Who Will Lead the Change?

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During the last decade, not-for-profit organizations have followed the trend of many business models and allocated resources to re-think, re-invent, re-organize, re-tool, and re-engineer our volunteer programs to better fit the needs of "stakeholders." Interestingly, the prefix "re" is defined in the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary as, "again, back, backward." Have our efforts and momentum been moving in the wrong direction? If we truly want to elevate the field and build capacity, it is imperative that a new conceptual framework is developed using different thinking, new language, and fresh approaches that are generated, promoted, and used by professionals within the field. Current thinking among experts in organization change management such as Peter Block, Peter Senge, and Margaret Wheatley suggest that it is time to "transform" existing models and their supporting systems. Transformation, as defined in the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, is a process that implies "major change in form, nature, and function."

There is a need for significant change within the field of volunteer leadership to better position the profession and change the existing management model. This need has been a growing concern, and well documented in recent reports such as *Positioning the Profession* (Silver, 1999), *A Guide to Investing in Volunteer Resources Management: Improve Your Philanthropic Portfolio* (UPS Foundation, 2003), and *Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report* (Hager, 2004). In these reports specific recommendations have been made; yet, a more perplexing and reoccurring question within the field is, "what will the model be" and "who will lead the change?"

Margaret Wheatley (2004), a renowned leadership and organizational development expert, uses the analogy of the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly to describe the process of transformation in which organizations experience change. As she describes it, a caterpillar first begins its metamorphosis when it starts to produce small, imaginal cells on its body. These cells are perceived by the caterpillar as foreign bodies that are attacking it. The caterpillar's immune system begins to produce antibodies to kill the imaginal cells. Individual imaginal cells are destroyed by the caterpillar until the cells begin to reproduce in small clusters. As the clusters grow in size, the caterpillar is unable to eliminate all the cells. Gradually, the cell clusters begin to envelop the caterpillar's body until it is completely encased and its resistance surrenders to its natural evolution. After a transformative period in the cocoon stage, the butterfly emerges. The new organism is no longer a caterpillar, nor does it bear any resemblance to its previous state. In fact, there is evidence that the DNA of a caterpillar and a butterfly are actually different; thus the transformation becomes complete. The implications of this are huge: if a transformation of this sort can occur in nature, it serves as a metaphor of hope that change is possible in the most resistant of situations.

Wheatley makes the point that not unlike the caterpillar, those within any profession who are the first or isolated voices that call for change are sometimes muted, ostracized, or replaced. However, as more individuals form clusters of conversations and activities, then true change begins. This author agrees with Wheatley that it is time we use our imaginations to create a new state of being—one that does not resemble today's model and systems. Albert Einstein said "Imagination is

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more important than knowledge." Today, we know we need to change, but it is the full power of our collective imaginations that will manifest a transformation that will result in our evolution.

To transform our models, organizations and programs will require a large number of individuals working together collectively to lead the change. First, it is important that academics produce and incorporate research on volunteerism in curricula and coursework throughout higher education. This will spur their colleagues and students to pursue scholarly investigation of this vital and evolving field. Research for scholarly journals should include naturalistic approaches so that themes, patterns, and trends at the grassroots level can be identified and used to share findings and recommendations. Second, recognized experts have the most influence and clout to promote cutting edge models and new practices to elite and powerful audiences such as CEOs, board members, and funding sources within all sectors. Capitalizing on advocacy and educational opportunities among these elite groups can increase the receptivity and motivation for them to lead change within established institutions. Third, consultants can open the door for change by facilitating the design and implementation of new models with their clients. Entering into contracts to provide traditional strategies and approaches that are merely repackaged does little to further the field or meet the real needs of the organization's staff and volunteers. Fourth, volunteer management associations are positioned to work closely with their membership to convene, facilitate, formulate, design, endorse, and disseminate new models. As a result of widespread and frequent convening opportunities, collective wisdom could be better garnered to increase and enhance conversations that expedite change within the field. Most important, volunteer leaders can benefit from creating vibrant — or engaging in existing — "communities of practice," such as local DOVAs or AVA online discussion forums, so they can meet regularly, either in person or via the internet, to discuss, exchange, and develop ideas about ways to design, initiate, and expedite the transforma-

tion. It is through their conversations and experimentation at the grassroots level that we can learn the most and guide new thinking and practices.

New volunteer management models can best be developed from the leadership and contributions of many. Everyone has a role to play on the local, state, national, and international level. The collective wisdom of all will produce the most imaginative and viable models. The time is now, the leaders are each of us within our own spheres of influence, and our mission is to become unified so we can manifest our vision.

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