

# WOMEN'S BUSINESS

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NONPROFIT

## Transform Inspiration Into Action

The holiday season is an inspirational time. It's an opportunity to gather with loved ones, to reflect upon the past year and to feel grateful for all that you have been given.

It's also a time to imagine how to make the world a better place, to dream about how you can make Greater Boston a more just, equitable and harmonious place to live.

This year, transform your vision into action.

When imagining all of the opportunities, taking the leap from inspiration to action seems impossible. But it is possible—and exciting!

Whether founding a nonprofit organization or simply becoming an engaged volunteer, it's exhilarating to identify a social challenge, collaborate with others to understand the issues and, ultimately, make change.

Moving from inspiration to action begins with identifying the social challenge you are interested in changing. What is it exactly that inspires you?

For example, while you may be broadly passionate about issues relating to the environ-



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ment, that can encompass organic farming, endangered species and reforestation. Impacting each of those areas requires vastly different solutions, resources and skill sets. Being as specific as possible about your interests enables

you to move more quickly and effectively to the next step: action.

After crystallizing the areas you are most passionate about, identify individuals or organizations that are making change in that area. Some of the country's leading social change agencies are right here in Greater Boston, and many of these organizations are seeking motivated volunteers to help them achieve their mission.

There are web-based resources available to match opportunities with your interests. For example, United Way created Volunteer Solutions, an online resource available at [www.volunteersolutions.org](http://www.volunteersolutions.org) that connects passionate individuals with mission-based agencies. Visitors can search broadly by keyword or issue, or find opportunities that are specific to individuals, families or youth volunteers.

Idealist.org is also a great place to look for volunteer opportunities and to develop an understanding of agencies that focus on specific issues. Visitors can search by focus, keyword and geography.

After you've identified a few interesting organizations, you can build your knowledge and skills in the issue area. How you choose to do this depends on your time availability, familiarity with the issue and how you envision yourself making change.

Be sure to assess your other commitments and develop a clear understanding of what you are seeking to do, learn or try before you take the next step. With a realistic sense of what you can and want to do, reach out. Contact the organizations you identified and ask for more information.

Think you have an idea or solution that is new to the field and you're passionate about following it through? Meet with organizational leaders. Learn more about what is currently being done and share your thoughts. Ask to be connected to others working in the field, which will give you an opportunity to begin building a group of

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advisors.

To gain frontline skills, seek out volunteer opportunities. Work with the volunteer coordinator to identify what you hope to learn and to determine if the agency is able to provide you with that experience.

While many organizations have a variety of wonderful volunteer opportunities, you may need to shop around to find the one that will teach you the skills you're seeking.

If you want to use your professional skills to make a difference, consult with organizational leadership to identify how to make the most impact with your expertise. If you have skills in an area of great need for the agency, they may ask you to serve on an advisory board or board of directors, which is a great way to learn and be involved with the organization's mission.

After you have spent about three months building your knowledge and skills in the issue area, pause to reflect carefully on the experience. Think about what first inspired you – are you still feeling that same passion and energy?

If so, identify what has continued to keep you inspired and incorporate those practices into

your work. Tell the agency if it has taken particular steps to keep you engaged – it's great for organizations to know when they are being successful.

If you are not feeling the same passion as you initially did, however, identify what you would like to change. This is a common experience that can be solved once you know the root cause.

Here are some examples, along with some suggested solutions.

• *"I'm just not as interested in this issue as I thought I was."* This is normal. It's often hard to know how interested you are in something without having experienced it directly. If the passion just isn't there, revisit the steps above and identify an area that you are truly inspired by so you can make change and enjoy the process.

• *"I am frustrated with my current role."* In some cases, the opportunities available within an organization are not the right match for your skills and interests. When this happens, voice your experience and desired role to leadership, clearly articulating exactly what you're seeking. If the organization does not have a good fit, ask for recommendations for other agencies where you can look for opportunities.

• *"I don't think we are really addressing the problem" or "I think I have a better solution."* First, remember that making lasting social change is a long and time-intensive process and the pace is often tied to the scale of the issue.

If you still believe that the model could be improved, communicate how to the leadership. Ask if there are ways for you to lead an initiative to improve outcomes and impact.

If you think you have a new and different solution, ask if they will let you pilot it within the agency's existing framework. While some will not be receptive to your ideas or won't have the resources to implement them, ask if they can recommend another organization for you to work with.

Transforming your inspiration into action is a bold and exciting step towards making Greater Boston a better place. Your efforts will positively impact those you work with, those you serve and yourself. This holiday season, be inspired to take positive actions to better the community.

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