

## Using an Interim by Katha Kissman, Interim Leadership and Nonprofit Organizational Development Consulting

*“Interim management is the temporary provision of management resources and skills. Interim management can be seen as the short-term assignment of a proven heavyweight interim executive manager to manage a period of transition, crisis or change within an organization. In this situation, a permanent role may be unnecessary or impossible to find on short notice. Additionally, there may be nobody internally who is suitable for, or available to take up, the position in question.”* Wikipedia

A leadership vacancy, even when it comes about under planned circumstances, may shift an organization into a period of, at best, stagnation and at worst, instability while the search for the new leader is undertaken. Recognizing this, many nonprofit boards now recognize the benefits of using an interim, deliberately choosing to engage a professional interim to provide a bridge between the departing and incoming executives. Reasons are varied and can include:

- Sometimes using an interim is just a matter of having a trained executive steer the ship, providing day to day management/oversight and acting as an objective liaison reporting to the board so that they can stay focused on the organization’s strategic issues and the search for the new leader.
- Sometimes an interim can provide a needed culture shift following the departure of a founder or strongly charismatic leader. Utilizing an interim can then give the board and staff some breathing room to have a facilitated opportunity for timely reflection about the specific qualities, skills, and experience the organization really needs in their next leader.
- Other times an interim is asked to do an organizational assessment and address specific operational issues so that by the time the new executive starts, he/she can hit the ground running without having to do “a fix” which can compromise his/her relationships with staff.
- Sometimes bringing in an interim can help establish a new leadership position within the organization (when it’s not the CEO).
- And sometimes using an interim is a way for a board to provide a long-time valued executive with a short sabbatical to prevent burnout and allow the executive to recharge their batteries!

Allowing for a planned and thoughtful transition from a long-time and highly effective CEO is also prudent. Often the first hired executive after someone who has been in the seat for a good length of time does not “stick” due to unrealistic comparisons and expectations, interpersonal challenges with board and staff because “they are doing things differently,” or failure to provide the incoming leader with a planned and comprehensive on-boarding regarding the current needs and future goals of the organization. This can further contribute to organizational instability and lost productivity and effectiveness.

In such transition, the board can assume that its engagement will be higher than normal. Effective interims are diligent in fulfilling their board liaison function, providing more communication and input into decision-making. Clarifying expectations at the start of the interim relationship is important and should be codified in the contract.

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