

How businesses can help nonprofits

BY GENE SCHAEFER

Look across South Florida and you will see a region that is being shaped by the mission-driven work of nonprofit organizations. Whether advancing access to education, encouraging better health, assisting the disabled or promoting the arts, these groups are not only weaving a stronger social safety net, they are enriching lives.

In addition, with communities still recovering from one of the worst economic declines in history, nonprofits have been asked to accelerate their efforts even further. Considering all they do to help us, there is certainly more that we can do to help them.

Many businesses here and across the country are trying to do just that. In addition to financial assistance and programs that encourage volunteerism among employees, some companies are finding new ways to help nonprofits access the kinds of operational and strategic resources that make for-profit enterprises tick.

One particular area that has been singled out as critical by nonprofit organizations is leadership development, along with succession planning. Today, businesses are helping put nonprofit leaders on track with the same professional skills development programs that are so important to their own success.

While nonprofits understand the connection between training, efficiency and results, budgetary restrictions mean that they often have little choice but to put leadership development on the back burner.

When they do, what they miss is this: research-based, comprehensive programs that help experienced nonprofit executive directors and new emerging leaders refine their leadership vision. They miss out on interactive skill building sessions that help improve strategic thinking, business planning, fund raising development, and succession planning.

Igniting the drive for leadership development requires resources and planning, and that is where the business community is stepping in — and where it should consider making even greater strides.

The Bank of America Charitable Foundation's Neighborhood Builders® award, celebrating its 10th anniversary, selects nonprofit organizations annually from 46 cities across the country and offers them a year-long leadership training program for both the executive director and one emerging leader.

Along with the training, which is implemented in concert with The Center for Leadership Innovation, and includes experts from the Nonprofit Finance Fund, CompassPoint and the Bridgespan Group, organizations are awarded a \$200,000 grant for general operating support over two years.

In Miami, the Neighborhood Builders Award has helped 18 organizations and their leaders grow and succeed since its inception. One of our first awardees, Carrfour Supportive Housing, is an excellent example.

Stephanie Berman-Eisenberg, who participated in the leadership program as an emerging leader in 2004, was promoted to president and CEO of the organization a year and a half later, and today her efforts have led her to millions of dollars in funding, which has made a difference on the lives of thousands of formerly homeless and very low income individuals and families.

To be certain, there is a growing recognition of the importance of ongoing leadership training for nonprofits in South

The Miami Herald

Florida, and nationally. For example, The Miami Foundation offers an excellent program for emerging nonprofit leaders through a grant called The Miami Leaders, which is designed to develop the leadership skills and management competencies of emerging nonprofit staff members, as does Leave A Legacy of Miami-Dade County. It provides skill building and networking opportunities for nonprofit leaders.

Much more work, however, remains to be done. As hard-working, but often overworked, nonprofit organizations continue to make an impact in our community, South Florida businesses should move to amplify that impact by supporting training programs for the great leaders of today and tomorrow.

Gene Schaefer is Bank of America's Miami Market president. He serves as chair of the board of directors of the United Way of Miami-Dade and is also on the board of governors of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce.