



Follow these steps to boost productivity and morale.

Overcome Organizational Indifference

By Linda Keefe

A plague is running rampant through the nonprofit sector. Its debilitating effects can strike any employee — even a top performer — at any time. Even worse, it's highly contagious and can sweep throughout the organization, ruining funding and limiting growth.

What is this plague? It's organizational indifference, and no organization is immune.

Here's the typical cycle: When people begin a new job, whether they're promoted or newly hired, they usually come into that position with great enthusiasm. They're excited about all the opportunities, the people they'll work with, and the goals they'll accomplish. They feel needed and proud that they have the chance to play an important role. The problem is, over time, their attitudes slowly begin to change. Eventually, enthusiasm moves out, and organizational indifference moves in, causing productivity

to decline while employee frustrations rise.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to ward off organizational indifference. By following these five steps, you'll keep your employees energized and see them rise to a new level of productivity. Keep in mind that these steps are interconnected. So if you neglect any one of them, organizational indifference may creep in.

A management team is only as strong as its employees.

1. Set Goals and Have a Clear Vision. Having clearly defined goals and a vision is essential for the success of any organization. Without a shared vision, there's nothing for your employees to strive toward. Employees need to know what their main objective is, as well as what the organization is ultimately trying to achieve. With everyone working in the same direction, confusion is eliminated, and employees are much less likely to become organizationally indifferent.

2. Keep People Informed. Communication is key. With so much going on within an organization, it's easy to get caught up in tasks such as handling crisis situations and devising plans to bring in more funding. The problem occurs when managers get so wrapped up in their duties that they forget to inform their employees about what they're doing. With little or no communication from their supervisors, employees feel disconnected. Since they don't know what's going on, they don't feel as much a part of the organization. Here are ways to make sure your employees don't get left behind:

- **Schedule** regular group meetings.
- **Meet** one-on-one with each employee. (Yes, it will take some time, but it will be well worth it in the long run.)
- **Create** status reports on a regular basis.

Employees should feel and act as if the organization is their own.

By keeping your employees in the information loop, you'll help them avoid unnecessary frustration and confusion — two feelings that often lead to organizational indifference. When everyone in your organization knows exactly what's going on, the organization will run more smoothly.

3. Equip Your Employees. One of the biggest mistakes you can make is to assume your employees have all the skills they need to do their job well. When you give people the opportunity to develop their skills, they'll get their jobs done more effectively.

Employees crave professional development. If you want to keep them from becoming organizationally indifferent, you need to arm them with the skills to reach their full potential. If they ask for training,

offer it. If they don't ask, find out what they need. Show that you're willing to invest in them. If they don't think you care, they'll reflect that belief in the work they produce.

4. Create a Motivational Environment. When your employees are doing a great job, they need to hear it. They need to be recognized for their contributions. Many managers forget to give employees the praise they deserve.

This appreciation doesn't have to be in the form of a monetary reward. You can post employees' pictures on a "wall of recognition" so everyone knows the contributions they've made. At other times, a simple pat on the back or "Excellent work!" will be well received.

Although you don't necessarily have to show appreciation with money, your compensation system does create an incentive — provided that it's fair and appropriate. As your organization grows, you need to check and recheck your compensation structures to ensure that they're fair to all employees. When people give 150% of their energies to an organization — and they see that their efforts have greatly benefitted the organization — it's only natural that they'd like to be compensated with a bigger paycheck. Employees become organizationally indifferent when they see their co-workers doing half as much work but making the same amount of money.

If you don't distribute money fairly, your lower-performing employees will never reach their full potential, and your top performers will get frustrated and leave. Creating a motivational environment with an equitable compensation structure encourages employees to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

5. Empower Your Staff. How much power do your employees have? Are they free to make certain decisions on behalf of the organization? Employees should feel and act as if the organization is their own. When each employee is a mini-entrepreneur, life is much easier for everyone in the organization.

Employees crave professional development.

Managers are then free to focus on their tasks, while the employees run the organization.

When people are empowered, they know what the organization is trying to achieve, what they can and can't do to make it happen, and how to find any answers they need. With this empowerment, each person is playing an integral role in the organization. And if employees feel they're an essential element in the organization's growth, they won't become organizationally indifferent.

The Cure for What Ails You

If your organization is infected with organizational indifference, implementing each of these five steps will bring about the cure you need. With indifference gone, your organization's strategic plan will take on a new sense of reality as people are once again energized, on track, and working together for common goals. You will then experience faster growth and higher productivity. ■

Resources

Gooding, Cheryl, "Using Training Strategically," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 14, No. 4.

Langer, Steven, "How Much Are You Really Worth?," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 23, No. 1.

Smergut, Peter, "Creating a Values-Based Road Map," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 23, No. 2.

These resources are available free at www.snpo.org/members.

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