



WHEN THE TIMING ISN'T PERFECT

Poised to begin Talent Initiative, Roca experienced a devastating tragedy. Could the process help the organization to heal?

An interview with Molly Baldwin
Founder and CEO, Roca, Inc.

The Kresge Foundation - AchieveMission Pilot to Strengthen Human Capital Practices in High- Potential Nonprofits

In early 2015 The Kresge Foundation partnered with AchieveMission in a pilot program to build the foundational elements of leadership development and human capital management in promising grantees. The core of the program, Talent Initiative, is a consulting, coaching and training engagement that helps organizations establish the leadership, culture and structure they need to implement their strategies and drive meaningful social change.

Six organizations were chosen for the pilot in a unique application and assessment process. For more information about AchieveMission and Talent Initiative, visit www.AchieveMission.org or call 800-834-0717 x700.

Molly Baldwin founded Roca, Inc. (Spanish for “rock”) in 1988 with an ambitious goal: to become intensively involved in the lives of Massachusetts’s most vulnerable, at-risk young men who would, in turn, eliminate their criminal behavior, find work, and go on to lead productive lives. And it’s working. Using a proven intervention model, Roca in 2015 served 659 young men, retaining 84% of them in the model. Of those engaged 24 months and longer, 93% had no new arrests, 88% had no new technical violations, and 92% retained employment for at least 90 days. Roca has, through these efforts, attracted national attention to the model and funding to support it. The current operating budget is approximately \$10 million and the organization now employs more than 80 full- and part-time staff.

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Molly Baldwin

Roca has big plans: expand in Massachusetts and scale to another state and develop plans for long-term scale and impact. But as the organization has sought to recruit new leaders and managers consistent with their growth goals, there have been challenges. “It’s been more difficult to recruit for certain roles,” Molly says, “and we’ve had more success with some than with others. We thought we had a sophisticated performance management system, but it was designed mainly for our program people. We needed some help with our structure, roles and onboarding process.”

Enter The Kresge Foundation, a longtime supporter of Roca, with a unique invitation: to apply for a grant to build and implement the foundational elements of leadership development and human capital management in the organization, and to work with nonprofit consulting firm AchieveMission to identify the challenges and develop

strategies to engage, position and support the organization's next generation of leaders (see insert). Roca was chosen for a pilot grant along with five other high-potential nonprofits. Roca's engagement with AchieveMission, which employs the six-month consulting, coaching and training program Talent Initiative, began in March 2015.

We sat down with Molly toward the very end of the engagement, to check in on Roca's progress and learn from their experience.

AM: Why was the Kresge invitation so compelling for you?

MB: We understood that as we were growing our structure was not accommodating the entire organization. We were trying to add a layer of management but did not have clear differentiation around roles and accountabilities. And although we have been very successful with a lot of our senior hires, mainly program people, we have had chronic problems with a few positions. We needed help to understand why and what to do.

AM: What did you expect to work on?

MB: Organization structure, roles, accountability, and on-boarding strategies.

AM: And then, just as you were beginning Talent Initiative ...

MB: We experienced a devastating act of violence that challenged us to ask a lot of questions. We work with extremely volatile and vulnerable young men. We literally go after them; we work with them in a long-term behavior model that is evidence-based and proven. Management and safety are at the core of our program. And we are highly scrutinized.

Following the incident, we needed to look at ourselves, our assumptions, our systems, and understand what we needed to do to improve. We would have done this in any case, but at times I thought to myself, we owe it to [the young man] to do this now in a different way than we had ever done if before.

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AM: How did this all affect the plan?

MB: Safety has always been a top priority and of paramount importance every day. However, we took this opportunity to look again at program structures, systems, talent development and human capital management with the lens of safety first and last. And I have to admit that we

went into Talent Initiative kicking and screaming. We had our own ideas about what the process should be. The AchieveMission team emphasized [the Talent Initiative] process. We were in a lot of pain, and the pain exacerbated the issues. I questioned: was this the best time? It turned out that [going through the process was] hard *and* helpful.

AM: What are the most important insights you're taking away from the work?

MB: There was tremendous tension within our team. We had been struggling with a vision of Roca five years out. But now, because of the incident, we needed to work on current reality. Being held to the process, to the meetings, pushed us.

The nine-box Talent Review session [using a nine-category assessment tool that evaluates employees' individual contributions and potential] broke something open. We had been doing different pieces of talent reviews, mainly for directors. Now we were talking about people's skills *and* potential, not only within our own organization but also as compared with people in like positions outside Roca. It was real-time and practical. And this led us to be able to look at the future.

AM: Who from Roca is involved?

MB: Mainly our leadership team.

AM: What is the AchieveMission team's part in all of this?

MB: Well, I think I have made clear that the team pushed us. They pushed their process, pushed the meetings. They are positive and hard working. I have found the coaching extremely helpful.

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AM: We've mostly talked thus far about the engagement from the point of view of you as member of a working team. How are you feeling as the leader of Roca?

MB: I have learned a lot. I tend to forget that as Roca grows, my role changes and carries implications with it. Sometimes I imagine that I am still a street worker. I've been too informal. I can't do that any more.

There are things I'm always working on ... I'm focused on our mission, and sometimes I've just addressed issues without necessarily creating process. For many years three of us have worked together like that. Now we are consciously working on doing something different as we tackle each problem. I learned that our decision-making was more confusing than I had thought. We need transparency in order to bring more Roca people into decision-making.

Each iteration brings another level of subtlety. I can come back to the data from Discovery now and think, oh, OK ... I couldn't see [the issues raised] then. Management and safety are a huge, huge thing ... how do I function, how does the team function, how do we get better? When is it that I'm in the way versus helping? There's always something to think about: the hard parts, the good parts, and the in-between.

AM: Molly, do you have any advice for other nonprofit CEOs who are thinking about leadership and talent?

MB: We had talked to AchieveMission a few years prior to receiving the Kresge grant and had decided that it wasn't quite the right time. I would encourage other CEOs to consider the timing: are you ready to look at yourself, your organization in this intense—but, again, helpful—way?