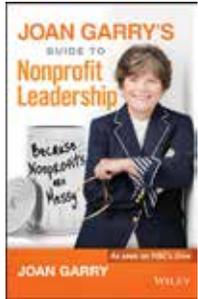


# Joan Garry's Guide to Nonprofit Leadership: Because Nonprofits Are Messy

by Mary Manning, Nonprofit Consultant, Cleveland

**J**oan Garry is a prominent nonprofit consultant, known to many through the internet as a prolific blogger and giver of advice. In *Joan Garry's Guide to Nonprofit Leadership*, she reframes this advice as straightforward lists of do's and don'ts geared toward Board leaders and high-level nonprofit staff. This book is not geared strictly toward museum



workers; but for museums or historical organizations that have staff or are thinking of making the leap to hire staff, Garry's advice and her framing of necessary questions may prove very helpful.

Garry's background plays a key role in her success. She began her career in the for-profit sector working for MTV and then Showtime, and she transitioned into nonprofit work in 1997, when she was hired to become the Executive Director of GLAAD (at that time, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, and now simply GLAAD). Garry is frank about the state of the organization she came into—she says, “It was actually 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.” Thus, Garry's expertise was gained the hard way by

managing an organization out of the red, into the black, and also into maintaining a roster of committed donors and support networks. *Joan Garry's Guide to Nonprofit Leadership*, she says, represents her effort to write the book she wished she'd had when she stepped into that job and realized the challenges ahead.

This book covers topics ranging from leadership attributes for the best Executive Directors and Board Chairs to how to build a good Board to how to manage paid and unpaid staff. Many readers will find the chapters on storytelling and fundraising to be most valuable; Garry gives advice for how to tell the best, most convincing story about your organization and explains why that can lead to better community support. For those of us who feel very close to our museums or have trouble articulating why history is so important, her advice may provide a means of prioritizing thoughts to turn them into actions. She suggests what to include in annual evaluations of Board members and staff, but also encourages an annual evaluation of the organization itself. In this, her suggestions readily line up with programs like AASLH's StEPs (Standards and Excellence Program), which rewards frequent check-ups on mission, interpretative goals, planning, and other topics with higher certificate levels. This book could serve as a good resource for those facing personnel or organizational challenges for the first time—she gives suggestions for planning leadership transitions effectively and preparing public relations strategies for crisis situations.

Organizations that are already struggling may find *Joan Garry's Guide to Nonprofit Leadership* too confrontational. Often it seems that she believes the best way is her way, tested and true, and any other way can only lead to a messier situation. Her confidence can be off-putting. For example, she suggests that planning may be easier in the summer when many nonprofits have quieter schedules and less structured programs, but any museum staff member or volunteer would find that statement patently untrue. Because of the measures and planning she suggests, nonprofits with paid staff who can devote time to solving problems would likely find her advice more helpful than all-volunteer organizations who struggle to find members, money, and time, even if these all-volunteer organizations need her advice the most.

Ultimately, this book can provide as many answers as an organization needs, or at least the strength to continue trying to find them. Garry writes: “it is my fondest hope that this book offered you both philosophical and tactical takeaways that enable you to feel less alone and more effective” (210). This statement is likely also the clearest evaluation of the book—it's worth a read, but is ultimately worth only as much as the reader is able to take away and apply to their organization.

*Garry, Joan. Joan Garry's Guide to Nonprofit Leadership: Because Nonprofits Are Messy. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017. ■*