

Executive Director Happy Hour (EDHH)



Toolkit

Nonprofitwithballs.com

INTRODUCTION:

ED Happy Hour started in Seattle in 2011. At a meeting, several EDs were complaining about stress. A couple of EDs mentioned how great it would be if we all had a billion dollars and private yachts. That would totally alleviate our stress. However, yachts are kind of expensive (I think they're at least \$5,000 dollars each), so the next best thing is for us to have a regular time to hang out in a stress-free context. Hence, happy hour.

During the next few months, we EDs would bravely set aside our important work writing grants and yelling at staff to organize the first few EDHH gatherings. Attendance and excitement at these first few Happy Hours made us realize how important it is for us EDs to have a safe space to drink and to complain about stuff. No one except other EDs or ex-EDs can understand what an ED goes through.

Each month, on the second Friday of the month, from 4pm to 8pm, 7 to 18 EDs would show up. Our topics of conversations break down as follow: 25% complaints about board/staff/-consultants/volunteers; 40%, recipes of our favorite drinks; 15% complaints about our families/spouses, and how fast teenagers are texting these days. 20%, who would win in a fight, a hungover gladiator, or a ninja who accidentally took night-time cold medication; 5% Discussion of economics, funding, politics, and other global issues; 5%, why US students are falling behind in math.

Two years later, our mailing list reaches over 200 EDs across the US and is growing. The EDs who are not in Seattle have been lamenting the fact that they cannot easily make it to EDHH in Seattle. This toolkit is created in response, with the hope that EDs everywhere will use it to open a branch of EDHH in every city in the world.

In this toolkit, you'll find:

- Principles of ED Happy Hour;
- EDHH organizing structure required of each local branch;
- Suggested logistics;
- Points and titles that EDs can earn once they become members of EDHH;
- EDiquette guiding ED-to-ED interaction;
- Frequently Asked Questions about EDHH.

Good luck starting your local branch of EDHH. Please email the EDHH in Seattle at nonprofitwithballs@gmail.com if you have any questions or would like any assistance.

7 PRINCIPLES OF ED HAPPY HOUR

Principle 1: EDHH should be stress-free. We have enough meetings that we dread attending. EDHH should not be one of those meetings. So no agenda, and few rules. If an ED is hosting at his or her place, the house may look like crap because the ED had no time to clean. That's OK. You yourself may not have time to bring a bottle of wine. That's OK also. Bring whatever snacks you have left over from board meetings or retreats, or bring nothing. And don't worry that you look like someone just ran you over with a steamroller. We look like that by default.

Principle 2: EDHH should be fun: Work discussions are fine. You can even trade business cards if you like. But EDHH should be a place for EDs to relax, tell jokes, talk about stupid TV shows, get tutoring from other EDs on the steps to The Wobble (It's a line dance; look it up on Youtube), etc.

Principle 3: EDHH should be welcoming: All EDs should feel welcomed, regardless of size of organization, mission, geographic location, and personal characteristics such as race, religion, class, sexual orientation, sports team preferences, dietary restrictions, etc. You can, however, openly make fun of EDs who wear skinny jeans, since they look ridiculous. As soon as an ED arrives, s/he should be greeted with enthusiasm and raised glasses.

Principle 4: EDHH is only for EDs and ED-Emeriti (former EDs). No staff, no board members, and certainly no funders. On occasion, there are positions that do not neatly fit into the standard definition of Executive Director, and some ED positions are called other things (CEO, for example). In general, when in doubt whether someone is an ED and therefore should be admitted into EDHH, their position must satisfy these three conditions 1. They must be the lead staff of their organization 2. They must report to a board or board-like entity. 3. They must be constantly freaked out about raising money.

Principle 5: EDHH should be supportive. At any time an ED needs to vent, that ED should invoke the sacred words "I need to vent," in which case, all conversation must stop and everyone must listen to the venting and offer encouragement. The same sort of support must be offered to any ED who invokes "I need advice" or "I need another drink."

Principle 6: EDHH is confidential. This is obvious, but it should be stated anyway: Anything discussed at an EDHH or an EDHH-sanctified event will remain among the EDs present. It is a serious offense to break this oath, and any EDs who do so, whether intentional or not, shall be cursed for seven fiscal years, their grantwriting yielding no fruit, their annual events doomed with terrible audio, their board all micromanagers.

Principle 7: EDHH should be free or dirt-cheap for EDs to attend. There are ED gatherings that charge EDs \$5 to \$50 to attend each time. On occasion they have trainings or serve as an opportunity for important discussions. EDHH is not that. If you have an agenda and/or you charge EDs to attend, you can no longer use the EDHH name.

EDHH ORGANIZING STRUCTURE

Director General (DG): Each EDHH branch shall have one ED assigned the role of Director General. This person must have high energy and be dashing and charming. It is the DG's responsibility to

- coordinate each month's happy hour, including
- figure out the location,
- send out hilarious reminders and recaps
- maintain the mailing list, adding and removing EDs as appropriate
- Settle fist fights between EDs during EDHH
- connect with the EDHH Mothership, which is the EDHH located in Seattle

Point Master (PM): Each EDHH branch shall assign one ED to keep track of ED Points. These points are bestowed upon EDs for various actions and will lead to awesome titles like "Synergy Harvester." This system is further explained in the section on ED Points. The PM must be someone organized and good at record keeping.

Upon selection, the Director General shall email Headquarters at nonprofitwithballs@gmail.com to request official recognition of the new EDHH branch.

LOGISTICS and DECORUM

Frequency of EDHH gatherings: Each local chapter shall determine its regular meeting time. The EDHH in Seattle meets once a month on the second Friday, from 4pm till whenever libations are completely consumed, which may be 8pm or later. We recommend an early start time to encourage EDs to leave work early on a Friday.

Location of EDHH gatherings: Each branch's Director General shall coordinate each EDHH's location. Bars in central locations are good, but they can be expensive. Think about having EDHH at different EDs' places. This may seem intimidating, since many of our places generally look like crap. However, see EDHH Principle 1 on page 3. Meeting at an ED's home allows for cheaper entertainment, as EDs will be able to bring wine and food leftover from annual fundraisers and other events.

Calendar entries: To avoid suspicion among staff and board members, it is best to schedule EDHH on your calendar as "Executive Leadership Gathering to Discuss Shifting the Paradigm for Collective Impact" or something similarly impressive sounding.

Safety measures: If EDHH is at a bar or other public location, one or more EDs should bring a copy of annual reports, strategic plans, or other official-looking paper, as well as a pen. These items should be prominently displayed on the table, so that in case a staff or board member happens to walk by, they will think that the group of EDs is hard at work shifting the paradigm for collective impact.

Addressing other EDs: As much as possible, EDs will address and refer to each other as "Director [first name]." This is to bring back a sense of prestige of the noble ED profession.

EDHH mailing list: The Director General or assignee will maintain a mailing list of EDHH members. It is the responsibility of each branch's Director General to verify each person who requests to be on the mailing list, to ensure that they are indeed an ED, as defined in Principle 4 on page 3. All communications to the mailing list must be BCC'ed to avoid reply-alls, since we EDs get enough emails.

Reminders: The Director General or assignee will send out hilarious reminders to the mailing list at least one week in advance of each EDHH, and preferably also one day in advance.

Recap: The Director General or assignee will send out a recap to the mailing list after each EDHH. This recap, too, must be hilarious. With few exceptions, recaps should use only first names and no organization affiliation, in order to avoid recording incriminating evidence in writing.

Tallying ED Points: The Point Master (PM) will be in charge of recording each member's points and titles and will announce with much fanfare new titles as they are earned by individual EDs. It is the responsibility of each ED to inform the PM of activities that may earn points. The complete list of ED Points and Titles is on the next page.

EDHH MERIT POINTS AND RANKING SYSTEM

Upon enrollment in EDHH, members will receive:

- 10 points for showing up during ED Happy Hours, plus 5 points for every additional hour of attendance after the first hour
- 25 points for hosting EDHH at one's domicile, in addition to attendance points
- 10 points for every new ED brought to EDHH
- 5 points for every new ED introduced by email and added to EDHH mailing list
- 10 points for attending another EDHH member's fundraising event
- 5 point for every hour helping facilitate another EDHH member's board or staff retreat
- 5 points for every grant rejected
- 20 points for every grant rejected after a site visit
- 3 points for every month you have been, and continue to be, an ED

Points shall earn you honor and respect across the field:

- For 100 points, you will be conferred the rank of **Cat Herder**
- For 200 points, you will be conferred the rank of **Meeting Master**
- For 300 points, you will be conferred the rank of **Overhead Tamer**
- For 400 points, you will be conferred the rank of **Double Bottomliner**
- For 500 points, you will be conferred the rank of **Collective Impactor**
- For 600 points, you will be conferred the rank of **Fiscal Warrior**
- For 700 points, you will be conferred the rank of **Synergy Harvester**
- For 800 points, you will be conferred the rank of **Paradigm Shifter**
- For 900 points, you will be conferred the rank of **Full-Metal Outcomist** (pun on "alchemist," get it?!!) and will forward be addressed as "Supreme Director (first name)"
- For 1000 points, you will be conferred the rank of **Equity Ninja**, and will forward be addressed as "Supreme Exalted Director (first name)"

(Unique merit badges for each rank may be forthcoming).

EDHH members agree to abide by an honor system where they accurately record their own points-earning activities and inform the Point Master as appropriate.

EDiquette

All EDs who are members of EDHH agree to abide by the following list of EDiquette, which guides how EDs interact with one another. These EDiquette govern ED-to-ED behavior both during and outside of EDHH gatherings.

EDiquette 1: An ED will always have another ED's back. For example, if another ED texts saying he's having a bad day, we'll drop everything to cheer that ED up. Unless we're talking to a funder.

EDiquette 2: An ED will not use his or her personal assistant to schedule a meeting with another ED, unless that other ED has a personal assistant too. This generally makes the ED without an assistant feel like crap and is not nice. Each time I get an assistant after directly emailing another ED, I am tempted to write back something like, "Please tell Her Royal Directorship, Mabel the Strategic, Successor to Julian the Programmatic, Successor to Edna the Founder, that I shall be glad to meet with her at noon on the 19th of May, and that upon my return to the office, I shall order my staff to sing her praise for seven and three fiscal years."

EDiquette 3: An ED will not ask another ED to serve on his or her board. Unless it's short-term and for a very strategic reason, such as turning a particularly challenging board around or bringing balance to a board/staff baseball game.

EDiquette 4: An ED will not fraternize with or poach another ED's staff. Good staff on the team means we ED's can work less while taking credit for more stuff, so it's not nice for another ED to steal them, or groom them to be stolen later.

EDiquette 5: An ED will not ask another ED to be a table captain. We can, however, ask other ED's to purchase individual tickets and be there for support. But, minimum donations do not apply to ED's since we go to so many of these events and would be seriously broke if we had to give the minimum each time.

EDiquette 6: An ED will try not to look at another ED's salary information on 990 Finder. And if she does—shame!—she will not admit to doing so. It is best to assume that all of us are equally underpaid.

EDiquette 7: An ED will not talk bad of another ED. Ex-ED's who chose to leave are fair game, as they have scorned our noble position, and thus we are righteous to spake ill of them and curse their field to remain fallow and their livestock barren until the seventh generation.

EDiquette 8: An ED will not judge another ED's coping methods. It is a stressful job, and each ED deals with it in a different way, be it drinking, or watching excessive amounts of TV, or making sock puppets resembling local program officers and having them act out scenarios where they fund our organizations. (What, like your Saturday nights are soooo much more exciting).

EDiquette 9: An ED will freely share templates. We don't need to reinvent the wheels; it's helpful when ED's share their personnel handbook, anti-discrimination and harassment policy, succession plans, and recipes for simple yet elegant h'ordeuvres.

EDiquette 10: An ED will open doors to funders or other stakeholders when nicely asked by another ED. Especially when asked at a bar after the other ED has bought several rounds already.

EDiquette 11: An ED will not say to another ED, "You look tired." That's just a euphemism for "You look like crap." We know this already. We have accepted the fact that ED's age twice as fast as normal people.

EDiquette 12: An ED will be honest with another ED when asked about the performance of a staff who just applied for a position at the other ED's organization. There are liability issues, so we are using a system of signals. One cough means "This person had a bad attitude and didn't get along with the rest of the team." A yawn means "This person was not good at following through." A long snuffle followed by a sneeze means "This person may actually be one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse."

EDiquette 13: An ED will publicly admit to knowing another ED, especially in front of program officers, even if that other ED is embarrassing and says things like "I have a sock puppet that looks exactly like you."

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Question 1: There people who are not EDs but who want to come to EDHH. Should we accept them?

Answer: No. This is an exclusive club for some of the most brilliant and good-looking people in the nonprofit world. EDHH must be a safe space mainly for EDs, so tell people you're sorry, and encourage them to form their own happy hour with their own kinds.

Question 2: What about people who aspire to be an ED? Isn't this a great place for them to gain valuable advice and network?

Answer: Anyone who actually wants to be an ED should be disqualified based on lack of critical thinking skills. Kidding, kidding! But no, no aspiring EDs. This is not a training ground. We do that through coaching and other stuff. EDHH needs to be strictly for those who are or have been EDs.

Question 3: With so many EDs in one room, can we use this time to work on collective impact strategies to address challenges collaboratively and advance our field?

Answer: You are officially banned from all future ED Happy Hours.

Question 4: A funder heard about EDHH and wants to give us a small grant to encourage these types of peer learning groups. Should we accept?

Answer: NOOOOOOOO!!!! This is not a "peer learning group"! It's a bunch of EDs getting together to drink and complain. Oftentimes we learn stuff from one another, but that's a bonus, not the main activity. As soon as we accept funding, we will have to start measuring outcomes and milestones and crap. That violates the principles of EDHH that it should be fun and stress-free.

Question 5: Can the EDHH mailing list be used to disseminate information like about conferences, or special events, or petitions, etc.?

Answer: The sacred EDHH Mailing List should only be used to remind people of EDHH, recap the hilarious hijinks of the previous EDHH, or to inform EDs of other FREE events where alcohol is available. On occasion, it can be used to rally EDs to support another ED; for instance, if an ED is performing at a beatboxing competition, the group should be informed so that people can come support that ED. Otherwise, don't use the mailing list or it'll be become another source of emails that everyone will ignore.

Question 6: The ED of the ABC organization is the board member of the XYZ organization. Can this ED as well as the ED of the XYZ organization both join EDHH?

Answer: An ED cannot be at the same EDHH as one of her board members, since so much of what we talk about is our boards. In this situation, encourage the two to work out an agreement where they will inform each other and maybe take turns attending EDHH.