

McHugh Publishing Reprint

Recruiting a Publishing Executive for a Nonprofit Organization: Tips and Techniques

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The Complexities of the Nonprofit Publishing World

Successful publishing in a nonprofit organization demands a talented and capable executive leading the publishing team. The complexity of running a nonprofit publishing company is such that the organization must recruit a capable executive, who is familiar with publishing management and the intricacies of a nonprofit organization.

Yet, many nonprofit organizations struggle to find capable executives to direct their publishing program. Finding the "right" publishing executive for the nonprofit organization is a much more vexing task than hiring a publisher for a commercial publishing company. Here's why.

Publishing in a nonprofit organization has a number of "wrinkles" one doesn't find in the commercial publishing business. Defining the specific

role of a nonprofit publishing division is much more difficult than defining the job in a commercial publishing company. The head of a publishing division, in a nonprofit, wears "many hats" and serves many masters.

Sometimes the publisher's job is to simply make money but this is rarely the case. The publishing division also serves as the "communications link" with members, various constituencies and the world at large. Other times, the publications division provides publishing and graphics services to other departments, for example, membership or education or certification. Some nonprofits are not sure what they want from their publisher. The resulting ambiguity, from the top, can result in a chaotic work environment, a confused publishing staff and a frustrated publisher.

The Publisher's Job and What to Look For

The "Publisher" is the executive position that brings together the many functions performed by the

publishing division. The publisher is the top executive, in a publishing business, responsible

for all functions including what is published, personnel, and product and financial performance. The publisher is also referred to as the publishing director or director of publishing. The

publisher should report to the chief staff officer, usually the executive director. For our purposes, I will refer to the top publishing executive in a nonprofit as the "publisher."

The Publisher as Multi-Dimensional Leader

The nonprofit publisher must be a multi-dimensional individual with leadership ability, business acumen, and strong editorial instincts. Because of the **highly politicized** nature of nonprofits, strong interpersonal skills, along with lots of political savvy, are all essential ingredients that make a publisher successful.

Added to the complexities of nonprofit organizational life an overlay of "short-timer" volunteers, each with their own agenda and needs, and you quickly recognize a tangled political landscape with many traps for the unwary. Navigating the political landscape of the typical nonprofit is much tougher than the politics of a commercial venture.

Think of your top publishing executive, as a leader. Leadership is an essential trait for your publisher. Someone once said "Managers do things right, leaders do the right thing." Leaders are able to align people behind a vision and are able to influence people to change and convince people to accept change in an organization..

Do not think of your publisher as a graphics or communications manager. Some organizations think of publishing as being synonymous with desktop production, it isn't. Publishing is a complex business requiring a myriad number of skills and experiences.

Who Should be Concerned about Recruiting the Publisher

The entire organization should be concerned about the publisher position. The publisher position is a visible, "highly leveraged" position with pervasive influence throughout the entire organization. The executive director, finance and administration director and human

resources director should have the most interest in the recruiting of the publisher. All should be involved in the recruiting of a new publisher. Generally, it's not a good idea to involve volunteers in the recruiting of the organization's executive staff.

Why the Publisher Position is of Critical Importance

What is published by a nonprofit is the organization's "face" to its customers and constituencies, whether it be members, media, business, government or the world

at large. The periodicals received by the membership are the organization's "voice" to its members. Members consistently rank publications as the number one

benefit of membership. By publishing, an organization can also define much scope and breadth of a profession or specialized field.

That's why organizations such as the American Bar Association, American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and American Medical Association sponsor publishing programs. One reliable estimate indicates that over 10,000 nonprofits sponsor some sort of publishing program in the U.S.

In addition to the "clout" and "reach" responsibilities of a publishing program, the publisher has significant financial responsibilities. Your publishing business should contribute significantly to your bottom line and should rank at the top of your

nondues income-producing programs. A publications program is an excellent way to diversify your organization's nondues income. In successful nonprofits, publishing can be in the neighborhood of 25%-30% of total revenues.

As a member of your executive team, your publisher can make substantial profits for the organization. You are looking for someone with **proven business instincts**. Both book and periodical publishing are specialized businesses demanding seasoned judgements by the executive. If a professional does not manage your publishing business, costs can spiral out of control, and soon, you will run a deficit. The financial implications of an amateur leading your publishing program are horrifying.

The Publisher as a People Leader

Publishing is a creative, people-intensive business. The leadership and human resource management responsibilities of the publisher position are profound. The publisher must align her staff behind the strategic plan of the organization.

The publishing staff must be sold on the idea that they are part of something much larger than their publishing division. The **publisher must daily reinforce to publishing staff the organizational context of what is published and the role of the publishing division in the**

nonprofit. If your publisher doesn't grasp the organizational mission or rejects it, she may cause alienation between the publishing staff and the organization's staff executives and the board of directors.

Compensation, promotions, discipline, and conflict resolution are people issues dealt with daily by a publisher. The publisher's main job, like any other leader, is to get results working through people. Team building and consensus building are important aspects of the

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publisher's job. Can your organization afford a trainee publisher handling these executive responsibilities?

The publisher position is not a trial period to figure out if a newly promoted staff member has the skills, inclinations and experience to deal with complex people issues. (Although, in many instances, a trainee is what you get, given the modest salary most nonprofits pay a publisher.)

If a "trainee" publisher can't cut it in the people leadership department, you may have a mess that will be time consuming and

expensive to clean up. A "trainee" as your top publishing executive can be expensive on-the-job training. Publishing is a specialized business requiring prior in-place experience to succeed as a new publisher in a nonprofit.

However, many nonprofits don't see it this way. Publishing is looked upon as a subset of communications or graphics or editing. It isn't. Maybe it's the significant pay differential between the commercial and nonprofits but many nonprofits are locked into the "Trainee Publisher" syndrome.

Steps in the Recruiting Process

Let's assume your organization has an opening for the Publisher position. First review the position in light of past history and with an eye toward the future. If the Publisher position has changed significantly since you last wrote the position description, you may want to revise the position description.

Ask these questions:

1. What are key attributes and skills required?
2. Does the position require more experience in magazines, journals or books? Or does the position require *some knowledge of all three* different types of publishing?
3. What does the Publisher need to accomplish in the first six months on the job? The first year?

4. What are the quantitative measures you will use to evaluate the Publisher's performance?

Your next steps should be:

- Write copy for the recruiting ad
- Decide in which media to advertise
- Establish a recruiting budget
- Establish a recruiting schedule and milestones

How much can you expect to spend on a classified? Plan to budget \$5,000 and up. That's a starting figure. You can probably spend much more. That's why you should establish a plan and budget before you proceed to recruit.

Where to Place your Classified Advertisement

If you are in a large metro area, consider advertising in the Sunday edition of the local paper. The sort of publishing talent you are looking for (remember you're not looking for graphic artists,

production managers or writers) is not found in every metro area. However, the following cities are stocked with the sort of publishing executive talent you are looking for.

Metro Areas with Executive Publishing Talent

- New York
- Philadelphia
- Washington, D.C.
- Atlanta
- Chicago

- San Francisco
- Los Angeles

Two dominant weekly publishing trade magazines, to consider, are *Publishers Weekly* (PW /Weekly Exchange 212-463-6784, Fax 212-463-6536) and *Folio* (PRIMEDIA Intertec 203-358-9900). *Publishers Weekly* will pull more book publishing types and *Folio* will pull more magazine types. I suggest advertising in both magazines if your budget can afford both.

An organization that reaches the association publishing community is the Society of National Association Publishers (SNAP). SNAP publishes a bimonthly magazine. SNAP can be reached at 703-506-3285 or [Www.snaponline.org](http://www.snaponline.org).

Consider using the media published by the American Society of Association Publishers (ASAE). ASAE publishes a monthly membership magazine, which features articles on association publishing. ASAE can be reached

202-626-2706 Executive or www.asaenet.org.

Free space is available to those recruiting positions for over \$50,000 in the *CEO JOB OPPORTUNITIES UPDATE*, which is an expensive Bi-monthly newsletter reaching job seekers in the nonprofit sector. Call 703-370-6700 or www.associationjobs.com. Finally, *Association Trends* is a weekly trade newspaper for the association management community. They run a classified advertising section. Call 301-652-8666.

Screening and Sorting Resumes

For an "average" search for a senior association executive position, you can attract anywhere from 25 to 200 resumes. You'll need a method to evaluate those resumes you receive. Here are a few tips:

Use the "three pile method" to sort those you receive. The breakdown is:

Definite Prospects. Meets and exceeds qualifications and experience requirements. Probable phone call to discuss position and interest.

Marginal Prospects. Meets some of the qualifications and experience requirements. Possible candidate.

Not a Prospect. Meets none of the qualifications and experience

requirements. No further action required.

To facilitate your sorting develop a rating matrix. The matrix should list the required skills and attributes along with points assigned to each skill, experience and attribute for the candidates. The matrix will help you to objectively evaluate the resumes.

It's also a good practice to look at the resume twice, with a time interval in between screenings, before you decide which one of the three piles to assign the resume. Your perspective may be different after a break and you'll see that some candidates are pretty close to either category #1 or category #2. Given the importance of recruiting an executive position such as Publisher, a second look is a good practice.

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How Long Will it Take to Recruit a Publisher

So many variables are involved in recruiting that it's impossible to suggest absolutes. However, assume it will take about twice as long as you expect it will. Recruiting top executives is an art. It's labor intensive and a highly inefficient activity.

There are many false starts and stops. Candidates express interest and are not really interested. Reference checking takes longer than you think. Scheduling interviews with candidates and your organization's staff is cumbersome and time consuming.

Take your time. Be thorough and meticulous in your screening and interviewing. Make sure you take the time to understand the "human connection" between your organization and the finalists. The stakes are high, so don't rush.

Set milestones. I recommend a six-month window maximum for recruiting a Publisher. A three-month window to recruit and hire a new Publisher would be above average in getting closure.

An Additional Resource on Publishing Management for Nonprofits

As a professional consultant, who specializes in the field of nonprofit publishing, I recognize that nonprofit publishing is a separate and distinct field with many of its own "rules" and nuances. Because nonprofit organizations (and their publishing arms) operate in a unique environment, many of their management needs are distinct from commercial publishing companies.

For those reasons, I have written a publication exclusively for the needs of the nonprofit organization in the publishing business. The publication is *Publishing Management for Nonprofit Organizations: Principles for Associations, Foundations, and Societies* (162 pages, 1997). For information call 414-351-3056 or E-mail j.b.mchugh@worldnet.att.net.

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services. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the service of a competent professional person should be sought.

About John B. McHugh

John B. McHugh is a publishing management consultant and industry commentator. He has held management positions at Houghton Mifflin, Richard D. Irwin, and Wadsworth, Inc. At the American Society for Quality, McHugh served as Publisher and Director of Programs.

McHugh's articles have appeared in *Association Publishing*, *Association Trends*, *The Book Marketing Update*, the *COSMEP Newsletter*, *Independent Publishing*, the *PMA Newsletter* and *Small Press*. McHugh also conducts on-site training workshops for publishers.

Other McHugh Publications of Interest:

Managing Publishing Rights: Acquiring, Protecting and Selling, 158 pp., 1998. \$90.00. Item M-16

Permissions Management for Requesters and Granters: Dealing with Copyright and Fair Use, 62 pp., 1996. \$70.00. Item M-14

Publishing Management for Nonprofit Organizations: Principles for Associations, 11/99

Foundations and Societies, 162 pp., 1997. \$85.00. Item M-15

Book Publishing Contracts: An Introduction, 68 pp., 1996. \$70.00. Item M-13

Managing Book Acquisitions: An Introduction, 100 pp., 1995. \$65.00. Item M-12

College Publishing Market, Third Edition, 100 pp., 1995. \$65.00. Item M-11