Just When They Thought It Was Safe To Breath, Executives Had To Adjust -- Again

By Paul Cloery

The pandemic was mostly done during late 2022 and early 2023. Supply chains were getting back to normal. Staff members were starting to go back to the office at least a couple of days a week.

It was about that time that the pandemic's trap door opened. Some executives might have thought the mailroom staff hadn't come back given the lack of checks in the mail. Fewer people were getting sick, but for some reason they could no longer find their checkbooks and credit cards to donate.

The war in Ukraine and hunger due to drought had executives at international relief organizations wondering how to do even the bare minimum but, somehow, they did better than that. Social justice remains a priority because for some reason Americans can’t find common ground on everything from basic rights to agreeing that we can disagree and still work together.

The past 12 months challenged the nonprofit sector’s most innovative minds. It has also been a year of rapid turnover in the sector’s suites.

Just as the sector has been influenced by events, so has this 26th edition of The NonProfit Times Power & Influence Top 50. Roughly one third (30%) of those honored have not previously been inducted into the club. Women outnumber men on the list for the second time, 30 to 20. It also is arguably the most diverse list of honorees.

The honorees have distinguished themselves as initiators, innovators and leaders who can redirect and rebuild vital nonprofits and their operations. An important criterion of the list is that the honoree must be a working day-in, day-out executive.

The 2023 honorees were selected from a group of roughly 300 nominated top executives. A committee of The NPT editorial staff, contributors and a few leaders plugged into executive movement were involved in the selection process. This is not a lifetime achievement award. The executives must have had an impact during the previous 12 months.

The fine china will be rolled out for honorees and their guests as they are feted in Washington, D.C., next month during the annual NPT Power & Influence Top 50 Gala at The National Press Club. The event is sponsored by Data Axle, DMC Executive Search, Grant Thornton, JMT Consulting, Mitch-Stuart, and Moore.

One of the honorees will receive the NPT Influencer of the Year award. Turn the page and discover why these leaders are exceptional.
Leaders at foundations with assets exceeding $1 billion often lose touch
level of intimacy in being at the street level. That’s how $238.2 million
members of 500 tribes in 50 states rely on Albert to advocate for them
Council, the National American Indian Business Leaders Organization,
more just, sustainable, and prosperous future. His words: Community
and the San Francisco Federal Reserve’s community advisory council.
Center for Accelerated Drug Discovery, her $85 million research and
can’t measure” and brings an entrepreneur’s mindset to data
outside the sector. She’s known for saying “we can’t fix what we
and resources. Advising and action are at her core.

Fred Blackwell
Chief Executive Officer
The San Francisco Foundation
San Francisco, California
Leaders at foundations with assets exceeding $1 billion often lose touch
with their communities. That’s not Blackwell: In his words, there is a level of intimacy in being at the street level. That’s how $328.2 million
got spent. He’s a national player with board seats at Independent Sector, the Northern California Grantmakers, the Bridgeman Group,
and the San Francisco Federal Reserve’s community advisory council.

Nancy Brown
President & CEO
American Heart Association
Dallas, Texas
The name has “heart” in it, but Brown is a warrior for equitable health, connecting science, technology, and overall public health.
Every impact can’t be included in a small space. Start with the AHA Center for Accelerated Drug Discovery, her $85 million research and innovation enterprise One Brave Idea, and the roughly dozen board and World Economic Forum leadership roles.

Phil Buchanan
President
Center for Effective Philanthropy
Cambridge, Massachusetts
Buchanan is the foundation world’s conscience, the type of probing that makes you roll around and remain sleepless because his pattern of the current philanthropic environment is frightening and on target. While others thought about the impact of big gifts on nonprofits, he examined impact on the organization’s leaders. Philanthropy is about people, after all.

Don Chen
President
Surdna Foundation
New York, New York
Chen works to show that a trust-based approach to philanthropy and a focus on impact and results aren’t in conflict but rather the opposite—they go hand in hand. He believes those involved in community economic development need to step up and show how to create a more just, sustainable, and prosperous future. His words: Community economic development is an essential U.S. institution.

Jim Clark
President & CEO
Boys & Girls Clubs of America
Atlanta, Georgia
With 4,300 U.S. locations and affiliated youth centers on U.S. military installations worldwide, even what Clark has for lunch has impact. He launched a new strategic direction, the Great Futures Impact Plan, focusing on academic success, good character and citizenship, and healthy lifestyles. To do this, he spearheaded a major restructuring of the national organization.

Abigail Dillen
President
Echoing Green
New York, New York
Dorsey launched a nonprofit, but her thinking transcends the tax-exempt world on issues such as structural inequities inside and outside the sector. She’s known for saying “we can’t fix what we can’t measure” and brings an entrepreneur’s mindset to data development and use. Her Racial Equity Philanthropic Fund blew past its $50 million goal and it’s now in excess of $73 million.

Sarah Kate Ellis
President & CEO
GLAAD
New York, New York
Ellis has evolved GLAAD into a powerhouse for advocacy and change, benefiting the LGBTQ+ community. She was key to organizing the first Presidential Candidate Forum on LGBTQ+ issues during the 2020 election, and has brought the issue to the World Economic Forum. She spearheaded a digital event highlighting LGBTQ+ response to COVID-19. Consumer brands court her thought leadership.
because to this day many are not in the room let alone at the table. She is changing philanthropic balance and thinking regarding the “illusion of the team as they make philanthropic investments worldwide, even if it sometimes...
The 2023 NPT Power & Influence

Mary A. Pittman, DrPH
President & CEO
Public Health Institute
Oakland, California
Pittman is showcasing how diverse stakeholders can work together and use data for healthier communities. Pittman built a workforce during COVID which would have been impossible had she not been an influencing voice in public health. Her ideas are shared throughout a network of 2,400 grassroots and community-based organizations in 29 states.

Suzanne McCormick
President & CEO
YMCA of the USA
Chicago, Illinois
McCormick’s has a very active couple of years, bringing more youth voices into advocacy and amplifying the volume of those voices for participation in board decisions and leadership, a model for other nonprofits. Youth-oriented or not. Her focus on mental health and her partnerships with others (the White House, Camp Counselors USA, Habitat for Humanity) builds bridges.

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Susanna Pollack
President
Games For Change
New York, New York
Gaming is now integral to influencing, advocacy and fundraising. There is no doubt that Pollack isn’t “camping” and doesn’t have a “cool down” period. USC has become an important influencer in the sector. It is “sandwich” in its own right and Pollack is “powned” of this realm. (Sorry, you’ll have to look them all up.)

Eboo Patel
Founder & President
Interfaith America
Chicago, Illinois
Patel was thinking about diversity to serve long before it became a national mantra. He has worked with every entity imaginable to make faith a bridge of cooperation rather than a barrier of division. Once a self-described “hair-on-fire activist,” he is pulling together faith-based and youth nonprofits to evolve to understanding others, as he personally did.

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Gail McGovern
President & CEO
American Red Cross
Washington, D.C.
If the sector was a rock band McGovern would be the quiet Beatle whose driving beat moved everything forward. By quiet, there’s no longer controversy surrounding one of the nation’s most important nonprofits. Her mantra of try new things and if it doesn’t work, try something else also has been the foundation to regulating issues that long plagued ARC. She is an inclusive problem solver.

Alison Moore
Chief Executive Officer
Comic Relief US
New York, New York
Moore is so much more than a celebrity connector. She is a visionary on workforce issues who juggles entertainment, media and international management. The Kids Relief online gaming initiative, which supports young people’s ability to drive change, is simply genius with many nonprofit managers just now figuring out the importance of gaming.

Michelle Nunn
President & CEO
CARE USA
Atlanta, Georgia
Under Nunn’s leadership, CARE directly reached 174 million people in 111 countries. She was among the first executives to embrace digital currencies and turned the donations into crypto-based vouchers for women and groups in Africa and Latin America. She’s proving cryptocurrencies are a viable and effective option to deliver aid with CARE now accepting 78 digital currencies.

Una Osili, Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Research and International Programs
Lilly Family School of Philanthropy
Indianapolis, Indiana
Just about everyone’s favorite philanthropy economist, Gail’s hands up some of the most important sector-wide research. Her explanations are designed to be inclusive and accessible by all who are interested. She founded Giving for Life, a digital platform that provides new data tools for philanthropy and social impact.

Barron Segar
President & CEO
World Food Program USA
Chicago, Illinois
Check your wallet after you meet with Segar. It will be empty. He is one of the most effective fundraisers in his effort to prevent a couple million people from starving to death. The organization has had explosive growth on his watch and his depth of knowledge on the international politics of hunger will save lives and should spur more people into action.

Douglas Rutzen
President & CEO
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
Washington, D.C.
There is no international civil society crisis that Rutzen hasn’t had a hand in trying to quell or at least reducing the heat. He is often called on to work behind the scenes in the response to many attacks on democracy and civil society, whether the backing away from the White House or from leaders abroad. He’s a vital counselor to other nonprofit leaders working in desperate parts of the world.

MacKenzie Scott
Philanthropist & Author
Seattle, Washington
It’s $15 billion and counting — all unrestricted, trust-based giving. Sector leaders have encouraged trust-based giving. Scott leaders have encouraged trust-based giving. The NeighborWorks Center for Foreclosure Solutions is a model that can be used by others for their challenges.

Marietta Rodriguez
President & CEO
NeighborWorks America
Washington, D.C.
Rodriguez is a walking ad for leveraging public-private partnerships, leading a network of 245 organizations and nonprofit partners helping low-income families with home ownership, foreclosure prevention and community building. Her knowledge of the program is firsthand. The NeighborWorks Center for Foreclosure Solutions is a model that can be used by others for their challenges.

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Perspective on the Nonprofit Sector: The Influence of Shannon McCracken, CAE

Shannon McCracken, CAE
Chief Executive Officer
The Nonprofit Alliance
Washington, D.C.
It is astonishing how much and how quickly one person can impact multiple silos of the nonprofit sector. McCracken has expanded an association for direct response fundraising to almost every aspect of running a nonprofit, especially regulation and professional education. She’s made room under the tent to strengthen all associations and charities. Her impact is felt nationwide.

Jonathan Reckford
Chief Executive Officer
Habitat For Humanity International
Atlanta, Georgia
Reckford is more than the trailblazer at HFHI. He’s led the field to understand the economic realities of community, bringing together people from every silo. Reckford lives his words that service is the antidote to polarization, and that you don’t have to agree with people to work or engage with them. He’s chair of Leadership 18 and an active participant at global economic forums.

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www.thenonprofittimes.com
Rusty Stahl
Founder, President & CEO
Fund the People
Brockton, New York
Stahl spends his days convincing funders that the sector needs to be talent-investing. It is about the “human health” of an organization. He is not coming to this lately. It has been his focus for years. Academic institutions are finally catching up to what he has been preaching. His podcast on the inner working of organizations is an illuminating experience.

Mark Suzman
Chief Executive Officer
The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Seattle, Washington
Suzman was greeted with a pandemic when taking over the top job and pivoted the organization to expand its already strong world health policies to focus on COVID-19. Billions of dollars were deployed for vaccine development and distribution to less resourced areas of the world. More importantly, he has instilled calm at a foundation known to be less than disciplined.

Henry Timms
President & CEO
Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts
New York, New York
Timms received the Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) from King Charles III, citing his service to the arts and philanthropy. GivingTuesday was his idea while leading 92Y. He’s an award-winning author on philanthropy and is now turning the storied Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts into a street party, connecting and influencing New York City’s cultural community.

Fay Twersky
President & Director
The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation
Atlanta, Georgia
Twersky was already the person behind many shifts in philanthropy through her push for funders and nonprofits to hear from those they seek to help. Now she is possibly the biggest philanthropic force in Georgia, also serving on the leadership team of the Blank portfolio of socially-minded enterprises, including the Atlanta Falcons, Atlanta United, PGA TOUR Superstore, and Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

Victoria Vrana
Chief Executive Officer
GlobalGiving
Washington, D.C.
Nonprofit infrastructure and finance have long been her stock in trade. She boosted the body of work for “everyday giving” and along with it the capacity of organizations that share that mission. She understands that money is nice, but it means little if you don’t have systems in place. Vrana was an early booster of the unsexy sector infrastructure pushing innovation and data use.

Darren Walker
President
Ford Foundation
New York, New York
Whether it’s nodding your head in approval or side to side in disbelief, there is no arguing that Walker is unconventional in what the foundations chooses to fund. His varied professional background in law, finance and philanthropy, coupled with having grown up in poverty, push the foundation’s agenda to make $1 billion bets on human capacity and the potential of people.

Angela Williams
President & CEO
United Way Worldwide
Alexandria, Virginia
This could get interesting in a hurry. Williams has been issuing statements on the horrific gun violence and just might have the community-by-community muscle to make a difference. She is evolving herself an international presence while keeping a focus on local issues. Williams understands that local impact emits energy waves of renovation.

Tycely Williams
Chief Development Officer
Bipartisan Policy Center
Washington, D.C.
Williams isn’t just a world class fundraiser. She is the embodiment of nonprofit leadership for the next decade. Williams is a sought-after thought leader on fundraising, DEI, the state of the sector, interpreting research and organizing to develop consensus. She lends her strategic thinking to numerous committees and boards throughout the sector.