

Transcript – Episode 65 - [Empathic Management in the Nonprofit Sector with Carrie Rice](#)

Dolph Goldenburg: Welcome to the Successful Nonprofits™ Podcast. I'm your host Dolph Goldenburg, and in just a minute, we will welcome Carrie Rice to discuss empathic management in the nonprofit sector.

Do you find it ironic that the sector that we work in is dedicated to serving the community and often lacks empathy and compassion internally? We create community mental health nonprofits that expect therapists to sacrifice their personal lives by working nearly every night and weekends. We have arts organizations that don't pay their artists employees a living wage, and don't get me started about those social change orgs that treat staff like they're replaceable cogs. As you have undoubtedly seen in the sector, we often pursue the mission so ruthlessly that our communication and management techniques suffer. In rushing to get every possible dollar, pinch every penny to be good stewards of resources and not taking the time to effectively communicate internally and externally, we often end the day and the week and the year feeling frayed, warned out, and burned. To share more about this topic, we're just about to welcome Carrie Rice, a nonprofit consultant based in San Francisco. She specializes in developing and growing individual donor programs and providing board and staff leadership training through her work in empathic nonprofit management. Carrie's goal whenever she works with an organization is to rapidly discover its pain points, work closely with various key stakeholders and create long-term actionable plans with follow-up. So, let's play the music and welcome Carrie rise to the podcast.

Thanks for joining us, Carrie. So, you know the first question I've got. I always plan the first one. I don't plan all the rest anymore. Why is empathy important in the nonprofit sector?

Carrie Rice: For so long, we've been using metrics and numbers to represent when things are going well in our organizations. We've actually changed that, and now we're talking about not just metrics but impact. What impact are we having on our community? So, we're trying to think empathically or empathetic towards our constituents. However, we don't use the same empathy towards each other, which is board members and other stakeholders as well as staff and donors. Empathy is the key to creating genuine relationships that deepen and lengthen the relationship of all the stakeholders to the organization. It's a much deeper connection than just having people support you based on the cause that you serve or the fact that you're connected with a recent event or something that I considered to be more shallow than empathetic leadership.

Dolph Goldenburg: So, you know, and I will admit I am a numbers nerd, and I love how data-driven the sector has gotten, especially as it pertains to service delivery. But I also think that's one of the reasons why our sector has less empathy than maybe it used to because we are so data driven.

Carrie Rice: I completely see where you're coming from, even though I'm sort of a more of a right brain kind of person that I have a background in social science. I have a master's degree in social science, so I love data. As a matter of fact, I think I had a bumper sticker at some point that

said, "I love data." I'm not trying to say don't follow data. I'm saying you have to tell a story. If I tell you that 100 people feel a certain way, you can come back to me and say, "Prove it. How do you know that? What are the numbers on that?" And I can show it to you and you can still say, "Well, but another 100 people wouldn't feel that way," but if I tell you the story about the people that I'm describing, whether it's the community members or whether it's the stakeholders involved with running the organization is much stickier as they say, and it builds a much stronger connection than just the data. And there's really nothing to argue with. You can't argue with, here's a great story about someone who we had a major impact on. There's no pushback on that.

Dolph Goldenburg: So, or how does that crossover and apply to other stakeholders, whether it's a staff person, a volunteer, a board member?

Carrie Rice: Well, I go through an exercise, for example, with staff members where I have them literally list if they're at home or mentally list, if they're together with me what kinds of challenges their board members have that they maybe don't have. So, staff members typically talk about, you know, the challenge of not being properly compensated. And so, one of the things I have to get teased out of them is the fact that board members don't get paid anything, that these are people who do this purely out of passion. We do it out of passion, but at least we make some sort of living at it and hopefully get health insurance. But these are people who could be putting their children to bed when they come to a board meeting. They could be hanging out with their family that's in town on a weekend when there's a gala. These are people who have gone way outside of their comfort zone necessarily to give back to the community, and by having empathy, then the staff can create a deeper connection to them and have an easier time thinking through, what is the perspective of the person I'm working with?

Dolph Goldenburg: I just had a conversation with a podcast with somebody, and we were talking about board members that might, for example, take five donor calls but not make them. It sounds like that might be a good time for a staff member to think about that in a more empathetic way.

Carrie Rice: Well, I went back up a couple of steps, and I would say we have been practicing empathy from the very beginning or at least from the step before this. I have a friend who has a website where you can ask your board members to go and find out via an assessment what they're asking style is, are they an introvert or an extrovert? Are they analytical or qualitative? Myself, I'm an introvert, and I'm actually analytical even though I told you I was more creative, but according to this I am, and by having people identify their own asking style and get some best ideas of how you as an introvert, you make those phone calls and acknowledging that it is really hard for introverts to make those phone calls and then to maybe even say, "Let's give the people who are competent and comfortable making phone calls, all the phone calls." We'll just split it up a different way and the people like myself who hate being on the phone, let's figure out something else that they can do. So, hopefully, by the time the ask is being made of the leaders, you've already distinguished whether they are going to feel comfortable making phone calls or not.

Dolph Goldenburg: I love that. So, can you give a shout out to that website?

Carrie Rice: It's Brian Saber, and his website is www.askingmatters.com, and you can do a free assessment there and get on his email list, and then you'll find out best practices. Like I said, I'm a mission controller is my primary asking you style and so I stayed very aware of that when I'm asking for something or when I'm teaching my client is how to ask for something, whether it's money or help.

Dolph Goldenburg: So, listeners can get a sense of like what people learn about themselves when they complete this, what is a mission controller?

Carrie Rice: Well, for myself, like I said, it's an intersection of introversion and quantitative analysis. For myself as an introvert, I absolutely cannot stand talking on the phone. It was something I could never explain for so many years. I just, I absolutely feel uncomfortable about it. But by knowing that's something that I have a hard time with as an introvert, then I can take an analytical approach to it and say what is the process I need to go through to make these phone calls? So, that might be writing down my notes. That might be asking them to do a video call so I can make eye contact with the person I'm talking to you. It feels completely different for me to make eye contact instead of talking to someone on the phone. So, I have that information about myself. So, when someone asks me to ask for money or actually right now doing a crowdfunding campaign for some projects for myself, I've been using my own style to do the asking, which is I feel comfortable sending a text message to someone but I don't feel comfortable calling them.

Dolph Goldenburg: So, why is that called mission controller?

Carrie Rice: I think there's something about control about the analytical style. For my secondary, which is introvert and qualitative, is called a kindred spirit, and then there's a *go-getter* and a *rainmaker*. I at least know the names of all of them, but I don't know the details of exactly how Brian categorizes them, but it really helps me open the boards' that I'm working with minds, too. There is a way you just need to figure out what it is, and here's a resource that you can use in addition to my coaching to figure out how you can be successful because I want my clients to be successful.

Dolph Goldenburg: I love that. And we'll put a link to Brian's website in our show notes as well. So, if a listener is driving on the subway blowing leaves in their yard, whatever, don't worry. There's another way you can get it. What are some other ways that staff and leadership can work on being more empathetic?

CR: Well, like I said, a lot of the exercise is to start by reversing it and imagining what it would be like if someone was being empathetic or empathic towards you. By the way, I should mention, I usually use the word *empathetic* because to me when I think of *empathic*, I think of Deanna Troy on Star Trek Next Generation. Um, so we, I am using the terms interchangeably in case anybody is wondering. So, I started about thinking, okay, I'm a board member, and I want my executive

director to empathize with me, what would I want that executive director to know about me to be able to connect with me? That's step one. Step two is to actually empathize with the other stakeholder groups. One that I'm working with a very actively right now is donors, and I actually have a product that's coming out in January that's going to be an assessment of your organization's donation page. We are not using empathic design as we do here in San Francisco for all of our websites on our donation pages. Let me ask you, what do you think the donor abandonment rate is once you've actually started a form and you do not complete it and make the transaction?

Dolph Goldenburg: Oh, okay. I'm now going to assume it's high just the way you asked that question. So, I'm going to say, and I'm going to be precise. 78.3%.

Carrie Rice: You are very close. You're off by eight point three percent. It's actually between 50 and 70 percent. You're right. So, if you think about it, if you had an empathic design to your donor page, you would be following certain best practices. Again, thinking like you're a donor, you have as few fields as possible for them to fill out. You don't have a captcha. A captcha is when it asks you a question. The hardest ones are the ones that asked you to do math, but usually, it says if you're not a robot, click here. That actually serves no purpose whatsoever for a donor. It doesn't protect them from anything. It's simply something that makes people feel like they are safer making donations, but it's an extra step and it drives donors away. When you have a security badge on your donation page, that's empathy of someone who's looking at it saying, wait, do I really want to put in my credit card information here? And one of the others is a single page form that you don't make your donors go through page after page to get to the point where they know that they've made a contribution. So, that's empathic design. Empathetic fundraising are different ways that I've been working recently.

Dolph Goldenburg: Can I share with you my pet peeve when I want to make a donation or buy a ticket to an event?

Carrie Rice: Please do.

Dolph Goldenburg: my pet peeve and so again, this is, you know, okay. For all the charities out there that you know, care about being empathetic to those of us that might work in the sector but are also donors is when I have to create a login to give you money or to buy a ticket, it drives me up the wall in part because you know, almost every organization uses some different portal. And so, I ended up with all of these different logins. Oftentimes, what will happen is I will not know whether or not I have an account and so I'll try to create an account and then it will say, well you've already have an account, and then I have to reset my password, you know, it's just frustrating for me

Carrie Rice: And that doesn't make you rain hundreds of dollars on an organization based on that. You're right. That is like a bigger wall than anything I'm even talking about. I'm talking about minor changes. You're talking about something that would absolutely drive new [donors away], and I'm not sure I've actually experienced that personally. That's pretty bad.

Dolph Goldenburg: I prefer to give by check anyway, so I am part of that abandonment rate because I'd be like, oh well I'll just write them a check, which is probably better. There are fees associated with it, but I will also admit that there are probably times that I say, "Oh, well I write them a check," and then I forget to.

Carrie Rice: And actually, one of the areas I've been focusing on is donor retention, and one of the biggest predictors that we can find donor retention is having a monthly donation program. So, by setting someone up and saying, for example, "Instead of giving us a \$100, could you give us \$10 a month?" That's \$120 actually, so you just gave yourself a 20 percent increase in your donation without actually causing any pain to the person whatsoever. And once they leave it and set it and forget it, then they can focus on what is the mission of your organization. You're not asking them for money all the time. They're already giving you money. You already know that your budget is set with that person maybe except for the annual fund or certain other add-ons, but you know you're going to be getting donations from them. You have an opportunity to focus on the mission, the communications, the leadership, the best practices and ultimately the impact that all these things are having and not focusing on asking for money.

Dolph Goldenburg: You just focus on the relationship.

Carrie Rice: Exactly and most of the relationship I think that some people would say 99 percent of the relationship should have nothing to do with money, but that one percent should be absolutely captivating, and the person should feel that you are giving them an opportunity to donate money to your organization or in other areas the opportunity to be a board member or the opportunity to be a volunteer by make people feel special and using empathy towards them, not necessarily as the puppies that you're trying to rescue or the homeless people that you're trying to shelter. The way I feel about those puppies and the way I feel about those homeless people is how I feel about my donors, too. You know, I want to take care of them. And so, just as the relationships we build with our service recipients get deeper and stronger over time so do they with the other populations, volunteers, donors, and leaders specifically.

Dolph Goldenburg: Real quick, the new product you mentioned that will help analyze a nonprofit's donor page, you said that goes live in January, yes?

Carrie Rice: That's correct. I actually haven't released the name yet, but I will say that of course it will be connected to my website, and it'll also be connected to my other social media accounts

Dolph Goldenburg: We'll promote the website in the second half, but that's www.Carriericesf.com.

Carrie, we are going to take just a short break, and when we come back we're going to talk about how to build empathy among staff, teams and staff structures.

The Successful Nonprofits™ Podcast is produced by The Goldenburg Group as part of our mission to provide board development, strategic planning, and interim leadership to help nonprofits thrive in a competitive environment.

Before you know it, it will be January and it will be time to launch the second annual board performance index. Funders often ask you about your board evaluation efforts, and that BPI is a painless and free way to conduct an external board evaluation. It includes two parts. The first is a 25-question online survey, and the second is a simple one-page excel spreadsheet. On average, the online survey only took organizations eight minutes to complete last year. Again, this will go live in January, and we will make sure that you know about it when it goes live.

Welcome back, Carrie. So, I promised that we would have a conversation about building empathy among staff teams and staff structure. As I think about staff structure, that's kind of across the entire hierarchy of the organization.

Carrie Rice: Well, I like to start with the one time that everybody in the office is together, the weekly staff meeting. I hope there's a weekly staff meeting. So, starting with the weekly staff meeting, as a consultant, I come in or as I've been an interim executive director like yourself, I come in with a bore, an agenda for the staff meetings that starts with – well, I'm from San Francisco, so of course I'm a little woo as they say – we start with a breathing exercise where we all become president in the staff meeting and come there from a place of empathy and connection that we're all there for the same purpose. So, that creates a nice headspace for everybody that's in the meeting, ranging from the executive director down to the assistants and anyone else that's involved with your organization at a staff level. After that, we do a sharing exercise or something else that creates a connection between the staff members.

Sharing something they're looking forward to over the weekend, sharing a memory that came up recently because of a holiday that happened, something that gets the staff members to present themselves and see others as whole people. We aren't our parents or grandparents' generation where our personal lives and our professional lives are completely separate anymore. I knew when I got involved with social media that my personal and professional identities, we're going to clash, and luckily, I've managed to make that happen in a really positive way, but we want our staff to understand each other and see each other as the people they are besides the work that they do. And so, for me, that's like the most obvious thing that I can do right from the beginning to start building empathy amongst the staff for each other without having to do a whole separate exercise or a whole separate effort.

Dolph Goldenburg: How do you help people build empathy for others that are maybe not at their level? So, that is both, you know, people maybe that are management, having empathy for those indirect services and those indirect services, having empathy for those that are management.

Carrie Rice: I do a lot of exercises that have to do with walking people through what their assumptions are, what their expectations are and what their perceptions are of the other person and what they think that person's perception is of that. I do a lot of coaching as part of the work

that I do where I'll have a staff person who has the opportunity to work with me as part of a bigger project, and I will take that opportunity to say to them, how do you think other people see you? How do you see other people? Are you presenting the nicest, warmest, most caring, authentic self when you come to work every day? And then maybe say nicely to people, I'm having a rough day instead of snapping at people and maybe being maybe you realized that you're known by people as being less than nice or less than fun to work with.

A lot of it is getting people to figure out what their own issues are and then to be able to say, what are the challenges that the other people are facing? With the expectation that some executive directors have had historically, including one of my favorites that if she sent me an email at 12:00 at night that for some reason I was going to respond to it as an assistant before the next time I saw her at 9:00 the next morning, and I was the type of person at that point who felt like that was my job. So, I would go and see that I got an email at midnight, and I would go in the middle of the night and answer the email because I felt like that was what I was supposed to do. When each of us took the time after a number of years to talk about what the pain points were in our relationship, I was able to say to her, you know, "When you send me an email at midnight, I assume you need it back." And she said, "That's just what I come up with, the emails, you don't have to answer me then I know you're not going to get it until 9:00 AM the next day." So, it was that type of thing where it was really about expectations and communication and once we acknowledged it and I was able to say as an assistant, I'm not opening my email before 9:00 AM tomorrow and then to be able to immediately address it. For executive directors who really get a lot of pushback on that and who are trying to practice what we call technological wellness, what I'll do is say, "If that's really how your body works, and you really want to write an email at midnight, why don't you schedule it to go out at 9:00 the next morning."

Dolph Goldenburg: And that is the amazing thing about technology these days is you can almost always schedule. So, you could be writing it at 2:00 in the morning and skid still schedule it to go out at 6:00 AM or 7:00 AM or 8:00 AM.

Carrie Rice: Absolutely. And as consultants, we know better than anybody that, you know, lightning can strike at any time day or night, and we have an idea, or we're ready to work, and we don't expect other people are running on the exact same schedule as we are.

Dolph Goldenburg: How about in the other direction? How can we help maybe direct service staff develop empathy for management because you know, because sometimes it's easy to see the people on the other side of the fence as other has like, "Oh yeah, that's management. That's what they do. That's not the way I would do it."

Carrie Rice: That's an interesting question. I wish I had a simple answer for that. I think it's something that needs to be worked on a consistent basis, but I think I would go back to the exercises of okay, I, you know, I, I'm a development professional. I know everything there is about raising money. Well, but why am I in development for this organization because I care about what we do and the people who do what we do are the direct service providers. So, let's think about what it must be like to be a direct service provider. I don't have to deal with

difficulties in scary situations that sometimes come out of that. They do. Now, I have a new understanding of what that person's role is like that sometimes it's dangerous or scary or affects them personally in emotional ways.

Whereas as the direct service provider being able to say, "Okay, I can't provide this service unless the fundraiser raises the money to pay for this service." So, that person is not some mean person who came along to tell me how to do my job but is someone who's trying to do their job well so that I can do my job well. And so again, communication is key. This isn't a quick fix. This is something that has to take place over time, and it needs to be encouraged by executive directors, board presidents, senior staff, people from every area need to prioritize the depth of these relationships. I mean the turnover rate of development directors is horrific, but we think that there are very significant ways that development directors lives could change where they feel more connected with the organization and able to work with our executive directors in a way that will keep them there for the long term, which guess what, [keeps] out their relationships with the donors than you.

Dolph Goldenburg: Could you share some of those ways that they can work together so that you do have a longer retention of your development director?

Carrie Rice: Absolutely. Well, I think it starts with the interaction between the development director and the executive director. A lot of executive directors come from the programming side, so they don't even really understand what fundraisers do or how important development is. They only know that they need the money. By starting a relationship, what I like to recommend is a weekly meeting between the development director and the executive director to make sure that the strategy of the organization and the fundraising of the organization are running side by side, that they're actually in tandem. Another way to work on that is to have the development director and the program staff have some sort of regular interactions that aren't just staff meetings, so I don't like to do, you know, cheesy activities and things like that. I'm not about icebreakers and games and stuff like that. I like to do things like board game lunch where you play board games with your fellow staff people and the boss brings in pizza and doing that once a quarter or something like that and having people realize that when they're on the same team as someone playing trivial pursuit, that that's the person that they think they don't understand, but that person is so much more than that. I think that's part of the long-term strategy of deepening those relationships.

Dolph Goldenburg: Carrie, thank you so much for being on today. I think this has been incredibly helpful, certainly for me, and I know for a lot of our listeners, but before I let you go, I've got the Off-the-Map question and so you know, this is a question that helps our listeners to get to know you a little bit more as a person and also as a professional. So, I understand that you have a campsite rule in all of your engagements. What is the campsite rule? How did you come up with it and you know, why is it important to you?

Carrie Rice: As a child, I grew up going to camp, and we were literally being instructed by our counselors that we are when we arrived at a campsite, that we were to leave the campsite

better than we found it. So, if there's no trash there, make sure there's less than no trash when you leave the campsite. There's another phrase that says, "Take only pictures. Leave only footprints." that you're not actually damaging the campsite by having used it. I followed that rule when it came to camping. I found other ways to apply it, but it was actually a celebrity, a sex educator named Dan Savage, who taught me the campsite, rule about relationships that if you're gonna date someone or being involved with someone, don't make them any worse than you found them. Make sure that by the time if the relationship's going to end, you leave them better than you found them, and that's where I originally read that and realized how much it applied to consulting. That is consultants. We're not there to make anybody's lives more difficult. We are there to make lives easier for staff leadership and everybody who's involved with an organization.

Dolph Goldenburg: I love that, and I never would have guessed that was Dan Savage, so I'm glad I asked the question. Thank you

Carrie, thank you again for being on the podcast. I can see why the Human Rights Campaign, Emily's List, the Hispanic Scholarship fund and so many other prominent organizations have engaged you. Now, listeners are interested in your empathy trainings for leadership, fundraising management or boards can visit your website at www.carrierciesf.com. At that website, they can also find out about your strategy, change management and fundraising consulting services and contact you directly from that website, and I think you mentioned that when your new project goes live in January, that there will be a link from your website as well as on your social media, so it's a good reason for listeners to now go to your social media. Hey Carrie, thank you again for being on the podcast.

Carrie Rice: Thanks, Dolph, and good luck with the new business performance index in January.

Dolph Goldenburg: Did you miss Carrie's URL? Did you miss one of the other URLs that we may be mentioned in this episode? Do you want to see the cool artwork that we have developed for this episode? If so, visit www.successfulnonprofits.com to read the show notes, which will include a link to Carrie's website. Now, before we sign off today, please remember to take a few minutes to subscribe, rate, and review the podcast. Every subscription, every good rating, and every review makes us easier to find and expands our listenership. Producing the Successful Nonprofits™ podcast is a team effort, and I am grateful to Carrie Rice for being on the podcast today and to Brianna Ohonba for her expert editing skills. That is our show for this week. I hope you have gained some insight that will help your nonprofit thrive in a competitive environment.

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