

LEAP OF REASON

MANAGING TO OUTCOMES IN AN ERA OF SCARCITY

The Next Leap

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January 2013

Repurposed article from *VPPNews*
Venture Philanthropy Partners monthly newsletter

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We have a New Year's offering for all of you. It's a gift that I hope you can use to gain additional meaning, purpose, and clarity this year—especially those of you who truly embrace the need to create higher quality and serve more people in this time of scarcity.

In mid-February, the *Leap of Reason* team will produce and make available for free download a new book in the Leap of Reason series: [Working Hard—and Working Well](#), by Leap of Reason essayist [David Hunter](#). The book will help the many people who have written to tell us that they are ready to take the leap—that is, to really rethink, redesign, and reinvent to achieve higher performance for the people they serve—but need detailed, practical, on-the-ground insights to get started.

If you liked *Leap of Reason*, you'll love *Working Hard—and Working Well*. In the words of Center for Effective Philanthropy President Phil Buchanan, who got an early peek at the book, "It picks up where *Leap of Reason* left off—moving from the moral imperative for rigorous performance management to the specific challenges of doing it."

In *Working Hard—and Working Well*, David generously shares the successful processes he has developed over two decades to help nonprofit leaders find their North Star. He puts the emphasis where it belongs. He recognizes that high performance has far less to do with data and systems than it does leadership, clarity, commitment, and organizational culture.

In his book and workshops, he gets very concrete. He helps organizations wrestle with and answer critical questions like these:

- What is the intended target population?
- What is the program model?
- How many people can the program serve at any given time (in ways that can be expected to produce intended outcomes)?
- How is enrollment managed to ensure that program participants meet the intended profile(s)?
- What is the program completion rate?

- What are the reasons that participants are dismissed or leave prematurely before they achieve targeted outcomes?
- What services and other activities are performed or delivered by program staff (or volunteers)?
- What short-term outcomes are tracked to show that clients are benefiting incrementally and in a timely way?
- What outcomes are clients expected to achieve before they leave the program? What number and percent do so?

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 change-maker. David, as EMCF's director of assessment and knowledge development, was one of Mike's secret weapons.

As my colleagues at Venture Philanthropy Partners and I began to interact more with the EMCF team, 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 non-believers. 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. 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. As I dug deeper into the culture and performance of these nonprofits, a common thread emerged in the best of the best of these—David had worked with them, pushed their thinking, and set them up for success.

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. If you're one of these leaders and want an electronic copy of *Working Hard—and Working Well* when it's available in February, please [let us know](#).

Happy New Year.

—Mario Morino