openly, look at differing perspectives, actions and/or approaches not as a criticism of our your own behavior and ideas, but as information that can be of assistance to you, present new options, or provide another way of looking at things, for your own growth and that of the organization."  
- **Tamra A Smith**, CEO, YWCA National Capital Area



"Embrace continued learning, especially from other individuals, organizations and sectors of the economy. No individual or organization knows everything."

- **Michael Watson**

Senior Vice President, talent & Culture, 4-H Council

"I think the most important thing is to learn from missteps and share your thought process regarding why that decision was made and now, looking back, what you might have done differently. I love the story of someone asking Thomas Edison about the 10,000 times he tried and failed to invent the light bulb. In response to that question, Edison said, 'I have never failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.'"

- **Michael F. Curtin, Jr.**, CEO, DC Central Kitchen & The Campus Kitchens Project

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## HABIT 2: EMPOWER OTHERS

"To me, one of the most important thing a leader can do is to cultivate and empower new leaders. People often talk about surrounding themselves with people that are smarter than they are. That's great, but it's only the first step. The second is allowing them to truly use those talents we often claim to value, even if it means stepping back and letting someone else to the front of the room. Perhaps the most undervalued talent of a leader is the ability to listen. "

- **Michael F. Curtin, Jr.**, CEO, DC Central Kitchen & The Campus Kitchens Project

"I like to say that you need to switch from thinking about yourself as being most like the quarterback on the field involved in every play, and more like the coach and general manager: the key to success is to recruit the right people for your strategy and manage them effectively. I spend nearly half of my time recruiting staff, recruiting board members, and helping all of them be set up to be successful." - **James W. Shepard, Jr.**, CEO, *Achieve Mission*

"As a CEO, you need to work hard to keep your organization connected to the external environment – trends, potential partners, stakeholders, etc. But to do that effectively, you also have to have a strong handle on what's happening inside your organization. Making sure that you are bringing energy and focus to both environments on a regular basis is critical." - **Anne Wallestad**, President & CEO, *BoardSource*

"Highly effective leaders hire the best talent and focus on their development. This provides the organization with greater capacity to achieve its goals and mission." - **Michael Watson**, Senior Vice President, *Talent & Culture, 4-H Council*

## HABIT 3: EMBRACE CHANGE

"Nothing in our nonprofit world is constant. We are influenced by a wide range of forces regularly. A leader's capacity to shift gears and respond well is key to weathering crises of famine or fortune." - **Susan Tomlinson Schmidt, MPA, CNP**, President, *Nonprofit Leadership Alliance*

"While I think most leaders never want to show any signs of weakness, I think one of the most effective things a good leader can do is admit when they are wrong or maybe went down an errant path. Quite simply, it's impossible for one person, or even a group of people, to be 'right,' whatever that is, all the time." - **Michael F. Curtin, Jr.**, CEO, *DC Central Kitchen & The Campus Kitchens Project*

## HABIT 4: LEVERAGE YOU NETWORK

"Seek big and effective collaborations. Any goal large enough cannot be done alone. The stronger the collaborations, the greater the potential achievement." - **Michael Watson**, Senior Vice President *Talent & Culture, 4-H Council*

"Seek and establish a network of peer advisors and supporters – a leadership group, individuals confidants, mentors." - **Tamara A. Smith**, CEO, *YWCA National Capital Area*

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