



A New Perspective On Collaboration From 'Finding Nemo'

By Caroline Boudreaux

One of my favorite movies is Finding Nemo. There's a great scene in the film where a group of fish find themselves trapped in a net. They struggle, feel scared and desperately try to come up with a plan to escape and survive. It's every fish for himself. However, Nemo devises a brilliant plan and bravely swims into the net to help. He instructs all the fish to swim down. His father, on the outside of the net, echoes the same. The fish place their trust in them and start swimming down together, and somehow, miraculously, they manage to synchronize their movements. The collective power of everyone working together in the same direction ultimately breaks the net, setting all the fish free to swim away.

This scene can be used as a metaphor for the nonprofit sector, where organizations often struggle to work collectively to achieve their goals. Much like an individual fish, each organization prioritizes its own survival rather than recognizing the power of working together. It can be challenging to adopt a collective mindset when the primary focus is on individual survival. However, if we are going to actually solve some of the important problems we face today, we must embrace the power of collaboration and work together.

The Power Of Collaboration

Collaboration is the future of successful nonprofits. It allows organizations to pool resources, exchange ideas, collaborate on marketing efforts, and share expertise to leverage our collective impact and create lasting change. Although collaboration can be challenging, particularly in a sector where organizations often compete for limited resources, the value to the people we serve is undeniable.

We've seen collaboration work before. In our lifetime, we have witnessed significant progress in poverty reduction and child mortality rates. According to World Vision in 2015, the Millennium Development Goals of 2000 "saw the international community commit to poverty reduction on a level we'd never seen before. As a result, the number of people living in extreme poverty (less than US\$1.25 per day) has more than halved to 836 million. The number of preventable child deaths also fell dramatically, from 12.7 million in 1990, to six million today."

HIV/AIDS was going to destroy us, yet governments, pharmaceuticals and nonprofits joined forces to develop a cocktail to keep people alive. Successful collaboration between the private and public sectors continues to make a significant impact today. And yes, the Covid pandemic has presented new challenges, but it also highlights the urgent need for us to work together, in unison, for the people we strive to help.

Thanks to a grant, our organization is working with several of our "competitors" on a marketing campaign to raise awareness about children who are separated from their families and put into foster and orphanage systems. We're committing money, megaphone and minutes to work together to amplify our message to the world. We refuse to tolerate orphanage systems that incarcerate children or foster systems that move children from foster family to foster family without considering the child's best interest. Today, we are united and declaring not only that we will continue to fight, but also that we will join forces and fight together. This collaboration is a beautiful thing and, like the fish, we know that by swimming in the same direction, we can break the nets of bondage and not just survive but thrive.

Moving At The Speed Of Trust

To be clear, when I talk about partnership, I'm talking about the collaboration of two organizations that are willing to join forces and share ownership and responsibility for a project. This is different from one organization simply providing financial support for another organization to carry out a task. In a true partnership, nonprofits can come together to share resources such as property, labor, tools and even fundraising efforts. A partnership is real when both sides are responsible for the outcomes and the

management of a project, making it a collaborative and mutually beneficial endeavor.

The hardest part about partnering with others who do the same work that you do is building trust. The sum-zero ("my win is your loss") belief system still permeates the human condition. To overcome this, I suggest starting with one or two partners and initiating pilot projects together. By finding shared goals and successfully completing small projects, you can begin to add more partners. I'm not going to say that it's easy, but as you're in the business of changing the world, did you think it was going to be easy? You can begin by partnering on policy updates, sharing resources and expertise, or doing what we're doing and working together on some shared marketing costs.

One insight I've learned is that there are those who want to genuinely partner and those who don't. I suggest targeting the low-hanging fruit: an organization that readily embraces the concept of partnership. I've found initiating discussions with the board is a great place to start as sometimes individuals in an organization can say no but are not really in a position to say yes. In other words, sometimes individuals may say no without having the authority to say yes. We established bi-weekly meetings with decision-makers to discuss progress, determine next steps and assign responsibilities for taking those steps.

Conclusion

Collaboration is the future of nonprofits. We have seen its success in the past, and now it is time to move beyond mere acts of charity and embrace the pursuit of justice. Our mission is to create systems that work for everyone. Martin Luther King Jr. famously stated, "Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere." We have a lot of work to do and the problems we're trying to solve are gargantuan. Only by partnering with one another can we escape the nets that limit us and bring true justice to our brothers and sisters around the world.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesnonprofitcouncil/2023/07/17/a-new-perspective-on-collaboration-from-finding-nemo/?sh=61c29249619a>