

FACULTY INSIGHTS

Q&A WITH HERMAN B. (“DUTCH”) LEONARD



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STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES IN NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT



Today's nonprofits might be struggling for funding, but they play a more important role than ever, says Harvard Business School (HBS) professor **Herman B. (“Dutch”) Leonard**, cochair of the School's Social Enterprise Initiative and faculty chair of the Executive Education program [Strategic Perspectives in Nonprofit Management](#). An expert on organizational strategy, governance, performance management, crisis management and leadership, and corporate social responsibility, Professor Leonard explains why nonprofit leaders need to take a fresh look at their strategies.

How is the world of nonprofits evolving?

Nonprofits today face unparalleled challenges—but also significant opportunities. For example, the weakness of governments throughout the world and the economic stress they are experiencing mean that they are withdrawing from services they've previously been responsible for delivering. As a result, there is enormous pressure on nonprofits to take up some of the slack. However, this is happening in a fiscal climate where it's difficult to raise the money needed to expand services. This is also a time of redefining the role of social enterprises and exploring hybrid models of nonprofit/for-profit social enterprise activity. All of this change is challenging the skills and creativity of nonprofit leaders.

How does the HBS program [Strategic Perspectives in Nonprofit Management](#) help leaders respond to the needs of their organization?

The focus of this program is strategy. We prompt leaders to ask: What are we trying to accomplish? How can we organize to do that? Where can we get the resources? How do we design the organization so it can perform in an excellent way?

The exploration of these questions drives a vibrant, insightful conversation among executive directors, presidents, and CEOs from nonprofit organizations around the globe. In our research, we have found that many executives have been drawn away from strategy and into the day-by-day challenges of running their organizations. As a result, they haven't had an opportunity to examine or rethink their strategy as the environment around them has evolved. The program is designed for these executives, providing an opportunity to step away for a brief but very intense period, explore strategy best practices, and interact with peers who will challenge their thinking and bring different ideas to them. It doesn't matter to us whether the organization is small or large—the best fit is an executive who is strategically on the move.

What are some of the high points of the program?

Participants tell us that the insight they gain from one another is extremely valuable. The program is designed to foster interaction between executives across the nonprofit spectrum—from arts to human services to environmental groups, from advocacy to service delivery. For example, we do an exercise in which the executives in each eight-person living group discuss specific strategic problems presented by each member of the group. This peer consultation is very valuable. The diversity of viewpoints produces a brilliant discussion about how a strategy should evolve.

For complete information, program updates, and an online application, visit:

www.exed.hbs.edu/programs/spnm/



Another highlight of the program is the focus on results. The curriculum is organized around the general idea of strategy, but we particularly look at organizing for high performance. We identify the features of high performance, the requirements, and how you design the organization and its activities to drive excellent outcomes.

At a time when resources are stretched thin, how can a nonprofit justify sending an executive to a program like this?

Coming to the program is an investment for an organization and for the individuals who do it, but we believe that this is a valuable investment in the future of their organization. If you think about the actual scale of the resources required to participate in the program relative to the scale of the activities that they're trying to manage in the world, it's a very small fraction. If by our work here, we can improve the work they do—improve their efficiency, improve their ability to find resources and make progress on the challenges that they face—I think they'll find it a very high return on investment.

Executives who are thinking about attending the program should consider the exceptional peers they will be joining here. They're going to meet people focused on education in South Africa, or hygiene in rural villages in India, or open space preservation in the U.S. By bringing their own perspective, they will be helping to challenge the thinking of every other executive participating. This creates an exciting environment in which people are given the freedom to really think about how they might redesign what they do.

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