

## **Maximize Your Nonprofit's Performance in 2011**

**By: Hardy Smith**

For nonprofits resolving to improve their performance in the year ahead, here are 10 action suggestions that will help you achieve greater success.

1. **Devote time to planning.** Too many organizations don't give attention to developing strategic direction and annual action plans that will allow them to successfully achieve their mission.
2. **Think ahead.** Solve your problems in advance. What challenges can you expect to face in the year ahead? Don't wait. Begin working on solutions now.
3. **Communicate your message effectively.** Begin with ensuring that you understand who your audience is. Evaluate current methods of message delivery; are they effective? Most importantly, commit to listening to your targeted audience so you can communicate what "they" want to hear.
4. **Add advocacy as a priority activity.** Actively promote your cause to those making decisions affecting your nonprofit's ability to deliver the services its mission statement calls for. What you do matters to those who benefit from your good work. However, it may take entirely different reasoning to convince a decision maker to support you.
5. **Create a culture of creativity.** New and innovative ideas are needed in the challenging times we are in. Encourage and recognize out-of-the-box thinking within your organization. Support creative time and brainstorming sessions away from the daily work routine.
6. **Be a student.** Devote time to personal growth by reading and researching issues that affect your organization. Do comparison visits to other organizations and events. Seek both internal and outside-of-the-organization opinions for ideas that can improve your effectiveness.
7. **Take the personal mirror test.** Give yourself an honest evaluation to determine what changes are needed. What needs to be done

differently if you are going to reach your desired success? How can you work smarter?

8. **Build relationships.** The benefits of an environment when people are working together, is more likely to be realized, when positive relationships exist. Work to establish solid relationships among staff, volunteers, board members, donors, sponsors, clients, and the community your organization serves. True relationships require two-way participation. Communication, listening, trust, dependability, and support are the critical keys. Incorporate relationship building time into meeting schedules.
9. **Work to resolve issues contributing to a major question facing most nonprofits**—“Why don’t those board members do what they’re supposed to do?” Start by taking steps to ensure each board member has a clear understanding of what the organization is asking them to do. Then gain a commitment that the performance expectation will be fulfilled. Have a process in place that allows for regular evaluation of progress being made which reinforces accountability. Examine your board recruitment process. Be realistic about board prospects. Are they able AND willing to perform as needed?
10. **Invest in your organization’s future.** Take advantage of available resources. Attend conferences that will stimulate new ideas and solutions. Make use of professional expertise to assist with improving staff productivity, developing a more engaged board, motivating volunteers, or building organizational capacity. It’s a critical investment.

Take action on these 10 suggestions and your nonprofit will have a much more successful year in 2011 and beyond!

**(As a nonprofit consultant and speaker, Hardy Smith has a proven ability for helping organizations achieve high performance success. To learn more about Hardy or to sign up for his free Tips for Nonprofit Success newsletter, please visit [www.hardysmith.com](http://www.hardysmith.com) )**