



REBECCA GREEN | SBJ

From left, nonprofit CEOs Janet Dankert, Jaimie Trussell and Mike Powers address the pressures of being expected to do more with less.

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CEO Roundtable: Nonprofits



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Each month, we gather around the table with a different group of Springfield business leaders to discuss company operations, workforce and industry trends. Join us as we get a behind the scenes look into our business community from the C-suite. Now available as a podcast, the full discussion is available at [SBJ.net/CEORoundtable](http://www.SBJ.net/CEORoundtable) (<http://www.SBJ.net/CEORoundtable>). Below is an excerpt.

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Springfield Business Journal Executive Editor Christine Temple discusses workforce, revenue sources and demand for services with nonprofit leaders Janet Dankert, president/CEO of Community Partnership of the Ozarks Inc.; Mike Powers, president/CEO of The Arc of the Ozarks; and Jaimie Trussell, CEO of Council of Churches of the Ozarks Inc.

Christine Temple: There was a recent study done by Community Foundation of the Ozarks on the challenges that leaders at nonprofits are facing. In a recent 18-month period, 18 leaders of nonprofits actually exited their positions. A number of reasons were found for this by the CFO study: burnout, trends as part of the “great resignation” and challenges in working with board leadership. What are those challenges that nonprofit leaders face?

Janet Dankert: One of the key issues is lack of resources. I think a lot of nonprofits don’t always invest in infrastructure. So, it’s very easy to add new programs or get funding for programs for services, but then we don’t invest in infrastructure when that means we don’t have the resources to really grow and expand. And I think as a leader, it makes it more difficult to keep things going. Of course, staff turnover is also an issue. It’s a stressful job. Adding a pandemic on top has made it even more difficult and so, not surprised that there was an exodus. I do think that it also opens up opportunities for new leadership to step up.

Jaimie Trussell: During the pandemic, the pressure cracks that are always present in nonprofit workforce became even more apparent. Overhead and infrastructure were words we used over and over. So, things that worked fairly well, or at least were manageable pre-pandemic, we had to adjust all of our models, all of our timelines, all of our margins. We went from a face-to-face service organization to a distant service organization, and so those things

that we could manage before became fissures. In nonprofit, you are always on the edge of maxed out because people expect you to do all the things with less resources than your for-profit partners, and that's just a stereotype and an expectation that most places have. I think nonprofits bore the brunt of that in the last two or three years, particularly.

Mike Powers: At the Arc of the Ozarks, we're a large not-for-profit organization just on the cusp of 1,500 employees. We have a lot of various positions in leadership and middle management. And we haven't had quite the issues on the upper management, but middle management and entry level. Having a stable, well-trained workforce has basically been the greatest challenge and continues to be. We focus a lot on retention and coming up with strategies so that when we do get good employees, we maintain and we keep them. We've tried to add additional time off and (encourage) people to take time off so we don't experience the burnout. I think succession planning is very important. We try to take all levels of our organization and we plan for the future so we know that we have somebody on the back burner who we're working with and training and preparing, so that if we do have an opening, we've got somebody ready to slide right in. And then lastly, one program we created about three or four years ago, we started our own internal training program for leadership and management.

Dankert: I was going to jump back in and touch on the do-more-with-less philosophy that Jaimie talked about. I do think that is a significant challenge for nonprofits, and it's a philosophy that we need to change. That's a huge expectation on staff who are working many times with very hard cases, and one of the things I worry about is trauma that my staff face every day when they're dealing with hard cases. That's one of the huge challenges a nonprofit faces because they're expected to do more with less every single day. I think that is an unrealistic expectation that we are understanding now. It used to be something we would brag about. Yes, we are very lean, but that's not necessarily the best perspective when you're dealing with people.

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