

John Hancock Presents Pivotal Conversations

Hope Floats

He didn't know how to build a boat. But Adam Green knew how to teach. So in 1995, when he volunteered to instruct 10 junior high school students in East Harlem to craft an 8-foot dinghy from scratch, he had to learn as he went along. And when the class successfully launched the boat in the school's swimming pool, they also helped launch Adam's idea for helping the area's underprivileged kids.

Three years later, he started Rocking the Boat, a non-profit after-school program in New York's South Bronx that teaches kids to build boats—and build better lives. Adam's passion helped fuel the organization's tremendous success in serving the community and raising funds. But his teaching background didn't lend itself to knowing how to implement the kind of business discipline needed to take Rocking the Boat to the next level. So in 2006, Adam turned to Jassen Trenkov, a Rocking the Boat volunteer board member who specializes in finance, for advice.

Jassen Trenkov: "The challenge I saw was that Rocking the Boat's rapid growth made it difficult for it to keep up with business functions that aren't the focus of its mission—like financial management. Staffers who weren't qualified to take on those responsibilities had to manage them because there wasn't anyone else to do it."

Adam Green: "I had this fear of not feeling in control of the business I was running—an anxiety about never exactly knowing if we were going to come out in the black or in the red. Jassen offered me phenomenally wise perspective on so many different levels of operation."

Jassen helped Adam take a harder, more realistic look at Rocking the Boat. He explained key methods for better managing a non-profit. He also stressed the importance of not just solving problems as they come up, but in creating sustainable, long-term solutions.

Jassen Trenkov: "Over the last couple of years, we've established systems that help staffers and board members be more effective in their roles, while expanding the program and continuing to grow financially."

Adam Green: "Jassen instituted financial and personnel management procedures and policies that have helped Rocking the Boat really grow into an efficient business."



Jassen Trenkov and Adam Green;
Inset: Rocking the Boat students

photographs by Joaquin Cotten

With long-term solutions now in place, Adam spends less time worrying about his business, and more focusing on the reason he started his non-profit in the first place: making an impact by teaching deserving kids to build boats. And he's still learning as he goes.

Adam Green: "To this day, I haven't built a boat I didn't teach."

Jassen Trenkov: "Just for the record, they all swim. None of Adam's boats have ever sunk."

Rocking the Boat currently services 2,000 students and community members annually. For more information, visit www.rockingtheboat.org.