

## Concord Leaders Podcast, Episode 008

### Mark Vogelzang – Influencing & Growing Organizations

Marc Pitman:

Welcome to the Concord Leaders Podcast. I'm Marc Pitman, CEO of the Concord Leadership Group, and today our guest is Mark Vogelzang. Mark is the President and CEO of Maine Public Broadcasting, which is the NPR and PBS Stations for the whole State of Maine, and he's one of my favorite people that I ever get to talk to. He's not only been the President there for a number of years, but he was also the President of Vermont Public Radio for around 16 years, and he's served in leadership in the NPR Foundation. If there's anyone who's ever been experienced with leadership over a lot of years, and a lot of change, it's Mark Vogelzang. Mark, I'm so glad you're here today.



Mark Vogelzang:

Glad to be here, Marc. This is a lot of fun and I'm a big fan of yours, as well, so it's a delight to be on your program, and on your podcast, and on your helping to talk about something that I know is very near and dear to your heart.

Marc Pitman:

Well, thank you, so as I ask all guests, and as we were talking before we started the podcast, with all the leadership experiences that you've had, what do you enjoy most about leading?

Mark Vogelzang:

I love the fact that you can influence an organization's direction. Your institution's direction when you're the CEO, and that is a very important responsibility that you have in your role as CEO. Because what I've learned over the years is that the Board looks to you as the expert. Your donors look to you as this person, if you will, holds the keys to the kingdom, and your employees look to you, and your stakeholders look to you. As a CEO of a public broadcasting institution, whether it's in Vermont, or NPR, or here in Maine, I love the idea that you can influence the direction of the institutions. Now you can't do it alone. As I said, stakeholders are really important, but you can help influence, and I use the word influence in that way. That, to me, is really good, because organizations take a lot to move direction and change course. That's what I feel like one of the things I enjoy the best.

Marc Pitman:

I like that you said, "Influence and help influence." It popped into my head when you said that just now was not dictate, but influence.

Mark Vogelzang:

That's right. Years ago, I read a very good book by a fellow who ran a Michigan company, and it was ... I'm forgetting the name of the company. It had to do with being a servant leader, and you do need to be subservient to your Board, and work with your staff, like they're colleagues, friends, who know more than you do, but you can also show a vision for what might be the potential for a

project, for a direction, for a capital campaign, that's really terrific and very satisfying in a career.

Marc Pitman: Now let me ask you. You're talking about the Author, and I'll put a link to this on the page, is Max De Pree and the company was Herman Miller. He wrote Leadership Jazz and Call to Serve, which are two just amazing easy reads, but hard to implement because they are so profound. What have you seen as you're working with a leading non-profits that's different than maybe in the for-profit sector? Because you mentioned that you have to serve the Board, and that's not, many business leaders don't think of it that way when they're leading their organizations.

Mark Vogelzang: I think working with the Board of Directors and having the right people on your Board is the critical thing. Because, obviously, if you're working in a small organization, and your Board is still selling tickets, or helping do bake sales, that's a different level of Board responsibility than a Public Broadcaster Board, but we're not associated with the University, or we're not owned by the State Government, so I'm talking about an independent Board of Directors that can help guide the basic principles of what we believe public broadcasting should be doing.

In our case, being an NPR Station, having a classical music network, and of course, this amazing television network called PBS, that we are responsible for and there's tens of thousands, literally of viewers and radio listeners everyday who tune in and count you to be there technically, so there's both this technical thing and also, of course, the money-raising thing that's really, really important. I love the challenge of that and you need a Board of Directors that is in line with what you're trying to do with your organization. Whether it's an organization that helps needy people, so it's a charity, or it's a service organization in the community, or it's something bigger in terms of education or environment. All of these are important in your community. Find the people who are passionate about your mission and bring them onto your Board.

Marc Pitman: I guess that makes it easier to serve, because when you have Board members that aren't as passionate, it can be harder.

Mark Vogelzang: We all do. Yes, that's right.

Marc Pitman: That leads to the next part of these podcasts, which is describe a time that you've had a challenge as a leader and tell us a little bit about how you handled it.

Mark Vogelzang: For me, the biggest challenge was, this past two years. It was not a capital campaign, but we had decided, and it was very clear from evidence, that we were not being as effective. In order to grow our audience, we wanted to launch a new Classical Only Channel. In other words, on radio, take the classical music and build a whole new network for the classical music and jazz and opera that

we had on our air. It had 30 years of that being a tradition here in Maine, so touching that was like a third rail.

People said, "You cannot change that lineup of music that people love during the daytime," but slowly and methodically, we built that, but it was a real struggle, and my own ego got in the way of that. I was trying to push too hard, and finally when I let somebody else explain to my Board and the Staff, brought in some experts who said, "Here's why it will help the organization grow a new line of revenue, serve more people better, and actually, you can be successful." I had to let go of that, and when that happened, it was a moment where the Board coalesced, the staff coalesced.

We all said, "Yeah, let's do this." That was a two year, very challenging, very rewarding, but very, very challenging effort that I undertook. I admit I was not good. I would do it differently this time around, next time around, but and there were personal challenge that I was facing, but also through it all, the Board of Directors was helpful in that they kept saying, "All right, so prove it to us. Show us how this will work. What's next?" They asked a lot of questions, and we just had to continually answer, me and my Executive Team, had to answer those questions.

Marc Pitman: That was a positive prove it to us. It wasn't a passive aggressive-

Mark Vogelzang: Yeah, it was. There were some of those questions inside that, inside that prove it to us with, "You're not from here. We do it differently in Maine, and you could fill-in that blank for any city you're in in America."

Marc Pitman: Right.

Mark Vogelzang: Because everybody feels their place is special and unique.

Marc Pitman: Of course it is, but it's special and unique in many similar ways, as many other communities.

Mark Vogelzang: Correct, and donors and supports of your organization understand. It goes back to that issue of leadership and saying, "Folks, here's what I think we could do together. What if we contemplated this? How would that work?" Ask those questions as a leader and show them a path that it might work for them.

Marc Pitman: Now I remember being in one of the meetings, that one of the experts you'd brought in was in, it strikes me that so much of storytelling, what we're learning with corporate communications, and communicating to influencers and donors is very much that, if you have statistics and graphs, you're going to reduce fundraising. You need to tell stories of impact. What struck me was how comforting it was to have somebody up on stage, show graphs and charts, and the pathways of stations that had done what you were pushing for and wanting, and stations that had kind of just maintained the sort of one size fits all format,

and how they had diminished while the other ones had increased. For me, I just remember the shock in the room, because I went in there expecting to have to do some clean up, too. I didn't expect everybody to be on board as much, but it really captivated people. How did you find somebody with those stats?

Mark Vogelzang: Well, it was part of ... It's a big network, and I think every non-profit organization is similar. It just helps to have somebody from the outside with a different perspective, that understands where you're going, and can help tell your story in a little different perspective, and that's what happened. There were lots of charts and graphs, which helped, but it was also a convincing story about how these other organizations had made the shift, and they didn't go bankrupt. They didn't get in trouble, and they served more people. That was the success there.

Marc Pitman: That's true, because it was all this guy's personal experience, too. He was able to really meet people where their fear was.

Mark Vogelzang: Correct.

Marc Pitman: Acknowledge it. That's really true. He wasn't just kind of running roughshod over them. That's really powerful. When you said that about other industries, too, I'm thinking, "The library there is some really good research and graphical research that libraries could use," so yeah, I think looking outside of just your non-profit's own research, but looking for something within your space can be really helpful that way.

Mark Vogelzang: Yeah, yeah, someone who you think would also work with your staff or Board, who could be ... That's a judgment call, but finding somebody who you think has a comfort level that would not come in as the expert, but coming in as an expert who understands who they are and where they're coming from, so that was helpful.

Marc Pitman: That is a good ... I'm taking that down. Not as the expert, but an as expert. That's a really interesting separation there. Good. Well, I appreciate your vulnerability into sharing the last two years, and congratulations. Tell us a little bit about how, at the time of this recording, how the transition is happening.

Mark Vogelzang: Transition has been broadly well-received. There's still people who stop me on the street saying, "Hey, I don't like this. I need a Classical Music Station," but it gave us an opportunity, also, to fundraise around this project. That was a real wonderful success story. I would say for advice for people is take one of your donors to lunch today, or a cup of coffee, and ask them why they're giving, and what do they want to accomplish by giving to your organization? That's been very helpful, for me, as a non-profit leader to do that. Just take a donor for lunch or coffee today. Don't ask them for money right away, but ask them for advice.

Marc Pitman: Wonderful, wonderful advice there, Mark. Thank you so much, and I know that people are going to want to listen to this over and over again, because there's so much about how to influence and work within your Board, and influence as a leader as you're serving. I also have the links to the Max De Pree books up with this podcast.

Mark Vogelzang: Good. Thank you for that. I had forgotten his name, but that's excellent.

Marc Pitman: Where can people reach you if they want to learn more?

Mark Vogelzang: You can reach us at [mainepublic.org](http://mainepublic.org). That's our website, [mainepublic.org](http://mainepublic.org). You can also reach me at [mvogelzang@mainepublic.org](mailto:mvogelzang@mainepublic.org).

Marc Pitman: Great, Mark.

Mark Vogelzang: I'd love to chat with anybody about this idea of raising money and building a Board. It's a very difficult, but a worthy and noble endeavor.

Marc Pitman: It becomes rewarding for the effort you put into it, just from your own personal experience, I can tell.

Mark Vogelzang: Yeah, very much so.

Marc Pitman: Well, I know people are going to want to listen to this, and you can listen to this episode, and all the other episodes in the Concord Leaders Podcast at <http://concordleadershipgroup.com/podcast/>. Until next time, remember, healthy non-profits start with healthy leaders.