

## Recommended Reading for Nonprofit Leaders

Over the years, Bridgestar has interviewed a number of nonprofit leaders, seeking their advice on myriad nonprofit leadership, recruiting, and career topics. Their thoughtful feedback and advice has proven valuable, so when we decided to ask “What resources have you read that you would recommend to other nonprofit leaders?” it seemed natural to start with these same individuals. Here we share a number of nonprofit leaders’ top picks which you can find in the [Bridgespan Amazon bookstore](#). We hope you find their recommendations helpful as you consider your reading list in 2012.



### **Father Steven E. Boes, Executive Director, Boys Town**

#### *How: Why How We Do Anything Means Everything...in Business (and in Life)*

By Dov Seidman

This book about corporate culture is about “moving from blind obedience to a culture of self governance.” It has been helpful to Boes as Boys Town has navigated its own culture change. “It’s about informed acquiescence... I consult it to learn how to break down silos and how to be more transparent.” In particular, Boes recommends pages 228 and 229 as an entry into the book—“If these pages appeal to you, you’ll get exactly what he’s talking about.” Beside self

improvement, Boes uses the book to educate and empower Boys Town staff to make good decisions.

#### *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything*

By Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzer

Boes likes this book because it shares how to structure a rewards and accountability system to change the environment. “It’s really about how to do informed acquiescence—things like what to put in peoples’ appraisals, metrics, and values. It’s helped me work on how to change culture... how to reward the right behaviors and to watch for divisive incentives.”

#### *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*

By Chip and Dan Heath

“I used this book to market our change [at Boys Town].” Page 87, in particular, said Boes, gives you the whole book on one page. It’s this page that tells you about what makes a good story, specifically being able to share something unexpected, concrete, credible, and emotional. “I used this when I was crafting

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my messages to people, and I always told a story about a child. We define inspirational leadership as being able to tell a kid's story and inspiring people to do their jobs.”



**Aaron Hurst, CEO, Taproot Foundation**

*Moneyball*

By Michael Lewis

*Moneyball* came immediately to mind when Hurst was asked about what he'd recommend. "It's about an industry led by practitioners who had become very dogmatic and set in their ways; this was much like the state of service and capacity building ten years ago," he said. According to Hurst, the book really speaks to the need to use data-driven insights to question assumptions and to discover what works and what creates value. "To me, this was really the charge of Gen X leadership in the sector," he added. "To come in and question the assumptions of the founders of the modern nonprofit sector and help sharpen our approach and not be scared to kill a few sacred cows."



**Charles Kamasaki, Executive Vice President, National Council of La Raza**

*The Effective Executive: The Definitive Guide to Getting the Right Things Done*

By Peter F. Drucker

This was one of the first books Kamasaki read when he realized that he'd have to actually perform effectively as—and not just assume the role of—a manager. While the language and examples are dated, he said, the book's key lessons endure. "For example, Drucker advocates that executives allocate big chunks of time to important tasks, a practice that is all too rare, but even more important, in today's high tech, multi-tasking world," said Kamasaki. "Similarly, [Drucker] notes that many executives fall into the trap of focusing too much on data and trends coming from within the organization, while failing to note that everything that really matters in the real world is happening outside the organization.

"At a time when all executives from the President of the United States on down are often trapped in and react mainly to stimuli from the proverbial 'bubble,' obtaining unprocessed empirical information from the outside remains a critically important need for most of us," Kamasaki noted. Kamasaki noted the timelessness of Drucker's advice to fellow executives to think critically about themselves, their roles, and their functions—and how they allocate their time. "All of us would benefit from following this prescription, some six decades after Drucker first suggested it," Kamasaki said.

*Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Laws that Changed America*

By Nick Kotz

On a completely different front, Kamasaki was deeply moved by and learned from *Judgment Days*. “While I suspect most readers would focus on Koltz’s outstanding character portraits of Johnson and King, as a DC-based advocate working in the civil rights field I viewed the book through the lens of a practitioner,” he said. “I was particularly captivated by the glimpses of the relationships between the grassroots-based King and his DC-based counterparts like the NAACP’s Clarence Mitchell, which felt very familiar to someone that has attempted, albeit with mixed success, to harmonize the interests and perspectives of advocates from within and outside the Beltway.” He added: “It reminded me that transformative change isn’t easy, [and] is rarely popular, but can be shaped by individuals and institutions often working at the margins of society—lessons that today’s advocates need to remember.”

**David Nelson, former COO, The National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship**

*In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best Run Companies*

By Robert H. Waterman, Jr. and Thomas J. Peters

To Nelson, the most important message in this book is the importance of culture within an organization. After reading it, he began to interview potential job candidates with this frame in mind, asking them what they knew of the culture of the organization and how they feel they’d fit into that culture. “This was the most profound influence I received from a book,” he added.

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

By Lewis Carroll

When Alice chased the white rabbit down the hole, she ran into a fork in the road and met the Cheshire Cat, to whom she said, “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” The Cheshire Cat replied: “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.” Nelson sees this short interaction as very relevant to leadership and management in terms of the choices you make when problem solving.



**Sue Dahling Sullivan, Chief of Staff, Citi Performing Arts Center**

*The Execution Premium: Linking Strategy to Operations for Competitive Advantage*

By Robert S. Kaplan and David P. Norton (also authors of *The Balanced Scorecard*)

“Since [Citi Performing Arts Center] uses the Balanced Scorecard, this has obvious strategic value to both myself and the organization.”

*Winning the Customer: Turn Consumers into Fans and Get Them to Spend More*

By Lou Imbriano and Elizabeth King

(Lou is the former chief marketing officer of the New England Patriots and Citi Performing Arts Center board member)

“I believe that you need to read books that are outside of the nonprofit sector to inspire outside of the box thinking,” Dahling Sullivan said. “My take away from this book is the value of ‘creating memorable moments’—I also bought copies for my staff!”

The *Harvard Business Review* Daily Alert, *Harvard Business Review*

“To me, this is like eating brain candy every day.”

*Gift from the Sea*

By Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Dahling Sullivan is currently re-reading this. “It reminds me about the value of simplicity and taking time to actually think (easier to read than actually live by!); good for work and for life.”

**Sandra Timmons, President, A Better Chance**

*Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*

By Robert Cialdini

*Yours for the Asking: An Indispensable Guide to Fundraising and Management*

By Reynold Levy

A Better Chance is preparing for its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration and Campaign in 2013, and while a great deal of Timmons’ focus of late has been on the organization’s achievements, its future remains front and center on her radar. “We have been exploring the feasibility of an anniversary campaign and I have been reading about influence and fundraising,” she explained. “These two books have been particularly helpful.”

*“Your First Sixty Days,” Fast Company*

*“Managing Your Boss,” Harvard Business Review*

Timmons also has two go-to articles that she’s been carrying around for years and re-reads from time to time when she needs a reboot. “A great deal has changed about the job market since I first entered—but human nature hasn’t—which is what I believe that both of these articles speak to.” She discovered “The First 60 Days” when making the transition from chief of staff at The College Board to chief operating officer at Girls Inc. “The article proved invaluable then and has ever since. Now, I always do 60-day plans for my direct reports when they’re coming in. It really is a critical period for creating impact.” “Managing Your Boss” was given to her when she joined Honeywell as a manager in corporate planning at the beginning of her career. “I’ve come to read and understand it differently over the years from both points of view.”



### **David Williams, President, Make-a-Wish Foundation**

In general, Williams enjoys reading biographies and autobiographies of all types of leaders, but especially those of leaders who come from the worlds of business, politics, religion, entertainment, and sports. However, the book he reads the most is *The Bible*. While he reads it for spiritual purposes, he finds wisdom in it for leading an organization. “Individuals such as Moses, David, Solomon, Peter, and Paul faced huge challenges, and made many mistakes, but were tremendous leaders.”

### *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*

By Eric Metaxas

Recently, Williams finished this biography about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a young German pastor in the 1930s and 40s. “Bonhoeffer very clearly saw Hitler’s evil intents when very few did and was courageous enough to stand up to the Nazis when many, especially in the German church, chose to either ignore the warnings or go along with the crowd,” he said. “I think nonprofit leaders need to be reminded that we are called upon to think deeply about our pertinent issues and then be courageous in our actions.”

### *Decision Points*

By George W. Bush

*Decision Points* by President George W. Bush presents a good reminder that while some leaders are judged by the speeches they give or the books or articles they write, most are judged by the decisions they make, according to Williams. “Decisions at the most senior levels have serious implications and we always need to be mindful of the unintended consequences of our decisions,” he said.

### *The Help*

By Kathryn Stockett

Williams’ last recommendation is *The Help*. “I think this is an especially important reminder that while we in the nonprofit sector are called to serve, there are many, many people who serve us every day from the waiter at the restaurant to the janitor at the office where we work,” he said. “Being a nonprofit leader who is busy doing good things does not give us a pass on being nice to all people. In fact, I think we have a higher calling to do so given the profession we represent.”