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Alanna McInnes  
Student Research Intern, 2012-2013  
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ABSTRACT

This research report examines female leadership in the nonprofit sector. A literature review of contextual issues of leadership revealed high female leadership turn-over rates; a significant demographic and generational shift in the nonprofit workforce; and challenges in the recruitment and retention strategizing of young women. The research itself is founded on personal interviews with twenty-one influential female leaders in Canada’s nonprofit sector.

Each leader was asked: **What three key pieces of advice would you offer a young women interested in entering the nonprofit sector?**

The three key pieces of advice for young women were to:

- develop their diverse work skills;
- seek mentorship opportunities;
- become financially literate.

This research could be of potential value to current and future nonprofit leaders, nonprofit organizations, and to young women interested in a career in the nonprofit sector. Efforts made by nonprofit leaders, organizations, and young women to facilitate these three key pieces of advice could ease the transition of leadership, develop a greater understanding of recruitment and retention strategies, and raise awareness of productive and rewarding careers in the nonprofit sector.
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INTRODUCTION

Entering the workforce is an intimidating process for many post-graduate students. The transition from student to work-life can be overwhelming if the appropriate information, guidance, and training tools are not available. As a soon-to-be post-graduate female student, I was intrigued by the nonprofit sector. I was also unaware of the career opportunities I could explore within the nonprofit sector, and wondered if other students who felt the same could benefit from knowing more about the sector. Beyond my personal perspective, I also started to wonder if leaders and employers in the sector really saw or appreciated the contribution that young women could make.

I found numerous stereotypes associated with nonprofit careers, such as over-qualified and under-paid (and under-appreciated) employees. Employees in the nonprofit sector might find themselves being asked, “Why did you decide to work for the nonprofit sector?” or, “Is that a full-time job?” Questions like these expose the common perceptions of the sector that are shared by many Canadians, that is, a sector that you either work in on the way to or from somewhere else; or a sector where you may have a short-term job, but not a long-term career.

Laura Gassner Otting, founder and president of the Nonprofit Professionals Advisory Group, exposed ten myths about the nonprofit sector in her book, *Transitioning to the Nonprofit Sector*. These myths included: you have to starve to work in the nonprofit sector; working in the nonprofit sector will deplete your retirement; money is evil; nonprofits are lucky to employ whomever they can find; working in nonprofits is not challenging; nonprofits are flat, non-hierarchical places; a nonprofit is a nonprofit is a nonprofit. These myths may be a consequence of the sector’s lack of prestige and its self-sacrificing nature, and the opinion that the sector is a place to start your career but not to build one.

Yet a survey, *From Learning to Work*, published by Imagine Canada in 2009, revealed that one in ten university students expressed an interest in nonprofit employment after graduation. The lack of a vision of a career path for post-graduate students also contributes to the struggle many nonprofit organizations face when trying to recruit and retain new talent. In fact, recruiting skilled staff is a major challenge in the nonprofit sector.

Nonprofit recruitment and retention strategies have come to the fore as the need for new talent increases. *Toward a Labour Force Strategy for Canada’s Voluntary and Non-profit Sector (2009)* published by the HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector made general key recommendations for the long-term sustainability of the sector. The goal of the HR Council strategy is to recruit and retain skillful employees and to determine the contributing factors contributing to career choice such as: opportunities for career advancement, working conditions, amount of responsibility, employment status, pay, job security, and access to benefits.

Building on this research and the underlying questions it provoked, I chose to find out the advice that established and respected nonprofit women leaders would have for a young woman, such as myself, who were interested in a career in the nonprofit sector in Canada.

---

3. The From Learning to Work survey is not entirely representative of all university students in Canada. The following fields of study were under-represented: liberal arts, fine arts, education, social sciences and law.
Key Terms
For the purpose of this study, the following operational definitions will be used:

**Nonprofit Sector**: A sector where organizations have the following five characteristics: organized in structure, private from government, self-governing, nonprofit distributing and voluntary to some degree.\(^6\)

**Leaders**: Women who have influenced and have an impact on the nonprofit sector.\(^7\) Their opinions are valued and their innovations have aided an organization’s agenda and the broader nonprofit sector in a significant fashion.

**Mentorship**: Occurring when a “senior, experienced manager provides guidance and advice to a junior employee.”\(^8\) Additionally, it is when “two people involved have developed a working relationship based on shared interests and values.”\(^9\)

**CONTEXTUAL ISSUES**

Women and the Nonprofit Sector

Women comprise almost 75% of the nonprofit sector workforce.\(^10\) Women have traditionally shown more interest in employment in the nonprofit sector than men. Ipsos Reid’s national survey (2009) of Canadians aged 16 to 27 years found that 1% of males compared to 3% of females were interested in entering the nonprofit sector.\(^11\)

For this reason alone nonprofit organizations that seek new talent will likely continue to recruit young female employees; while simultaneously taking steps to increase workforce diversity.

Ironically, a study conducted by the HR Council of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations of Canada (2008) showed a disproportionate number of men in senior management posts, while women occupied the majority of administrative and support-staff positions.\(^12\) This same study revealed that women only held 40% of CEO positions in the nonprofit sector.\(^13\)

As governments choose to downsize and offload programs and services, the community’s need for the nonprofit sector will continue to increase. This dynamic puts pressure on the nonprofit sector to be more creative and innovative.

---


\(^7\) Zarin Poush and Hall, 6.


\(^9\) Ibid.


\(^11\) Ipsos Reid, “Perceptions and Attitudes about Police and Policing as a Career,” *Ottawa Police Sector Council* (2009): 33. This survey is representative of Canada’s regional, age and gender composition for 16 to 27 year olds in accordance with 2006 Census data.

\(^12\) HR Council for the Voluntary and Nonprofit Sector, (2008): 1. It is important to note the difference of leadership positions of the four areas of activity assessed during this report. The leaders of this report felt that there was the least amount of structural sexism within the arts/ culture subsector compared to the public and private sectors. Leaders affiliated with this subsector noted gender neutrality. Leaders associated with the sports/ recreation and housing/development subsectors felt the presence of a gender gap, referring to the under-representation of women in senior management positions. The health/ social services subsector leaders asserted that women were well represented in senior management positions.

\(^13\) Ibid., 22. The subsectors included in this survey were the following; health, education, religion, welfare and other.
The traditional cultural norms and expectations of women and their work life pose challenges to equate male and female leadership positions. Barriers for women aspiring to become leaders were highlighted in a study, *Progress in Inches, Miles to Go*, conducted by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Leadership (2012). Some of the barriers were:

- patriarchal corporate culture,
- lack of role models,
- lack of opportunities for critical work experience and responsibility, and
- lack of networks and mentoring.

### Leadership Deficit

The dynamic between the nonprofit sector, female leadership and young women include high leadership turn-over rates, a demographic shift, as well as low recruitment and retention rates. I will discuss each of these contextual issues in turn (*see Figure 1*).

---


The Nonprofit Sector and Female Leadership: High Turn-Over Rates

Surveys show that there is a high leadership turn-over rate in the nonprofit sector. For example, 36% of executive leaders of the 19,000 organizations in Alberta will be leaving their current position within two years, and 82% were said to be leaving in the next five years. Another American survey, Daring to Lead 2006, found that, “three quarters of executives don’t plan on being in their current jobs five years from now, and most don’t see themselves leading another nonprofit organization.” However, these particular leaders were not planning to leave the nonprofit sector. Another American study found that many leaders are leaving the sector altogether in search of areas of work such as governance, consulting, or volunteering. Reasons for leaving the sector included: concerns over structural organization such as board relationships, issues surrounding organizational sustainability, difficult funder relationships, as well as the financial challenges faced when leading a nonprofit organization.

When organizations lose their leader, they are at risk of losing their networks, skills, and valuable knowledge accumulated by that individual. Easing the transition of leadership positions to the next generation of hopeful leaders becomes particularly challenging when high leadership turn-over rates are unbound with significant demographic and generational shift in the workforce.

Female Leadership and Young Women: Demographic Shift

Discussions stimulated by population demographics and pending retirements are not new for the public, private, or nonprofit sectors in Canada. Studies show that only one person in the labour force will be available to replace every two individuals that are expected to retire. Thirty percent of the soon-to-retire baby boomers in Canada were born between the years of 1946 and 1964. This shift is affecting all employers in Canada, increasing the competition for talent. According to data accumulated by the Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) in 1999, only 26% of employees in the nonprofit sector were less than 35 years old, compared to 37% of employees in the for-profit sector. This overrepresentation of baby-boomer employment in the nonprofit sector is a serious challenge for nonprofit organizations, and will have a direct impact on recruitment strategies.

18 Bell, Moyers and Wolfred, 2.
19 Ibid.
21 Bell, Moyers and Wolfred, 2.
The Nonprofit Sector and Young Women: Recruitment and Retention Strategizing
A combination of pressures has catalyzed the need for skilled workers in the nonprofit sector. These pressures include: an aging workforce, an increase in service demands as a result of income inequality and decreased government funding, an increase in financial and service accountability, and challenges associated with private fundraising.  

Promoting the sector as an attractive career option for the next generation has been discussed within and between organizations in the nonprofit sector. A survey by the HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector found a higher than average level of recruitment challenges in Western Canada, in health and social services, and in medium-size and large nonprofit organizations. In addition to the general low unemployment rate in Western Canada, other challenges were unclear career paths, and a lack of awareness and understanding of the nonprofit sector’s employment and career opportunities.

And yet, the next generation of leaders might not view leadership positions of the nonprofit sector as a desired career goal. Some “next generation” view leadership positions as “thankless,” and interfere with their desire for a healthy work-life balance.

Young employees of the sector who have some nonprofit work experience reported the following challenges: low pay, work efficiency challenges, ageism, poor work-life balance, lack of career development, MBAs need not apply, and inattention to new hires.

There is a shift in values alongside the demographic shift from baby boomers to the X and Y generations that nonprofit organizations need to pay attention to. Younger people are more interested in developing many skills and exploring different positions rather than remaining in one position throughout their career. It is therefore imperative for organizations to encourage increased levels of professional development throughout the sector in order to recruit and retain young employees.

RESEARCH QUESTION
The overrepresentation of women in the nonprofit sector has inspired the focus of my research. I asked myself, what would female leaders in the sector have to say to a young women like myself? Thus the question which guided this research was,

What advice do female nonprofit leaders have for young women interested in entering the nonprofit sector? The aim of my research was to identify influential female nonprofit leaders and profile their experience within the nonprofit sector. Subsequently I summarized what these women had to say to young women contemplating a career in the nonprofit sector.

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Toupin and Plewes, 133.
PASSING THE TORCH: Female Leadership in the Nonprofit Sector

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative analysis via personal interviews was used to generate the findings in this report. The appropriate literature and theories were reviewed in order to generalize and validate the qualitative findings.

Use of Statistical Analysis Data

Statistical labour force analysis studies were not reviewed from Statistics Canada, Canada Revenue Agency, Imagine Canada, and the Human Resource Council for the Nonprofit Sector. These primary findings established the three independent variables regarding a nonprofit organization: their area of activity, size, and region of Canada.

Area of Activity

Each sub-sector in the nonprofit sector has unique strengths and experience their own set of challenges. Therefore, I separated these sub-sectors into the four areas:

1) arts/culture,
2) sports/recreation,
3) housing/development, and
4) health/social services.

This study is over-sampled in the health/social services and housing/development sub-sectors. The four sub-sectors are characterized by The International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations (ICNPO) and can be seen in Appendix A.\(^{31}\)

---

\(^{31}\) Salamon and Anheier, 70-72.
Size of Organization

For the purpose of this study, organizations were devised into the following categories for the number of full-time staff employees:

1) small 0-10
2) medium 11-50
3) large 51 or more (See Figure 3).

Additionally, organizations were divided into five categories according to their total annual operating budgets:

- Extra Small $0-$249,999
- Small $250,000-$499,999
- Medium $500,000-$999,999
- Large $1,000,000-$9,999,999
- Extra Large $10,000,000+ (See Figure 4).

Figure 3: Size of Organization by Number of Employees, (number of interviews)

Figure 4: Size of Organization By Operating Budget, (number of interviews)
Regions of Canada
Highlights from the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations *(Statistics Canada)* were divided regionally and I decided to profile the same regional categories to determine where to conduct my interviews. Interviews were conducted in: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia *(See Figure 5).*

![Figure 5: Regions in Canada Representation](image)

Leadership Interviews:
Influential female leaders interviewed were required to have fifteen or more years of experience in the nonprofit sector. I identified the leaders and verified their standing through biographical and career information (e.g. awards) and through conversations with their peers. Intermediary contacts provided valuable information and additional recommendations. A snow-ball technique was used to identify candidates, thus existing candidates recommended others. Twenty-one formal interviews were conducted across nine provinces over a period of five weeks.

Female leaders were chosen if they were a part of, or had experience in the following four areas:
1) arts/culture,
2) sports/recreation,
3) housing/development, and
4) health/social services.

As leaders had overlapping areas of expertise, each were classified based on their latest area of activity.

Each leader was sent a research brief outlining the purpose of the study. I asked each nonprofit leader the following questions:
1. Please briefly outline your experience in the nonprofit sector. What is/was the scope and nature of your work?
2. In what ways do you think you are/made a difference?
3. What are/were the biggest challenges you faced as you progressed in their career in the nonprofit sector?
4. What is your general opinion of the position of women in the nonprofit sector?
5. What are the three key pieces of advice would you give a young woman contemplating a career in the nonprofit sector? and;
6. How would you describe the future for women in the nonprofit sector?

Please note that the perspectives and insights provided here reflect only the leaders interviewed for in this research and should not be generalized beyond these findings.

Study Limitations:
This study examined four sub-sectors of the nonprofit sector; arts/culture, sports/recreation, housing/development and health/social services. Due to time and resource constraints, there were not enough leaders from each area of activity, size of organization, or regions of Canada to accurately represent the overall opinions of leaders in the nonprofit sector.
Young women need to be aware of the challenges they might face when progressing their careers throughout the sector.

Twenty-one formal interviews with female leaders of the nonprofit sector unveiled three key pieces of advice that they would offer young women interested in entering the nonprofit sector.

**Figure 6: Three Key Pieces of Advice: Diverse Work Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diverse Work Skills</th>
<th>LEADERS</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>YOUNG WOMEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place value on continuous learning</td>
<td>Develop professional development strategies</td>
<td>Become a generalist</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentorship Opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial Literacy</td>
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</table>
Professional Development: Develop Diverse Work Skills

Most interviewees saw developing a diverse work skill set as one of the three key pieces of advice for young women (See Figure 7). One nonprofit leader advised young women to become a generalist and understand the value in continuous learning. Many of the leaders used the term, generalist. Others described this characteristic as being a *jack of all trades*. Developing a diverse skill set was described as being *crucial to the survival of a young person’s career*. Some of the skills interviewees referred to were:

- fundraising
- finance
- managing staff
- working with boards
- advocacy
- public speaking
- writing
- negotiating

The nonprofit sector is large, dynamic, and diverse. This presents a wide range of options in many positions and areas of expertise. Each nonprofit sub-sector contains an inherently different experience of unique successes and challenges. This diversity presents a young person with many different career possibilities, both professionally and personally. Building a career in the sector over time requires a person to have a diverse set of skills and experience.

All health/social service sub-sector leaders I interviewed advised young women to diversify their skill set. Over half of housing/development, half of sports/recreation and one-third of arts/culture sub-sector leaders had this same piece of advice.

All of the leaders attributed their success to the fact that they never lost sight of the value of continuous learning. As one leader stated, *I attribute my success to my experiences, timing, and network opportunities presented to me.* Many of the leaders had explored a variety of areas of expertise, not limiting themselves to one concentrated area.

Sufficient resource levels for paid staff professional development opportunities are often cited as a challenge faced by nonprofit organizations.\(^{33}\) After discussing this with over half of the leaders, it was apparent that the larger organizations increased access to professional development opportunities. All leaders from smaller nonprofit organizations advised young women to have a diverse skill set. A staff member employed by a smaller nonprofit organization may need to develop more broad and diverse skills, due to the limited number of staff employees available to do all the work. A staff member of a larger organization may concentrate in one area of expertise and not achieve the range of skills needed to advance within the organization.

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\(^{33}\) HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector, 2011, 3.
A Public Policy Forum report and Imagine Canada’s Sector Monitor survey each found that smaller organizations show greater levels of financial and organizational stress. Staff members of smaller organizations are expected to multi-task and be generalists. Consequently, smaller organizations spend more dollars on a per employee basis than larger organizations who are in a position to have professional HR management staff. One leader asserted that, a CEO of a smaller organization has to do and know absolutely everything from financial management to human resources.

A HR Council report found that 78% of small organizations and 96% of mid-sized organizations participate in professional development activities. This professional development included: occupational training, strategic leadership, marketing, human resources, finances and fundraising, partnerships and basic skills. Professional development participation was correlated to the amount spent on training. Generally, insufficient sources are being allocated for this professional development. Only 27% of larger organizations (100 employees or more) spent more than $50,000 on training, and 43% spent less than $20,000. In extra small organizations (one to five employees), 44% admitted to spending less than $1,000, and 83% spent less than $5,000. This survey also found that for 23% of respondents, the lack of internal career development opportunities added to their training challenges. This same study found that there was no significant difference in relation to which region of Canada the interviewees came from when it came to advising young women to diversify their skills.

Career Advancement: Seek Mentorship

Find someone who leads in a way that you respect and think highly of. This quote encapsulates the next piece of advice. Young women are advised to intentionally seek mentorship. With the help from female leaders who have made a career in the sector, young women will become more aware of the career paths that are available to them.

Find someone who leads in a way that you respect and think highly of. This quote encapsulates the next piece of advice. Young women are advised to intentionally seek mentorship (See Figure 7). With the help from female leaders who have made a career in the sector, young women will become more aware of the career paths that are available to them.

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36 HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector, 2011, 3.
37 Ibid, 16.
38 Ibid, 25.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid, 27.
For 57% of the leaders interviewed for this study, seeking mentorship was among one of the three key pieces of advice. Intentional mentorship programs for emerging leaders were said to provide impactful opportunities to both learn from previous leaders who have valuable knowledge and to be exposed to their experience of critical and strategically thinking.

Mentorship was important to these leaders independent of area of activity, size of organization, or region of Canada.

A study by Bell and Bezanson (2006) showed that high-school students were influenced by direct exposure to career information via the workplace and the actual person doing the work. Acquaintances, professors and parents were more influential than co-op or career centre advisors.

The term “mentorship” was often described in interviews as creating “intentional spaces” for mobilizing knowledge between the mentor and the mentee. One leader asserted that, creating an intentional place and space to advance is essential for the survival and continuation of strong leadership within the sector. Creating intentional spaces was also seen as the responsibility of the young women interested in entering the sector to advance their early career. One leader advised young women to surround yourself with people who you admire most and aspire to be more like. Identifying these leaders and mentors throughout your life will lead you down the path fitted for you.

The relationships and connections built with those most admired, such as a mentor, ought to be based on regular exchanges and not only in times of trouble. This frequent interaction will provide more benefits for both parties.

**Financial Literacy: Negotiation**

*Figure 8: Three Key Pieces of Advice: Financial Literacy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diverse Work Skills</th>
<th>LEADERS</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>YOUNG WOMEN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place value on continuous learning</td>
<td>Develop professional development strategies</td>
<td>Become a generalist</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentorship Opportunities</th>
<th>LEADERS</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>YOUNG WOMEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create intentional spaces for advice-giving</td>
<td>Formalize mentorship programs</td>
<td>Seek mentorship and networking opportunities</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Literacy</th>
<th>LEADERS</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>YOUNG WOMEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value and reward talented employees</td>
<td>Create open areas for negotiation</td>
<td>Become financially literate and develop negotiation tactics</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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44 HR Council for the Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector, 2010b.
An overwhelming 86% of nonprofit leaders I interviewed advised young women to strive to become financially literate (See Figure 9). The skills required for financial management, as well as negotiation tactics, can pay life-long dividends.

Negotiation skills are said to support healthy relationships between the leaders, boards, and staff of nonprofit organizations. The most important tool is relationships that are strong, trusting, respective and transparent… I would advise young women to be extremely open, upfront and transparent in order to build those important relationships with the boards. Another leader indicated that,

“Some of the biggest challenges I have faced throughout my career in the nonprofit sector have been: the idea of a humble sector, the retention of staff, and the learning curve of negotiation… Conducting difficult conversations face-to-face was a concept which required practice… I believe that negotiation skills are on the decline.”

(Interviewee, 2013)

Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever’s book, Women Don’t Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide, revealed reasons for initial salary gaps between male and female students graduating with their masters degree. Curious as to why the gap was so prominent between these graduates (on average men received $4,000 higher than women for an initial salary), they asked how many of those students negotiated their salaries. This study found that only 7% of female students negotiated their started salary, compared to 57% of male students.46 Furthermore, of those who negotiated, most were able to increase their starting salary on average by 7.4%.46 This gender gap exposed by Babcock and Laschever was attributed to: making incorrect salary comparisons, expecting less, and enunciating uncertainty as to what they deserve.47 Another study found that people will often compare themselves to those whom they consider to be similar to (ie. men to men and women to women).48 Therefore, women will compare themselves to women who earn 76 cents to every man’s dollar.49 One leader I interviewed expressed said, “the lack of self-confidence of leaders to assert themselves in any setting in the nonprofit sector has been a frustrating experience.”

Typically, employees enter the nonprofit labour force expecting lower salaries for intrinsic value trade-offs. This is otherwise known as the “donative-labour” hypothesis which argues that individuals seeking employment in the nonprofit sector should not expect a wage in return for “morally palatable” work.50 According to Dave Cybak of the Canadian Society of Association Executives (CSAE), as quoted in a HR Council report:

“There once was a time where if you were working for a charity, you almost felt guilty for accepting the salary because you were taking money away from the charity. I think this has shifted to a more realistic approach that says ‘We need the very best people and we have to pay for the very best people.’” 51

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46 Ibid.
47 Babcock and Laschever, 1.
The HR Council’s Labour Force Study (2008) indicated that 67% of employers had difficulty with recruitment because the salaries offered were too low. Low salaries often lead to retention challenges. In 1999, 86% of all paid employees in the nonprofit sector reported that they were satisfied or highly satisfied with their job. The percentage of job dissatisfaction rose slightly for female employees in general, as well as those between the ages of 35-44 years (15%). Employees aged 45 years or older were even more dissatisfied with the pay and benefits received (32.7%).

All leaders interviewed from the arts/culture and sports/recreation sub-sectors advised young women to become financially literate. The majority of the leaders in the other two sub-sectors echoed this same advice.

An HR Council study reported that 48.8% of employers in the health, education and social service sub-sectors offer supplemental medical insurance, a dental plan, and life/disability insurance. Only 32% of employers from the nonprofit culture, recreation and associations subsectors offered the same benefits.

Organizations servicing a larger community with a larger operating budget and more staff, generally offer the highest salaries and access to benefits in the nonprofit sector. All leaders of smaller organizations interviewed in this study advised young women to become financially literate. The majority of leaders in the medium-sized large organizations had the same advice. This issue was confirmed by one nonprofit leader who said, “women are not very hopeful that they can advance in small organizations with financial constraints.”

Smaller and medium-sized nonprofit organizations (less than 20 staff) are not able to offer the same level of access to benefits to their employees when compared to larger organizations. The HR Council’s 2008 Labour Force study indicated that 92% of large organizations (100 or more employees) provide life and/or disability and drug plans, compared to only 46% of small organizations (less than 10 employees).

A Charity Village survey (2012) indicated that those working in Toronto and Ottawa on average receive better compensation and benefits than elsewhere in Canada.

“I would advise young women to be aware of provincial transitioning. One’s salary will often fluctuate between the provinces. For example, you cannot expect to earn the same wage in Nova Scotia as in Ontario even though the position and responsibilities might not change.”

(Interviewee, 2013)
Two additional pieces of advice for young women was to find their own work-life balance, and a genuine sense of passion.

**Work-Life Balance**

According to a majority of the leaders interviewed, it is imperative for young women to “find their own work-life balance.” The leaders asserted that finding this balance will ensure the greatest amount of productivity, as well as happiness, in and out of the workplace.

Two-thirds of the women in both the health/social service and housing/development nonprofit sub-sectors offered this advice to young women interested in entering the nonprofit sector. The majority of leaders from medium-sized organizations also emphasized the importance of a work-life balance. Flexible work arrangements of the nonprofit sector are often described as a positive attribute, setting itself apart from the public and private sectors. This study reveals a variance in what it means to find a work-life balance, particularly between current leaders of the nonprofit sector and the next generation of leaders. Work-life balance is highly valued by the next generation and a lack of balance may deter young women from applying for leadership positions. One leader in the arts/culture nonprofit sub-sector reported that staff entering the field did not want to be in senior positions. They did not want to take on a leadership position after witnessing first-hand the amount of work that needed to be done.

Financial insecurity, budgetary constraints, increasing number of clients and reporting demands all add to the challenges faced by nonprofit employees and result in heavy workloads, long hours, and unpaid overtime. For example, unpaid overtime in the nonprofit sector accounts for 5% of the total aggregate hours worked by employees.

“**I cannot overemphasize the importance of this balance due to the unpredictable nature and timing of the sector.**”

(Interviewee, 2013)

Fifth, financial insecurity, budgetary constraints, increasing number of clients and reporting demands all add to the challenges faced by nonprofit employees and result in heavy workloads, long hours, and unpaid overtime.

“**It is extremely important to be diligent and to find a work/life balance... overstepping these boundaries could potentially lead to over exhaustion and could cause women to burn out.**”

(Interviewee, 2013)

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60 “Job Quality in Non-profit Organizations” p 22.
If women do not find this work-life balance, they could be faced with health risks as well as costs to their family, one leader asserted. Another stated, funders and boards are not recognizing these risks; therefore women in the sector are sacrificing their balance… Can a nonprofit attract the kind of leadership they are looking for? To attract people who are passionate under these risks?

This challenge is not only the responsibility of the young women entering the sector, it is also the responsibility of leaders and organizations alike that allow this behavior to become part of the organizational culture of the nonprofit sector. Leaders interviewed in this study advised young women to surround themselves by a strong support network which will help them to create this desired balance and reduce the risk of feeling isolated.

“Female leaders have an obligation to change the nature of their work so that future leaders can achieve a more balanced life.”

(Interviewee, 2013)

The shift of organizational culture in the nonprofit sector must begin with its leadership. Succession planning will be difficult enough without the explicit support of work/life balance for the next generation of leaders. The self-sacrificing nature and current work style of nonprofit leaders is a deterrent to potential leaders.

“I value working with the younger generation of women because they challenge the status quo. Younger women value a more balanced life style therefore, the organization is encouraged to be more creative and flexible when it comes to scheduling and event planning.”

(Interviewee, 2013)

Young women are challenging the traditional work/life balance and are demanding that boundaries be clearly defined. Increased demands of women in leadership positions is due, in part, to advances in technology. The consequence of advanced technology is a demand for immediacy which is only sustainable for so long before burnout occurs. This calls for a clean and balanced work and response expectations.
Passion
Two-thirds of the Western Canadian female leaders I interviewed advised young women to act from a genuine sense of passion, as did a majority of the leaders interviewed from Quebec and Ontario.

“Figure out what drives you and become aware of what it is that you are truly trying to accomplish”
(Interviewee, 2013)

Young women were advised to be authentic. The process to achieve this was described as taking the time to figure out one’s passions, values, and what drives you. Young women should be aware of their skill-sets and judge how well these skills align with what they would truly like to get out of life.

“When a young person is truly passionate about what they are doing, the work will bring out the best in them...
The work as well as workers surrounding them must be an inspiration and motivate them to accomplish great things.”
(Interviewee, 2013)

Organizations that have the capability of hiring those who are energetic, capable, passionate, will have engaged employees with ideas that will go far. A creative and passionate environment is critical if the next generation of leaders are going to enter and remain in the nonprofit sector. Leaders of the nonprofit sector have an obligation to demonstrate to young women what it takes to be genuinely passionate. To do this, leaders must be aware of their own passion and align this passion with their own values and that of their organization.
This research has implications for
1) current and aspiring nonprofit leaders,
2) to the recruitment and retention of young people in the sector; and
3) to young people themselves who are contemplating a career in the sector.

In addition, I hope that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the nonprofit sector in Canada.
Leadership: Easing the Transition
Easing the transition of leadership to the next generation of leaders in the nonprofit sector could be achieved if young women were to gain access to professional development tools, mentorship opportunities, and resources to become financially literate.

Professional Development
By initiating and investing in professional development strategies and programs to diversify young employees’ skills, leadership responsibilities will not be as overwhelming or as unexpected. Leaders could create opportunities for young employees to advance their learning by giving them ‘special projects’ in different areas of expertise and by creating networking opportunities in order to gain exposure in their external environment. By doing so, young employees will become more aware of their organizations context within the nonprofit sector as a whole.

The idea of cross-sectoral exposure was also recommended by many of the leaders I interviewed. This idea refers to the act of consciously seeking out acquaintances that do not work in the nonprofit sector. This is otherwise known as active networking. Actively networking would create a culture of supporting diverse skill development and continuous learning.

Career Advancement
Leaders are advised to create intentional spaces to mentor an aspiring young female leader. This act was also referred to as the ‘lateral movement’ of knowledge throughout the organization as well as the sector.

By offering experience and knowledge to young women in the form of mentorship, a leader could ease the transition of leadership to the next generation of nonprofit leaders. This transitional support will help a young woman to visualize a tangible career path within the sector. Formalizing this process could potentially ensure that young people are not left feeling overwhelmed when taking on leadership positions. Awareness of the potential challenges that could be faced when developing an early-career-to-leadership-role would provide benefits for both the employee and organization.

One leader enjoyed the time when she had a support role to play. She also stated that mentorship is desperately needed within the sector, even if it were just a monthly interaction between a peer and their mentor. Another leader stated she wishes she had more guidance for inspiration and direction. Creating a visionary pathway for young women will raise awareness of the potential careers in the sector.

Financial Literacy
It would be wise for nonprofit leaders to make an effort to search for the salary market value for their employees. These efforts would encourage an organizational culture with values of respect, self-worth and loyalty.
Organizations: Develop a Greater Understanding of Recruitment and Retention Strategizing

Today, nonprofit organizations are in a position to create an environment which encourages an employee's professional development, career advancement as well as their financial security.

Professional Development

The majority of the women interviewed strongly asserted that leaders, organizations and young women alike in the nonprofit sector must recognize the importance of continuous learning. Tools used for the professional development of an employee could include training courses, mentoring, coaching, job shadowing, peer exchanges, and/or self-directed learning. Topic areas could involve fundraising, finance, managing staff, working with boards, advocacy, public speaking, writing, and negotiating.

Efforts made by both leaders and organizations to guarantee available opportunities for staff could include: extra time off to participate in continuous learning, providing funding for a course and/or providing the course within the organization. These opportunities would consequently attract the next generation who value both diverse and continuous learning. Training needs could be met by nonprofit training bodies, private training bodies/consultants, in-house staff trainers, and universities/colleges.

Strategies for skill development are important tools for the continuation of the nonprofit sectors' growing role as a significant source of employment, as well as the deliverer of services. Identifying training gaps can be accomplished by addressing professional development strategies, increasing access to information, and increasing networking opportunities between leaders, other nonprofit organizations, and other young women.

Networking can also be used as an innovative tool that is used to share valuable information between organizations. Participants in Fataneh Zarinpoush and Michael H. Hall's study, Leadership Perspectives: Interviews with leaders of Canada’s charities and nonprofit organizations, attributed their achievements to a “variety of collaborative efforts with governments and other nonprofit organizations.” The collaborative efforts between leaders and other nonprofit organizations encourages the accumulation of talent and improves learning.

Smaller organizations often prefer to develop partnerships and networking tools to professionally develop staff. According to a Public Policy Forum report, “Almost 70% of organizations studied and/or developed new partnerships to reduce costs and/or enhance their impact, and 80% believe partnerships are critical to their success.”

The competition for talent is increasing between all three sectors in today’s knowledge-based economy. 58% percent of employees in the nonprofit sector have completed a post-secondary certificate, diploma or university degree, and one-third are in professional occupations. For comparison, 44% of employees in the for-profit sector have a post-secondary qualification, and 10% of all employees have professional designations. Therefore, the nonprofit sector relies on a highly-qualified workforce and it is expected that the competition for these workers will continue to increase. The availability of professional development opportunities for employees increases the chances of the recruitment of new and skilled talent in the nonprofit sector.

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62 Ibid.
63 Zarinpoush and Hall, 13.
64 Ibid.
65 Public Policy Forum, 5.
66 McMullen and Schellenberg, 11.
67 Ibid.
The next generation values diverse learning experiences. Placing value on the employee’s continuous learning will enhance the level of performance for both the employee and the organization. It will also help to retain staff looking for other areas of expertise. A leader in this study referred to this concept as cross-pollination. The reference was made in relation to a study of collective work of fifty nonprofit organizations in San Francisco. These organizations collectively began to notice that they were losing young people to the public and private sectors. In response, they began to look at sector employees as a ‘collective pool.’ In this case, it built opportunities as one collective opportunity. A leader interviewed for my study said, this will help retain employees who are looking for a different challenge that can only be provided outside of their current organization. The challenge here is how the sector views itself. It would be beneficial to see employees of the sector as a collective pool. Nonprofit organizations have the ability to create an environment which could effectively differentiate the nonprofit sector from the private and public sectors.

This study did not address the perceptions of leaders and organizations when faced with a ‘puddle-jumping’ resume. This term refers to an individual who has deliberately (or not) explored several areas of expertise through various positions in the course of their career. Employers need to appreciate this unorthodox career path strategy and assess potential employees accordingly.

**Career Advancement**

Formalized mentorship programs can be used as a tool to ease the transition of leadership. The National Cancer Institute (NCI) in the United States launched an eighteen-month mentorship program, Research to Reality (R2R) in September of 2011.68 This program involved six mentor-mentee pairs for the purpose of improving the “skills of practitioners to navigate within the complex real-world settings in which evidence-based decision making occurs.” The three primary program components included: mentorship and mentee projects proposed by the mentee, training and support, as well as an online community platform.69 Monthly highlights shared by the mentees in the form of “stories” exposed the successes and challenges.70 Throughout this process, the mentees realized the importance of allowing for time to develop needed partnerships and to understand their broader context.71 This program offered a capacity-building model for the NCI in the hope of generating a safe environment to dissolve the learning barriers associated with complex issues.

Intentional mentorship programs will create spaces for the purpose of minimizing the learning curves of young employees who want a career in the sector. They will also show employees a clear career path, therefore helping to recruit and retain employees to the nonprofit sector.

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69 Ibid, 4.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid, 6.
Financial Literacy

The views of many nonprofit leaders with respect to direct and indirect compensation for employees are changing.

“I want organizations to realize that if they invest in talent, that individual will make it back and more.”  
(Interviewee, 2013)

The difference in earnings and benefits between non-profit, private and public organizations significantly affects recruitment and retention strategies. Most employees of the nonprofit sector are highly-educated women who have displayed an increasing amount of dissatisfaction with their job as they age. This is due to shifting perspectives on a secure financial future and family responsibilities. Flexible work arrangements and hours often appeal to women who have family responsibilities (either with young children or aging parents). This can result in retention issues as women leave these stages of their life and look for higher compensation and more benefits.  

Organizations are also in a position to encourage a stronger and more open relationship between its leaders, employees, and boards through thoughtful negotiation skill development by all included. This will construct a foundational level of respect for employees, leaders and boards. As was stated by a leader interviewed in this study, a strong relationship is one which is open, transparent and direct.

Young Women: Greater Awareness of Careers in Nonprofit

Young women interested in entering the nonprofit sector will become more aware of the careers available to them if they have an opportunity for professional development, explicit career advancement pathways, and financial literacy.

Professional Development

Each sub-sector within the nonprofit sector is extremely diverse. Consequently, an experience in one area will not necessarily be the same experience encountered in another. Self-Assessment skills and a skill development agenda will be extremely helpful in this diverse setting.

Networking can be used as a tool for young women to develop their diverse work skills. One leader advised young women to, develop partnerships that you can leverage. This includes the fearless nature of gathering people around you that have different skills and learning from them. Those who experience the world in a different way than you do will enrich any young woman’s perspective on work and life.

It is important to recognize the interplay between the public, private and nonprofit sector by building relationships beyond the nonprofit sector and to be involved in the community at large. Community involvement between all three sectors will provide valuable opportunities for young women to build an extensive network (also known as ‘cross-sectoral networking’) as well as to recognize all sub-sectors within the nonprofit sector. Building a strong network will also assist a young woman to ‘connect the dots.’ Many women referred to this as internal and external networking abilities as well as the ability to visualize the greater picture.

72 McMullen and Schellenberg, 11.
Career Advancement
Young women should intentionally seek out mentors who they feel most connected with in relation to where they would like their career to advance. They should also create their own opportunities for learning such as sitting in on board meetings or attending conferences and workshops. One leader advised young women to find a peer mentor who creates synergies. People and organizations working together toward a common goal was often described as being a common characteristic of an influential leader.

Networking and a greater awareness of the career paths available to a young woman in the nonprofit sector could be a consequence of mentoring. Seeking mentorship could also help young women prepare for some of the challenges they might encounter as they progress through their careers in the nonprofit sector.

“I would advise young women to be more assertive and to take some ownership in developing leadership opportunities which could include asking to go sit in on board meetings…”
(Interviewee, 2013)

Financial Literacy
Young women are advised to have greater expectations, challenge tradition, and realize that there does not have to be constant tension between extrinsic and intrinsic values. Young women should improve their negotiating skills, research what comparable people in comparable jobs are making, identify the salary they should be able to get, and practice negotiation tactics. This level of preparedness could potentially build a respectful and healthy relationship with the executive, manager, or board of an organization. It certainly has the potential to enhance self-confidence and equip young women to stabilize their financial future. A young woman will be more likely to stay with an organization which values its organizational culture and sustainability.

Long-term financial stability is best addressed personally as was stated by one leader: It would be wise to take personal responsibility to plan for a financially stable future because once you hit fifty, it might be too late.

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73 Interviewee, in discussion with the author, March 2013.
74 Babcock and Laschever, 112.
CONCLUSION

Nonprofit leaders I had the privilege of interviewing during this research advised young women to: develop their diverse skill set, seek mentorship, and become financially literate. These three key pieces of advice were accompanied with other common responses advising young women to find their work-life balance and work from a genuine sense of passion.

This research was intended to provide new career insights that would be of benefit to female post-graduate students. These insights have the potential to inform current and aspiring nonprofit leaders; to improve the recruitment and retention of young people in the sector; and to assist young people themselves who may be contemplating a career in the sector. In general, I hope that this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship of women and the nonprofit sector in Canada.

There are limitless opportunities for young women in the nonprofit sector.

The wise nonprofit leaders interviewed for this study noted that young women today have more clarity and ambition than earlier generations. It is essential to recognize the contributions of all female leaders past and present, and their achievements. The place for young women in the nonprofit sector will only be secure and inviting if current leaders and organizations create an environment that embraces and celebrates diverse work skills, mentorship opportunities, and financially literacy.


Crosby, F. Relative deprivation and working women. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982)


PASSING THE TORCH: Female Leadership in the Nonprofit Sector


APPENDIX A

The International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTS/CULTURE</th>
<th>SPORTS/RECREATION</th>
<th>HOUSING/DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>HEALTH/SOCIAL SERVICES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media &amp; communications, visual arts, architecture, ceramic arts, performing arts, historical, literacy and humanistic societies, museums, zoos &amp; aquariums, multipurpose culture and arts organizations, support and service organizations, auxiliaries, councils, standard setting and governance organizations, culture and arts organizations not elsewhere classified.</td>
<td>Sports clubs, recreation/pleasure or social clubs, multipurpose recreational organizations, support and service organizations, auxiliaries, councils, standard setting and governance organizations, recreational organizations not elsewhere classified.</td>
<td>Economic, social and community development, housing, employment and training.</td>
<td>Hospitals and rehabilitation, nursing homes, mental health and crisis intervention, other health services, social services, emergency and relief, income support and maintenance.</td>
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