Insights on 30 Years of Leadership

“Time is a very interesting concept,” says Gidget Hopf philosophically. “We always hear ‘Time flies!’ The reality is, it does.”

As Gidget reflects on her 30 years leading the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI), an affiliate of Goodwill of the Finger Lakes, she knows that the wisdom she’s gained over that time has led to many insights about herself, her leadership style, and why making every day count is so empowering.

Stereotype Buster

When Gidget first came to ABVI to interview for the executive director position, she says she “looked about 15 years old” and that as a result there were people on the Board of Directors who were skeptical.

“Good things come in small packages,” says Gidget with a knowing smile.

Gidget explains that she saw the opportunity with ABVI as a chance for her to use her skills and what she had learned throughout her career to that point to make a difference.

“I didn’t plan it, but my whole career up until that point had been serving people with disabilities,” she says. “I have a soft spot in my heart for people

Gidget’s strong belief that people with disabilities have the ability to contribute and succeed regardless of their barriers worked hand-in-hand with her skills to help open doors for people and change attitudes.

“I like to think of myself as a stereotype buster,” says Gidget. Since arriving at ABVI, she has worked to enlighten everyone about the ability of people who

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I am pleased we are honoring my friend and colleague Gidget Hopf who will receive the Visionary Award at this year’s Gala in celebration of her 30 years as President/CEO of ABVI. The Visionary Award is presented to an individual who exemplifies the spirit of ABVI and demonstrates a long standing commitment to advancing our mission.

When Gidget joined ABVI in 1986, there were 127 employees and annual revenue was approximately $6.4 Million. Today, the organization employs 700 people with annual revenue of approximately $42 Million. In 1994, Gidget recognized and seized the opportunity to affiliate with Goodwill Industries International, adding significant resources and a retail business to ABVI’s existing manufacturing, food service and vision center units.

In 1998, under her visionary leadership, ABVI established a contact center with two employees. We now employ 75 individuals in the Contact Center, many of whom are legally blind. Our competence in this field has been nationally recognized and we have helped many other agencies across the country establish their own contact centers. Further, this infrastructure allowed us to provide 2-1-1/LIFE LINE with a new home when it was needed 12 years ago. This important community resource connects over 130,000 people each year to services that help guide them through challenges. We are especially proud of our team members who listen with compassion and counsel people contemplating suicide, especially our Veterans.

Most recently, Gidget has set her sights on educating people who dropped out of high school. The Excel Center is an adult education program that provides the opportunity for adults to complete their high school education and set a new positive course in life. It is a practical, efficient and cost effective way that has proven to be a huge success in other cities. Most importantly, it’s a two generational solution to ending the cycle of dropping out because we know that if parents reengage in their own education, so will their children.

Many of us are in awe of Gidget’s determination to bring the Excel Center to Rochester. Personally, I hope the Excel Center will ultimately be her greatest legacy.

We have been very fortunate at ABVI and Goodwill to have Gidget’s sound and transformational leadership for the past thirty years. We thank her for it and can only hope for more leaders like her.

“What you’ve [Gidget] done at ABVI has had a tremendous impact on the lives of thousands of blind or visually impaired people and their families. In my opinion, ABVI is truly one of the most outstanding agencies for the blind in the country.”

– Don LoGuidice, President & CEO
Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI), 1969-2007
Our Wish List

The kindness and generosity of our donors help us to offer the best and most up-to-date services possible. The following is a list of much needed items that are not covered by ABVI and Goodwill of the Finger Lakes’ budget. To donate funds to purchase any of these items, or to donate the items themselves, please contact Tracy Schleyer, CFRE, at tschleyer@abvi-goodwill.com or (585) 697-5780.

**Dog Booties: $90 ($18 per set)**
Of our 700 employees across ABVI and Goodwill of the Finger Lakes, 121 are blind or visually impaired. Many of these employees choose to work with a dog guide rather than use a white cane as a tool to travel independently. Similar to our human employees, our dog guide friends need to take a break during their workday. We provide break areas for the dog guides outside. We would like to have five sets of dog booties available at these areas so that the dog guides’ feet are protected.

**iPad for Adjustment to Vision Loss Groups: $750**
Through our Adjustment to Vision Loss (AVL) group series, participants are able to receive emotional support from others in similar situations, and coping techniques from our social workers as they adjust to their visual impairment. Because participating in the AVL groups can be difficult for those living outside Monroe County due to lack of transportation, we want to provide access to the groups by implementing the use of an iPad. Our ability to reach these individuals through this technology will help provide hope where hope was lost.

**Amazon Echos and Dots with Apps: $1,000**
It may feel like Star Trek, but it’s not! With a smart phone or tablet, and an Amazon Echo or Amazon Dot, you can use voice activation to do things such as search the internet, play music, and even turn up the heat. Our Vision Rehabilitation team is committed to being on the fore front of this technology and how people who are blind or visually impaired can use it to be independent. Our staff need to have these products available to demonstrate the capabilities to the people we serve either at ABVI or in their home.
- 4 Amazon Echos at $180 each ($720 for 4)
- 4 Amazon Dots at $50 each ($200 for 4)
- Apps specific to the Echo and Dot: $80

**SPOT Vision Screener: $8,145**
Our Early Vision Screening program provides vision screenings for children from six months old through kindergarten who attend Rochester’s ABC Head Start programs, child care centers, and other agencies serving at-risk children. The SPOT Vision Screener is used to conduct the screenings. It is easy to operate, non-invasive, yields more accurate results than any other screening method, and provides immediate results indicating if the child has passed the screening. If the child doesn’t pass, the screening results and information on how to access an eye exam are provided for the parent. Through this program, we are helping the youngest in our community see their world more clearly and provide a foundation for future success! We need to upgrade to the latest version of the screening equipment.

**Braille Paper: $500**
Our Multi-Media Center is located at our main campus, but people who are blind or visually impaired from around the world can access this very special service. Our dedicated group of Braille transcribers volunteer their time to create materials in Braille. Braille remains the only form of literacy for those who are unable to see regular or large print. It is truly the window to the world!

**Watch Display: $82**
Knowing the time is fundamental to living independently. Therefore, a watch is one of the most requested items by people who are blind or visually impaired. We offer an array of talking, large print, and braille watches. We are in need of a watch display and storage cart in order to display our plethora of watches in a neat and organized fashion.
U.S. Paralympic Swimmer Speaks at Gala

This year’s Visionary Gala speaker is Martha Ruether, a Paralympic swimmer who competed in the Rio games in 2016. First held in 1960, the Paralympics are organized in conjunction with the Olympics and include athletes with a wide range of disabilities.

Martha was born with 20/2400 vision in her right eye and no vision in her left eye. Growing up in the Southern Tier, she didn’t interact with other kids who were blind very often. That changed when she attended Camp Abilities at SUNY Brockport. The experience of being around other kids like her had a profound impact on Martha. She saw how other children who were blind or visually impaired interacted with the world and with each other.

It was also through Camp Abilities that Martha’s talent for swimming was recognized. Even in her early teens, her times were comparable with other Paralympians. In Rio last year, it was her turn to compete, swimming in the 50 and 100 meter freestyle, the 100 meter breaststroke, the 100 meter butterfly, and the 200 meter individual medley. She ranked eighth in the world for the 100m breaststroke and her time was a personal best at 1:20.48.

Martha is currently a junior at SUNY Brockport, majoring in psychology.

Dear Project Eye Care Team,

Two months ago, I received new eyeglasses through the Project Eye Care program. I am writing to thank you. It had been 15 years that I had bought my previous pair. Not one to replace things that didn’t need fixing, I kept them for years. When it became clear that I needed a new prescription, I put off buying new glasses several times. The economy had changed and so had insurance coverage. I had a very large deductible and no coverage for eyeglasses. A friend told me about Project Eye Care. I did not want to do it at first, but I finally contacted your organization. I have to say, I very much appreciated the respectful, skilled care I received.

With the voucher for Empire Vision I soon had my new glasses. What a tremendous thing this is! I can see better driving at night. I can hold books at the right distance. I can see text on my phone more easily. I feel confident going into work situations knowing that my glasses do not look scratched and worn. And I see something tremendous in our community – people who care. Thank you for what you do. You have made a difference in my life and in the lives of many others.

– Barbara D., Person Served
30 Years of Leadership, continued

are blind or visually impaired to be contributing, empowered members of the community. She continues to work today to overcome the belief that vision loss and blindness is the worst thing that could happen to you as a person. Helping people who have become blind understand that “not only is there hope after blindness, there can be happiness too.” Most of the people that come to us with a new diagnosis of blindness have difficulty seeing that at first. “That's what drives me. And that's what drove me back then.”

Transforming into a Leader

When Gidget transitioned into the role of executive director at ABVI, she had a transactional style that focused on getting things done. She was very much a “doer” with a driver personality.

“But there's a real transition that has to take place when you move from a direct role to leading people. Now all of a sudden you're not doing it, you're getting your work done through other people. And that is a whole different skill set all together,” says Gidget.

“I learned that if I really cared about the organization being successful, that I had to care about how my style and how I lead effects other people,” says Gidget. “My style was not fostering excellence. It was getting in the way of other people being effective.”

This realization caused Gidget to make a commitment to herself to change her style so that it would better the organization and the people who were a part of it. Gidget knew it would be a lifelong journey and from it developed her mantra: “Nothing changes until the leader changes. And when the leader changes, everything changes.”

Fast forward to today and the results of the hard work Gidget put in are easy to see.

“I think I am a much better leader today than I was back then,” says Gidget. “What I learned was that to take an organization to the next level you have to have leaders who grow with the organization.”

Excel in Learning

As evidenced by her willingness to change, and her openness to feedback regarding her leadership style, Gidget has demonstrated a committed belief in life-long learning. Her interest in understanding leadership, led her to enter into a doctoral program at George Washington University. She continues to seek new learning opportunities and fosters and encourages continuous learning in others.

Lifelong learning is one of the secrets to Gidget’s well-being; it is important to her to always have something to look forward to. She thinks about the importance of this for the people we serve and the people in our community who have so many barriers in their lives.

The desire to help others find something to look forward to through education has led Gidget to her next dream. She is working to bring the Excel Center model to Rochester to enable adults who dropped out of high school and never graduated to have a pathway to prosperity.

“It is not about solving everyone’s problems. It is about helping them to solve their own problems,” says Gidget.

This is an underlying thread that ties the Excel Center dream to all of the others that have driven Gidget to this point in her life. It is the thread of empowerment.
A memorial or honorary gift is a wonderful way to celebrate special occasions, honor a loved one, or pay tribute to the memory of family members or friends. Many generous people have found a way to express their caring spirit while helping to ensure the success of ABVI. As a thank you for your gift, ABVI will list your name and the names of those who you are honoring in our newsletter. We'll also send a note acknowledging your gift according to your wishes. For more information about making a memorial or honorary gift donation, please contact ABVI’s Development Department at (585) 697-5711. Thank you to the following friends who have made tribute contributions from October 1, 2016 through January 20, 2016.

HONORARIUMS

In honor of Matthew Alexander
Timothy and Karen Bancroft

In honor of Janie Baker
Ronald Behan

In honor of Liza Crudele
Donna Crudele

In honor of Michael Frame
Scott Frame

In honor of Joyce Ziegler Hills
Donalee Farrell

In honor of Gidget Hopf’s 30 years as President/CEO of ABVI
Dr. Cedric Alexander
William and Jason Barnecut-Kearns
Joyel Bennett
Paula Briggs
John and Linda Buttrill
CCRG Marketing Group, LLC
Wendy and Philip Clay
Donna Dedee Doyle
Michael and Suzanne Frame
John and Judith Henderson
Maggie Hopf
Cecelia Horwitz and Floyd Tucker
Joseph and Patricia Istvan
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In honor of Matthew Alexander
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Joseph and Patricia Istvan
Howard and Karen Kessler
Klein Steel

In memory of Joseph and Patricia Istvan
Patricia Warth

In memory of Eileen Kisel
Jeffrey Kisel

In memory of Jennifer Lake
Jane Miholland

In memory of Gwen K. Sterns
Susan N. Rosenthal, M.D.

In memory of Oliver Williams
Shirley G. Williams

MEMORIALS

In memory of Muriel Ackroyd
Anne Wolff

In memory of my sisters – Jean Cummings, Mary Lou Knapp and Helene Witzmann
Nancy Premo

Continued on next page.
In memory of John Daniszewski
Raymond and Mary Bleier

In memory of Eli Eckman
Karen Schuhle-Williams

In memory of Ruth Etter
David and Virginia Rice

In memory of Alice Faiello
Karen Dale
Kathleen and Dennis Farrell
Helen Hicks
Patricia Micklus
Frank Spang

In memory of Patricia Graves
Ronna Hudson

In memory of Kathleen Griffith
John and Elaine McCorry

In memory of Samuel Halaby, Sr.
Samuel and Jill Halaby

In memory of Hubert Hill
David and Linda Ayers

In memory of Harvey Holderle
Nancy Pearce

In memory of Mildred Komoroski
Lynne Giglia

In memory of Patricia Lago-Avery
Dilas Lago

In memory of Jean Fox Lee
Allan Anderson
Bruce Bates
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Bob and Robin Vavrina
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Ernest Whitbeck III and Mimi Whitbeck
Catharine Wise

In memory of Rose M. Meyers
E. Bryce
Sebastian D’Angelo
Michael and Ida Ferraullo
S. Lang
Eileen and William Meyers
Rena Jo Storti

In memory of Marian W. Neun
Mary Ellen and Peter Parry

In memory of James Parson
Janet Walton

In memory of Charlotte R. Russell
Jean Losinger
David and Joanne Poland

In memory of Ellen J. Ryan
Charles Johnson
Nathan and Carly Ryan
Clarence Waters

In memory of Abraham Saludo
Sheila Livadas

In memory of Henry R. Silberstern
Lynn Giglia

In memory of Peter Van Slooten
Joseph and Patricia Hammele
It has been said that rare is the person who regrets having been truly generous or thoughtful, and I believe that to be true. More often, well-intentioned people are sorry for not having done more to help others while they still could. I understand that passing down your treasure for your family and loved ones is always the first priority. In addition, many individuals also provide for the charities that they deeply care for. We are always humbled and grateful to the many individuals who include ABVI in their estate plans. Have you considered how you want to hand down to the next generation, whether that be to individuals in your family or individuals in our community who would benefit from your caring thoughtfulness?

Your bequest to ABVI will help so many, such as:
- a child with retinopathy learn to play safely just like their sighted peers in our Children’s Center, or;
- a parent with retinitis pigmentosa learn the skills needed to stay in the workforce through our Employment and Technology Program, or;
- a grandparent with macular degeneration learn to bake with a grandchild using techniques learned from our Vision Rehabilitation Therapists

If you are interested in making a bequest to ABVI and would like to become a member of our Foresight Circle, please contact me at (585) 697-5780 or tschleyer@abvi-goodwill.com.