

HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES IN NON-PROFIT MANAGEMENT

Tim Mulligan, Communities in Schools of the Lehigh Valley Testimonial

Tim is the President/CEO of Communities in Schools of the Lehigh Valley, <http://cislv.org/>. Founded in 1977, Communities In Schools (CIS) is the nation's largest dropout prevention organization bringing coordinated, integrated student services into public schools to meet the needs of at-risk students. The mission is to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life. The organization identifies and mobilizes existing community resources and fosters cooperative partnerships for the benefit of students and their families.



Tim has the responsibility of overseeing the agency; a senior VP/CFO oversees finance, payroll and human resources; a VP of Advancement oversees fundraising; and a VP of Operations oversees operations. CIS also has a director of operations for Lehigh County and a director of operations for Northampton County. Other administrative staff include an administrative assistant, an AmeriCorps VISTA who supports social media, and a part-time finance assistant. All other staff are located in the schools they serve. The most critical issues Tim faces are: the need to grow their signature service, the CIS evidence-based model, increased fundraising efforts, strategies to grow brand awareness, capacity-building to grow the organization successfully, and develop quality staff retention strategies.

1. How did the Strategic Perspectives in Non-Profit Management program change your view of your career?

The SPNM program helped me to appreciate that leading a nonprofit is all about communicating a vision and then coordinating our resources to achieve that vision. If anything, the SPNM program reinforced my belief that successful nonprofits begin with leadership that is strategic, consistent, and transparent.

2. How are you applying what you learned?

My most important learning focused on the value of strategic planning. While some of my energy in leadership is taken up by day to day events and needs, the discipline of planning and strategic thinking is what moves a nonprofit into higher quality services and greater impact.

3. Has your approach to leadership changed?

My approach to leadership continues to change and SPNM has been a huge catalyst. SPNM helped me to appreciate a long range view to decision making that considers the current organizational needs and also where the organization will be in 3-5 years. SPNM broadened my scope. I now know that in order to grow the organization, I need to tend to leadership first but also management issues, public relations, organizational flexibility, and cultivating a culture of success. Also, I am mindful to listen to new ideas and encourage creative approaches by our board, staff, teachers, students and donors.

4. How has the program changed you?

The program gave me a new excitement for organizational leadership and I brought this excitement to our strategic planning process. SPNM has made me a better leader and manager. I understand that I need to recognize my own strengths and weaknesses as a leader and also recognize and utilize the leadership skills of my board and senior staff and use them effectively.

5. What is one lesson-learned that you would like to share with other non-profit leaders in the Lehigh Valley?

It's hard to just mention one lesson. Non-profit leaders need to create learning communities that listen to the voices of others. They need to create an organizational culture where ideas are valued and considered, and at the same time, keep the organization steered in one direction. While this may seem easy, there are many quick fixes that don't equip the organization to achieve its overall goals. Non-profit leaders need to ensure that board and staff leadership have a firm grasp on priorities so that time and resources are not wasted on secondary or tertiary issues.

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