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## Upfront

### **No Substitute for Experience** **When hiring executives, many nonprofits should seek marketing expertise**

By Rosaline Juan

Stanford Social Innovation Review  
Spring 2007

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## No Substitute for Experience

*When hiring executives, many nonprofits should seek marketing expertise*

Nonprofits will soon have many chances to hone their executive hiring skills, finds a 2006 study by CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and the Meyer Foundation. Close to 10 percent of nonprofit executive directors will leave their jobs within the next year, and a whopping three out of four will leave their organizations over the next five years.

When the time comes to fill that top spot, nonprofits that rely on fundraising should zero in on one particular area of their candidates' resumes: their background in marketing, concludes a study in *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* (vol. 17, no. 1). The study's authors, William J. Ritchie and Karen Eastwood, looked at the relationship between chief executives' backgrounds in various management disciplines and their nonprofits' financial performance. They found that the more experience executives had in marketing, the greater their organization's ability to fundraise.

Ritchie and Eastwood, both management professors at Florida Gulf Coast University, surveyed the chief executives of 144 higher education foundations across 41 states. The authors focused on higher education foundations because these organizations are similar to many other kinds of nonprofits in which fundraising is an executive responsibility.

For the study, respondents indicated how many years they had worked in the areas of accounting, finance, production, marketing, and operations. The researchers then used IRS Form 990 data to calculate how well each respondent's organization raises money from various donors, excluding government grants.

The researchers could not conclude whether successful organizations simply hire executives with stronger marketing backgrounds, or whether executives with stronger marketing backgrounds more markedly improve fundraising at their organizations.

Betheny Reid, executive director of the Dallas County Community Colleges Foundation, can relate to the researchers' conclusion. She came to her current job after spending more than 14 years in senior marketing positions at nonprofits and for-profits, including Mary Kay Inc. Over the past nine years, Reid has grown her organization from relative obscurity to the seventh-largest community col-

lege foundation in the nation, as measured by endowment. That growth partly arises from her ability to "connect with individuals, organizations, and corporations in a way that helps them understand and believe that what they do aligns with what we do," she says. A background in marketing helps her do just that.

An executive director must be "a rainmaker," agrees Karen Alphonse, vice president of execSearches.com, a Florida-based nonprofit executive search firm. Even if executive directors don't always call what they do "marketing," she says, if you look at the core specifications of their job, "you could call [the job] VP of marketing or fundraising."

—Rosaline Juan

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