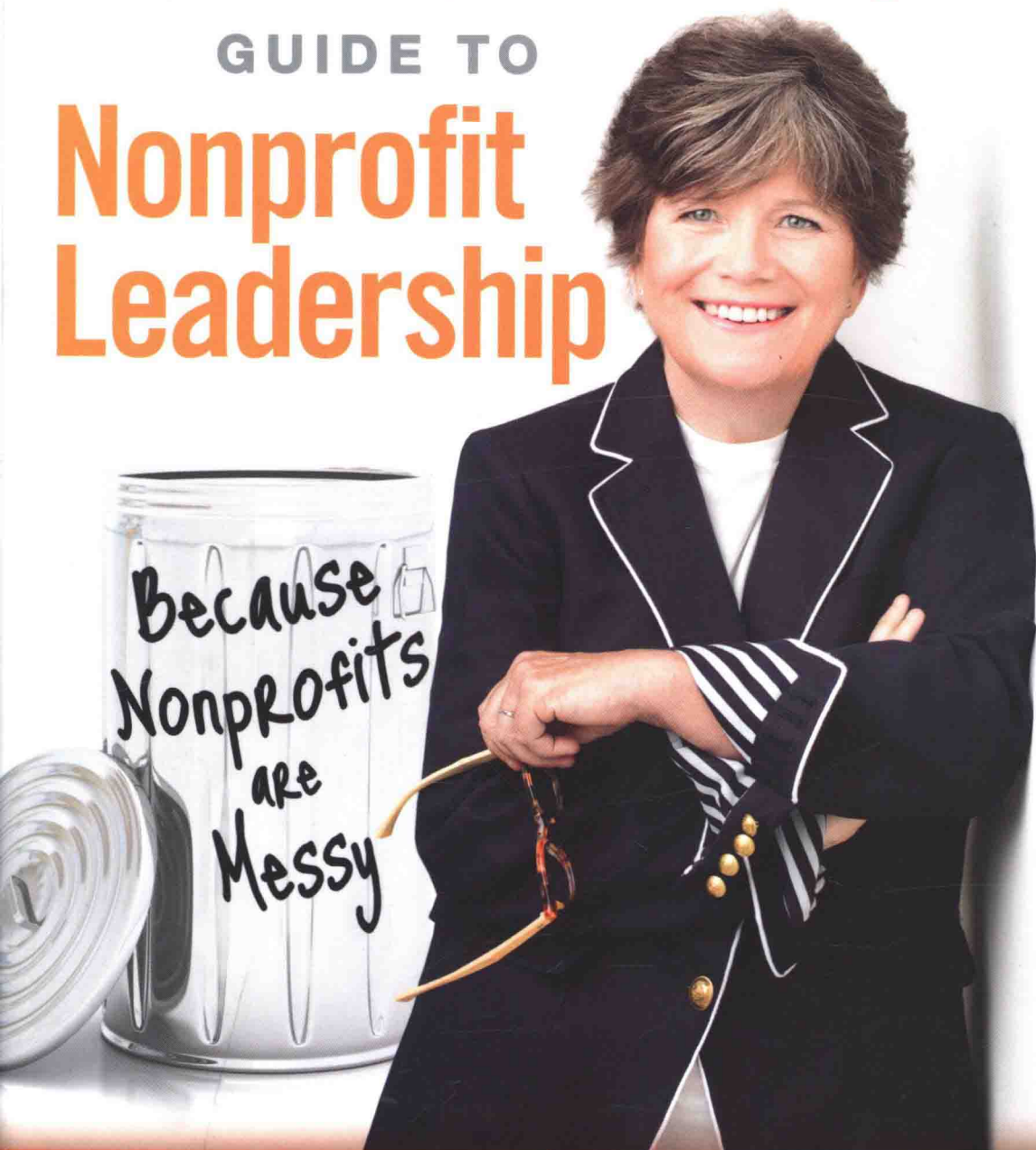


JOAN GARRY'S

GUIDE TO

Nonprofit Leadership



As seen on NBC's *Give*

JOAN GARRY

WILEY

PRAISE FOR JOAN GARRY'S GUIDE TO NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP

"When Joan Garry says messy, she really means messy! This book pulls no punches! It's a tell-all expose of the 501c-3 underbelly, a guide from the inside for anyone involved, or thinking of becoming involved, with a non-profit organization. What's a bigger surprise though, is the wit and heart and passion on every page, and the spirit of kindness that comes from someone truly passing on wisdom."

—ALAN CUMMING, *Celebrity*

"I have had the pleasure of working with the incomparable Joan Garry on NBC's *GIVE*, a show that highlights small non-for-profits doing big work. *Joan Garry's Guide to Nonprofit Leadership*, like Joan herself, uses irreverence and approachability to shake things up in the non-for-profit world. There is no voice in the world of philanthropy today, I would rather listen to than Joan."

—JENNA BUSH HAGER, *NBC's Today/GIVE*

"Joan's unique and engaging perspective is honed from years of working with non-profits, and that expertise comes through loud and clear in her new book. Her insights on how to harness the passion of thousands of committed leaders, staff, volunteers, and board members should be required reading for anyone tasked with—or considering—a leadership role in a non-profit today."

—JIM CLARK, *President of the Boys and Girls Club of America*

"Joan Garry is the *Dear Abby* of the nonprofit sector, dispensing practical and brilliant advice to nonprofits with her trademark humor. Her book is a must-read for every nonprofit executive (and their board members) who want to harness their super powers to change the world and become a high performing organization."

—BETH KANTER, *Trainer and Author, The Happy Healthy Nonprofit: Strategies for Impact Without Burnout*

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JOAN GARRY'S
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Nonprofit
Leadership

*Because
Nonprofits
are
Messy*

JOAN GARRY

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Praise for *Joan Garry's Guide to Nonprofit Leadership*

“WOW! I giggled, I pondered, I smiled, I nodded! Awesome! I share Joan’s belief that nonprofits can change the world and she has given us the book that will make that happen! What’s more, thanks to the way it is written, we’ll be smiling as we learn!”

—Caryl Stern, President & CEO, U.S. Fund for UNICEF

“Joan has written a powerful, must-read book for nonprofit leaders. Her experience and compassion will motivate you in your journey to ‘experiment your way to success.’ Filled with good humor and free of jargon, this book provides readers with valuable lessons from one of the country’s most skilled leadership coaches.”

—Vikki Spruill, President & CEO, Council
on Foundations

“As an instructor here at The Annenberg School, Joan has proven herself to be a joyful and inspiring educator, igniting student interest in the power of nonprofit communications. How fitting that she has invested time in sharing that joy and inspiration in *Joan Garry's Guide to Nonprofit Leadership*. Among the qualities that make for an effective nonprofit leader, writes Joan, are boldness, joy, a good sense of humor, and the ability to tell a good story. Not coincidentally, these same attributes describe her book perfectly. The arguments and advice are bold and illustrated by a range of engaging and personal stories drawn from her career as one of the nation’s most influential nonprofit leaders.”

—Michael X. Delli Carpini, Dean, The Annenberg School
for Communication, University of Pennsylvania

“Joan understands nonprofits the way a great mechanic understands cars—from years of getting her hands dirty under the hood. *Joan Garry’s Guide to Nonprofit Leadership* is the owner’s manual nonprofit leaders need. Her take is always serious, but never solemn; right but not self-righteous. She’s the wise friend every nonprofit leader needs. I know I do.”

—Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President, Union for Reform Judaism

“As an overworked nonprofit ED with one eye twitching due to cash-flow issues, I am always skeptical of people claiming to be ‘experts’ about nonprofit leadership. Joan, however, proves to be not only an authority on our work, but also no-nonsense, down-to-earth, and hilarious. This book is chock-full of helpful stories and concrete recommendations, delivered in Joan’s usual engaging conversational tone, sprinkled with jokes and witticisms. You feel like you’re venting with a wise and caring friend at happy hour. There is great advice here for new as well as experienced nonprofit leaders.”

—Vu Le, Blogger, Nonprofit with Balls

“While it may sound idiotic to think about curling up with a good book on management and leadership, that’s how great this book is. *Joan Garry’s Guide to Nonprofit Leadership* is brilliant, practical, beautifully written, hysterically funny, insightful, moving, entertaining, original, incredibly useful, emotionally satisfying, and right about just about everything. There’s something useful and enjoyable on every page, and there is no excuse for not buying it immediately.”

—Kenneth Cloke, Author, *Resolving Conflicts at Work*
and *The End of Management and the Rise*
of *Organizational Democracy*

Acknowledgments

We are who we are because of the families that raised us. My mom passed away just after I completed this manuscript. As we went through her purse, I found a copy of the cover art for the book. On an otherwise dreary day, it made me smile. Until her last day, my mom was sharp as a tack. If I am smart, feisty, funny, and a bit of a dog with a bone about issues that feel important to me, it is because I am my mother's daughter. To steal a line from one of my kids, *Thanks for birthing me, Mom.*

My dad taught me the power of being a good coach. I saw him in action during years of being his right hand in Little League dugouts. And I admired him. Offering direction, support, and encouragement, he was not just a coach. He was a champion, and an educator. A quiet leader. Everyone wanted to be on his team. I was lucky. I was born into his team.

Father Jim Loughran, SJ, of blessed memory, taught my first philosophy class. He challenged me to consider the value of my moral compass, my own intellectual capacity and the power of inquiry.

We are who we are because of the people who shape our thinking during our journey. Attorneys Paula Ettelbrick and Suzanne Goldberg represented our family in a precedent-setting case to create a legal connection between our kids and me. These two triggered the activist in me, planting the idea in my head that it was time to get off the sidelines and onto the field.

In 1985, Showtime engaged consultants Joan Goldsmith and Ken Cloke. Joan and Ken were evangelists about making teamwork a reality (not a buzzword) in workplaces. And they taught me about the power of difficult conversations. Much of my work today feels like the baton they passed on to me.

Yes, this was the village that led me from a solid happy life to a life with real purpose—leading me to the nonprofit sector and never looking back.

During my tenure at GLAAD, I met activists, donors, and volunteers who inspired me to do my best for them. Lessons learned from this journey are too long to list but special thanks to “heart monitor Julie” and the five-star staff and board who partnered with me to build an organization to last. I hope you are lucky enough to find someone like Karen Magee to step into a board leadership role. I can talk about the power of that partnership because I speak from experience with Karen.

This book presents my chance to reach more people with guidance and direction. My deepest thanks to Scott Paley of Abstract Edge for believing that I had something to say and for working tirelessly to ensure that my message reaches far and wide. Without a blog and a podcast (both Scott’s idea), there would be no book.

Seth Rosen, a coaching client from years ago and now the senior member of my team, was the first person to utter the words “So, when are you gonna write a book?” Thank you, Seth, for planting the seed and recognizing that leaders need authentic, compassionate, and practical advice with a dose of good humor added for good measure. As my right hand, Debbie McNally is great with clients, a first-rate writer and editor and often makes that one comment in a meeting that brings the conversation into especially clear focus.

Special thanks to my best friend since age 14, Kim Freedman. Through this process, as she has through life, Kim has been a cheerleader, a fierce advocate for my brand, and a first-rate thought partner from Day One to put my passion into print.

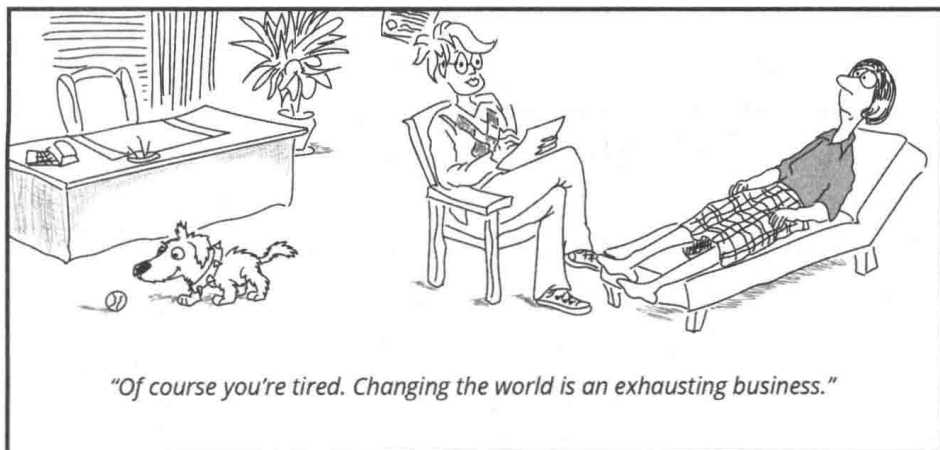
Thank you so much to Arielle Eckstut, my “book doctor,” and Jim Levine, my agent at Levine Greenberg Rostan Literary Agency. Jim was a nonprofit leader in a former life and I could not have asked for a better advocate who really understands that nonprofits are messy. And of course I am so grateful to my friends and colleagues at John Wiley & Sons for believing in me (and for agreeing to put an image of a garbage can on the cover of one of their books).

Lastly, we are who we are because of the families we create. I never thought I’d be so lucky to have one and try never to take it for granted. I keep a Chinese fortune cookie note in my desk drawer. It reads simply: *You Have A Colorful Family*. Amen. Thanks to my three kids, Scout, Ben, and Kit, for letting me catch you, raise you, annoy you, amuse you, and love you with all my heart.

And, of course, to my legal wife of 3 years and spouse for 35, Eileen Opatut. In 1996, she casually suggested I leave the for-profit sector and apply for a nonprofit executive director job. We had three kids under seven and had just bought a big house: perfect time for a new low-paying job. She saw, as she always

does, what I often miss completely—I was a leader and an advocate ready for a cause.

And so began a new chapter in my life. A life that turned from black and white to color the day we met. Like Dorothy's arrival to Oz. Complete with three munchkins.



Introduction

I could have killed my development director.

And I don't mean it the way you think.

Julie arrived at a quarterly board meeting. She didn't look quite right. It was hard not to notice that there was something protruding from her blouse.

A heart monitor.

She had flown from Los Angeles to Chicago and I had flown in from New York. We had not seen each other in a few weeks.

Maybe she mentioned something about a doctor's appointment, but come on. I was leading a nonprofit trying to save a portion of the world. Who has time for the health and well-being of staff?

Clearly not me.

I'm sure you're wondering. Julie is fine. Today, she is a clinical psychologist who no doubt helps clients contend with Type A, oblivious bosses who drive their employees to heart problems.

Oh, also, in case you are wondering, the board meeting was a big hit. Julie and I were impressive and on our game—as we usually were. I did get a few comments at the breaks, like “Hey, how's Julie?” or “Julie looks like the job is taking a toll on her.” “No worries,” I said. And went on to get an A+ on our board meeting presentation.

But wow. *Who was I?* Why did I not tell Julie to turn on her heels and take the next flight home to Los Angeles?

I am not insane. I swear. I would never intentionally try to put Julie (or anyone else for that matter) in harm's way.

But nonprofits can cause a person to transform into someone they don't recognize.

Why?

Because nonprofits are messy.

It's inherent in the formula of the unique beast we call a 501(c)(3).

$A + B + C + \text{a big dose of intense passion} = \text{MESSY}$

- A. A poorly paid and overworked group (staff) that . . .
- B. Relies on the efforts of people who get paid nothing (volunteers) and are overseen by . . .
- C. Another group of volunteers who get paid nothing and are supposed to give and get lots of money (board)

All of this is in the service of something that every single one of them cares passionately about. Wow. Now that is a recipe for messy. And that organization you care so deeply about can get messier still if not led and managed well.

I learned the messy lesson the hard way.

What did I know? Fifteen years in corporate America and then *poof!* I'm running a nonprofit (more on the "poof" part in a few).

I felt ever so well equipped with my financial skills, my management skills, and my understanding of how to manage a budget and to deliver results.

I had never met "messy" like this until the day I sat down at my desk at GLAAD (formerly, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and now just the acronym), one of the largest gay rights nonprofit organizations. Or so I thought.

It actually was large by reputation but "large" was not the first word that came to mind when I saw that we had only \$360 in the bank. *Large* was not at all the word that came to mind.

It was really bad. And I'll admit it here—I felt like a bit of a fraud, soon to be unmasked as having neither the grit nor the skills to dig us out.

There was one very bad day the first week on the job. I remember it well.

I was at my computer, writing a solicitation letter to a lapsed donor—trying *everything* to drive cash in the door. I was pleased with the letter. I sent it to print on the serviceable printer, reviewed it, and found a typo.

And with that I burst into tears. It may have been my predicament but I think it was singularly focused. I knew we could not afford to reorder another letterhead.

Then there was this other day.

I was in Los Angeles meeting with donors (and praying they would pick up the tab) when my phone rang. It was my deputy

director in New York. He calmly said that it might be time to look for office space he knew we couldn't afford.

There was an inch of snow on his desk when he arrived for work.

Very, very messy.

I'm not sure I knew what to expect when I left corporate America for this job. I'm not sure I did a lot of thinking. My move from the corporate world to the nonprofit world was more of a "heart" move than a "head" move.

* * *

I was not unhappy in the corporate world. Hardly. I had hit the corporate jackpot. In my first job out of college, I landed on the management team of MTV.

Yes, working at MTV in the early 1980s was just as cool as you can imagine. I also learned a ton. I learned about the pace, intensity, and thrill of being a part of a start-up (more on that later). I learned how to innovate when I wrote the business plan for the MTV Video Music Awards. And my Harvard MBA boss bought me an HP12c calculator (the calculator that allows people to *assume* you have an MBA) and taught me about budgets and balance sheets.

From MTV, I moved to Showtime Networks. There, I became a very good manager of people. I became a team player. I learned what it meant to be a good corporate citizen as one of the early gay poster children when Showtime began to walk the walk on diversity. We gave money to worthy causes and I found myself in the early 1990s advocating for corporate sponsorship dollars from Showtime to gay organizations.

While I was there, we built a new business, a now-dinosaur that we called pay-per-view. And it was there that I learned about boxing.

Yes, boxing. Like that thing big, sweaty guys do with gloves on in rings.

I learned that people pay a lot of money to watch boxing on TV. And that if you get really good seats at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas, the flying sweat . . . well, it flies.

The most important gift Showtime gave me was the recognition that I had a voice. I became another kind of poster child—essentially an employee advocate for better communication and transparency from the senior leadership. This work, which included hosting a full-staff (800) town meeting, was transformative.

I found my voice as an *advocate* for the employees at Showtime.

I found my wheelhouse.

Now what? I had no idea. I just knew a change was in the offing.

There was no “aha” moment for me. There was just a conversation. Eileen, my now wife but then spouse, partner, longtime companion, (enter other euphemisms here) came home from work and told me that the executive director job at GLAAD was open.

I casually remarked, “You know, somebody like me ought to have a job like that. We have three kids, I drive a minivan, and we really do have a white picket fence. That would shake up America’s picture of a gay-rights activist, huh?”

Eileen, who knows how to shake things up in just the right way, casually responded to my casual remark. “Well then, somebody like you should apply.”

I never in a million years thought they would hire me. No nonprofit experience and I had never asked a soul for money before.

But they hired somebody like me. A lot like me. So me it was me. As my good friend Amy says, “Well, slap my fanny!”

I guess I should have asked more questions before I took the job. That said, it probably would not have mattered. The board didn't have the answers either. The GLAAD *brand* may have been big but the problems were way bigger. I impressed myself with a tough salary negotiation that proved meaningless because all they could afford to pay me was \$360. But just a one-time payment. That was the sum total in the GLAAD bank account.

How did I manage? Well, nobody handed me a book—that's for sure. I don't even remember anyone telling me that everything was going to be okay. It was *my* job to tell everyone *else* that everything was going to be okay.

There was so much I didn't know. Like *everything*, it seemed.

I wish there *had* been a book—one with practical advice about how to untangle all of this mess written by someone who had stood in my shoes. Written by someone who would be my advocate, help me realize that I was not alone and maybe even make me laugh about sobbing over a piece of stationery.

So I decided to write the book I wish someone had handed me.

Because my experience as a nonprofit leader and then a board member and major donor and today the principal in a nonprofit consulting practice has taught me a great deal that I believe will help you as a nonprofit leader become more effective at your jobs and remind you of the joy you can find in being underpaid and overworked to save even the smallest part of the world.

Maybe you are wondering how I untangled the knots at GLAAD without a book.☺

We did indeed dig it out. I left the organization eight years later with a \$1.5 million cash reserve, an \$8 million budget, and a staff of over 40. But that's not what counts.

We made an impact. Long before marriage equality, GLAAD put same sex couples on the wedding pages of every major newspaper in America. Starting with the *New York Times*.