

SELECTED EXCERPT FROM  
*WORKING HARD & WORKING WELL*

# Working Hard Working WELL &

## Foreword

by Mario Morino

Chairman, Venture Philanthropy Partners



An excerpt from the book *Working Hard & Working Well*, which is available in full at [leapofreason.org/workingwellbook](http://leapofreason.org/workingwellbook)

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# Foreword

by Mario Morino, Chairman, Venture Philanthropy Partners

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In *Working Hard—and Working Well*, David Hunter generously shares the successful processes he has developed over three decades to help nonprofit leaders find their North Star. His rigorous approach leads them to gain clarity about what they do and to confirm that what they do makes a measurable, meaningful, and lasting difference for the children and families they serve.

I met David in late 2000 through Mike Bailin, the laser-focused and very smart president of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF). At the time, EMCF was well along in its transformation from traditional foundation to a highly strategic and performance-based change-maker. David, as EMCF's director of assessment and knowledge development, was one of Mike's secret weapons.

As my colleagues and I at Venture Philanthropy Partners began to interact more with the team at EMCF, we got to know David better. We had heard some of the legendary stories of David's wrath and his refusal to drink the field's Kool-Aid. It turned out the stories were true. You see, David tells it like it is, very bluntly, without apology. From the beginning I loved his directness.

My appreciation for David grew shortly after EMCF co-invested with Venture Philanthropy Partners in the Maya Angelou Public Charter School. As part of the investment process, David conducted a three-day theory-of-change workshop for the Maya Angelou team.

David's performance earned raves from my colleagues, including some who went in as true nonbelievers. My colleagues also acknowledged that having David lead a theory-of-change session is, in and of itself, a sign of leadership courage—given how tough he can be.

David comes by his tough-love approach honestly. As you will see in David's account in Chapter 2 ("Why I Take Performance Management Personally"), twenty-one years ago he was thrown into the deep end when he was put in charge of a dysfunctional state psychiatric hospital. On the first day of his tenure, he saw that the hospital was falling far short of living up to its mission of providing high-quality care to patients, many of whom were at risk of causing harm to themselves, other patients, or their healthcare providers.

The hospital's lack of performance was not an abstract or purely academic concern. It was a life-and-death challenge. Instead of sprinting for the hills, David ran into the breach. He turned the hospital around, despite every imaginable organizational challenge.

Two years ago, it was my turn to be the courageous leader. I invited David to be an essayist for *Leap of Reason*. I did so with some trepidation, not knowing if I was ready for his uncompromising ways. Thank God I did. David not only contributed a powerful essay; he also offered countless suggestions for improving my essay—and, yes, admonished me when I veered off or went too soft. David helped make the book much better, and I am grateful.

But it wasn't until after we released *Leap of Reason*, when my team and I visited some of the best nonprofits in their fields, that I fully grasped David's brilliance. On each visit, as I dug deeper into the culture and performance of these nonprofits, a common thread emerged—David Hunter was providing sage strategic counsel to all of them.

David helps turn on light bulbs for the leaders fortunate enough to work with him. Yes, his approach generates some heat. But by the end of one of his sessions, the process almost always produces far more light than heat. The leaders I met couldn't have given David

more praise for how he helped them. They literally love him. And I understand why.

David is now getting ready to hang up his spurs and head into retirement. And that's why I am so enthusiastic and thankful that he has documented his approach for all the members of our sector who are brave enough to ensure that they do what they say they do. In *Working Hard—and Working Well*, David gives the recipe for the “secret sauce” behind his famous workshops. He offers a template that other skilled facilitators and leaders can use to augment their own work with organizations motivated to make the leap of reason. Ultimately, I hope it provides some of the DNA necessary for cloning his effective approach and producing a host of rigorous, tough-minded David Hunters in our field.

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