

ANDREA BALL: PHILANTHROPY

The "It Factor"

What makes a persuasive charity leader?

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Some charity leaders make you want to save the world.

It happens all the time. I'll be chatting with some nonprofit guru about her work, and then next thing you know, I've been sucked in.

I want to adopt an African village. Or save a whale. Or do whatever that charity cheerleader wants me to do.

It's the do-gooder's version of the Hollywood "It Factor." Some nonprofit executives have it. And some really, really don't.

In a community with thousands of nonprofits, standing out among the crowd is crucial. It's how charities get the money and volunteers they need. And some leaders are better than others at making their missions shine.

"There's no doubt that quality people make a huge difference in nonprofits," said **Peter Frumkin**, director of the **RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service** at the University of Texas at Austin. "Some people think it's *the* deciding factor in predicting the success of a nonprofit."

So what is it that makes a nonprofit leader so convincing? Is the "It Factor" all about personal charisma and good looks?

Absolutely not, says **Barry Silverberg**, director of the **Austin Community College Center for Community-Based and Nonprofit Organizations**. A quiet, more reserved person can be just as persuasive as an outgoing one.

"There's no one type of leader that's effective all the time," he said. "Leadership is situational and contextual. Different styles will work in different arenas. But the most important things are personal integrity and credibility. People have to believe in you and be willing to follow you."

The ability to communicate clearly is especially important in the nonprofit world, Frumkin said.

In business, the metrics — supply, demand, bottom line — tell a pretty clear tale of success or failure, he said. And yes, there are financial measures for nonprofits as well, such as administrative and fundraising costs.

But numbers don't capture hearts. And because of the complexity of nonprofit work, selling a clear mission can be difficult.

"You need a very skilled person precisely because there's so much ambiguity," Frumkin said. "You have to be able to communicate the story because people respond to stories."

So the "It Factor" is obviously a combination of things, a mix of personal and professional qualities. But no matter how beloved a charity leader is, the most important thing a good leader can do is bring attention to his charity, Silverberg said.

"Leaders empower other people," he said. "Leaders are about establishing legacies for their organizations, not themselves."

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