Thank you Anonymous, We Walk Beside You

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In case you missed it, the article “Walking the Walk is Frightening” (http://www.grantprofessionals.org/rc_files/474/Walking%20the%20Walk%20is%20Frightening.pdf) was released as part of the March 3, 2015, GPA Grant News, a weekly eblast for Grant Professional Association (GPA) members. The anonymous author provided a cautionary tale of becoming a federally protected whistleblower after accepting that, without intervention, the misuse of grant funds would continue. Anonymous wrote, “Becoming a whistleblower has been the most difficult professional decision I have ever made, and it has endangered my ability to be successful in many ways. However, it was the right thing to do.”

Those words, the entire article, in fact, resulted in a visceral reaction on my part. I felt the need to share this story, engage fellow grant professionals, and enlist the grant community’s aid in educating our organizations, bosses, co-workers, and fellow man about the importance of ethics in our field.

So, this is my letter to Anonymous, but more importantly, my letter to all my fellow grant professionals.

Dear Anonymous,

Thank you. Thank you for voicing your concerns to your organization. Thank you for doing your best to steer them in the right direction. Thank you for taking that giant and scary leap into the unknown by becoming a federally protected whistleblower. Thank you for seeing this through. Thank you for sharing your plight.

But most of all, thank you for understanding that ethics is the most important aspect of the grant profession. In my most humble opinion, the GPC credential means nothing without its tie to the GPA Code of Ethics. Who cares how well you can write if you cannot uphold the rules, regulations, and intent behind the funding entrusted to your organization by the grant maker? I do not care if you can bring in $5 million a year if you cannot hold on to that money through ethical practice.

It is my sincere hope that your article will bring forth a resounding response from the grant community, one that shouts their support for you from the rooftops. For far too long individuals have focused on the great commission debate whenever the words “grant ethics” are spoken. But that is only one tiny aspect of the conversation. As you referenced, the Grant Professionals Association Code of Ethics, of which I adamantly adhere to, requires members to “Practice their profession with the highest sense of integrity, honesty, and truthfulness to maintain and broaden public confidence.” That says it all. Follow this, and you will avoid any appearance of criminal offense or professional misconduct. Follow this
guidance, and you cannot help but obey all applicable local, state, provincial, and federal laws and regulations. Follow this, and you will be truthful about your professional skills and experience.

As ethical grant professionals, we understand the most important rule in this game: grant money is not ours. It is entrusted to us by another organization. Yes, we have the authority to spend it, but not freely. A grant award is a contract, tying the words and promises in our grant application to the funding promised by another organization.

We use that money to create and enhance programs and projects in our local communities, fundamentally improving the lives of our clients. Whether we are providing housing for the homeless, after-school tutoring for struggling students, or a new greenway trail for area residents, the grant money used to fund these projects and programs comes with strings attached. The biggest string of all is that the money is the funders, and we are just the stewards. We must spend the money as directed. Anything short of that is, at the very least, an ethical breach and, at the very worst, breaking the law.

We need to do a better job of encouraging our grant colleagues across the country to read (and reread) the GPA Ethical Code of Conduct. Better yet, we should encourage them to print it out and post it in their offices. It is a good reminder to ourselves and our organizations/clients why we are so particular. It is why we follow our budgets to the tee, why we track goals and objectives thoughtfully, and why we always check with our funding agency before making radical changes to our programming.

We all know that one news story about a grant professional misusing grant funds is all it takes to give us all a bad rap. Sadly, all one has to do is search “grant funds mishandled” to learn about agencies and individuals who did not follow the GPA Code of Ethics.

As I stated earlier, it is my sincere hope that your article will lead to the battle cry of ENOUGH! Enough sitting silently and waiting until the Office of Inspector General shows up to audit a program. Enough realizing that grant award regulations are being broken but being too afraid to speak out. Enough being afraid to question a strategy we know to be wrong.

Thank you for caring enough and shouting it loud enough for me to hear. I expect my fellow grant professionals, especially my fellow GPCs, to join with me in saying thank you. Thank you for standing up for what is right and encouraging others to do the same. My prayers are with you.

My best to you,

Amanda Duy