**This is an introduction to my book about how nonprofit leaders maintain focus and commitment when they are constantly faced with dwindling funds and hiring challenges, among other things. I interviewed 13 executive directors and wrote their profiles with an eye toward how they can keep the fire in the belly. It was laid out by a graphic designer and line edited.**

**NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP: HOW TO BE MOTHER TERESA WITH AN MBA**

Introduction

Nonprofits are like bumblebees. Both provide an invaluable service, but no one knows how they do it. The odds of success seem against them. So what’s their secret?

For one thing, both keep moving ahead: Bumblebees need airflow, and nonprofits need cash flow. Indeed, logic would dictate that a nonprofit’s reduced resources, minimal working capital, lower salaries, and smaller staff would spell doom, but miraculously, nonprofits are expanding. Nationwide there are over 1.5 million nonprofits operating in the United States today, and in 2012 they received over $20 trillion in grant money to boot. That sounds like plenty of moola to keep them aloft. But it also takes the deft leadership of an executive director, who must be a supplicant for that money as well as a whiz at numbers. And that’s just for starters: they must also curry relationships with donors, manage staff and boards, keep abreast of their prodigious paperwork, stay in touch with marketplace trends, and hold fast to the bucking bronco when funding goes south.

Who are these magicians who guide their nonprofits through thick and thin? What makes them keep fighting for their cause? How do they renew to keep going in the face of shrinking resources and relentless insecurity over funding and demanding boards?

To more closely examine those bumblebees of the nonprofit world, and perhaps motivate others to join their ranks, I interviewed 15 inspiring leaders across nine sectors: 12 are executive directors of Washington-based nonprofits (arts, education, environment, health care, community services, and membership), two teach about and analyze the sector, one is the executive director (ED) of a foundation, and one is the vice president of a company that conducts searches for EDs. Together, they give an unalloyed view of the field that will help potential nonprofit leaders go in with eyes wide open.

This book is not about fundraising, strategic planning, or managing boards, although many interviewees touch candidly on these issues. Its purpose is to show how they became involved in nonprofits and thrive in a world that would make their for-profit brethren wilt. One thing’s for sure: don’t bother applying if you just want to kick back. Sixty- to 80-hour work weeks are the norm. Accomplishing one’s mission takes a lot of effort.

While all interviewees hail from Washington state, their struggles, motivations—and, yes, joys—are universal. An EDs’ community may look a lot different in Minnesota or Florida, but everyone’s goal matches that of the bumblebee: fly as fast as you can.