

Sunday Column – Nonprofits
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One of the benefits of utilizing the nonprofit structure to deliver services is that these types of organizations can be agile and responsive to the evolving needs of the community. While they are grounded by a core mission their management and governing bodies can take a variety of approaches to fulfill their core purpose.

Most nonprofits also have a vision of what they hope to accomplish if they are diligent in following their mission statement. The ultimate goal of most nonprofit organizations should be to put themselves out of business.

Each nonprofit is governed by a board of directors whose most essential duties include hiring a director, setting policy and raising adequate funds to support the activities outlined by the mission statement. A nonprofit can exist without paid staff members but it cannot exist without a board of directors. How well these men and women understand their roles and carry them out is what makes or breaks a nonprofit.

I've worked with nonprofit organizations for nearly 30 years, beginning as a CPA auditing their financial statements. I appreciated the sense of purpose their employees seemed to have and eventually decided to take a job as the finance director at a small organization. Later, I moved on to work for two large nonprofits, one a mental health agency and the other a regional church organization.

It wasn't until I had a good twenty years under my belt that I decided to try my hand at being an executive director. Since I knew I had to be all in I went for my passion which is companion animals. I come from a long line of animal lovers on both sides of my family.

In mental health our funds came primarily from government grants. Our agency was large and had been around for a long time. Getting grants to support our programs was like shooting fish in a barrel. Support for our regional church organization was built into the church system in which we operated. Funding was not an issue but even so, I never took our support for granted and tried to be a good steward of the funds we received.

Animal welfare is a different breed of nonprofit, so to speak. The Humane Society of the United States estimates there are about 3,500 brick and mortar animal shelters operating throughout the U.S. These facilities take in 6 million dogs and cats annually, possibly more. The available financial resources are limited. With large numbers of passionate folks working for the cause the grant application process is extremely competitive.

No nonprofit should rely on grants alone, however. In the case of animal welfare grants are usually intended for starting up or expanding a project. It is expected that if we do our job well the community will support our work. That support has to begin with the individuals comprising the board of directors. If they don't believe in the nonprofit's mission enough to

make a personal and sacrificial commitment then we can't very well expect the community to follow.

A healthy and high-functioning board of directors makes all the difference to the success of the nonprofit organization. They follow their by-laws (which should include term limits), they support the mission, they contribute their time, talent and treasure to move the organization forward and they encourage their staff members who are working in the trenches. I'm happy to say that PAWS Humane has this board of directors.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.