



GEORGIA CENTER
for NONPROFITS
Nonprofit Solutions At Work

Hey CEO! Who's Supporting YOU?

"Our relationship with GCN has been nothing short of transformative for our organization"

Christina Lennon
Executive Director
Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation,
Inc.

It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power. Alan Cohen

Nonprofit executives are facing unprecedented challenges; demand levels are rising to exponential levels in many human service nonprofits while many arts organizations are struggling to survive. Costs are up, revenues are down; staff and volunteers are stretched; and we could go on. The role of the CEO as chief decision-maker; chief cheerleader; chief relationship manager has never been more critical. So, who is supporting nonprofit leaders' leadership?

As leaders rise into executive roles and as an increasing number of corporate leaders choose careers in nonprofits, the fact is that developmental feedback is increasingly important, more infrequent, *and* more unreliable. Therefore, many executives plateau in critical interpersonal and leadership skills. The other fact is that *everything* a nonprofit leader does is a "people challenge" — from motivating staff, engaging board members, winning donors, working with partners, and creating results that matter—to people. Key to building an effective nonprofit is managing the people issues across an organization, and to do that effectively, leaders need feedback.

In the past, coaching was viewed by many as a tool to help correct under-performance, **today it is more widely used to support top achievers.** For many nonprofit leaders, stuck in a vacuum of feedback from staff or board while grappling with deep issues of change, work-life balance, and management conundrums, it can be transformative.

CEO Support helps Nonprofit Leader serving the Visually and Hearing Impaired SEE NEW GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

A New Leader Challenges the Status Quo

The Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation is a 60 year old nonprofit that helps uninsured Georgians with eyeglasses, eye surgery and hearing aids. In 2006 Christina Lennon, the executive director, worked with the Georgia Center for Nonprofits' consulting team on a project that led to a major transformation of the organization's constitution as well as her board. "Restructuring our constitution gave me more flexibility to modernize and grow the organization and to develop the board. We've moved light years ahead of where we were. We created a strategic plan, created a completely new and engaged board, worked on program expansions, and developed a more invigorated staff."

Demands Take a Toll

As Lennon pursued organizational growth and impact, her own career began to take off and in 2007 she was awarded a scholarship to a one week leadership institute at Harvard University. In 2008 Lennon won GCN's Revolutions Award for exemplary leadership and impact. But the pace of change and the birth of her first child were taking its toll on her energy to sustain the organization and the pull to have more time with her child. *"Over the last four years, at times, it does feel as if I have had to carry my flag and march into battle against apathy, budget restraints and the crushing weight of increased demand for services. I was torn between the requirements of my job as the leader and the requirements of my job as Mom and I was seriously considering leaving my job to get more time with my son."*

New Perspectives, New Opportunities Retain a Leader for the Field

In 2009, with the help of a capacity grant from the Healthcare Georgia Foundation, Lennon began working with a GCN coach, Neil Sklarew. *"My personal coaching sessions came at a time when I was seriously considering leaving the organization to be a stay at home Mom. Neil helped me identify some areas that were important to me from a personal and professional growth standpoint. But more importantly, he helped me understand concrete ways to improve. I felt like I had a renewed sense of what my contributions to the Georgia Lions Lighthouse could be. But I was torn because it was very important to me to be present for my son. Neil helped me work through some creative solutions that allowed me to keep my job and get more time with my son. He was great about helping monitor how the new situation was working out and my performance as a leader overall. I felt like I had formulated an achievable strategy to manage what the organization needed while making sure my family got the attention it needed."*

Leadership Support At GCN:

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WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF HAVING A COACH?

Coaching can be particularly effective in times of change for an executive. As a seasoned leader, you may be confident in your abilities to take on new tasks, but an independent sounding board often will allow a new level of performance, especially if peers are now reporting to you or your current role requires skills that you do not have. A coach can help you sharpen those skills, particularly when it must be done on the fly. Coaching can also help an executive who needs a little reinvigorating by developing new ways of attacking old problems, new approaches to increase staff productivity and methods for dealing with burn out.

Truth Telling: A huge benefit of coaching is that it is neutral. A coach isn't tied to the organization or its mission, your colleagues, friends, board or anyone else. The coach is only tied to you and what you want to accomplish and move forward—coaches support the leader and where they want to go.

WHEN IS IT TIME TO CONSIDER A COACH?

Coaching works best when you know what you want to get done. For example, you may have tremendous results or an impeccable balance sheet, but haven't mastered the interpersonal dexterity needed to navigate the art of influence—so necessary in the new realm of collaborative organizations.

Second, coaching can be powerful for leaders who say to themselves, "I want to get to that next level of my career or of community leadership, but I'm not sure how to do it".

Third, coaching can focus on navigating challenge and change, whether that is dealing with the challenges of managing younger workers, a new mission direction, a crisis or something else.

Last, you have to be ready for feedback and open to creating positive change. Coaching, at the end of the day is about examining what is under the hood and using that knowledge to leverage results in others, but more importantly—in yourself.

Has your feedback revealed an area of improvement? Do you need to refine a skill or management process to advance through the organization or to advance the nonprofit as a whole? Would you benefit from an outside perspective?

Many nonprofit executives can't find a neutral source of unbiased reflection and directional assistance within their immediate network. Coaching can be a powerful source of renewal and direction as nonprofit leaders continue to navigate their leadership challenges.

The Georgia Center for Nonprofits works with hundreds of nonprofit leaders from all types and sizes of nonprofits across the state and region. We bring unequalled experience and value to every engagement. Please call on us if we can assist you in reaching your goals.