

Picture Perfect



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This past weekend I attended a family wedding in Falmouth, MA on Cape Cod. The amateur photographers at the nuptials were able to snap beautiful photos of the newlyweds thanks to an extraordinary beachfront backdrop. With the sun shining, wind gently blowing and an ideal outdoor temperature of 71 degrees, it was hard to imagine a lovelier setting for a ceremony to celebrate a brand-new partnership.

As I surveyed the beautiful setting and enjoyed the sand between my toes, I couldn't help but think about nonprofit leaders who work each and every day to ensure "picture perfect" outcomes for their clients, communities and stakeholders. The commitment of those who toil in our sector's vineyards is, like the weather on the Cape in early September, awe-inspiring. But the commitment to ensure the clearest possible understanding of a nonprofit's risks may wane when other priorities crowd the view finder.

As you reflect on the risks facing your nonprofit today and in the year to come, remember to choose a wide angle view and to examine your landscape from a variety of vantage points. What does "success" look like from the perspective of your nonprofit's stakeholders? What impact is your agency having today, and what is the pace of progress to mission fulfillment? Consider the following additional questions as you work to improve your view of the always changing backdrop for mission fulfillment.

- Which viewpoints, perspectives or experiences haven't been factored into your understanding of the organization's risks?
- Does your view finder adequately capture your agency's past experience, present reality and future opportunities?
- What events, circumstances or experiences are distorting your view of risk? What is required to adjust the focus and create a more accurate image of the present and future?

Weddings are happy occasions for those who gather to witness or exchange vows. When the setting is beautiful and the ceremony goes off without a hitch, it's easy to be distracted from the central purpose of the event: celebrating the devotion and commitment of two people. When they reflect on risk, nonprofit leaders committed to making a difference for the communities they serve make a commitment to mission fulfillment. Striving to improve your view, appreciate the complexity of your environment, and factor in the impact of biases will help you bring the past, present and future into focus. While predicting the future with accuracy isn't practical, appreciating the range of possibilities is within reach.

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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.nonprofitrisk.org/ and offers [consulting assistance](#) to organizations unwilling to leave their missions to chance.