

# Concord Leaders Podcast, Episode 016

## Mary Pat Corrigan – Identifying Strengths and Melding a Team

Marc: Welcome to the Concord Leaders Podcast. I'm Marc Pittman, the CEO of the Concord Leadership Group. Today, our guest is Mary Pat Corrigan. She's the CEO of Volunteers in Medicine in Jacksonville, Florida. Mary Pat, it's great to have you here.

Mary Pat: Oh Marc. Thank you so much. I'm looking forward to this.

Marc: I am too, having just been in Jacksonville as we're doing this recording just a week or so ago. It's fun that we are able to make this connection. As you know from our communications beforehand, I like to have CEOs or executive directors on the podcast and just them, what is it that you enjoy about leadership. So I ask you, what is that you enjoy about leadership or leading?

Mary Pat: Several things, one is to be able ... Leadership is about working with others. Nobody can do anything by themselves. That is fun and to identify the strengths that different people bring and meld that together to form a team. It's something I enjoy doing. I also coach basketball and you have a common vision, you want to win the game but the parts differ and the skills differ so you got to figure out how to blend all of that and business successful. That's a challenge that I enjoy. Creating a vision and implementing, getting something done that makes a difference is really what drives me and what I think drive most nonprofit leaders.

The challenge is doing that with all the other things that come up during the day and ensuring that you can still stay on that path. That's a huge challenge especially if you're running a nonprofit and a small nonprofit where you don't have a lot of people resources. That whole challenge is what I enjoy and what I don't enjoy, all depending on the day.

Marc: Or the hour rate. Are there ways that you found, because I think that's something a lot of us struggle with is that big picture and the strategy and the melding the team together and looking at people's strengths and getting the other stuff done, that comes to answering the emails or budgeting or whatever else, the other administrator stuff that happens even if we have a team, are there rhythms or tools that you found that help you in accomplishing those, kind of keeping those in tandem?

Mary Pat: Yes and no. I will tell you, I have struggled with this. You can easily let the events of the day, the hour, the minute side track you. What I've tried to do that's a little more successful and I've also gotten a very good office coordinator who can help me keep a little bit on track is, "Okay, no, I'm going to put my head down and devote this two hours to this. I'm not going to let myself be side tracked by my email, by somebody



coming in with the crisis of the moment but I'm going to try to dedicate these two hours to working on a strategic initiative."

I haven't always been successful doing that. Sometimes actually, I'm a little more successful if I do something like go sit in the public library and do it versus staying in my office or staying at home to try to do it because in a public library, you really shouldn't answer your phone. Doing it in a venue like that sometimes helps me concentrate better.

Marc: It was interesting when you said focusing for two hours and not looking at email and other things. I was thinking about the last time the power went out and how much more productive I was. I couldn't get to my email. That's really interesting. Cool. As we know, leadership isn't always a bed of roses. Definitely there are things that come up as we've kind of been talking about. Is there a time in your time as a leadership where you've had to face something that didn't go the way you expected?

Mary Pat: Well, I'll give you an example. When I first started, so I am the CEO of Volunteers in Medicine for a whopping four days and understand I was also working my previous job because I was in consulting and this was a longterm client who had a major initiative implementing in those following months.

Marc: Wow.

Mary Pat: So I've been told during the whole interview process, "We have a couple of months of cash in the bank and that's normal. We have grants that come in on a regular basis and so we don't run out of money," blah, blah, "But we're not really sure, we're not comfortable with our financial reporting." So I came in in that first four days and I worked with the staff member and I put together a cash for cash. There was an already scheduled board meeting so this is not I didn't call a board meeting. So my first act as CEO of this organization was to stand and I'll never forget it, it was in a church conference room that had this really long table, to stand up and say, "If we don't do something, we're going to be out of business in a month and a half. There is no more money coming in this fiscal year. We need to do something."

Marc: Oh my goodness.

Mary Pat: I'll never forget it because all these people turned their heads and looked at me and said, "Well, what are we going to do?" It was just the defining moment of, "Oh my God. I'm in charge of this."

Marc: Welcome to your new position.

Mary Pat: Right, right. So what I did was I worked with some of the board members but I also, I had asked some very influential leaders prior to accepting this job their advise. I called up one of those people and I said, "Okay, here's the deal and what do I do?" She said, "Well, you need to come down and sit down with me and the CEO of a major health system here in town who's very influential and you can do that two days from now."

Those two leaders spent an hour and a half of their time. I mean, you couldn't pay for this level of advise and consulting. I mean, they spent an hour and a half of their time advising me on the next steps, what to do, et cetera, and who to communicate with and how to make that happen.

The combination of that, their support, and we came up with a fund raiser and fund raising, I had really, really little experience with. It wasn't anything I have ... We came up with an appeal and we made it happen. But that would be the most kind of defining moment.

Marc: Absolutely, yeah, that, "I'm in charge of this." Oh no, boy. That's amazing. How long ago was that?

Mary Pat: That was three years ago.

Marc: So it definitely works. Wow. What a shocker, I'm still feeling a little of my ... I think when you said four days into your position and you've been told there is a certain amount of money, my adrenal glands started going nuts because I thought you were going to say that you were out of money. Wow.

Mary Pat: I'm sure several of your listeners can relate to something close to that.

Marc: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I hear from CEOs all the time that fund raising wasn't part of their past experience and it's something and it's something that they've had to learn on the job so.

Mary Pat: I thought it was going to be the hardest thing I had to learn but part of it was a little bit of trial by fire so I got over relatively quickly the uncomfortableness of asking people for money. I also had an-

Marc: Because of the urgency or-

Mary Pat: Because of the urgency and the need to do it so quickly and it wasn't so much if we had closed, yes, there'd be staff impacted but everything but every single one of the staff, we only had six staff, we're very employable. But it was really the 1,700 patients that wouldn't have anywhere to go. That was the real-

Marc: Wow, that's great. Not that they wouldn't have anywhere to go but what's great is that what motivated this all was the vision.

Mary Pat: Right. That still is what motivates and that's the reward is I walk to the waiting room or I get notes from people. We are a integrated primary specialty mental health and eye care clinic for working uninsured individuals and their families. So the people who are in the waiting room are all people that are working hard to support their families and contribute to the community and so you get your reward walking through there and then from the notes or the emails that you get that say, a lot of them say, "I have been working for 30 years, always had insurance. Something changed in my job and now I

don't have insurance and I need your help and then I came to you." Last of them actually say, "And I had something that the doctors ..."

One of them said, "The doctors I've paid couldn't figure out but you guys figured out what was wrong with me and I'm now better than I ever have been in my life." Then a lot of the people on to a job which has insurance and great and that's a great goal. So there are rewards for all the frustrations.

Marc: That is so good. Well, thank you so much for your sharing that too because I know both with the time management, loving, putting the team together, but also having to do the other stuff, I think that's a constant, something that many of our listeners will be able to relate to but also that having the trial by fire fund raising and having those trusted advisers that you could, that were willing to pitch in and help you formulate a plan, that's wonderful. If there is one strategy or tip or one thing you'd recommend people do after listening to this conversation, what would that be?

Mary Pat: It would be to try to organize their time better, what are their priorities and carve out time for each of those priorities. I had a leader that I worked for once that said 30% of my time should be managing this organization, 30% of the time should be working with my peers, 30% of the time should be doing things for the board and 10% of my time should be self development and he did a pretty good job of that. I don't do as good of a job as he does with that but I strive to segment my time appropriately. If one strategy doesn't work, don't sit through it, try a different strategy.

Marc: That's excellent. Mary Pat, thank you so much. This has been really enjoyable. Where can people find more about Volunteers in Medicine?

Mary Pat: You can go to our website at <http://www.VIM-JAX.org/>.

Marc: Wonderful. Thanks again for being a guest here. I know people are going to want to listen to this over and over again, this episode as with all the episodes of the Concord Leaders Podcast can be found at <https://concordleadershipgroup.com/podcasts/>.

Until next time, remember that healthy nonprofits start with healthy leaders.