Successful Leadership Transitions in Non-Profit Organizations: What You Need to Know

1. Leadership transition is a catalyst for transformative change within the agency. It is a tremendous opportunity for renewal and growth.
2. Leadership transition must be treated as a long-term project to be managed vigorously. It will require substantial investment of resources.
3. The lack of a strategic process in leadership transition is the primary reason such transitions so often fail.
4. Failed leadership transitions can impact the ability of the agency to fulfill its mission for years to come.
5. Studies show it takes four to 12 months to have a new leader in place, and usually a minimum of six months to integrate your new leader successfully.
6. In order to hire a new Executive Director/CEO, you must understand your strategic vision, conduct an assessment of your organization's health, and determine what contributed to the departure of your former leader. Only then will you be able to determine the skills and characteristics necessary in your next leader.
7. It is imperative that you do not simply seek a replacement for your Executive Director/CEO. You must find someone who can achieve your strategic objectives.
8. You will need to establish a written plan for the management of day to day operations of the agency in the absence of a permanent Executive Director /CEO with very clear lines of authority established.
9. You will need to establish a written strategy, with a timeline, for the search for your new leader and share this with all stakeholders. The strategy should consider that an executive search takes, at a minimum, 200 hours of work time AFTER you have conducted your strategic planning and organizational assessment, determined what you want out of your next leader, and are ready to post the position.
10. Transparency and trust are essential during the process. Communicate regularly and openly with staff, volunteers, clients and contributors. Include staff as much as possible in the decision making about how to proceed.