

# Preface

The departing Executive Director (ED) meets with the incoming ED to ease the transition. As the departing ED is leaving, he hands the new ED three sealed envelopes and says: “As your work with this organization progresses, you will inevitably run into some rough times. I have numbered each envelope: 1, 2, and 3. Open the envelopes in sequence, one for each episode. I hope the advice in them will enhance your tenure with the organization.”

Within the first six months a few minor rumbles begin and things are somewhat stressful. The new ED opens envelope 1 and reads: “*Time to blame the problem on your predecessor.*” The new ED begins to imply the problem is related to what her predecessor left behind. The problem quickly resolves itself.

Four years pass and again the Board of Directors and staff are restless. One day the ED notices envelope 2 in her desk and quickly opens it to find this message: “*Time to reorganize.*” The ED starts reorganizing the staff, administration, fundraising, and programs. The problem that was festering soon dissipates.

The ED is a few months from celebrating her tenth anniversary with the agency when the relationship with the Board begins to change significantly. It seems that when she says an issue is white, they perceive it as black. She sees many other indications that she is in deep trouble with the Board. One evening the ED is working

late when she comes across the third envelope. She quickly remembers how helpful the two previous envelopes were, so she opens it and reads: "*Time to prepare three envelopes.*"

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Some nonprofits have to hire a new ED every few years, while others may go for decades without a change. An ED's departure is one of the most significant events that can occur in a nonprofit organization. How this departure is managed and how the next ED is hired and welcomed will determine the success of the organization for many years to come. Nonprofit organizations have enough challenges today that create instability and threaten their survival without having to fear the inevitable executive transition.

This book was written to assist nonprofit organizations with executive transition and inform them of the process and concept of transition management services (TMS): a compendium of activities that form the bridge between the organization's previous ED and the new one. Members of Boards of Directors, people currently serving as EDs, and private and public funding entities that invest in the nonprofit sector will find its contents helpful.

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