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The Inimitable Marty Schneiderman

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Martin "Marty" Schneiderman is not your typical IT guy. In fact, the more you get to know Marty the more you begin to find that he defies easy categorization. He's a pillar of revitalization, dabbling at the intersections of IT and, well, everything else. I first heard mention of Marty's name ten or so years ago at a New York Regional Grants Managers Network (GMN) meeting. I was talking IT shop with a fellow grants manager and the person was saying Marty thinks this and Marty said that until I finally stopped her and ignorantly asked, "Who is Marty Schneiderman?" "You've *never* met Marty Schneiderman!?" was her quick retort, delivered in a tone that suggested I had lived my life under a rock. While I had been active with GMN for several years at the time, our paths had sadly never crossed. As I was to learn, my not knowing Marty was a surprise as Marty has been associated with GMN since almost its inception. Everyone it seems knows Marty.

It was only at this year's GMN annual conference in Chicago that I finally had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Schneiderman in person, arguably the most closely affiliated "non-GMNER" the organization has known. Marty may not be an official GMN member, but he is certainly an institution to GMN's members. When we spoke recently, Marty said he was drawn to the organization and its members right from the start because he recognizes the unique role grants managers play in their foundations. He saw that grants managers are integral to their foundations, but often have few internal colleagues to reach out to for guidance and support. GMN fills an important need in this regard as it provides a context to the grants managers' role.

Marty has been a staple at GMN meetings for many years now, principally due to his prodigious knowledge of grants management software and the issues surrounding it. Marty *knows* technology. Through the company he founded and runs, *Information Age Associates*, Marty has helped the philanthropic and nonprofit sector understand and tend to its technology needs. But Marty sees that technology is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The company's mission "to assist organizations to achieve their goals through the *appropriate and effective use of information systems*" mirrors Marty's philosophy and his approach.

His advice to grants managers looking for an appropriate technology: don't start from scratch. "Look at what others



have done and why, and then apply that knowledge to your foundation's unique situation." For Marty, "systems integration" is the name of the game. He finds it surprising how few foundation staffers get out of their office to learn about best practices. "Want to know how different grants management systems work? Go visit some other foundations and see what they are using and how it works." Marty is shocked at how many New York City foundations seek his advice about grants management technology, but then don't bother to call and visit a peer foundation right down the block to check out their operations and system.

While Marty has spoken nationally and internationally to grants managers and foundation leaders on a variety of topics, most of his presentations focus on the online tools that are available to serve the grantmaking community. Marty's unique take on technology and philanthropy stems from the nontraditional career path he has chosen for himself, both in support of the nonprofit sector and working in other capacities. Marty has had a varied career indeed.

While much of his focus has revolved around assisting grantmakers worldwide to streamline their operations, strengthen philanthropic programs, and support grantees, his experience spans a much wider spectrum. He has been a Head Start and public school teacher, a school administrator and graduate school faculty member. He's sought and received grants and managed large grant programs. He was Chief Information Officer at the Rockefeller Family Office. He designed the first foundation website for the Carnegie Corporation. He served as Technology Editor and a contributing writer to [Foundation News and Commentary](#). In fact, an article he wrote for FN&C facilitated the development, integration, and low-cost availability of OFAC checking software that is now a standard feature in most grants management systems for ensuring that foundations comply with United States anti-terrorism guidelines.

The year he spent managing the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health's Grand Challenges in Global Health grant program (funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), however, is what he points to as one of his major achievements in the sector. In this capacity, he led a team to implement online systems that processed 2,000 proposals from researchers in 98 countries and enabled 6,000 peer reviews via the web and in panel meetings by internationally renowned scientists. It was the largest grant made that year by any foundation, and to date the program has granted \$438 million.

In response to a question I posed about how he thought grants managers could increase their value to their foundations, Marty suggested that grants managers consider how they present information to their leadership. They should go beyond the processing of information and take a leadership role by presenting the tremendous amount of information they have access to using interactive maps and charts with overlays of census data, to enable their colleagues to make better decisions. If grants managers can illuminate patterns and trends in their foundations and in

the sector, he believes this will lead to better decision making, which in turn will lead to better foundations, a huge added value.

As Marty continues down his unique career path, one can imagine his work remaining focused on making the philanthropic sector a better one. In the meantime, it's likely he will continue to remain a big part of the GMN community for years to come.

Oh, Marty met his wife Noriko while working in Japan and he now has a "wonderful, large Japanese family." This explains the traditional "Hakama" that he's wearing in the photo above. (Samurai originally wore Hakama, but nowadays men only wear it on formal occasions.)