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AFP Arizona Statewide Conference Flagstaff

LUNCH PLENARY

AUGUST 19, 2025

Resilient Leadership

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.." Sound familiar? Dickens said it well.

I am delighted to have this opportunity, and I have just a few requests before we start: I have NO slides to photograph, so you can put away your phones and focus on what I am saying while thinking about how it relates to you. If you want a copy of my speech, just ask: it will be sent to you. For now, let's really spend this time together.

Best and worst of times?

Yes! Giving USA is up. Federal money is down. Safety nets are coming untethered. Philanthropy must come to the rescue. Certainty is threatened. Uncertainty is thriving. Feeling proud that we are meeting challenges with creativity. Feeling exhaustion from being really good at what we do in spite of everything. Finding joy in unexpected encounters; feeling that joy cannot be sustained…

But I am not here to continue listing all the challenges we face today in our lives, profession and communities: I believe you have heard them all: ad infinitum. We all deal with them daily.

I am here to engage you in thinking about resilience: that quality that allows us to recover, thrive and keep moving through our lives and careers with energy and accomplishment and how it applies to our leadership of our profession, our organizations and ourselves.

It's time to unclog the drain where all the issues have accumulated since before the pandemic and get that good energy flowing again!

First, let's embrace our profession with resilient leadership! Your being here today is a major indicator of your resilience. You and I have chosen to work in the sector that exists to solve and support the social, educational, health, arts, environmental and other

essential aspects of our lives. The sector based in love of humankind. The sector that welcomes curious learners who, like us, want to seek the best idea for solving the hardest problems.

Often called the Third Sector – with Government and Corporations being the others – we stand proudly and hopefully free of bureaucracy, which can plague government, and greed which too often guides corporations.

So, what is resilient leadership and how do we find the internal and external resources to continue serving our communities in these times? A tall order. But I believe we can do it even though our capacity to cope is strained: *who asked for all this chaos and uncertainty on the heels of a global pandemic*!

Resilient leadership is the commitment and capacity to hold on to our values so we can regenerate our skills, enthusiasm, connections, vision and energy (yes!) even when we feel as though we cannot do it.

People have high expectations of us, many of which we created: many early nonprofits dazzled their donors by saying "We make $1 do the work of $10" – yes, but at what cost? At times like these,

that formula is a sure recipe for burnout, big time. So where do we find -- in this fraught time when more people want and need our programming – our own strategies and purpose that will help us be more resilient than ever.

For me, the key is hope. Some pundit said last week that "hope is not a strategy." I disagree – hope is both a noun (a vision) and a verb (what we can do actively to change how we feel and how we act). It is the light on the horizon that we keep moving towards. Without hope, how can we be resilient leaders? Without hope, how can we inspire the lives of those who depend on us for the basics and the enrichment in our lives? Our work is about enabling hope – helping others to feel hopeful that when they invest in us we will help solve the problems or provide the services they need for a full life and stable community.

I don't know about the impact of these times on you, but as I reflect on my 40+ years in nonprofit fundraising and administration I feel there has never been a time where my resilience has been challenged as often as it has recently. And yet, I can still hang on to my resilience and keep going. My resilience is restored when I

keep my values in focus. My resilience allows me to navigate times and issues, both professional and personal, that are painful, discouraging and frustrating.

As a resilient leader in our profession and your organization, mind your messages! Particularly your fundraising outreach. It is tempting to fall back on need – even though our work has proven that people give because we MEET needs, not because we HAVE needs, and that fundraising is about relationships based in shared values, not about money.

My resilience – and perhaps yours -- comes from a values-based belief that there is always a solution once we have defined the problem; that the "why" of our existence is the most treasured part of our selves; and that there is life outside our work – be it music, books, another art form, sports, church, family. We, and our supporters, are inspired by a organizational mission that conveys WHY we exist, but just what we do.

<u>Believing in the importance of resilience is as important as being resilient. This is true for sector leadership, organizational leadership, and personal leadership.</u>

I have learned that when I start spiraling down with fatigue, worry and anxiety, I take everyone with me. And in our world – where so many depend on us – we simply cannot succumb.

The late John W. Gardner, co-founder of Common Cause and the Independent Sector, a statesman and thinker of profound intellect, wrote about the tasks of leaders. *Not the job, the tasks*. In his seminal work, On Leadership, published in 1990, he suggested tasks that stand well today. The first, he said, is "Envisioning Goals" – his coupling of vision + goals is really all about hope. Without hope, there is no energy in your vision and you struggle to meet your goals. The second is "Affirming Values" – a leader is cognizant of the shared assumptions, beliefs, customs and ideas that give meaning and ideas that motivate – and among those ideas are norms and values. We are community-based organizations and our first and foremost priority must be serving our communities. As resilient leaders, our focus on vision, goals, affirmation and values is essential in the times we are experiencing. Gardner lists seven other tasks of leaders, but these two are the most relevant to our focus today.

Awareness of our values leads to reflection about issues, beliefs, feelings and choices and an increased ability to continue working and believing even when we feel like we cannot go one step further.

Values manifestation is a key to resilient leadership of our sector writ large, and our organizations. The absence of values withers our resilience.

Sounds simple – but we all know that staying in touch with our values is an increasingly challenging endeavor.

And yet, we really have no choice but to carry on – making sure that the result of our efforts provides hope, care, love and support for those whose needs are an additional worry in a world that is already filled with anxiety and fear.

We need to constantly search to find the will and the energy to give deeply of ourselves and make an impact in the lives of others. It's what our sector is all about. We are commited to this profession.

Resilient leadership of our organizations is critical now. John Gardner, in his wisdom, also believed that we can "lead from where we are" in an organization. You may not be the CEO – or even the

Director of Development – but don't wait until you are to start leading. Use the principles of resilient leadership in everything you do. Gauging impact is hard. Some results are not immediately evident. Be very alert to the people whose needs we serve in our offices and in our communities. Watch people bloom when praise and support are offered. Remember love of humankind every day. Deeply note when a life is changed through the impact of your work or programming. Applaud loudly when social, arts and health challenges are brought under control and those who seek our services for other reasons are changed by their experience. Most of what we do cannot be measured – and thinking everything can and must be measured is a trap into which we cannot fall. Our impact is most often told in stories we tell to others, or others tell to us. Be a storyteller. Find your narrative. Stories are one of the keys to resilience, and they will lift your spirits in the hearing and the telling and the retelling. Through your fundraising and ancillary work, you make it possible for the stories to happen. As messengers for your organization and your cause, be very mindful about the tone of messages you send out now. Your goal is to consistently and honestly convey hope, solutions and gratitude.

The irony is that although what we lost most in the isolation of the pandemic was community, our post pandemic messages for the most part did not convey *how our sector helps rebuild community*. They were about the organization's needs. We conveyed desperation rather than the ways in which we could bring people together again in a shared experience that was uplifting, beautiful and encouraged connection.

During that post-pandemic time, when I was urging people to reframe their needs into impact and engagement, I recalled a beautifully stated message about those who give to us.

25 years ago, Jerry Turner, the now late Artistic Director at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, wrote this in a performance program book: "The Greeks had a word for it: *choregus,* a citizen designated to supply the costs of production. It was assumed that such patronage was not a burden, but an honor. Playgoing was not an entertainment but a tradition akin to religious ritual: an act of faith. In a more secular age, Yeats called on suppliers of "twigs for an eagles' nest" to further the cause of art. Nowadays, it's harder to

muster the spirit of community that unites artist and audience. But the need to deepen connections is still here, and the hope…"

There's that word again! Hope…

To fully reconnect, we must bring hope into the lives of those we serve, and to do so we must be hopeful (literally, filled with hope). Where does that come from. Can YOU be a resilient leader, no matter where you are or what your role is?

How do we maintain our own hope and values when we are daily working to solve critical issues in our communities, perhaps struggling with tangled bureaucracies, resistant boards and drawing on inadequate resources to provide what is needed for our human family? And although the Giving USA Annual Report was a bright light for all of us, we have no guarantees for 2025. We must keep on keeping on – charting our progress, stewarding our donors, and maintaining our capacity to bounce back even when we are feeling discouraged.

Can we "unclog the drain" and get free-flowing again?

By now, you know what I do to recharge my batteries: I reignite my personal resilience – I find my spark: At the end of every email I send there is a quotation from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel that reminds me many times each day to keep my spirits up when life and others and world events are trying to push my spirits down:

"Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement…to get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed."

I love the idea of "radical amazement" and I am also guided in my choices by a single line from the poet, e.e. cummings:

"I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing, than teach 10,000 stars how not to dance".

My, resilience comes from knowing my values and living them.

What are my values?

Joy

- Finding it, experiencing it, spreading it (train whistle story)

Respect

- Receiving it, honoring it and giving it

Gratitude

- Showing it in all my work and relationships and simply living gratefully

Think about yours. Write them down if you can.

Resilience is critical if we are to realize our next era. We are no longer "post-pandemic" – Alvin Toffler, writing in another whirling era, called that time "The time of the parentheses, the time between eras – a great and yeasty time." We have moved from the anxiety and tolerance of post-pandemic times to the community and board expectation: "Show me." Show me what you can do, what you have done and why I should be involved…a tall order for us.

I remember right after the pandemic we went wild over "re" words: renew, reimagine, reignite, rethink…I was as guilty as anyone! But I have stuck with Resilience. Resilience starts with an ongoing commitment to "renewal" – bringing together stability + change -- maintaining ourselves and our values but with a willingness to

"surrender the memories" and "take the best and leave the rest" – to try something new.

Resilience adds another dimension to renewal: a big dose of purpose. While we in our profession often associate "renewing" with renewing a contribution rather than renewing ourselves -- synonyms for our personal renewal give it a better meaning: flexibility, elasticity, and suppleness. Again, I turn to the poet e.e. cummings to remind us about what is possible (and my secret wish for board members that have lost (or never attained) their "PQ" (Passion Quotient) : (*may my mind stroll about hungry and fearless and thirsty and supple, and even if it's Sunday may I be wrong, for when people are right, they are not young*), -- what a grand idea! To stay young, renewed and resilient as long as we can!

Another key aspect of personal resilience is emotion: our impact as professionals hinges on our fearless expression of genuine emotion. The capacity to recognize and allow emotion is critical: in your work with clients and community AND EACH OTHER – *particularly,* in fundraising. A young Romanian man I mentored from our Central and Eastern European Leaders of Tomorrow program was

in the US on a Fulbright for the past 2 years. He just completed his Masters in Nonprofit Management program, and I debriefed with him by phone before his return to Romania. He said his one concern about the program was the absence of emotion in his classes when addressing the value and importance of the nonprofit sector – *that all was too pragmatic*. To share your emotions with those who are on your journey is essential: *if you are to master resilience, you must allow yourself to feel.*

How you show those feelings depends on the circumstances – but in our work, emotion is the origin of most organizations in our sector: they come from a place of emotional commitment to solve a societal problem whether it is health, education, social service, access to the arts or any of the other areas of our concern: we are able to express emotion in staff interaction, in managing for results, expressing joy and gratitude to our boards even when things are not going well, when we send messages to raise money that touch people's hearts. That emotion is what generates passion – which is the most dramatic motivator of all for us and for our constituents. I find that struggling organizations and exhausted professionals often have a

“Low PQ” – Passion Quotient. They have not sufficiently engaged their hearts and they struggle to measure that which often cannot be measured.

The simple formula for effective fundraising outreach? Touch my heart, tell me what the problem is, tell me what you are doing about it, and tell me how I can help. Too often, we forget the first step – “touch my heart.”

Tell your stories. Do not lead from the need you have for money (scarcity): lead from the needs you are meeting (abundance). People give because they can see your impact.

Remember also that relationships are the heart of our work – everything we do – from direct services to administration to fundraising -- is about relationships based in shared values that grow and flourish. When we get too busy to take care of our relationships – we don’t have time to spend time with others -- we are more apt to be emotionally exhausted and veering into a hollow state of emotional bankruptcy.

So, what are some solutions?

What can you do if you have little time but want to connect with others outside your workplace so you can feel like yourself again? Some of us have turned to “Zoomtails” – meeting on Zoom at the end of the day with a glass of wine and friends who may be very busy or live faraway and have a chat. Restore (another “re”) relationships if they or you are feeling isolated or disconnected,.

- Schedule lunches or dinners with friends you have lost touch with because you are all “too busy” -- put the date on your calendar and you are more likely to do it – I did this just last week. It was so energizing!
- Share a morning coffee with someone new on staff or someone you met recently. A new member of our board was my coffee date.
- Make a “no real purpose” social phone call to a friend – or call a relative you have neglected because you are too busy. During the pandemic I started doing this and now it is a good habit!
- Take a walk in a park or the woods with a friend. We all know that getting out in nature is one of the most restorative

practices – do you make time for it? I walk 1.5 to 2 miles a day.

I have found that the time spent doing these things builds up my resilience and gives me energy that I felt was gone. And, for me, my writing also restores my resilience – even when I stare at the page and only come up with 5 words I like! It sets my resilience in motion and the next time there are more.

The capacity to recover – to bounce back -- is the key to resilient leadership of ourselves – and we need to practice it. – *As the Greek physician and anatomist Herophilus advised:* "When health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself, art cannot manifest, strength cannot fight, wealth becomes useless, and intelligence cannot be applied."

HERE ARE TEN WAYS TO MAINTAIN OR RESTORE YOUR PERSONAL LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE AND BE A MORE CONFIDENT LEADER OF OUR PROFESSION AND YOUR ORGANIZATION

These things have worked for me during my decades working in the nonprofit sector in governance, giving and administration, through

recessions, downturns, the technology "dot bomb" of 2000, 9/11, devastating personal crises and the current situation we here in America and the world are going through.

1. Don't stay in a job that is not aligned with your values – it is tempting to try to be a "hero," but you cannot live long in a contradiction, you cannot live wholly in dissonance and if you are not happy, it will limit your capacity to embrace your true values. I had a "job from hell" and I imagine many of you have, too – and if it is evident you cannot fix it, leave it behind. You will be happier somewhere else, and the Dalai Lama advises that "Happiness is the highest form of health." Happiness helps us stay resilient and is a key to good health.
2. Seek professional development (and advice) even if your organization has no budget for it – fund it yourself or find someone who will volunteer to help you. You are doing this now by being here today: the opportunity to be with fellow professionals is a huge key to resilience! Take an online class. Find a mentor. Hear new ideas. Listen to Audible books or

podcasts whose words may inspire and provide new ideas that ignite your spirit and values.

3. Become a trend spotter – read or listen voraciously about the world, your community and our profession – and weave those ideas together into a new thought bundle that can inspire you in your work. People ask me how I stay so current with trends: it comes down to a discipline of morning reading or podcasts that gives me a solid framework for determining where we are headed as a profession and what the call to action may look like.
4. Speak up, speak out but remember to do it in a way that is helpful – Anger is the enemy of resilience at all levels – profession, organization and self -- because it often leads to a breach in relationships and a challenge to your values – if things are very bad in your workplace and you do not have a voice, give adequate notice and leave (see #1, above)
5. Take personal time to do the things that lift your spirits – no matter how busy you are – read a chapter in a book, read a whole book, write a book, listen to music, go for a walk, climb

a mountain, stand in the rain --. If you fail to restore your own resources, you will have none to share with others.

6. If you feel yourself thinking you are a victim, figure out why, try to fix it and if it is a chronic feeling run, don't walk, to the nearest exit. Again, know when the party is over. Leave.
7. Dig deep into your beliefs – spiritual, religious, academic – and pull out the nuggets of new ideas lying there that are waiting to inspire you – I often turn to poetry. Others and my own. A wisp of eloquent language can lift my spirits.
8. Remember that we may be role models for others – sometimes unofficially, but particularly as we grow into our jobs – be careful what you model: do problems overwhelm you, or do you see them as puzzles to be solved, as ways to move forward, and do you invite others into the dialog as a vehicle for engaging others to increase their ownership of the solution? You can be the rising tide that lifts those boats.
9. Embrace joy, live gratefully. Find joy wherever you can and be grateful for the smallest thing. I feel joy when I look out my office window and see a squirrel bravely taunting an owl that has taken up residence. There is joy in seeing the bluebells

blooming in my garden after the winter. There was joy in pulling that train whistle. There is joy in listening to Bach, Beethoven or Brubeck, and I feel so grateful that music is a big part of my life. There is joy and gratitude in seeing people grow – children, grandchildren, employees, friends – we need not be so measured in our approach or our description of what we see – we can find joy and feel grateful even when we think we cannot. The "attitude of gratitude" is a maxim some of us learned when we chose our profession. Be grateful to your donors and volunteers, of course – but be grateful (and joyful) for what you have the opportunity to do for yourself, your work teams and your community.

> Morgan Harper Nichols said recently: If you truly want to grow, make a practice out of gratitude: the daily art of celebrating the life unfolding before your eyes.

10. Finally, become a life eater – each minute of our lives is irretrievable. We are all facing the "RT" – remaining time. And

who knows what that will be? Snap. It's gone. As these minutes flee, think of them as a gift. Because they are. Embrace them. Savor them. Devour them. Treasure them.

Conclusion

Our sector matters greatly in these times – and our profession and your work matter – but most of all, remember that YOU MATTER. To your workplace, family, friends, other loved ones – and you matter to YOU.

Love yourself and find ways to restore that self when you feel overwhelmed, over worked and unable to see the future clearly. You are capable of leading others even if you are not "the leader:" your impact will continue for generations if you are able to inspire resilience in others even as you show yours in your leadership, care, outreach and interaction. Let hope be your North Star – hope, in the words of Vaclav Havel, is a "state of mind not a state of the world. Either we have hope within us or we don't:…it is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart – it transcends the world that is immediately experienced and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons."

Let us imagine new horizons in our resilience. The future may not be what it used to be, but we don't know that. As resilient leaders we will seek opportunity and convey innovation and hope along with our vision and values.

We cannot know the future of our community, country or world, but we can shape our own, day by day. Resilient leadership helps us get better at navigating in our world, hones how we react to crises, inspires others and encourages us to embrace joy. In this "show me" era, let's show our communities our resilient leadership in everything we do. *Jon Kabat-Zinn wisely advised,* "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf."

Thank you!