

Are You Too Important to Fail?



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Many nonprofit organizations are created for the noble mission of serving others. But sometimes even the most giving organizations find themselves catering to a need that no longer exists. What then? Do you high-five your colleagues, shutter your doors and send your volunteers home? No. If you suspect that your mission may not be as relevant as in the past, it's time to ask yourself some hard questions with the goal of evolving your mission so that you may continue to serve your audience in new ways. Or, it may be time to seek new audiences to serve. As George Bernard Shaw once said, "Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

Here are some questions to help you re-visit the crucial topics of relevancy and risk at your next board or management team meeting:

Questions for the Board

- What *changes* in our environment could dramatically affect (for the better or worse) the relevancy of our mission and ability to achieve our strategic objectives?
- What *big risks* should we take this year to advance the organization's mission?
- What *perspectives on risk* and our changing environment haven't been considered?
- How can we sharpen our perspective on the relevancy of our mission and the risks we face?

Questions for the Senior Management Team

- What significant changes in future conditions do we *anticipate*?
- What possible outcomes, *favorable and unfavorable*, could positively or negatively affect our mission-advancing goals and strategies?
- What *adaptations are required* today in light of what we view as possible future environments?
- *Are we prepared to respond* to a variety of outcomes in order to ensure that the organization will recover when we stumble, or take advantage of outcomes that exceed our expectations?

Loyalty to the mission of your nonprofit is arguably a good thing. But that loyalty doesn't give leaders a pass on the tough job of looking out to the distant horizon. Making the commitment to scan and evaluate the environment—the events, forces and conditions that could bolster or impair mission fulfillment—is a leadership imperative as well as fundamental to sound risk management.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your

ideas about any risk management topic, feedback on this article and questions about the Center's resources at Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org or 703.777.3504. The Center provides risk management tools and resources at [www.https://nonprofitrisk.org/](https://nonprofitrisk.org/) and offers [consulting assistance](#) to organizations unwilling to leave their missions to chance.