

Who Is Your Boss?

By Nila Vehar, Senior Counsel

When you begin your workday do you ever start with this question: Who is my boss?

For the CEO, the organizational chart shows a direct reporting line to the Board of Directors. For the staff, the line ultimately is connected to the CEO. For the Board of Directors, the boss is governance document.

Consider adding another connection on the chart – a reporting line to your constituents. It's a good reminder of why we come to work each day. It can also prompt a robust staff discussion on what this means to your nonprofit.

Your non-profit organization would not exist without the folks who depend upon your service and mission. They are your bosses.

Individuals who benefit from your work are a source of information, financial support, and awareness. Let them know that they are incredibly valuable partners. They have a profound impact on the way you make decisions.

The best leaders are those who want to lead. They rarely know everything. When you are the expert, share your knowledge. If you aren't the expert ask your team and constituents. Before implementing a significant programmatic addition or change, check in with the folks who are most affected.

A former boss gave me Robert K. Greenleaf's book *The Servant as Leader*. It is a series of essays on the subject of leadership. It stands the test of time. One sentence that stays with me always: "Leaders are ordinary people who, through the needs of community, emerge as 'special' people." The needs of community are defined when many nonprofit organizations are created.

Whether we're 'special' or not, we have been given the opportunity to listen to our bosses, whoever they are on any day and at any time. When we do, our organizations are stronger and more effective. We might even have a bit more fun when we turn to many bosses to help advance greater awareness and success.

The for-profit sector has multiple bosses too. The most central boss is the consumer. They purchase Cheerios, iPhones, cars, and many other products. Not unlike the consumers of non-profit services, they expect strong service, quality, and dedication to excellence.

Enjoy the final days of summer! We welcome your feedback.