



# Prepared and Resolved: How to Become Future- Ready & Make an Impact

These ideas, drawn from the latest research, will help you develop talented staff and prepare for the future.

By Daniel Wolf

Over the past decade, four new leadership challenges have emerged:

- **The nonprofit environment has become far more complex and dynamic.** From service delivery models to resource development, the technical and economic aspects of running an organization have never been more challenging.

- **Preparing the organization for the future** has become part of leadership at every level, from the boardroom to the front lines.

- **Creating a practical strategic agenda and engaging talented people in that agenda** is imperative for building capacity and creating results.

- **Effective collaboration requires an adaptable organization** capable of working across boundaries and processes to create value for stakeholders.

To address these four challenges, follow these precepts:

## Embrace social entreship.

Social entreship (also known as social entrepreneurship or social enterprise) is the change engine in the nonprofit environment. Social entreship—the practice of creating new services, products, and models—helps nonprofits drive organic growth while they balance funding sources and applications in new ways. Entreship also helps create

a climate of innovation within the organization that fosters healthy growth and change.

## Forget the traditional plan. Focus on the strategic agenda.

Most nonprofits prepare strategic plans, but our research suggests that such plans often fail to deliver intended results due to disconnects between the strategy and organizational behavior. One prob-

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lem with the typical plan is that it fails to make things relevant and meaningful. Further, conventional strategic plans tend to be linear and static. Thus, the assumptions that underlie the plans aren't realistic or well matched to the organization's challenges.

An alternative to the conventional plan is what we call the strategic agenda for growth, performance, and change. The strategic agenda is dynamic and purposeful, and emphasizes the following facts:

- **The nonprofit environment is relatively “vuca”** or volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, and full of nuances.

- **Strategy is an unfolding, organic process** with three steps:

- (1) Choose a strategic direction toward the future.

- (2) Use resources and networks to align your strategy with your organization's capabilities, opportunities, and challenges.

- (3) Be sure board and staff members work together, contributing their perspectives and judgment, to make strategy happen.

- **Experience is learned in the routine practice of strategy.** Leadership and management competence is built through day-to-day experience with the strategic agenda.

Before you can execute a strategic agenda for your organization, you need to have a firm grasp of:

- **what** your organization stands for—its meaning and purpose
- **where** the organization is headed
- **the cause-and-effect factors** that frame change
- **emerging forces** that will affect the organization's ongoing transformation.

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Most nonprofit groups have a strong feel for the first item and perhaps the last item. The other two are often fuzzy issues. Normally, nonprofit boards are responsible for the oversight of strategy, and management is responsible for strategy assessment, development,

and deployment. Our research makes clear that nonprofit boards and management must work together to explore intended strategy impact in the right context. Otherwise, they'll have trouble connecting the dots between strategy direction, integration, and execution.

### Engage talented people.

At the heart of every nonprofit organization are people whose talents drive everyday efforts and results. The key to organizational success is to engage people in the organization's mission and strategy through a combination of leadership and management.

Most nonprofits have better leadership than management in place. However, both need to be developed. (See Table 1.)

Board and staff members must work together to make strategy happen.

Diverse talents, matched to a strategic agenda, and a dynamic, energetic culture make all the difference. Talented people develop in the practice of strategy. The retention of talent depends on a strategic agenda that makes sense to stakeholders. Talented people are drawn to organizations that have good reputations and serious intentions about their impact on the world.

### Collaborate constantly.

Collaboration is a process of working together across structures to create strategic and economic value that you couldn't generate alone. Effective collaboration involves four elements:

- **Common goals and values** give collaboration partners something to focus on, something to work toward.
- **Partnership behaviors** enable people to trust one another, gain commitment, contribute resources, and guide efforts.
- **Collaboration structures** (including shared development, shared resources, shared systems, and partnership programs) support problem solving, decision making, and planning.



- **Engagement practices** bring groups and individuals together in the shared journey, forging intentions and accountability.

### Reset your compass.

Today's nonprofit environment is more challenging than ever before. Boards and executives must balance economic performance, comparative advantage, relationship-building, and stewardship with a new compass heading that balances two key components:

- **A strategic mindset.** Your strategic agenda must be relevant and engaging at every level, from the boardroom to the front lines. Everything in your strategic agenda must relate to the creation and capture of real value.

- **Talented people.** Strategy issues are people issues. People are the engines that help the organization grow and flourish. Having a strong board and a strong, adaptive staff is a prerequisite to sustaining your mission, operations, and impact.

The world needs mission-driven, results-oriented nonprofit organizations that are prepared and resolved to make decisions, solve problems, frame judgment, and support plans. This is an ongoing journey, not an episodic blast of attention to strategic issues. Strategic thought and behavior, forged every day by people at all levels, can be the energy that assures your organization's long-term success.

Prepared means future-ready. Resolved means impact-ready. ■

*Daniel Wolf (dzwolf@dewarsloan.com) is managing director of Dewar Sloan (www.dewarsloan.com), a strategy and consulting practice focused on organization growth, performance, and change. He is the author of Prepared and Resolved: The Strategic Agenda for Growth, Performance and Change (dsb Publishing, www.preparedandresolved.com), from which this article is adapted.*

## Table 1: Leadership vs. Management Keys

### Keys to effective leadership:

- **Shape** a culture that promotes sound judgment, ethical behavior, collaboration, & learning.
- **Motivate and inspire** people, focusing on shared values.
- **Encourage** thought & idea exchange.
- **Help** people develop their abilities & character.
- **Provide** foresight & clear direction.
- **Forge** connections & relationships among people.

### Keys to effective management:

- **Put** systems & work processes in order.
- **Encourage** quality.
- **Assess & control** risk factors.
- **Support** sound practice.
- **Furnish** targets & measures.
- **Set** proper boundaries.
- **Provide** information.
- **Disperse & connect** resources.

### It's Time to Forge Ahead

For more ways to connect your strategic agenda with talented people, see these *Nonprofit World* articles at [www.snpo.org/members](http://www.snpo.org/members):

- **Seven Pillars of Social-Enterprise Success** (Vol. 22, No. 1)
- **Creating a Values-Based Road Map** (Vol. 23, No. 2)
- **Advance to the Future Or Retreat to the Familiar?** (Vol. 22, No. 6)
- **How to Stretch Your Organization** (Vol. 21, No. 6)
- **High-End Strategic Alliances as Fundraising Opportunities** (Vol. 19, No. 5)
- **Take the Collaboration Quiz** (Vol. 24, No. 3)
- **Using Your Organization's Culture to Build Productivity and Reputation** (Vol. 11, No. 6)
- **Hiring a Concern? Learn What Talent Magnets Do** (Vol. 24, No. 5)
- **The Three Roles of Nonprofit Management** (Vol. 23, No. 5)