

Do-Good Leadership

With Loretta Turner, MA, ACC, CNP



August 2023

Throughout July 2023, our team held four focus groups for 19 individuals (with 90% of participants residing in San Diego, CA) who identified as social impact professionals. This included nonprofit professionals, fundraising professionals, activists, nonprofit consultants, community organizers, coaches and more. Each focus group was one hour in length and was hosted virtually via zoom.

The focus groups were conducted with the intention of delving into the challenges and aspirations faced by social impact professionals and organizations. These discussions gathered insights from diverse perspectives to identify actionable solutions. Participants passionately shared their thoughts on subjects ranging from setting and maintaining boundaries, to voicing the real staffing-related risks that social impact organizations are facing.

The focus groups aimed to tap into collective wisdom, revealing strategies like professional development and capacity building to meet demands. Finally, these discussions underscored the importance of **flexibility, equity, and authentic inclusion within organizations**. With a keen eye on the need for better leadership models, the focus groups provided invaluable insights into how personal growth and organizational support can promote positive transformation and well-being. High-level themes can be found on the following pages.

Thank you for reading,
Loretta Turner, MA, CNP, ACC

Loretta Turner

PART 1: Well-Being

The following themes were uncovered when participants were asked to **define well-being**:

1. **Wholeness and Balance:** Complete well-being, ensuring a balance between various aspects of life.
2. **Ease and Harmony:** A desire for a sense of ease, harmony, and alignment in their lives, encompassing mind, body, and spirit.
3. **Safety and Open Communication:** Creating an environment where individuals feel safe, heard, and able to communicate openly about their needs, concerns, and boundaries is essential.
4. **Fulfilled but not Overwhelmed:** Fulfillment without overwhelming stress, striking a delicate equilibrium between meaningful work and personal well-being.
5. **Adaptability and Evolution:** Respondents see their well-being journey as something that evolves over time, paralleling a living document that adapts to their changing needs.
6. **Connection to Nature:** Nature and outdoor experiences are seen as important components of their well-being journey, offering grounding and perspective.
7. **Learning and Exploration:** An emphasis on continuous learning, exploration of new concepts, and personal growth is valued.
8. **Self-Expression and Authenticity:** Being able to be oneself, express individuality, and take up space without guilt is an important aspect of their well-being.
9. **Value of Time and Rhythm:** Respondents appreciate a rhythm and pace of life that values time and acknowledges the importance of taking moments to breathe and rejuvenate.
10. **Work-Life Balance Affirmation:** Messaging (especially from work) that reaffirms the worthiness of work-life balance is desired.

"For me... well-being isn't about being stress free. It is about being stress managed."

PART 1: Well-Being

The following themes were uncovered when participants were asked to identify what is ***compromising their well-being***:

1. **External Expectations and Pressure:** Including expectations of others and competing expectations and priorities; Constant demands and lack of control.
2. **Workload and Stress:** "Stress comes from everywhere"; Heavy workload and leaders that are not listening.
3. **Lack of Time Management and Resources:** Challenges finding time and resources; Poor planning.
4. **Well-Being is seen as a Privilege:** Well-being should be a birthright versus a privilege; There is no time for it self-care.
5. **Lack of Recognition:** Lack of praise and acknowledgment; "the more burned out you are, the more accolades you receive."
6. **Sector Challenges:** Operating from a deficit due to sector pressures; Carrying the burden for change to occur; Endless work due to societal issues.
7. **Constant Busyness:** Feeling unable to lead a full life.
8. **Personal Boundaries:** Not being heard or respected; Challenges in respecting own boundaries and roles.
9. **Misaligned Leadership and Values:** Leadership not embodying espoused values; Tone of voice and unchecked leadership anxiety.

"... because we're coming from the heart space we want to give more, often beyond our capacity. Working in this way is encouraged and awarded."

PART 2: What's happening in the sector?

The following themes were uncovered when participants were asked to respond to this prompt: ***What is specifically happening in the sector that impacts your sense of well-being?:***

1. **Unreasonable Job Descriptions and Low Pay:** Concerns about job descriptions not aligning with compensation.
2. **Expectations for More:** Feeling overwhelmed by increasing demands from both individuals and organizations.
3. **Management Trends:** Observations on management practices that might be fashionable but not always effective.
4. **Vague Job Descriptions:** Frustration with unclear job roles and expectations.
5. **Work-Life Balance Issues:** Imbalance between work and personal life.
6. **Speed of Change and Urgency:** Pressure to align with the pace of capitalism, impacting meaningful change.
7. **Generational Gaps and DEIB:** Challenges related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and leadership across generations.
8. **Values and Ethical Concerns:** Discrepancies between stated values and actual practices.
9. **Funding and Pandemic Impact:** Concerns about funding sources and the pandemic's effects.

"Things are unreasonable for individuals and for entire organizations... every time we turn around, they're asking for more"

PART 3: What's at risk?

The following themes were uncovered when participants were asked to respond to this prompt: ***What is at risk if we do not solve for this?***

1. **Lack of Support:** Concern about not receiving the necessary support from their leaders and bosses.
2. **Isolation:** Fears of being alone and isolated in their work environment.
3. **Lack of Professional Growth:** The absence of guidance or support from their boss could hinder their professional growth; Without proper support, career progression might be jeopardized.
4. **Emotional Well-being:** Potential negative impacts on their mental and emotional well-being.
5. **Work Performance & Quality:** Concerns were raised about how lacking support might affect their work performance.
6. **Communication Breakdown:** Worries about breakdowns in communication and collaboration without proper support.
7. **Job Satisfaction:** The lack of supportive leadership could lead to reduced job satisfaction.

"The organization itself is at risk because we're going to be putting folks into positions where they are overworked and undervalued and don't have the support they need. [If they] don't feel like they're in service or having a measurable impact, that is a risk to the communities that we're working with. "

PART 4: How do we move forward?

The following themes were uncovered when participants were asked to be ***solution-oriented*** with ideas on how we can move forward in solving these issues:

1. **Setting Firm Boundaries:** Setting personal and professional boundaries, and holding onto them firmly to maintain a healthy work-life balance.
2. **Empowerment and Inner Peace:** Opportunities to empower themselves, taking control over their peace of mind and emotional well-being.
3. **Capacity Building and Team Growth:** The idea of building capacity, especially in terms of expanding teams, is mentioned as a strategy to manage workload and stress.
4. **Adaptation and New Paths:** Recognizing the need for flexibility and adaptability, even to the extent of forging new paths if necessary, especially when there's a lack of flexibility in existing situations.
5. **Professional Development:** Focus on enhancing skills and professional growth
6. **Wellness Days:** Prioritizing separate wellness days alongside traditional vacation and sick time is suggested, along with educating staff about utilizing sick time for wellness.
7. **Scheduled Breaks and Reset Opportunities:** Building in scheduled breaks for individuals to reset and communicate their needs is seen as important.
8. **Flexibility as a Value:** Participants call for a genuine commitment to flexibility, not just promoting it but embodying it within the workplace culture.
9. **Equity and Authenticity:** Consideration for the whole person, fostering equity, and enabling employees to bring their authentic selves to work and community is emphasized.
10. **Better Leadership:** The role of leadership in modeling and promoting well-being is noted, with the idea that leaders who work on their personal growth can better create supportive spaces for others.
11. **Inclusivity and Belonging:** The need for an inclusive environment where individuals can fit in and belong within the organization