

## Welcome to BOSS 2017: Transforming Not-for-Profit Leadership

Blog  
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Board: Effective Governance



*Transcript of the welcome given by Denise Baker, Executive Director, Vantage Point.*

Good morning everyone! Welcome to BOSS 2017! I am so delighted to see you all here at our 3rd annual BOSS conference: Building Organizational & Sector Sustainability.

It is important that I acknowledge that all our work and every event we hold in Vancouver is taking place on the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations. Intentionally acknowledging the traditional lands and the experiences of Canada's first peoples is an important part of Vantage Point's journey of reconciliation and to working together towards a better future for all.

Look at all the talent in this room. More importantly - look at all the *potential* in this room! Imagine what our organizations can accomplish if each of us had the opportunity to more fully develop our leadership. I'll suggest this - improved stakeholder engagement, better staff engagement and retention, superior program outcomes, and increased financial sustainability. Ultimately, we would create stronger, healthier communities.

And what is what is required to unleash all this potential? Investment in time - we are busy and have multiple pressures and priorities. Investment in money - we are reluctant to spend money outside of critical programs or on overhead. Investment in commitment - to ongoing coaching and support and encouragement of each other. But if we made this investment, imagine what this will make possible for our sector?

I personally can attest to this based on my own leadership journey, which started in the for-profit world. Early in my career I was provided with leadership training, coaching, support, and stretch assignments. The impact on my confidence, my ability to make tough decisions, to take risks, and to lead and motivate teams and organizations has been immeasurable.

In our sector, there is a persistent belief in the overhead myth - that we not-for-profits can't invest in ourselves and our organizations. Here are some of the stories we tell ourselves: we don't need to pay our staff competitively. We can't invest in administrative systems for current and future benefit. We don't have time or budget for continued professional development.

There are many reasons that we continue to believe these myths. We are afraid of losing funding. We want to put our own clients' needs ahead of our own. We are reluctant to spend money on training that could be put towards programs.

But let's be honest. These are myths. Alternative facts. Fake news. These beliefs come from a scarcity mindset, a mindset that is well past its due date. Continuing to believe in these myths hurts us, not helps us. It results in less funding, high staff turnover, lower program impact, and a weakened sector.

When we invest in people, leaders act more strategically, boards make better decisions and motivated staff are encouraged to stay in the sector. Vantage Point's mission is to transform not-for-profit leadership. And given our 75-year history working with thousands and thousands of leaders from across British Columbia, we are experts on how to improve the success and sustainability of not-for-profit organizations.

In today's unstable environment, our effectiveness and the ability to achieve our organizational goals, depends largely on four cornerstones: administration, governance, people, and finances. Imagine your organization as a table. These cornerstones are your table legs and provide support to the table top - which are your programs. And here is likely where you make your biggest investments - in your programs. Ask yourself: how much have you invested in your table legs? Is one maybe too thin to hold up your table top? Strategic capacity building strengthens your organization's table legs so you can better support and sustain your programs.

Recent research and Vantage Point's own evaluation outcomes prove that investing in capacity increases overall organizational performance, including fund raising, program outcomes and employee engagement and retention.

At Vantage Point, we recently did an in-depth evaluation of 125 participants of Executive Lab, an advanced program for senior leaders that we have run for 8 years. The impact on individuals and organizations is remarkable:

- 82% of participants agreed that because of the Executive Lab program, their effectiveness as a leader, confidence and competence with executive director roles & responsibilities greatly improved
- 68% significantly increased their number of donors and volunteers
- 100% said the scope of programs was much better
- And 75% said their program effectiveness was also much better.

Look at how well their table legs supported their programs -100% better!

We know the world is changing and the ways we used to do business and serve people may no longer work or be relevant. New ways of thinking and new approaches to leading and collaborating are required. If we don't start seriously talking about and investing in capacity, our organizations, and indeed, our sector, are at risk. If we want high performing organizations that achieve results, and a robust and sustainable sector that provides a satisfying career, we need to change our mindset from one of scarcity to one of abundance and potential. And that change needs to start now.

Vantage Point is going to be advocating for the investment in capacity. We want to spark conversations about how capacity supports and creates impact - and I invite you to join us in these conversations. Funders, talk to your grantees about what is required for ongoing success. Organizations, talk to your supporters about what administrative expenses really are. Board members, be open to discussions and decisions about longer term investments. I know you are all already capacity champions because you are here at BOSS - investing in yourselves and your organizations!