

Director Turnover: Are We Sustaining our Talent?

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"You have to be clever to figure out how to be welcoming and defensive at the same time. When to love something and when to quit. If you don't know how, you can end up out of control or controlled by some outside thing." --Toni Morrison, Jazz

Introduction

If you are part of a museum that recently changed directors, you belong to a sizable club. The museum boom and the baby boom might be to blame for this turnover. Several capital campaigns have come to a close. Baby boomers are beginning to retire. Directors often choose to leave their posts at such natural transition points. If your museum's transition was smooth, consider yourself a fortunate member of the club. But, if your director change was dramatic, resulting in turmoil and wagging tongues, you are not alone.

Consider these news stories, all from the year 2001. Headline in a Midwestern business journal: *Unhappy staff bolt museum: departures blames on new chief's style*. The story: discontent with a local new museum director hired out of the corporate sector has triggered the exodus of 13 out of 21 senior staff, a talent drain that some business leaders fear may damage this museum's stature. Headline in a widely-read east coast daily: *Museum of Rotating Chiefs*. The story: a local museum is so dominated by its founding board that six directors have rotated through in fourteen years, the latest leaving after only three months on the job. Two stories appearing on the same day on different coasts about different museums: *Leadership Shakeup at *** Museum; Museum CEO leaves to pursue other endeavors*. Story in a southwestern newspaper a month later: another museum director has left after four years on the job due to frequent clashes between board and staff. The Board "suspects the director of sympathizing with philistines." And, front page news in a major western city: *Museum Director resigns abruptly: Even wife is surprised*. The director is quoted citing personal financial needs for his departure. A few days later, a political gossip column reveals a generous six-figure salary and positions a head shot of the ex-director next to that of a philandering member of Congress.

If museum directors have ever striven for celebrity status, recent stories such as these promise tumultuous, scandalous mismanagement and high pitched board staff blowouts. In a field as earnest as the museum profession, such coverage is very uncomfortable. In our quest to become more popular, should we simply rejoice in the fact that museum director travails are deemed worthy front-page news, capable perhaps of actually selling newspapers? Or, is this proliferation of headlines no mere sales strategy? Is a national crisis in leadership and turnover in the museum profession looming?

Some new data begins to answer to this question. In 2001, to assess training needs in the nonprofit sector, Compasspoint Nonprofit Services (San Francisco, CA) surveyed 1,072 executive directors of nonprofit organizations of all sizes in California, Texas, Hawaii and Washington DC. The researchers found that the average tenure of directors is three to five years. Compasspoint suggests two reasons behind such short tenure: lack of management training and/or nonprofit experience.

Almost two-thirds of current directors participating in their study have no prior training in executive leadership, are performing the job for the first time, and/or are recruited from outside of their organizations. It is hardly surprising that a majority of directors reported long hours and high stress. More pointedly, despite their commitment to their organizations' missions, half stated that they never want to be a director again. The Compasspoint data foreshadow a serious talent drain for nonprofit organizations of all types.

The finding of short tenure, long hours and high stress mirrors University of Nebraska professors Hugh Genoways and Lynne Ireland's research for their forthcoming book on museum management (AltaMira Press: 2003). Most museum directors, Genoways and Ireland discovered, last less than four years at their posts. The authors suggest that museum management has become such a complex endeavor that there is a high burnout rate in our field. Practitioners from across the country echo their concern. "Having to constantly raise money and resolve so many ongoing financial and personnel pressures is wearing to the extreme," states Michael Hawfield, director of the Pratt Museum in Homer, Alaska. "There is so much pressure and expectation to be excellent at all things; it requires tremendous self-sacrifice," implores Terrie Rouse, former director of the African American Museum of Philadelphia, who resigned in summer 2001, "We need help."

What can we make of this disheartening state-of-affairs? How can museums continue to advance in society with such tumult at the helm? Are museum directors burning out? To gain some insight, I interviewed a group who has thought long and hard about the role of a museum leader: directors who have thrived in the museum field for fifteen years or more. I also interviewed successful directors who have left their positions, researchers, and executive recruiters. A labyrinthine story emerged.

One version goes like this: A museum director's job is extraordinarily demanding, and only getting more so. Yet, no matter what the data may say about high stress and long hours, a great many executives enjoy the challenge and are optimistic about their work. Bright and creative people who have the capacity to be leaders and want to be leaders fill museums. But, because museums have become so complex, there is no agreement on what qualifies a person to be in charge of a museum. Priorities shift constantly. This lack of clarity causes friction at both the staff and board levels. Some up-and-coming museum staff burn out of the profession entirely. For others who strive to move up the ranks, training, most especially in financial management and board relations, is lacking.

The board also plays a significant role. To paraphrase Leo Tolstoy, all happy boards are alike, but every unhappy board is unhappy in its own way. Board members may have different agendas from staff members, further complicating a museum's priorities. In times of change (and for museums, those times never seem to cease), some boards blame the person at the helm than to consider the bigger picture. "I've seen superb directors get blindsided by a board for no reason," a history museum director told me, "we are all one rogue board member from potential ugliness." Boards fire directors, and rather than looking inside of their organizations, hire an outsider, either from another museum or from another profession altogether. Senior staff leave, some to become directors of other museums, even though they may lack executive training. The job of the director becomes even more demanding.

Of course, this scenario has countless variations and does not apply to all museums. There are other reasons why people leave or remain in jobs. Yet, I believe that three key internal issues -- organizational complexity, burnout, and tension around the hiring of outsiders -- diagnose the overall challenge we face in bringing stability to the position of director and the museum profession as a whole. It is important that board and staff acknowledge these three issues.

Museums as Complex Organizations

Consider J.Q. Average Museum Director. My research paints a median composite of a white 52-year-old, with at least a master's degree. If J.Q. is female, she probably runs a small or medium sized museum, as opposed to a large one. She earns less money than her male counterpart, no matter what her education, job experience, or size of her institution. In the year 2002, J.Q. finds herself in charge of an institution markedly different from the museums of her 1950s and 1960s childhood. The business, academic, technological and social environment in which she lives has transformed. A

once sleepy and elitist set of institutions has grown into a fast-paced, multi-billion dollar industry.

If J.Q. has museum experience, it is likely as a curator or educator. J.Q. may have been part of an era of innovation that took place roughly from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s. During this time, institutions like The Boston Children's Museum, the Exploratorium, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Smithsonian Institution and Williams College, to name just a few prominent examples, were beehives of innovation. New kinds of exhibits, programs and scholarship -- such as interactivity, blockbusters, community festivals, and diverse ways of looking at art and history -- changed the face of museums. Many leaders in the field emerged from these institutions and others that shared their goals.

In the 1990s, however, museums concentrated on institutionalizing and replicating these innovations. Attracting and serving visitors, raising capital funds, and augmenting operating budgets were all part of this trend. As Boston Children's Museum director Lou Casagrande states: "The corporatization of museums, the cookie-cutter mentality, the shift to a blockbuster and an audience emphasis, the team process -- all things I was part of -- have made museums de-emphasize the horsing around and kookiness that resulted in so many innovations." A bright spot of museum innovation in the 1990s -- where experimentation and a distinctive brand of kookiness was tolerated -- was technology, but that was mostly relegated to basements and back rooms and, with a few shining exceptions, has yet to be fully integrated into most museums' overall planning and operations.

For the most part, museums became multifaceted business. This complexity boils down to three concurrent and over-lapping phenomena: the shifting emphasis to visitors; the growth in size and number of museums; and a unique financial structure. The pace of these developments has been especially dizzying in the last ten years.

Visitors at the gates

Directors of J.Q.'s childhood museums tended to be scholars, concerned with connoisseurship and research. Today's directors focus on a museum's public presence. "I've seen a generation of change in my twenty-seven years as a museum director; the most profound is the shift in emphasis from collections to visitors, declares Harry Parker, Director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, "I am spending much more of my time thinking about marketing, attendance, and community issues." Community accessibility sits at the top of most directors' agendas. "Museums have become much more open and accessible to the community. That's a priority for us now," states Seattle Art Museum Director Mimi Gates.

The shift toward marketing and visitors contributes to museums' growing attendance. We are preoccupied with attendance figures. "Are your numbers up or down?," is a common greeting amongst colleagues at professional meetings. In the past few years (before the current recession), the news was usually been good. No matter how you crunch the data, more people use museums today than ever before. Overall, in the United States, visitorship has expanded by an astonishing 50 percent in the last ten years.

The influx of visitors is both blessing and challenge. Museums run out of space, prompting ongoing capital campaigns. In addition, a visitor-oriented

attraction adds new responsibilities to directors' plates. "I used to tell my friends that in addition to the museum, I ran a parking lot, a storage facility, an educational research institute, a food service business, a design firm, a repair shop and a retail outlet," quips former Children's Discovery Museum (San Jose, CA) director Sally Osberg.

Great Expectations

In a 1990s business climate that stressed growth above all else, museums felt pressured to grow. Budgets and facilities multiplied exponentially. Many directors were excited by the entrepreneurial spirit of the decade and very successful at growing their institutions. "In my ten years at the Wing Luke Asian Museum, the budget has grown eight-fold. We've grown from a small to a mid-sized museum," director Ron Chew (Seattle, WA) recounts. Not all directors were skillful in managing this level of expansion; "I've seen plenty who drained their organization's budgets," another director with 25 years experience confided. But for the most part, museums took advantage of a strong economy and produced admirable results. In 1999, two-thirds of museums reported an operating surplus.

New museums are also part of this financial growth. No exact figures show how many new museums have sprung up recently, but ask most museum directors and they will rattle off the names of new museums and competing capital campaigns in their locales. "In my community, we have seen at least three significant new museums in the last ten years and, at the same time, my museum's attendance has doubled. That's a lot of growth for a city of about one million," comments Gail Trechsel, director of the Birmingham Art Museum in Alabama.

Often, the most committed entrepreneurs are museum founders, with the drive and stamina to work at a fast pace. Start-up museums also attract a new kind of board member, one with little museum experience and less ties to past models. Experienced board and staff members in such communities are stretched. Thus, many non-experienced people sign on with great ideas and expectations, but few concrete skills to run their museums once built. Have museums accelerated too quickly? Have our forays into entrepreneurship resulted in great expectations we can't keep or pay for? What does the all the expansion and growth do to those in charge?

A financial juggernaut

The growth of visitor services, budgets and buildings, and promises of untold community access, creates a financial juggernaut. John McCarter, director of the Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago, IL) and formerly a consultant for Booz-Allen, believes that even the smallest museum can be more complicated than the largest corporation. Museums perform many functions at the same time. They attract visitors, provide amenities, conduct scholarly research, care for precious objects, and provide community services. But income streams don't necessarily dovetail with these diverse activities; surplus funds from some activities pay for other programs that lose money, but support mission. Income sources constantly fluctuate, each source demanding its own marketing strategy.

As compared to the for-profit sector, it's impossible to cleanly reconcile a museum's services (and thus expenses) with its revenues. Each line of income is beholden to a different stakeholder, or market segment and, at the same

time, intertwined with other income and expense lines. Admissions income depends on bringing in visitors. Retail operations must entice visitors to not just attend, but to buy. Membership programs must induce them to not just attend, but to join. Government funding requires strategic relationships with local politicians. Foundations want to see community impact and outcome-based evaluation. Research grants must satisfy scholarly standards and peer-review panels. And, finally, directors must maintain traditional relationships with major patrons, as well as have some understanding of how to invest endowment funds.

Attending to these simultaneous -- and oftentimes conflicting -- needs is so demanding that executives have little time for reflection and even less room for making mistakes. Juggling only begins to describe a director's day. Juggling, at least, has a predictable rhythm. A day in the life of a museum director is multifarious, its predictability apparent only to a mathematician or expert gambler. During the course of my interviews, one director was getting ready for an important meeting on museum parking; another was interrupted when a local politician walked into the museum and demanded immediate attention; one was installing labels for an exhibit opening and talking to me at the same time; and two -- in separate cities -- were called into last-minute legal proceedings over a landuse issue related to the museum's building project.

"A museum director is a CEO of an important community business," declares Charlene Akers, Director of the Scurry County Museum (Snyder, Texas). Yet only a few earn close to what a CEO of a for-profit company makes. Who in their right mind would take on such a complicated enterprise? Isn't the exhausting scenario I have just painted simply a recipe for burnout? Surprisingly, it is not.

Who is really burning out?

"I am incredibly exhausted in my work as a museum director, but I am exhilarated as well. And I am not burned out," states Lou Casagrande. Ann Mintz, Director of the Berkshire Museum (Pittsfield, MA) agrees: "I may get tired, but I don't burn out; that is, I don't lose my enthusiasm for my work or museums." Jim DeMersman, director of the Hayward Area Historical Society Museum (Hayward, CA) captures a common feeling: "At times I find my work very spiritual and gratifying; after 25 years as a director, I still love coming to work every single morning." Museum directors are passionate about their work, and I heard countless stories about the pleasures of leading such vital community resources.

Burnout in the museum profession, however, should not be minimized. Burnout not only hurts organizational productivity, but it is a serious health problem for individuals who experience it. Defined by psychologists as high emotional exhaustion, depersonalization ("shutting down", "emotionally removing yourself from a situation"), and low personal achievement, the essence of burnout is a clash between a person's idealistic expectations and the reality of their workplace. The combination of a person's work environment and personality sets the stage for burnout. Lack of clearly defined boundaries, workaholicism and time management problems contribute as well. Fortunately, growing old has its benefits. The longer people stay in a field or at a job, the less likely they are to burn out. This is all the more reason to prevent unnecessary turnover.

Directors with whom I spoke have well-honed coping skills for dealing with the fast pace of contemporary museum work. They are aware of -- and even claim to practice -- proven coping strategies against burnout. These include regular exercise, a sense of humor, and maintaining open communication with staff and board members. Developing a thick skin and taking regular vacations were also frequently mentioned. "It is vital to know yourself very well," explains Dan Keegan, director of the San Jose Museum of Art, "I did a lot of serious soul searching before I became a director." Professionals who have an honest awareness of their own personality speed traps more successfully counter situations that put them at risk of burnout. Directors also share a strong esprit-de-corps and regularly share information with each other. "I have a wide network of colleagues who provide me with support," says Karen Franklin, director of the Judaica Museum of the Hebrew Home for the Aged in Riverdale, New York. Good board relations with a shared set of realistic goals is vital as well. "I work with an excellent board. There is mutual trust. Without them, I could not do my job," says Keegan.

Although successful directors do not burn out, the problem in museums is more insidious. Museums burn their staffs out. "I think other museum workers such as curators and educators experience more burnout than directors. They came to museums for the content, not the pace," says Steven High, director of the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno. People who step into a leadership role have a certain resiliency, as well as control over their work environment. Those in middle and entry level positions may not. These are the museum workers most in danger of burning out and leaving the museum field. Younger employees and those who come to museums from other industries enter the field with excitement and idealism inspired by their experiences as museum goers as well as the unique flavor of a museum's building, collections and, of course, mission. People who are prone to burnout tend to be givers who strive to make a difference, and be recognized and appreciated for doing so. If a museum's culture exploits this kind of personality, these workers face the possibility of burnout.

It behooves museum directors to create a workplace that allows employees drawn to museum work to thrive. Clearly defined expectations are the most important step in creating a work environment that is burnout-proof. Yet, how can museum directors foster this kind of workplace if their positions are subject to so much pressure from external forces? Perhaps the fast-pace and increasing complexity of the museum forces a situation where directors push their organizations forward and take care of themselves, but cannot create an environment that fosters long-term growth and longevity for others in the profession.

When a director suddenly leaves, no matter what the circumstances behind her departure, she may leave behind an institution with a stretched and anxious board, an expectant community, a precariously balanced set of revenues and expenses and a potentially-burned out staff, possibly with no trained successor in place. Is it any wonder that many boards turn to outsiders?

Who's an insider? Who's an outsider?

How can boards fill empty positions? Sometimes they go to other museums. But, many current directors running happy shops don't want to leave their positions, especially if they are in the midst of a capital campaign. Besides, the Compasspoint report found that half of nonprofit directors

never want to be a director again. Both the Compasspoint study and hearsay in the field suggest therefore that many new museum directors are coming in from outside industries. The hiring of outsiders into leadership positions in museums causes much consternation and more headlines, from the Smithsonian Institution on down. If museums are so particular and so complex, how can someone who does not understand their content (or contents) lead them? What if a "corporate type" comes in and only cares about the short-term bottom line, compromising scholarship, collections and programs that have taken years to develop? "Do outsiders really have the passion to guide a museum to its core mission?" Gail Trechsel entreats. "I have been with the same institution for 25 years and was promoted from the inside. I came to my position very committed to the museum." Steven High, who advanced to director from a curatorial position and holds an MBA in addition to a degree in art history, agrees: "It's much easier to manage a museum when you know how one works." Phillippe De Montebello, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, argues that developing a pool of curators with the qualifications to become museum directors is essential for the future of art museum leadership. He believes that a system that puts administrators - as opposed to content specialists -- at the head of museums will eventually tip the balance in favor of a market- rather than a mission-driven museum.

Yet, since we possess no precise data on how many museums are run by outsiders, fears may be exaggerated. According to Nancy Nichols, executive recruiter for the search firm Heidrick & Struggles, boards of the major museums with which she works still prefer candidates with museum experience and content knowledge. "I've only placed one so-called outsider and that was for a museum in very bad financial shape that needed someone with proven business skills. The candidate wowed the board. Major candidates do not come from the outside. In my experience, there are extraordinary candidates coming from within museums."

Whatever the extent of the situation, let's admit to ourselves that at times, museums benefit when outsiders are hired to lead them. Outsiders may offer financial, personnel or community-building skills that the museum hasn't nurtured from within its ranks. An outsider may cleanup a financial mess -- rather than letting it fester by doing things the same way as always. He may also have the clout to deal with what a history museum director aptly described to me as "the well entrenched employee who makes everyone's life miserable." Since community relations are a priority, a leader's local connections and knowledge may be more important than their understanding of museum practice. A former museum director in a mid-sized community, whose successor is a local businessperson with an MBA and no direct museum experience, poses this question: "If museums are so set on reaching their communities, isn't it better to hire someone committed to the area than someone with museum training from another city?"

Ellsworth Brown, President of the Carnegie Museums (Pittsburgh, PA) believes that outsiders may breathe fresh air into the field. "Of course we should be bringing in people from the outside. We have to admit that sometimes we may not have the right people on the inside. Museums are the ones who have been insular and put up barriers for years. I think bringing in outsiders is a sign of our health; we are finally reaching out to the world and it's a big place," Brown asserts.

Even if boards hire outsiders from throughout the globe with the best of intentions, the tension between insiders and outsiders feeds the turnover problem. Museum internal culture can be daunting. Willard L. Boyd, former

director of the Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago, IL) spoke eloquently about the challenges of coming to lead a museum as an outsider in his keynote remarks to the Visitor Studies Association annual meeting in Orlando, Florida in August 2001: "is it any wonder that the museum field was appalled when I went to the Field Museum? The Board of Trustees wanted a fund-raiser and I wanted a different kind of educational venue with which I had no experience...I had a lot to learn about museum learning when I got to the museum. Very few people in the museum offered to help me learn. Most said you do not know anything about museums--leave it to the experts. You should be seen and not heard, and you should only be seen with donors." If insiders can be unwelcoming, outsiders can wreak havoc in museums. In the worst of cases, such as that of Smithsonian Citibank Executive Larry Small in 2001, outsiders inspire contempt and public calls for resignation amongst their peers. Small is accused of selling out the Smithsonian's mission to commercial interests. In other instances, such as the museum in one of the news stories above, culture clashes drive qualified staff to quit their posts in fury. But, even when the new chief seeks to retain qualified staff and uphold the museum's mission, the practice of hiring from the outside sends a strong message to those on the inside: the path to the top is blocked. Entrepreneurial acumen is more important than core mission. If business people from the outside and content people on the inside are perpetually set up to alienate one another, talent is drained on both ends.

On the subject of outsiders, Boyd's successor at the Field Museum, John McCarter offers this advice: "Other types of institutions and industries have orderly career paths that people can follow. Universities, for example, bring in professors who then, if they choose to, can advance to chair, provost, and other administrative positions. Museums don't have this structure. As long as museums want to continue to be complex institutions and, at the same time, don't cultivate successors from within the ranks, they will need to turn to people with outside experience to run them." "Museums," adds Lou Casagrande, "do not make a wholesale effort to nurture people in number two positions to become directors."

Therein lies the problem. What is the line of succession in museum leadership, especially in a profession that may be burning out its middle level ranks? How are people nurtured, if at all? At some museums a deputy director is in charge of content, that is exhibitions, collections and programs, whereas at others, he may focus on internal operations such as finance or visitor services. Still at other museums, the development director is a CEO's closest confidante. Yet at others, it is the chief curator. Traditionally, curators ascended into executive roles. But with so many other power brokers -marketers, educators, fundraisers, financial officers -- at the table no clear-cut career ladder presents itself. Thus, some boards are inclined to parachute outsiders in, hoping that they will somehow clear cut through the jungle of tangled priorities.

Nurturing and Sustaining talent

As a whole, museums have much to be proud of: they have successfully ridden the tide of change and blossomed. Competing in a world increasingly driven by the bottom line and commercial culture, the great majority has maintained their integrity. Some have boomed; others have blossomed. Still others have nearly gone bankrupt and individuals have led heroic acts of rescue. This collective success would not have been possible without a generation of

directors acting like entrepreneurial scholars, artfully bridging the worlds of scholarship and business, mission and market. The problem of turnover, however, threatens to undo much of this great work. Left unchecked, the revolving door at the top jeopardizes the operations beneath. The task of improving the long-term health of museum leadership reaches beyond the position of the director. The problem of turnover involves everyone, from board to staff and even perhaps to funders. Its solution may be found through innovative approaches to compensation, training, and research.

First, let's address the ongoing issue of compensation. The Compasspoint study found that, as a group, directors are more motivated by their organization's mission than earning a large salary. Still, no one would dispute that they deserve to be paid well for their work. It is fortunate, therefore, that directors' salaries are rising. Yet, the gap between what directors make and what their staffs are paid is growing, fueling discontent and lack of continuity in mid-level positions. The gender gap is also an ongoing embarrassment especially in an industry that claims to be so devoted to ethics and equity. To nurture and sustain talent in the field we need fair compensation at all levels.

Executive Recruiter Geri Thomas states it well: "I find that on one hand museums are extremely interesting and progressive places. Museum workers are fabulous at understanding culture. On the other hand, we are not rewarding people for their work. A few stars make the large salaries. But, what happens is that middle management leaves because they have the small salaries. How can people advance when we don't pay them enough to stay in their jobs?"

Salaries are, of course, linked to museums' financial resources. Some may argue that more public and private funding is the key to raising salaries. Yet, as discussed above, each new funding source brings with it added responsibilities and expenses that may tax museums more than it supports them. The issue-at-hand is to create equitable compensation packages, perhaps taking into account not only salaries but flexible work schedules, sabbaticals, coaching, or training opportunities.

Second, in order to sustain staff, a systematic emphasis on leadership training must be implemented. Board-director breakdowns are a serious part of the turnover problem at the top. Some boards need skill-building to set reasonable goals and develop sound hiring practices and they may also need to become more informed about changing museum practices. Most first-time executives will benefit from training in financial management, board relations and personnel. Directors also need to invest in training opportunities for willing staff.

But there must be standards for this training. Much verbiage exists on what constitutes a great leader and solid management practice. Leadership-theories-of-the-month come and go as rapidly as get-rich-quick-schemes. (As recently as summer 2001, for example, a prominent business journal saluted Enron as a management model for the future). In order to provide stability and clarity to museum leaders, let's be careful about which leadership training strategies and programs we, as a profession, endorse. The most consistently praised training program for mid-level personnel and new directors is the Getty's Museum Management Institute (MMI). Harvard University runs a well-regarded training program for art museum directors. Museum studies and other university-led programs are also energetic resources for the profession that may well be the current and future

incubators of innovation in our field.

Finally, we must recognize that training programs for museum leaders can only do so much without more robust industry-wide data. Information on museum turnover and advancement is primarily anecdotal, coming from scattered journalistic inquiries, hearsay through professional networks and extrapolating from other industries' studies. We need more reliable data about museums. A comprehensive national study along the lines of the Compasspoint report focusing solely on museums, would go a long way to giving us a realistic picture of what directors and would-be directors experience, and what they need to be more successful. Steps in this direction include recent surveys of cultural leaders by the American Association of Art Museum Directors and the Illinois Arts Alliance (through the Cultural Policy Program at the University of Chicago).

Personnel make up at least 50 percent of museums' annual expenses. Yet we know more about how to motivate and retain our visitors than we know about motivating and retaining our staff. Substantial resources, including the elaborate reports written by audience evaluators, analyze our visitors. Yet, as a profession, we have expended virtually no energy understanding ourselves. Psychologists have studied the phenomenon of job stress and burnout in entry and mid-level positions in health, human services and education since the 1970s. Such wide-ranging trades as the military, clergy and even sports have recently invested in detailed studies on burnout in their professions. Museums have not. There is so much that we need to know.

To help boards make informed hiring decisions, we need to be able to objectively compare the experiences of those who have been promoted from within, from another museum, and those who came in from the outside. How prevalent is each practice? What are the common circumstances leading to each? Are there differences between discipline, size, and region? What has been the outcome for the museum? What happens to people who apply for director positions and aren't hired?

To help directors, we need to look at museum boards nationwide and understand their perspectives on hiring and overseeing a director's work. What do they feel their role is? Where do they need help? What is their vision for the future of our profession?

To help staff, we need to understand the phenomenon of turnover in our profession. Are there personality traits or work environments common to museum professionals that contribute to turnover? Is turnover even such a bad thing? How do museums with high turnover fare as compared with museums that retain their staff for a long time? Some may think that the answers to these questions are obvious. But as we've learned from studying visitors and working with new audiences, reliable data and active listening yield unexpected results.

Directors occupy a changing and precarious position within a cultural industry that itself continues to transform. Museums face outside financial and community pressures as well as forces emerging from within traditional content and collections. Museum directors often find themselves caught between board members, heads of different departments, and community stakeholders. Clearly, while museum directors have an indomitable spirit, and while their record proves that they can and will move mountains when they need to, we can't go on ignoring our human resources. If museums can devise new ways to use collections, create exhibits, and program for

visitors, why can't they spend more time sustaining their employees? In an industry that has reinvented itself over the past thirty years, there's no reason why we can't create a bright future for all our talent.

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