

ANOTHER VOICE WORKING TO CHANGE THE CONVERSATION

One of our colleagues recently shared a presentation delivered in a workshop to the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra by John McCann, President of Partners in Performance, about addressing the [Orchestra's financial challenges](#) and building a sustainable business model. The talk was framed to inspire discussion and new ways of thinking, as nonprofit organizations must “carve out roles of relevance and impact for their specific and unique community if they are going to garner the investment necessary for future endeavors.”

Well, one can just imagine how seeing that phrase got our hearts racing! That very idea, *empowering nonprofit leaders to rise to the challenges and opportunities of fostering relevance*, is what led us to launch our **Bigger.Better.Faster.** approach in the first place. (And also inspired the name of our firm!)

Mr. McCann points to three key features that support relevance and are required for long-term sustainability:

- A **vision** that is clear, concise and compelling
- Adaptive **strategies** that allow for growth and learning
- A **healthy, inter-dependent culture** that prioritizes high-quality dialogue

We agree that these are three critical elements, but would go even further in highlighting the impact that culture can play in the ultimate success of any plan or on the overall health of any organization. Though we agree that an organization needs a shared vision and a solid plan or strategy to realize it, culture has the capacity to overwhelm vision or strategies. There must be cultural integration at every level within an organization if long-term goals are to be achieved for, as Peter Drucker famously noted, “culture eats strategy for breakfast!”

Issues of resiliency, leadership, analysis and communication also feature prominently as Mr. McCann concludes his presentation – all topics near and dear to our heart. Our **Bigger.Better.Faster.** summary of these issues:

- Be ready for the roller coaster! Progress is very rarely linear or fully predictable and organizations must be nimble enough to juggle while staying on the tracks.
- Leadership matters! Mr. McCann talks about the importance of *champions* for nonprofit organizations and he is absolutely right. The BBF Leadership Institute was established to help foster the kind of staff and board leadership nonprofit organizations need for long-term sustainability and success.



- Don't stop thinking about tomorrow! As we often say, "Don't look backwards. You're not going that direction." Use the past for information, but look to the future for inspiration. Nonprofits should focus their valuable planning time on taking their specific and unique definition of relevance and determining how to make it a reality in ways that appeal to their audience both now and into the future.

Though John McCann was delivering his message to a symphony orchestra and we have initiated our RSS Leadership Institute with zoos and conservation organizations to start, we know that **defining relevance** is an important and necessary step for ALL nonprofit organizations across all sectors to embrace if they are to survive and flourish through the future. And that is why *relevance* is a focal point for us as we work with our clients not *only* to create sustainable futures, but to dig a little deeper – to look forward, push boundaries and build the kind of leadership that has the confidence to connect vision with inspiration, action and experiences. That's the **Bigger.Better.Faster.** philosophy in a nutshell.

We appreciate Mr. McCann's approach to the financial realities confronting the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. Given the seriousness of this challenge and the fact that most if not all nonprofit organizations are in a similar boat, figuring out how to connect relevance to impact should be at the top of everyone's "To Do" list.

As you can imagine, we have much more to say about relevance, financial sustainability and other issues as they relate to our **Bigger.Better.Faster.** philosophy, including connecting with community and changing the conversation. Stay tuned for more in the coming weeks!