

THE SEVEN TURNING POINTS: PIVOTAL INDICATORS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

By Ruth Purcell-Jones, from the work of author Susan Gross

Whether you are an experienced board member, an Executive Director, a long-time staff member or a consultant with nonprofits, you have seen circumstances where organizations struggle through change or a difficult transition. In these situations we too often settle for “getting by” instead of “getting better.” Or worse yet, we blame the leaders for “poor management” rather than seeing these struggles as the indicators of a fundamental need to reassess and redefine how we operate.

Many of these challenges are predictable and can be opportunities for new levels of strength and capacity *if* they are recognized as the normal results of growth and managed well. Pivotal turning points exhibit characteristic stress patterns that shoot up red flags and demand fundamental changes in structure, leadership, management, governance, operating style or culture. Most, if not all of us in the nonprofit sector have experienced one or more of the following:

The Seven Turning Points

- 1 When staff reaches the pivotal size of six or more.** *Up to this point the organization usually operates with a loose, informal structure. The characteristicly “family-style” culture begins to demand structure. Communal decision-making begins to create conflict and confusion.*
- 2 When the structural needs of an organization outstrip the skills of the entrepreneurial executive director.** *This organization often operates great programs, but administrative functions and infrastructure is a mess. Policies and procedures are in the minds of the staff and are nonexistent in writing or practice.*
- 3 When the founding volunteer board hires its first executive director.** *The Board finds itself struggling with its changing role and how to define and structure both its work and the staff's work.*
- 4 When unplanned growth results in an absence of focus and priorities.** *This is the organization that has become so*

successful that funders and the community continues to bring it opportunities until it is doing a little of everything and nothing well.

- 5 When strong central direction becomes micro-management and over-dependency on the leader.** *Low staff morale and limited productivity results from over directive leadership and too much process.*
- 6 When decentralization goes too far, splitting the organization into autonomous units that have little or no connection, coherence or coordination.** *Often results from too much restricted funding and overly focusing on autonomous projects. Programs begin driving the organization.*
- 7 When a long-time executive director prepares to step down.** *Organization responds with fear of lost knowledge and influence, denial of need for orderly transfer, and little understanding of the challenges of “letting go.”*

Later this year, Susan Gross, co-founder of the Management Assistance Group, will release her new book entitled, *Seven Turning Points: Moving Your Organization to a New Level of Strength and Impact*. Her thirty years of helping nonprofits through organizational change have provided the basis of knowledge that will assist readers to build strong structures and management, achieve focus and staying power and increase impact.

You can be privy to its content at the August Fridays2.0 on **August 8th from 8:00 to 9:30 am** as Ruth Purcell-Jones, President of Leadership Ventures leads a discussion about the findings surrounding these key transitional times and some recommendations for managing these changes .

Join your peers from the local nonprofit sector to explore the research, share what you have learned about these transitions through your own work, and pose questions about a current transition facing your organization.

RSVP to Amanda at Amanada@Leadershipventures.org or register at our website www.leadershipventures.org. Fridays 2.0 takes place in the Leadership Ventures' training room, located at 303 North Alabama Street, Suite 250, Indianapolis, In – next to Marsh at the Marketplace (the Old O'Malias). Free parking is available in the grocery lot.