

# Get **OUT** of YOU!

# RUIN

The longer one's been in the philanthropic field, the lower and lower in the "to do" stack the task of developing a formal approach to professional development usually slips. Yet attention to growth and renewal actually becomes *more* important as a grantmaker progresses in his or her career.

Fortunately, there are several ways to stay curious, current, creative and engaged in foundation work. There are plenty of things to do to avoid—or work through—feeling cynical, isolated or just plain burned out.

## **It Takes Commitment**

Professional development is not likely to happen unless you make a deliberate commitment to it. The commitment to renewal acknowledges that *you*, not your productivity alone, are the greatest asset you bring to the job. And the only way to stick to a commitment is to budget a portion of time, perhaps on a weekly basis, into your schedule. The decision to spend 10 to 15 percent of your time doesn't seem so difficult, but when you realize that translates into up to six hours every week devoted to learning and reflection, it might be difficult to maintain.

Time apportionment alone, however, is not enough to make you be able to withstand the pressure to forego professional enrichment in favor of the very real pressures of job responsibilities. That's why it's best to frame annual objectives, which can then serve as concrete yardsticks for measuring progress on a monthly and quarterly basis. A set of annual objectives serves as a reminder and a promise.

It is crucial to get buy-in from leadership. If you're an executive director, president or foundation administrator, professional development activities will require receiving board recognition for their importance. If you're a program officer or other staff member, your supervisor must be supportive (see "Dealing with Naysayers," page 34).

## **Leverage Your Peers**

One of the best strategies for professional growth is to schedule regular interaction with people you respect and share common values and interests with. In a word: network.

A sustained network of colleagues can encourage you to be creative and take risks. And because of better awareness of each other, you can delve more deeply into issues or relate current challenges to past experiences. But there are two caveats. Friendly colleagues are the most understanding of lapses between

**Has your learning curve flattened? Are you feeling burned out or isolated? Here are ways to renew yourself and your grantmaking.**

**BY LEE DRAPER**

**ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
ANDREW SHACHAT**

# Dealing with Naysayers

An ideal professional environment values training, educating and developing employees. However, getting a commitment from your organization to encourage professional development can be a matter of luck

The Council on Foundation's *Grantmaking Basics* (see [www.cof.org](http://www.cof.org) for details) provides some strategies for dealing with environments in which professional development may not be highly valued. For some grantmakers, it may prove easier to loosen purse strings and work different hours if professional development is framed by the formality of written annual goals.

Another way to make it happen: Allocate funds for professional development in the annual operating budget. This can appear as funds for books and periodicals, travel to meetings, fees for workshops, and even consultants to help sharpen specific skills.

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occasions to meet, and the "regular" part may fade. What's more, a closely knit circle that reinforces what you already know and do will rarely provoke new approaches or give blunt feedback that stimulates growth.

There are some specific ways to leverage your peers:

**Schedule time with "key individuals."** Identify people you admire and could learn from. Set aside time every month for one-on-one informal meetings that allow you not only to catch up, but also to support each other's values and aspirations. This can provide both a sense of connection

to others in the field and till the fertile ground for unanticipated collaborations and exchanges. It can overcome the isolation of working in a small office or with coworkers who don't share core interests or approaches.

**Form a learning circle.** A learning circle is a group of peers who gather regularly to explore grantmaking experiences. Information shared in the learning circle should be held in confidence, so that discussion can be open and incisive.

Typically, a circle will consist of up to about seven people who meet every six weeks for about three hours each time. During each meeting, a different member of the group facilitates discussion of a theme, case study or question that was identified at the previous gathering. Half of each session is devoted to structured discussion, through which all participants explore new ideas, challenge familiar assumptions, and encourage brainstorming and big-picture thinking in a safe environment. The other half of each session consists of informal time to share experiences, receive feedback related to compelling issues or new developments, or alert each other of upcoming events of professional interest. Members establish strong working relationships and should feel they can count on each other to provide counsel, information, or resources related to immediate questions and concerns between sessions.

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**FN&C asked, "How do you avoid feeling burned out in your job as a grantmaker?"**

**Change is Essential**  
**Robin S. Tryloff, President and Executive Director, Sara Lee Foundation (Chicago)**



The key word here is avoid. It's hard to snap back quickly when you've reached a state of professional burnout, so it's important to take active measures to keep it at bay. It's easy for the day-to-day tasks to become a focal point of your work. So take initiatives to ensure that you regularly seek new challenges, learn new things and take calculated risks. Growth and change are essential com-

ponents of a rewarding career. However, if you find yourself in a state of professional burnout, take the opportunity to stop and reflect on whether your psyche is telling you it's time for a change.



**Variety of "Jobs" Is the Spice**  
**Mary Thomas, Senior Program Officer, Spartanburg County Foundation (SC)**

I avoid burnout by doing multiple jobs within my role as a foundation professional. Grantmaking is more than reviewing requests—it's listening to your constituencies and just really becoming very immersed in your community. And when you do that, burnout isn't

something that should be an issue. You also need to find time for some R&R, because the work truly is never ending.

**Do the Part You Like**  
**Lara Iglitzin, Executive Director, Henry M. Jackson Foundation (Seattle)**



One of the things I do is spend time on the aspects of my job that I like the most. For example, I just went to Russia for a week to do some human rights work there, and I got to meet with 16 or 17 grantees. Having these intensive meetings with people who do this kind of work really energized me. I like meeting with people because I see the connection between what they're doing and what we're

To create a learning circle, look for people who might be at similar stages in their careers, hold positions similar to yours, or have similar value systems or goals. Developing relationships through involvement in a regional association of grantmakers (RAG) or a Council on Foundations affinity group can help identify peers for a learning circle.

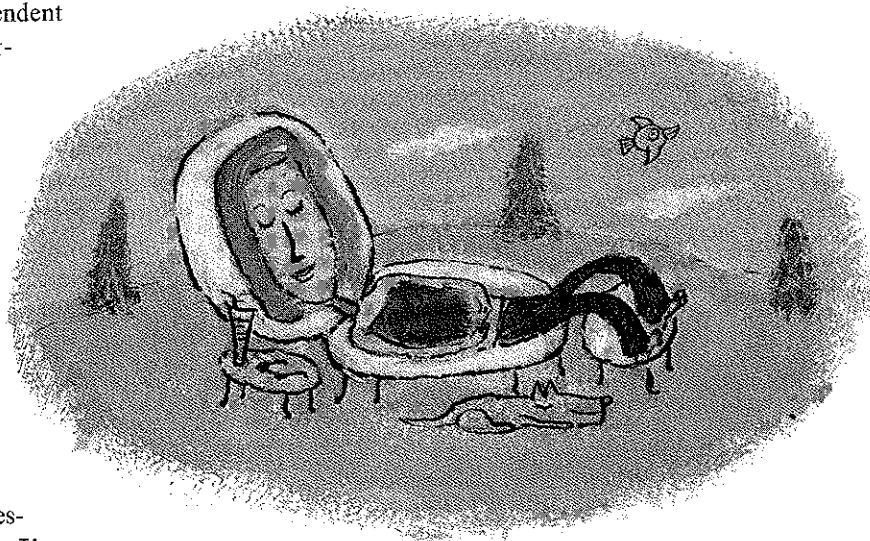
**Join a funding collaborative.** A funding collaborative begins when two or more grantmakers recognize they're interested in similar problems. It can entail pooling funds and sharing responsibilities or involve coordination of independent efforts to stimulate synergy and avoid overlap. By working with other grantmakers, you'll have opportunities to analyze issues from diverse viewpoints, challenge each other to ask tough questions and mobilize greater resources to undertake joint planning, needs assessment or evaluation that may not be possible individually.

The Los Angeles Urban Funders, for example, began when an ad hoc group of foundation executives and trustees started meeting after the civil unrest in 1992 to ask probing questions about the root causes of the rioting. These

funders of all sizes and types decided to establish a formal consortium based at the Southern California Association for Philanthropy (SCAP), a regional association of grantmakers. They pooled funding (\$5 million over five years), hired project staff, and developed objectives and strategies for addressing poverty and disenfranchisement in three neighborhoods.

Now comprised of 30 foundations, the collaborative has been a powerful tool for professional

**A set of annual objectives serves as a reminder and a promise.**



doing, and that inspires me. I also strongly believe in going to the gym. That's what I do when I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.

**Be Present**

**Sharon B. King, Executive Director, F. B. Heron Foundation (NY)**

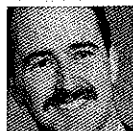


I try to pay attention to the first signs of "smoke" and head off actual burnout. For me, this means getting out of the office and off the management treadmill to spend time with the grantees. The purpose is not as much to evaluate a grant but to gain a better understanding of the work that actually makes a difference in the lives of people. That's the connection to what we do as grant-

makers. It is to be present when a family visits the site where its first home is to be built and the children show you their rooms. It is to walk the streets and witness the transformation of neighborhoods. If that doesn't snap me out of the doldrums, I really do need to look for a new job. Thus far, it's worked like a charm.

**Look in the Right Mirrors**

**Tim Dechant, Director of Technology, Kellogg**



**Foundation (Battle Creek, MI)**

I celebrate successes. All too often in this information-driven world, we don't stop to identify success, much less celebrate it. It

also helps to reflect on progress over a period of time. We're driven by the hectic nature of getting a hundred e-mails a day, but we need to stop to see where we were in 1997. I call it "looking in the right mirrors." And it helps to keep talking to people who will give you an honest sense of how you're doing.

**Every Five Years, Reinvent**

**Alicia Philipp, President, Community Foundation for**

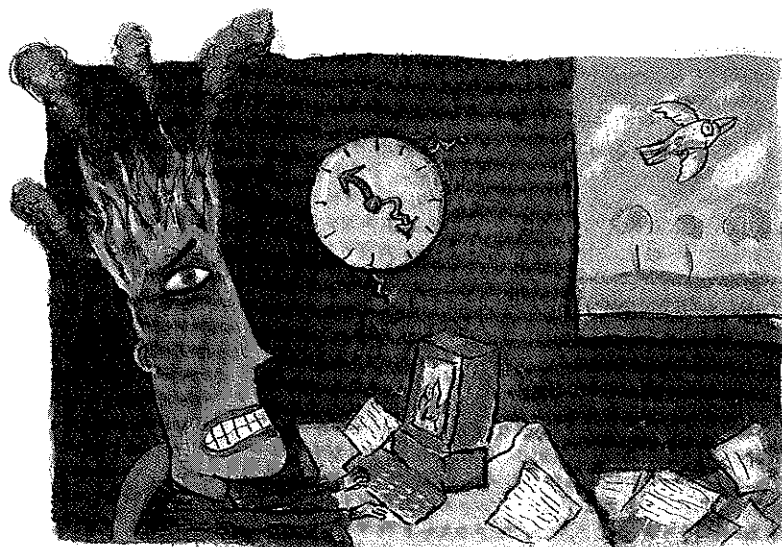


**Greater Atlanta**

The exciting thing about community foundations is that there's always a new project coming up. That's the reason I'm not burned out after 24 years. The most recent one is

development, as funders learn the challenges facing neighborhoods and develop collegial relationships with local leaders. Each funder serves on one of the Los Angeles Urban Funder committees, which meet monthly, and on its full board, which meets four times a year.

SCAP provides space and other support to the collaborative. Check with your RAG, affinity group, or other grantmaker organization to find existing funding collaboratives or other grantmakers who share your interests



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our intergroup relations program, where we're working with new residents, like immigrants and refugees, and longtime residents, finding ways to work together and build bridges. And I think every five years we sort of reinvent ourselves and think about how the community foundation reorganizes itself. That's exciting and energizing and has some great proven results.



**Take Time Away from Paperwork**  
**Gerri Mannion, Chair of Special Projects,**

**Democracy Program, Carnegie Corporation of New York**

I'm lucky that my job is very diverse. The

most difficult thing is writing up the docket—at one point we have three meetings back to back—with tons of deadlines. You have to do your own daily work as well as making sure the grant write-ups are done well. I try to take a break and do something very different, go out of the office or go on a site visit. It rejuvenates me and reminds me that the paperwork is only one part of it; I'm really trying to ensure that an exciting program is going to get funded. When I go see young people working on the program or I hear the results of a research project, it's rewarding to see that the money did mean something and it made a difference.

## Get on Top of the Information Curve

There are two general ways to keep abreast of relevant information and trends:

**Broaden beyond the funding world.** Becoming active in professional associations of nonprofit leaders can help you stay connected with the specific issues facing the nonprofits you fund. Membership will diversify your peer group and enable you to learn from policymakers, scholars and leading practitioners. With a little research, you can develop a list of organizations in your foundation's areas of interest whose meetings and publications you might enjoy

**Seek affinities within philanthropy.** Join an affinity group of the Council on Foundations to connect on a national level with other funders who share your concerns in a targeted area of interest. Affinity groups provide newsletters, seminars, conferences, publications, and other resources that can aid professional growth and development (Visit [www.cof.org](http://www.cof.org) and click on Links & Networking for a list of affinity contacts.)

## Go out into the Field

Continually going into the field can renew the meaning of foundation work. You can create trusting relationships with practitioners in the community. You'll see needs and find opportunities firsthand



**Know What Rekindles**  
**Ann Cramer, Regional Director of Corporate Community Relations and Public Affairs, IBM (Atlanta)**

Know yourself and know the things that bring you energy. For me, it's dealing with other people. Some people love to go run or work out or take a walk in a garden. Sometimes I can get really overwhelmed by a situation that's really hard or negative and I can get re-energized by giving a speech or going to a meeting, or so on—interacting with others. Also, I am a faith person, so quiet meditation and prayer work well for me. The essence of burn-out is not paying attention to what rekindles us.

# The Basics *Read and Join*

**Volunteer Service.** Serving on a nonprofit board or committee or volunteering directly in service delivery can expand your knowledge base. You'll learn by actually doing the work and gain a perspective from being on the "other side of the table." Constituents will expose you to realities of need through individual stories and will be a reminder of the grantmaker's position of privilege. Giving of yourself personally can also augment the rewards gained from professional grantmaking.

**Site Visits.** As well as being a crucial step in proposal review and grant monitoring, site visits are valuable for professional development. Approach visits with the idea that they're investigative fieldwork. Consider the staff and volunteer leaders you meet as teachers. Ask them about trends in the field and new approaches to solving entrenched problems.

## Get a New Role

Another strategy for professional development is, ironically, to encourage growth in others.

**Teaching.** Teaching requires the instructor to organize ideas, evaluate beliefs and conclusions, review current literature, and communicate. All of these activities sharpen skills and expand knowledge, benefiting the teacher as much as the students.

- Attend a Council on Foundations conference (see [www.cof.org](http://www.cof.org) for details). If your foundation isn't a Council member, encourage its leadership to join.
- Become associated with your regional association of grantmakers (RAG). Take advantage of RAG programs to develop grantmaking skills and peer networks. A list of 28 RAGs can be found at the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers Web site ([www.rag.org/rags/index.html](http://www.rag.org/rags/index.html)).
- Start reading and signing up for publications related to philanthropy, beginning with *Grantmaking Basics*, published by the Council on Foundations (try the online version at [www.cof.org/grantmakingbasics/index.html](http://www.cof.org/grantmakingbasics/index.html)). Also on the list are *Foundation News & Commentary* magazine and the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*.
- Join local nonprofit associations within your program areas.
- Look for a mentor—a seasoned grantmaker at another foundation—or a group of grantmakers you feel comfortable with, can share your passions and frustrations with, and can call for advice or assistance.

—L.D.

Offer to teach a seminar or facilitate a panel discussion at a gathering of a grantmaker association or another conference you've attended as a participant for the past several years. Explore teaching a course at a local college or university (especially if it has a program in nonprofit management or in an area of your foundation's programmatic interests). Consider asking a colleague to team-teach, so that the workload is shared and

## Time to Think Hard

**David Bergholz, Executive Director, The George Gund Foundation (Cleveland, OH)**



I've been here nearly 13 years, probably the job of greatest longevity I've had. What has kept me here is that I'm meeting new people and hearing new ideas all the time, which keeps things lively. Also, the staff on the program side of things has turned over; there are fairly extended periods where I served as a program officer. I've covered everyone's agenda at some point, so that's been very good for me to get out of the trench and have ongoing contact with the grantees. One thing that's unique to foundations is that you have

time to think hard about what you're doing. It's not that we don't work hard, because we do; it's that there's a certain security in the foundation world that you don't have when you're worried about meeting your payroll.



## Feeling Worthwhile

**Patricia A. Wright, Executive Director, The Community Foundation of Dutchess County (Poughkeepsie, NY)**

Surprisingly enough, after all these years, I haven't felt burnout. I enjoy and feel really rewarded by making grants. Each one is an opportunity to revitalize myself. I feel that what I do is worthwhile in the community, and, therefore, it's worthwhile to me.



## "Secure Your Own Oxygen Mask Before Assisting Others"

**JoMie Goerge, Program Officer, The Fetzer Institute (Kalamazoo, MI), and Trustee, The Colina Foundation (Southgate, MI)**

I do work that is an expression of who I am, so I bring the best of myself to it. Still, it's important to take a "time out" and to balance my life of service with the rest of my life. It's like the announcement flight attendants make just after takeoff: "In the event of an emergency landing, secure your own oxygen mask before assisting others." By remembering that I need to take care of myself, too, I am better able to serve others.

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you benefit from the collaboration with a peer you respect

**Writing.** Write an article on a topic you feel strongly about. Like teaching, it stimulates you to delve deeper. It also connects you to those who share your views and to others who sharpen your thinking by presenting divergent viewpoints.

**Mentoring.** Consider becoming a mentor, informally or formally, to someone who is new to grantmaking. Working with others who are fresh to the field and passionate about issues can serve to inspire and challenge grantmakers' traditional ways of thinking and behaving. The Council on Foundations is currently developing a mentor program to facilitate grantmaker involvement in developing and training other grantmakers

### Seek Balance and Reflection

Most people would say they already know that long-term career management requires a good balance between work and relaxation. Indeed, one must have sufficient energy to enable growth, fresh thinking and productive engagement with peers. Of course, it's easier said than done.

Although professional development may serve to keep you connected to grantmaking and help you avoid burnout, it's important to take care of your whole being. Take vacation time, spend time with loved ones, travel. Take time to do

something completely different from your professional activities. If you find that you are working too many hours, make a conscious effort to scale back.

Create opportunities for self-reflection. Schedule personal retreats—for as short as a half-day or as long as a weekend—that enable you to explore the big picture of your work. Write, plan and evaluate.

### Then, Celebrate

Don't overlook celebrating success as you move forward in your career. Once a goal has been accomplished, it's all too easy to focus on the next job to be done. However, it's important to commemorate milestones and accomplishments.

Take yourself, staff or colleagues out to lunch or buy something special for the office. There will be time after that to begin the cycle over again with your new goals. ■

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in a loving, compassionate and helpful way. The Fetzer Institute has been developing professional renewal retreats (we call them "formation retreats") to bring people in philanthropy together to ask the "who" questions. For example, "Who am I in my work? Who am I as I relate to colleagues, to grant applicants and recipients, and to others inside and outside the organization?"

### Use Different Skill Sets

**Doug Jansson, Executive Director, Greater Milwaukee Foundation**

I think the question relates to program staff rather than CEOs by definition. Having been a program officer, I am of the belief that good program staff shouldn't spend more than half their time reviewing grant requests. The other half should be spent doing research, providing technical assistance to nonprofits and a variety of other tasks that make the job more interesting—those tasks require a different set of skills than reviewing grant requests.



### Keep Priorities Clear

**Jennifer Leonard, President and CEO, Rochester Area Community Foundation (NY)**



I have been using tennis for seven or eight years to keep my stress down and mental alertness up. I'm also a firmly committed family person who is not above scheduling family events with equal importance to business events.