

# Kym Luqman: Focusing on Transferable Skills

Kym Luqman had worked exclusively in information technology sales for nearly 30 years when she decided she was ready for a change. After a lifetime of increasingly rewarding volunteer work, including nonprofit board roles, she wanted to move to the nonprofit sector full-time, and thought her skills and interests were a good fit for a nonprofit executive director (ED) role.

Before beginning her job search, Luqman met with a career counselor to get some objective feedback about whether she was correct about the ED role being the right for her. “We talked about what I liked to do, my skills, and what would be a good fit,” Luqman said. “We discussed the executive director position and the counselor not only said, ‘Yes, it would be a good fit,’ but she showed me how many of my skills were transferable.”

Now confident in her decision, Luqman read online articles about how to adapt a for-profit resume and cover letter to a nonprofit job search, and also articles about the process of transitioning to the nonprofit sector and others’ experiences.

Luqman said she was encouraged when her research showed that the nonprofit sector is increasingly open to hiring talent from the for-profit sector. But she said the research also stressed that the onus was on those attempting to transition from the for-profit sector to show how their skills would translate to new roles in nonprofit organizations. “I had a very rich resume, but it was all technology,” she said. “I needed to figure out how to catch someone’s attention so I could get that first interview.”

Luqman created a resume that stressed her transferable skills rather than the jobs she had held. She devoted most of her energy and time to carefully crafting a cover letter specific to the job she was seeking. She stressed her diversified management skills, her ability to juggle numerous projects, and how those traits fit the job description. As she began landing interviews, Luqman said she learned how to size up a nonprofit organization’s readiness to hire from outside the sector.

“I learned pretty quickly that if the person interviewing me couldn’t get past the fact that I had not spent 10 to 15 years in the nonprofit field ... then trying to

convince them that I should even be talking with them—much less that I had the skills for that particular job—wasn't worth my time," she said.

Luqman was hired in April 2008 as the ED of Rebuilding Together Oakland, a small but high-impact Oakland, CA-based organization that rehabilitates the homes of low-income elderly and disabled homeowners. Luqman secured new funding and has begun building the systems needed to expand the organization's programs and staff. In addition to realizing her ambitious growth goals for her organization, Luqman also is an advocate for improving management practices in the nonprofit sector as a whole.

"Whatever I touch—especially when I'm talking to board members and all the different stakeholders—I try to evangelize that nonprofits should try to develop some of the same attributes as for-profit businesses to be successful," she said. One of these attributes, according to Luqman, is a compensation model that allows them to attract and retain talented professionals. "Most nonprofits can better serve their missions if they have good management practices," she added.

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