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**The Boomer Generation: Helping clients create the next stage of life**

**From Profit to Passion: Comparing for-profit and non-profit work**

by: Marlene L. Olshan, Chief Executive Officer, Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern Pennsylvania

It is impossible for me to know the exact moment that I decided to make a career change from the for-profit to the non-profit sector. But now that I have just celebrated my five year anniversary with non-profit Big Brothers Big Sisters, I can unequivocally say that it was the best career decision I have ever made. And under the right circumstances, I strongly recommend it to others looking for a life-changing career move.

When people that I meet in my role as Chief Executive Officer of Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern Pennsylvania find out that I spent 20 years of my career in the fashion retail business and six years in the financial services consulting field, the first thing they usually say is “wow, that’s different.” And it is. But some of it is also the same. At the end of the day, I believe that all leadership and organizational success boils down to a few key principles, which when executed well and with meaning, help any organization – regardless of mission – to succeed.

When I graduated from Temple University in the mid 1970’s, the nation was in the midst of a recession. Unsure of exactly what I wanted to do, I was offered a job with a department store chain as a management trainee. Working with people always appealed to me, so I took the job because it paid enough money (barely) for me to support myself. The training program was actually quite good, and prepared me for what turned out to be a 20 year career in retailing. Like many boomers, I got into the retail business by accident and stayed because it served me well and because I worked with so many wonderful, bright, and fun people. I learned a lot from my supervisors and took the initiative to learn the ropes of the business at an early age. I was fortunate to work with very reputable retail organizations that were growing rapidly, allowing me to gain more and more responsibility as the years went on.

In 1995, I left my career in the retail business as Vice President, Store Operations and spent six years with a progressive financial services consulting firm. As a Managing Director, I was responsible for marketing, human resources, and operations. It was during my last year there that I decided to do something more meaningful with my life. Not that my other jobs weren’t important and meaningful, but something was nagging at me to give back in a different, socially redeeming way. I left the financial services consulting firm and began what has been a truly remarkable, meaningful journey into the non-profit world.

In 2001, I joined Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS), the nation’s largest and most effective youth mentoring organization. We place a carefully screened volunteer into the life of a

child. While simple, the value proposition is very powerful - independent research confirms that a relationship with a Big Brother or Big Sister helps a child stay in school, stay away from drugs and alcohol, and improves their self-esteem. When I joined the agency five years ago, we were serving about 1,000 children, and now, I am proud to say that this year we will serve almost 3,000. While these numbers are impressive, they don't even scratch the surface of the need. Right here in our service area, the greater Philadelphia region, it is estimated that 100,000 youth - yes, that's right - 100,000 are at risk for social or academic failure. The numbers are sobering. BBBS helps these kids by matching them with a volunteer who meets with them two to four times a month for a few hours a week - playing games, talking, going to a movie, or just hanging out. And it is precisely this attention that makes a difference in a child's life.

The journey from the "profit world" to the "non-profit world" needs to come first and foremost from a deep, personal passion. If you are thinking about making the switch, it needs to come from the heart, not the head. The work is too hard, too demanding, and too challenging to not feel personally passionate about it. It's that simple. How do you want to make the world a better place? What resonates with you? Start there and the rest will follow. Throughout my career in for-profit industries, I found my passion to be social justice, civil rights, and leveling the playing field for those who, just by virtue of their birth, may not have a chance to succeed. To me, equality of opportunity is an important social value and my decision to move to non-profit work capitalized on this. By providing an at-risk youth with a Big Brother or Sister, BBBS is building a stronger community and a brighter future for our region's youth – and so am I.

If you make the decision to enter the non-profit arena, keep these key differences and observations in mind:

### ***Learn to Collaborate***

Non-profit work is much more collaborative than the private sector. I have learned that it has to be for some very systemic reasons. Collaboration is integral to the internal operations of a non-profit organization. When everyone contributes, the work gets done faster, better and the organization succeeds in helping more people and raising more money. All of the employees share the passion for a mission. When they work together, the result is a more passionate product. Collaboration is equally as important with external communities. Resource sharing, networking and fund development, and often organizational existence, rely on community partnerships. If you do not have experience working in a collaborative culture, join a board or volunteer to gain real life collaborative experience.

### ***Acting on Diversity***

Diversity really matters. While most businesses give lip service to diversity, the non-profit arena is always struggling to find a work force that more closely matches its clients. While the challenges are the same in meeting diversity objectives, it is "spoken" and active in the non-profit world, as opposed to "un-spoken" in the profit world.

### ***Changing the Language, Changing the Culture***

"Business" and "marketing" used to be dirty, "corporate" words in non-profit organizations. As more and more people from the private sector enter the non-profit arena, these words are becoming more palatable, and they are making a difference in how things happen for non-profit organizations. Still, non-profit folks don't like to think of themselves as "business people." But this is changing too. Jim Collins, a New York

Times best selling author, researcher and business professor, recently wrote a monograph called *Good to Great in the Social Sectors* which, if read by enough people, will help break down the barriers to running a non-profit like a business. Because truthfully, as Collins argues, it's not about the business of our work, it's about moving an organization from good to great, year after year.

### ***New Stakeholders and Capital Accumulation Systems***

The non-profit world has a completely illogical revenue system. Most non-profits exist through donations from foundations, corporations, United Ways, the government, and individuals. In most cases these are NOT the people who are their clients, or with whom they provide their services. This model holds non-profits accountable to many more stakeholders. Additionally, all of these funding sources can change their priorities at any time. Unlike the profit world, when a non-profit expends capital or provides a service, its capital is subsequently depleted. In the profit world, when capital is expended (by providing a service or selling a product) capital comes back to the business in the form of revenue or profit. Capital accumulation is completely de-linked from services in the non-profit world, and therefore becomes a major organizational focus of its own.

### ***Overcoming Resistance toward Change***

Change is hard for most people, but I believe change is much more difficult in the non-profit world. People are entrenched in the mission and there is no penalty for doing things the way they have always been done. Most businesses must change (through expansion, product development, delivery models, customer relations, business development strategies and so on) to remain competitive. However, non-profit organizations do not face the same market factors and challenges, therefore there is no inherent need to change, to stay ahead of the curve, or to exceed competitors. This makes it easy to just stay put. Non-profit leaders must recognize this, and create their own factors for change. Whether through new organizational development, human resources, technology, communication or fund development strategies, non-profits must continually push for advances in organizational effectiveness and growth – even if it means pushing employees outside of their comfort zones.

### ***Measuring Results***

Measuring the outcomes of non-profit work is very difficult. How do you really measure the impact that a Big Brother or Big Sister can have on a child's life? Surely, we can measure the number of children served, but can we capture how those children's lives have been improved? While independent research studies have proven the effectiveness of BBBS's mentoring, they have not quantified our everyday results with each and every child. Measurement is easy in the business world - profit and return on shareholder value! But how do you measure success in an agency like BBBS? It is much more difficult. Without measuring progress, an organization's successes and areas for improvement are not clear. In addition, many funders prioritize their giving based on an organization's measurable impact. Non profits must find creative ways to accurately measure success.

### ***Measuring Performance***

Metrics and performance measurement are not the norm in non-profit. Again, they are received as "too corporate" for the often organic cultures of many non-profits. However, with the influence of more business leaders entering the arena, and with social philanthropists like Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, non-profits are becoming more aware of the need to measure and manage to metrics.

Despite these differences, for-profit movers and shakers will notice some similarities in these two opposing worlds. For me, these similarities are in powerful leadership and management techniques. As mentioned earlier, I believe that effective leadership boils down to a few principles that, when well executed, lead to success in any arena:

- Hiring and retaining the right people
- Setting high goals, and being disciplined in planning how to achieve them
- Measuring and holding people accountable
- Most importantly, inspiring people to believe that they can accomplish more than they ever dreamed possible

The one huge advantage that non-profits have over the for-profit arena is the ability to tap into the passion each and every person has for the mission. Begin with the passion, and all else will follow.

Making the career change from for-profit to non-profit was the best decision I ever made. It's a wonderful feeling to go home everyday knowing that you did something to strengthen the community you live in. I carry around a folder with letters, cards, and emails from Bigs, Littles, moms, and others telling me about the impact that our work has had on their lives. These real life testimonials are the greatest return on investment that anyone could ever ask for.