
Critique the Managers of Metro Arts and Film

Posted by Mark Hager - 2008/02/11 19:29

First read the whole case, and then join the discussion! Case available at http://www.nonprofitquarterly.org/images/fbfiles/files/The_Ultimate_Question.pdf

The staff and board at Metro Arts and Film (MAF) contributed what they could to the life and times of the organization, but their combined talents and flaws led to unhappy times.

How do you size up the situation? While it's rarely helpful to assign blame, we can learn a few things from the characteristics of these managers:

Laurel, the board president, may not have been as involved as we might have expected she should be.

Chris, the founding director, may have left an unfavorable imprint on the organization.

Jackie, the new director, may have gotten in over her head.

Others?

How do you see it? What person or circumstance do you see as particularly important in explaining the fate of MAF?

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Re:Critique the Managers of Metro Arts and Film

Posted by Joanna Schmolke - 2008/02/14 05:08

It seems like new ED Jackie might get the bad rap in this case study, but is she really to blame?

I think she had a lot to live up to, for starters. It cannot be easy to come in to a new organization that has had such a recent upheaval in its management. Any ED has a time period after they come in to their leadership period in which there is a learning curve. By the time she had a handle on the organization's finances and development, it was perhaps already too late.

I must also note that Jackie came from a national search. I assume this means that she is new to the community in which Metro Arts and Films is located. This is also part of the learning curve regarding local and statewide funders. Regardless, the situation she was presented with was one that needed to be addressed urgently. She may not be the exuberant ED that Chris was, but if she was a good leader she would have been able to tackle the issues she faced in ways different from him. Unfortunately, if it was more time she needed, she wasn't going to get it. I think it takes a great deal of integrity to be Executive Director of an organization, and be able to recommend closing the organization. Her reputation, just as much as the organization itself, is at hand.

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Re:Critique the Managers of Metro Arts and Film

Posted by Kate Barr - 2008/02/14 18:01

Joanna,

I think that you make a great point that Jackie is taking the fall and looks like the poor leader. Was it a set up? It's pretty common for a board to think that their job is done after the search and hire process - and they want someone who can do everything right away. The transition time to help a new director become successful is at least as important as the actual hiring decision. Did they make an error in hiring Jackie? What skills and characteristics were needed in the new director, and would a different person have resulted in different decisions?

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Re:Critique the Managers of Metro Arts and Film

Posted by Mark Hager - 2008/02/15 18:24

All good questions. I recall presenting an early version of this case in a class awhile back, and asking people to consider whether Chris or Laurel should be considered the "most" to blame. I was surprised when people wanted to talk more about Jackie, because I really hadn't considered it until then. The current version of the case tries to implicate her more, but I agree that she gets a bum rap. Even if it's true that she wasn't the best person to put into this particular situation, she wasn't the person who had created the situation to begin with.

When I think about Jackie, I think about the difference between "leadership" and "management." Jackie might have had good management skills, but that might not have been what was needed.

Kate asks the big question: what skills and characteristics were needed in the new director? Could the right person have turned it around?

Mark

Re: Critique the Managers of Metro Arts and Film

Posted by Maria De La Cruz - 2008/02/16 21:16

I do believe that Jackie was not only unqualified to lead an organization of this size, but she also did not have the leadership quality that was necessary to revitalize the organization. It is clear that the board, who we must remember hired her, did not have trust in Jackie. With that being said, I think that when the relationship between the board and the ED is strained, then the organization will suffer. Jackie needed to have tried to cultivate that relationship while at the same time illustrating her leadership in an already tenuous situation.

Re: Critique the Managers of Metro Arts and Film

Posted by Rebecca Barker - 2008/02/17 18:26

To me it seems that Jackie came into this particular Board meeting and blindsided the Board with her news. It also seemed that she had her mind made up that the organization would close even though it had only been one day since she heard the bad news of funding cuts. From what I've read, it doesn't seem like Jackie is the turnaround type of ED, but the Board really failed the organization by not taking their responsibilities more seriously. There was no in depth discussion on ways to continue the organization or that they should meet again in a week with new ideas on what could be done. I feel this organization was decided to be closed rather abruptly. Once Jackie gave the bad news, all the Board members seemed to give up and go along with it. It didn't seem like anyone at that meeting besides Peter was thinking about the mission or had passion for the mission.

Re: Critique the Managers of Metro Arts and Film

Posted by Ben Lentz - 2008/02/18 01:14

I wonder if the board and the board president took time to evaluate their current situation after the dismissal of Chris. If they had evaluated the organization based on the coo that took place to remove the former ED, the evaluation from the consultants and morale of the employees they should have hired someone with previous experience dealing with change. They needed a leader who could take action to engage the board and employees around the positive things MAF was doing and quickly work to bring balance to the organization. They needed a leader and they instead hired a manager.

Re: Critique the Managers of Metro Arts and Film

Posted by Mark Hager - 2008/02/18 18:29

Maria De La Cruz wrote:

It is clear that the board, who we must remember hired her, did not have trust in Jackie. With that being said, I think that when the relationship between the board and the ED is strained, then the organization will suffer.

Maria, Rebecca, Ben... thanks for your thoughts on the management situation. I'd like to suggest that Jackie inherited a terminally ill patient to begin with, and neither she nor the board probably realized it at the time. The organization was suffering in spite of Jackie, not because of her. I suspect they were all hopeful, and I believe that the board had more trust in Jackie than Maria gives credit. Eric was starting to get wary that Jackie might not have the skills to pull it out, but that's the only clue we have that anyone on the board didn't have full faith in Jackie. She might have had a hard go of it

after that meeting if the board had appointed an interim director or decided to be more deliberate in their decision making, but they seemed to have faith in Jackie's decision-making. It would take a lot for somebody to move to take a new job in a new city, and then cut her own feet off. Maybe we should applaud Jackie's courage.

Mark

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Re: Critique the Managers of Metro Arts and Film

Posted by Krista Gallagher Colt - 2008/02/20 22:57

She may have inherited a sick organization, but the panicked way she handled herself at the board meeting sent a sign to the board that the organization was in trouble. If she had been a bit more calm and composed the outcome of the meeting may have been different.

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Howdy

Posted by orasngo - 2008/04/08 15:09

Pandora's Rule:

Never open a box you didn't close.

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