10 Must Read Books for Nonprofit Leaders

1. <u>Good to Great and the Social Sectors</u> by Jim Collins

You *must* own this book. It captures in just 40 pages (yes… 40… so you have *no* excuse not to read it) the recipe for taking a good organization to the next level. There are infographics that will totally stick with you as you go about your day. And I guarantee you – you will become way more intentional about the hires you make and the board members you invite to join you.

2. <u>Give and Take</u> by Adam Grant

This is bigger than just your role as a leader. It's a book about who you want to be in the world. Grant identifies three kinds of people – 'givers,' ' takers,' and 'matchers.' Those who give generously and freely of their time and expertise may not start out as the most successful but they end up at the top. They learn by solving others' problems and they develop extraordinary social capital. This one is a great staff offsite read or a gift for your senior team or board chair.

3. <u>Changing Minds</u> by Howard Gardner

Gardner is a groundbreaking educator who teaches us that we each have multiple intelligences that lead to different learning styles and a diversity of skills across society. He understands how the mind works and thus what it takes to ***change a mind***. This is the work of the nonprofit sector – to move someone to consider something differently so that it matters in a new way to them. Don't be daunted by how

long ago it was written. Trust me – like all good leadership books should be – this one is evergreen.

4. **Difficult Conversations** by Stone, Patton, and Heen

In my work as a consultant, I find myself contending with conflict. A LOT. Not just with those in opposition to the mission but within organizations themselves. Amongst staff members, between staff and board. This led me to **become a certified mediator** and also to this book.

First off, many of us are in the business of talking about difficult subjects (can you say *Planned Parenthood or any organization that has to do with race, gender, politics, religion, homosexuality – just to name a few)*. Secondly, I find oh so frequently that managers simply don't have tough conversations with staff and are reluctant to hold them accountable in ways that feel difficult.

This book teases out the WHY but then also is very actionable for both the internal and the external difficult conversations far too many folks avoid because of a lack of tools. Tools await you in this book.

5. **Made to Stick** by Dan and Chip Heath

This is a must read. And an easy one. To me, the biggest takeaway for nonprofits is that leaders love their work and want everyone to love it. So they over-tell and try to cover everything. The Heath Brothers talk about cutting through the clutter and "the curse of knowledge" – we know so much about our organizations that we get into detail that listeners don't understand. They say that we can't un-know what we know so we have to transform how we communicate to those who don't know about our work.

6. **Start with Why** by Simon Sinek

Most leaders start by talking about **what** their organization does. But Sinek argues it's not the **what** or the **how** that drives great staff candidates, five star board prospects or donors. It's the **why**. Sinek gave **a great TED talk** if you don't have time to read the full book.

Recommended by Dana Weeks at **Germantown Friends School in Philadelphia**.

7. **It's Your Ship** by Mike Abrashoff

I've actually never heard of this one, written by the former US Navy captain of the USS Benfold. His practical recipe? Lead by example; listen aggressively; communicate purpose and meaning; create a climate of trust; look for results, not salutes; take calculated risks;

go beyond standard procedure; build up your people; generate unity; and improve your people's quality of life. Sounds like a great nonprofit leader to me.

Recommended by **Kevin Jennings, CEO of the Arcus Foundation**.

8. **Getting Things Done** by David Allen

One of the biggest productivity books of the last two decades, I've added this to the list. That said, I haven't read it and feel skeptical simply because the subhead reads: *The Art of Stress Free Productivity*. It may seem unattainable in a nonprofit setting, but my oh my, isn't it worth a shot?

Recommended by **Mark Pelavin at the Union for Reform Judaism**.

9. **How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work** by Kegan and Lahey

I am so ordering this book, which tackles the inherent human resistance to change. One reader wrote, "Most of the time, when confronted to change, a little voice inside us will tell us why not to change." The authors write that this voice speaks with 7 tongues. One could even say that these "voices" make us immune to change. Luckily, for each of the 7 languages, this book offers a powerful antidote." I'm totally intrigued.

Recommended by **Parisa Parsa, the E.D. of The Public Conversations Project in Boston**.

10. **Tribal Leadership: Leveraging Natural Groups to Build a Thriving Organization** by Logan, King, and Fisher-Wright

A 10-year study of 24,000 people in two-dozen organizations revealed that within these organizations exist separate tribes. That's certainly been my experience. This book is a unique look at high-performance organizational cultures.

Recommended by **Glennda Testone, ED of the LGBT Center in NYC**

ONE MORE...

Ok, so this wasn't in my original list. But I'd be remiss to not mention MY new book.

11. *Joan Garry's Guide to Nonprofit Leadership: Because Nonprofits Are Messy* by Joan Garry

I wrote the book I wish I could have read with my board chair in my first ED job at a very messy nonprofit. It's written for all nonprofit leaders – staff and board. It's funny, honest, intensely actionable, and based on my own decades of experience working in the nonprofit sector as an Executive Director, a board leader, a volunteer, and a donor.

I hope you find it worthy of being on this list...

Source: https://www.joangarry.com/nonprofit-leadership-books/