“Remember, no human condition is ever permanent. Then you will not be overjoyed in good fortune nor too scornful in misfortune.” Socrates’ advice on the human condition can easily be the motto for the charitable sector and for the superstar executives who understand the concept and are honored as the sector’s most powerful and influential of the past 12 months.

In one week alone, equity ruled the day with the U.S. Supreme Court’s decisions on same-sex marriage and the Affordable Care Act. It was change about which the overjoyed far exceeded the scornful. The honorees for 2015 were the lightning rods for those victories and for many others.

Those selected for inclusion in this year’s The NonProfit Times Power & Influence Top 50 exemplify the words of Spanish philosopher and essayist Jose Ortega y Gasset who wrote: “Living is a constant process of deciding what we are going to do.” The executives on this 18th annual spotlight made decisions every day that changed lives for the better and for which we should be overjoyed.

These nonprofit innovators exemplify what happens when people stand firmly for inclusion and equal rights, whether it is in healthcare, public policy, education or opportunity for all. They provided new methods for delivering ideas and used persuasion to get it done.

The honorees were selected from a group of roughly 300 top executives. A committee of NPT staff, contributors and a few executives plugged in to executive movement were involved in the selection process. This is not a lifetime achievement award. The executive must have had an impact during the previous 12 months.

There is quite a bit of turnover in this catalog of the sector’s big brains. There are 19 new honorees on the 2015 honor roll and seven executives who are returning to the list after coming up with some new ideas that are moving the charitable needle.

The honorees and their guests will be feted in Washington, D.C., next month during the annual NPT Power & Influence Top 50 Gala at The National Press Club. One of the honorees will receive the NPT Innovator of the Year award. The evening always involves conversation between people who would not normally have the opportunity to interact.

Historian and Pulitzer Prize winner Wallace Stegner wrote in Angle of Repose that “Civilizations grow by agreements and accommodations and accretions, not by repudiations. The rebels and the revolutionaries are only eddies, they keep the stream from getting stagnant but they get swept down and absorbed, they’re a side issue.”

Stegner also wrote that “civilizations grow and change and decline -- they aren’t remade.” This group of executives is proving Stegner wrong on that point. This nation can be remade into a more perfect union and these executives are leading the way.
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There has been a very interesting evolution at the Arc since Berns joined in 2008. It’s now a leading voice on criminal justice issues regarding the intellectually disabled via its National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability in 2015. And, he’s a member of the President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities.

There is finally on the table. That doesn’t mean they’ll be fixed.

This leader simply is fearless. Although she is leaving this position to head Feeding America this fall, she righted the ship of one of the sector’s vital advocacy organizations. There’s no reason to believe that she won’t turn Feed America on its ear, too, by asking tough questions that get to its core and reason for being.

Angela Glover Blackwell
Founder & CEO
PolicyLink
Oakland, Calif.

An authority on U.S. race and equality, she believes most equity issues are finally on the table. That doesn’t mean they’ll be fixed through “we are at a point of more possibility than I have seen in my lifetime.” In her words, we have to ask “some tough questions about what we are doing leaving people behind.”

Jeffrey L. Bradach
Managing Partner & Co-founder
Bridgespan Group
Boston, Mass.

Bradach and Bridgespan remain the brand names in nonprofit research-based management consulting. Other big names are starting to get into the space by hiring recognizable names, but none have his track record for analysis of nonprofit management practice.

Michael Brown
Co-Founder & CEO
City Year
Boston, Mass.

The words national service and Michael Brown are synonymous. Leaders at many big-name service groups come and go. Brown has been there all along, innovating and redefining the service and volunteering. The model was the blueprint for AmeriCorps. Change starts by being on the ground in communities.

Phil Buchanan
President
Center for Effective Philanthropy
Cambridge, Mass.

His five myths of philanthropic strategy list would be funny if they weren’t so true. He remains the Pied Piper for effective practice in philanthropy and against for-profits that masquerade as charitable enterprises. He’s not afraid to call out leaders of the anti-regulation/overhead myth to provide their missing transparency.

Dan Busby
President
Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability
Winchester, Va.

Busby is the leader for transparency in financial dealings of religious tax-exempts. Not forgetting the 10 commandments, he demands four things of members: Telling the truth, keeping promises, offering appropriate transparency, and demonstrating accountability. It seems simple but apparently is more complex than you’d think.

Sonya Campion
President
Campion Advocacy Fund
Seattle, Wash.

Campion is a rare hybrid of talented fundraiser and shrewd funder. The social entrepreneurs in the Northwest also love her passion for new ideas and methods of “catalytic philanthropy” and service. Now she’s collaborating to push board members to speak up for and advocate for organizational mission.

Susan N. Dreyfus
President & CEO
Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Mountain View, Calif.

Carson has built SVCF into the 13th largest single grantmaker internationally. Philanthropy is global and multi-purpose, what he calls “both/and” not “either/or.” An example is when the foundation decides to stay out of a situation but still is involved because its donors are giving through SVCF.

Elizabeth Darling
President & CEO
OneStar Foundation
Austin, Texas

Whether it’s supporting volunteer centers, an academic affinity group, an interagency coordinating group or working with social service entrepreneurs. Darling manages what is tantamount to a small country’s charitable sector. She also has a respected national presence in Washington, D.C. and around the nation.

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Tim Delaney
President & CEO
National Council of Nonprofits
Washington, D.C.

Straddling state and federal issues is not easy. Delaney provides a national perspective to local leaders trying to make sense of what’s going on. He is right to push foundations to focus more on local issues right now, including many states where charitable regulations can be destructive to all in the sector.

Susan Calvin
President & CEO
United Nations Foundation
Washington, D.C.

Calvin makes connections between UNF (which is actually a public charity) and NGOs around the world on almost every conceivable crisis. It’s more than funding. It’s connections, mediation and solutions. On the ground floor of CyberMonday in a different gig, she was also key to #GivingTuesday and the Social Good Summit.

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Silicon Valley Community Foundation
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Lavizzo-Mourey believes that meaningful philanthropy must achieve the lack of transparency in healthcare billing that influences consumer and provider decisions. Forget the surgeon general. Lavizzo-Mourey’s national Culture of Health makes her the nation’s doctor.

Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, M.D.
President & CEO
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Princeton, N.J.

Lavizzo-Mourey believes that meaningful philanthropy must achieve lasting social change. She is a member of every federal policy-making advisory committee that matters. The foundation exploring the lack of transparency in healthcare billing that influences consumer and provider decisions. Forget the surgeon general. Lavizzo-Mourey’s national Culture of Health makes her the nation’s doctor.

Daniel Lurie
Founder & CEO
Tipping Point Community
San Francisco, Calif.

T Lab, a nonprofit R&D initiative, is unique. He even hoodwinked the NFL and city officials into giving 25 percent of money raised from sponsors for the 2016 Super Bowl to support nonprofit work in the Bay Area. All of the work is via zero-based budgeting. There’s no endowment safety net.

Rita P. Balducci
Executive Director
Women’s Cancer Research Fund
New York, N.Y.

Balducci is the one who got cancer research off the back burner. Even as she had her way, she doesn’t impose concepts. Novogratz invests in local ideas. Acumen has invested more than $90 million of patient capital in 80 businesses that have impacted more than 125 million people, according to the organization. She gives the ideas time to take hold, instead of arbitrary timetables.

Douglas Rutzen
President & CEO
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
Washington, D.C.

Rutzen is an expert called on by leaders around the world on efforts to protect the freedoms of association and assembly around the world. You need to go to YouTube and find his presentation Defending Civil Society.

Ai-Jen Poo
Director
National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA)
New York, N.Y.

There’s a good chance that the revolution Poo brought to organizing domestic workers she’ll bring to battle for long-term care in a U.S. society about to get old in a hurry. It’s about workforce equity for a group often specifically left out of protective legislation and a nation in great need of the assistance.

Wayne Pacelle
President & CEO
Humane Society of the United States
Washington, D.C.

You want Pacelle to have your back in a bar fight. He has taken on state regulators, even suing Oklahoma, regarding fundraising harassment generally started through a back door by people opposed to the organization’s aggressive animal rights agenda.

Sally Osberg
President & CEO
Skoll Foundation
Palo Alto, Calif.

Social entrepreneurs fixate on a problem and try to fix it. Osberg sees that as too myopic. She’s a systems visionary whose bigger picture thinking moves others who sink money into singular projects. A museum junkie and founder of the Skoll World Forum, she understands the past, can envision a future and put it together.

Constance L. Rice
Co-Founder
Advancement Project
Los Angeles, Calif.

She was one of the key reasons Los Angeles didn’t become Ferguson when Ezell Ford was shot and killed by LAPD two days after Michael Brown. Her work with street gangs and in civil rights across decades is a blueprint for community organizing and developing respect for diverging opinions in a community.

Rip Rapson
President & CEO
The Kresge Foundation
Troy, Mich.

Rapson’s idea of impact funding breeds opportunities in American cities. His implementation of flexible funding methods finds its way into operating and project support, and program-related investments. He emphasizes arts as a community cornerstone and funds it. He was key to the “Grand Bargain” to save Detroit.

Yolanda Soto
CEO
Borderlands Food Bank
Nogales, Ariz.

Produce on Wheels - With Out Waste is a model that should be replicated. Soto and FBF are border patrol for between 30 and 40 million pounds of food that is eatable but for some stupid reason blocked and ticketed for a landfill. They could do more if there was space available. BFB is also shipping produce into 18 states.
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Bryan Stevenson  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice Initiative  
Montgomery, Ala.  

It is said that America is the land of second chances. Stevenson is making sure it’s true. It’s not just getting wrongful convictions overturned and blocking executions. He changes the way people think about financial and racial inequity in the legal system. His concept of the power of identity needs to take hold in this nation.

Kelvin Taketa  
President & CEO  
Hawaii Community Foundation  
Honolulu, Hawaii  

Taketa is always looking for ways to help innovate. While nudging part-time residents to get more active, he brokers deals between tech firms and government to speed-up state benefits. The foundation’s Flex awards program is something other foundations should emulate.

Mark Tercek  
President & CEO  
The Nature Conservancy  
Arlington, Va.  

A rose has a net worth. You won’t find Tercek hugging a tree but helping business calculate the worth of keeping it. A clean environment has a rate of return and the former Goldman Sachs executive works with firms not known for the best land stewardship. He’s also turned the place around from a management standpoint.

Henry Timms  
Executive Director  
92nd Street Y  
New York, N.Y.  

It’s an automatic placement on this list when you’ve spearheaded two of the sector’s most innovative events, the Social Good Summit and #GivingTuesday. He’s now thinking about the impact of old power and new power and how changing consumption patterns will evolve philanthropy.

Gustavo Torres  
Executive Director  
CASA de Maryland & CASA de Virginia  
Hyattsville, Md.  

National advocates see this Colombian immigrant as the model for Latino leadership in immigration reform that is a community’s civil rights movement. With former Maryland Gov. Martin O’Malley running for president, this could get interesting very soon.

Darren Walker  
President & CEO  
Ford Foundation  
New York, N.Y.  

Walker knows you can’t litigate social justice and have it stick. He’s getting his own hands dirty, making big bets on education and culture to develop economic opportunities. And, he built the coalition of foundations that helped Detroit emerge from bankruptcy.

Amy Sample Ward  
CEO  
Nonprofit Technology Network (NTEN)  
Portland, Ore.  

NTEN is the primary technology nonprofit in the nation because of Amy Sample Ward. While helping keep Portland weird, she’s leading the sector’s conversations about digital inclusion. She is unafraid to challenge assumptions regarding nonprofits and technology while throwing the best conference in the sector.

Andrew Watt  
President & CEO  
Association of Fundraising Professionals  
Arlington, Va.  

Watt understands and articulates well the concept that there is no social impact without fundraising. He is building an international, diverse network of fundraisers who are starting to learn from each other. Cash is still king but for Watt it’s really about resource mobilization from every area of a community.

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