

Transcript

Episode 78 – [Important Career Lessons](#)

Dolph Goldenburg: Welcome to the Successful Nonprofits™ Podcast. I'm your host, Dolph Goldenburg with an episode that will help your nonprofit thrive in a competitive environment. This episode is going to discuss the important professional lessons of high performers in the nonprofit space. Let's face it, no one was born an amazing fundraiser and inspirational executive director, a CFO who makes financial statements saying like an opera or a marketing guru. They honed their talent over decades, learning lessons along the way, and yes, even getting some bumps and bruises with many of those lessons I know from listener feedback that many people download this podcast for their weekly dose of professional development. So in that vein, I asked six incredibly successful people in their field who are also former guests to share the most important lessons they learned and even more importantly, to ask them to share how they learned as professional lessons that people who are going to share their lessons today have achieved the highest levels of success in their field.

Having said that, we also spoke with successful people from a variety of fields in the nonprofit sector, including a fundraiser and executive director and executive coach, a consultant and attorney, our founder, a board member and author, and an entrepreneur. Now, you may have realized that I just listed more than six roles even though we only pose the question to six people, like many folks who achieve great things, our guests today have succeeded in multiple fields and multiple roles, so when a lot of cases, it is a former fundraiser who is now a consultant and also as an author or it is a founder, executive director who is also an attorney. As you listen to the important lessons today, please think about which one or ones resonate with you and how they could benefit your career.

A few weeks ago, we had Rachel Muir on the podcast to share how we as organizations can steward donors as well as the top brand steward their customers. You may recall when I talked about her bio that in her twenties, she grew an organization do a \$10,000,000 organization and she also has had a very successful career that has spanned the nonprofit and for-profit sector, has a fundraiser, a speaker, and a consultant. She has been recognized by Oprah Winfrey by Ernst and Young and by Fast Company among many other accolades that she has received. Rachel, will you please share with our listeners the most important professional that you have learned and how you learned it?

Rachel Muir: Sure, so the lessons that I learned was my omg WTF moment in fundraising. The moment when I gave a donor sticker shock, I made a really large vilification to my donor. Her face went white. Her jaw literally dropped to the floor. I asked a donor for too much, too soon without the proper cultivation. I had a donor who she and her husband had been giving, had given me a really, really generous gift, and I went in several months later and asked her for a much larger gift without cultivating her properly. Had I cultivated her properly, had I taken her along with me on the journey and shown her the waiting list that we had for girls trying to get into our program, how deep the need was, what our strategic plans were, who else we had

involved in it... had I shown her and taken her through that journey step by step, she would have not only made that gift and would have brought other donors on board to make that gift, but I failed at it.

It was my biggest fundraising mistakes, but it was my favorite fundraising mistakes because it's forever changed me as a fundraiser. I totally changed the fundraising playbook. After that, I really focused in on cultivating my donors and having my eyes on the prize with my donors to properly cultivate them and take them along on the journey and show them how deep the need was so that the gift almost so with the pit itself. I missed that gift, but it forever changed me as a fundraiser. It made me a better fundraiser. It's a story that I tell fundraisers a lot. It was a big mistake, and it was a big learning moment for me. I'm not perfect. We're all learning and growing as fundraisers, but it was a mistake that improved me as a fundraiser. I'm really grateful for that mistake because we don't want to learn from what we do, right? We learned from what we do wrong and that is one mistake that forever changed me and made me a better fundraiser.

Dolph Goldenburg: Well, Rachel, thank you for sharing that. One of the traits of highly successful people is undoubtedly one of the reasons you're successful as when you were able to take that step back and say, "Gee, what should I do differently next time?"

Rachel Muir: Absolutely. I think that's something that we get so excited about the project. We get really nervous about making the big ask and within all that - between being excited about it and being nervous about doing the ask - we're not putting the attention where it should be, which is really on the donor, where they are, why is it important to them and how do they feel about it. It's really not about us. It's really about them, and it's really not about money. It's about what the money can do. I think sometimes we can get lost as fundraisers with other with the demands and the priorities, and we can kind of lose sight of what's important. I'm grateful for the moments that we've had to reflect on what's important and use those to ground us and help us be focused on having deep and rich and meaningful, rewarding relationships with our donors.

Dolph Goldenburg: Absolutely. Thank you. Rachel.

Kim Powell has been among our most popular guests. She was on [episode 27](#) where she talked about the 100-day launch plan for your new CEO, and she also was on the podcast more recently to talk about her new book, [The CEO Next Door](#), she was a management consultant, and now she does Coaching and advising and counseling to boards of directors and CEOs in both the for-profit and nonprofit sector. She is a sought-after coach.

Kim, I am so thrilled to be able to ask you the question of this episode. What lesson have you learned in your career and how have you learned it?

Kim Powell: My career lesson is to think about your career not as a bunch of jobs but as a portfolio of experiences. I learned this as a result of mining the career paths of thousands of leaders in the research I did for my book. It's important because the experiences you build are like LEGO™ blocks that help you get to places where, at least for me personally, you can have

more impact on more individuals. I have a greater appreciation that career steps take zigs and zags. Ultimately it's the experiences that you gain and the portfolio you build, not just your last job that makes you effective as a future leader.

Dolph Goldenburg: I love that, so really kind of build a portfolio. You know, I have this toolbox and I keep putting tools in our box and I carried my toolbox with me from gig to gig.

Kim Powell: That's exactly right.

Dolph Goldenburg: Well Kim, thank you so much for joining us for this question.

Kim Powell: Thanks for having me Dolph. I really appreciate it.

Dolph Goldenburg: Several weeks ago, we spoke with Michael Strader of [Crouch and Associates](#) about OMG fundraising secrets that will make your fundraising efforts more successful. Michael has three decades of fundraising experience, including with the boy scouts, with institutions of higher education with other schools and with the nature conservancy. He is an amazing fundraiser, and today, Michael, I am hoping that you will share with our audience the most important professional lesson that you learned and how you learned it.

Michael Strader: Thanks, Dolph. I think I looked back in my last 30 years, and the one thing that I did not have was a plan, a plan to get from here to there. I spent time with the Boy Scouts and the nonprofit sector for 11 years, and then I transitioned into fundraising role full time with a couple of different groups out there in it and it fell into place, but I didn't have a plan when I was 30 years old and say, "Okay, one day I want to be a VP of development at XYZ school, and here's how I'm going to get there." I didn't have that. Now that I'm working with so many younger development directors and executives out there who are either just starting out or been in for five, six, seven years, you know, I try to help them figure it out.

Where do you want to be in 10 years or 20 years? You know, I learned that lesson from me, but also learned it from Bill Crouch, our founder, who told us in the very beginning that he knew at age 22, he wanted to be a college president, and that's where he went to work and he actually took jobs that didn't pay it any day where he was just an a driver for a college president one time for almost a year and driving him. This is back before cell phones, back and forth, laptops back before the Internet was there, but he would drive and he couldn't talk. He had to listen to this president talk all the way back and forth, but then Bill could ask questions and athlete learns so he knew from the beginning how you want to get there. I think one piece of advice: figuring out who you want to be; before you know it, you'll be 52 years old like I am before you blink an eye. Understand where you want to go and how you want to get there.

Dolph Goldenburg: Thank you. That is such great advice, Michael, and I get how you feel. I'm like, where did the last 30 years ago.

Michael Strader: Exactly, exactly.

Dolph Goldenburg: Otis Fulton, disgust, peer to peer fundraising on [episode 76](#) of the podcast and if you recall, we talked about his book, [Dollar Dash](#), and we talked about really how to motivate your team captains and your volunteers to raise the most money from peer to peer fundraising. We did all of this from a behavioral economics perspective. His conversation has helped many nonprofits improve their peer to peer efforts and his book is a must read for any nonprofit fundraiser. So Otis, thanks for coming on for this extra special question, and I'm hoping that you can share with our listeners the most important professional lesson that you have learned and how you learned it.

Otis Fulton: Change is good. I think that's the most important professional lesson.

I was in a role for 10 years that I got very good at, and it was very easy that it was easy to become complacent. I think that a lot of people get to a certain level in their careers and they become complacent and don't kind of look for the next challenge. I was kind of forced to look for the next challenge. I the stopped traveling as much and so forth. My family was expanding. I was kind of forced into it change, but taking on a new challenge was very positive for me and so, you know, I wish in hindsight that I would have looked for that next challenge instead of kind of falling into it. So that would be my most important professional lesson that I've tried to really put into action since then in my career.

Dolph Goldenburg: Thank you. Otis. I think we all can kind of learn that lesson as well. Thank you.

Several episodes ago we spoke with Sandra Pfau England about her blog post, "Please Do Start More Nonprofits." Sandra has provided legal counsel or nonprofit groups for over 30 years and is founder [myRENOSI](#), a company that helps nonprofit groups manage the growing federal and state filing requirements necessary to obtain and maintain tax exempt status. Lord knows I have seen several nonprofits get in some trouble for failing to comply with government regulations, and we just wanted to pose this additional question to Sandy. Sandy, what is the most important professional lesson you have learned and how did you learn it?

Sandra Pfau England: That is a great question. I think I'll go way, way, way back.

I had just left my job and I'm working as an associate and hung out my shingle as an attorney, had a new baby at home, et Cetera. I was just getting clients, and I took more of anything back then and it was less selective and I took on, it was a Trust and Estate matter actually that I took on and everything turned out fine. The lesson I learned is that I was trying to fake it before I made it. They're trying to take on something that really wasn't in my bag of tricks that I knew really, really well. I never did it again. You know, I learned that I only stuck with and it becomes easier as you've been a professional for over 20 years.

You can stick to more of what your real, true expertise is. I have a second one to that I think I'd like to mention, and that is that you have to fight through the fear. Not Everybody may have a fear of failure, but I came from small town Ohio. You go to college, get a job, and work for somebody else. It was never to be an entrepreneur. I think for a long time at least I felt that my

parents thought I had hobby businesses, right? This was just something I did on the side. It was certainly not what I was taught to do. There are still moments today where I think, “Who the heck am I? Am Little Sandy from Ohio?” I'm doing whatever. You just have to believe in yourself, bite through the fear and do it.

Dolph Goldenburg: I love that. I can certainly appreciate when your parents think that your business is or hobby businesses. My mother was sick for the last year or so of her life and when she knew when it was her last week. I walked into her bedroom and she looks at me and she says, do you have a job? I'm like, well, actually, mom, I have a lot of jobs.

Sandra Pfau England: It's just not something they know, so I think my mom's real proud of me now that I think she knows I make a living, but I don't know.

Dolph Goldenburg: That's awesome. Well, Sandy, thank you so much for sharing the professional lessons that you have learned.

I hope you heard one professional lesson today that resonates with you and will help you achieve even greater levels of success. Through my consulting practice, I try to make a big impact on the nonprofit sector and this podcast as well as my very active blog are the two primary ways that I give back. If you would like to get a short email from me every Friday with information about the most recent podcast that week, the bonus break or our blog -and keep in mind that it's a very active blog. It's typical for us to do two or three updates on the blog every week - then just sign up for our mailing list at www.successfulnonprofits.com. I only send one email a week that typically goes out on Friday, and I won't sell trade or give your email address to anyone, not even the Russians. I also will not spam your email address.

That's our show for this week folks, and I hope you have gained some insight to help your nonprofit thrive in a competitive environment.

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