

Empower Your Employees to be Mini-Marketers



Help your employees embrace an entrepreneurial spirit that lets your organization shine.

By Linda Keefe

Your employees are walking billboards for your organization 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Your organization will receive good, bad, or neutral press depending on whether your employees are satisfied in the organization and feel a part of its mission. The key to harnessing the positive press is to empower your employees so they're mini-marketers for your organization, whether they realize it or not.

What Is Empowerment?

Empowerment is a process that builds trust between employees and the organization. It has three dimensions:

1. When employees are empowered, they know precisely how much latitude they have in any given situation. They don't have to second-guess themselves when they make decisions because managers have detailed what each person can do.

Deep in their hearts, employees want more responsibility.

2. When empowered employees reach the limit of their authority, they know the steps to take to find out additional information or to make suggestions.

3. Empowered employees aren't afraid to think outside the box or offer ideas because they know they have management's support. They feel that the organization values their input, and they strive to devise new ways to help the group perform better.

No matter how your group is currently organized, you can attain this three-fold level of empowerment. When you do, the rewards will show not only in an increase of positive press but in your overall effectiveness.

Initiate a Culture Change

Empowerment is a culture you need to instill. In most organizations, employees expect managers to tell them what to do. Deep in their hearts, however, employees want more responsibility. They want to play a vital role, but experience has taught them that to be "good employees" they just need to do what they're told. In reality, organizations today want employees who are entrepreneurially minded and who feel as though they have a stake in the organization's success.

Such a culture change requires that management stop making decisions for people. Rather than tell people what to do, introduce a questioning style of management. Ask employees what they think they should do in a situation, and then listen to their answers. If their answers aren't well thought out, ask them more detailed questions

to prompt further thinking. Whatever you do, don't jump in with the solution. Instead, make it a safe environment where employees can think through their options and come to their own decisions.

For example, if you're uncertain whether to develop a new program, ask employees for their input. After all, they're the ones on the front line who interact with clients, so they have valuable insights you can't get from the executive suite. If their initial responses don't make sense, ask them to think in the context of different scenarios, such as "What if the client is enrolled in a similar program?" or "What if the client wants a trial period?" As they refine their ideas, be open to what they say. In as many situations as possible, use their input toward the final decision. Such a process may take longer upfront, but it will pay off as employees take over more and more of the decision process.

Listening Is Key

When you don't listen to your employees or when you discount their input, you squash their

Whatever you do,
don't jump in with
the solution.

motivation. When you respond to feedback, however, you give your employees the information, know-how, and skills that contribute to the organization's vision and strategic plan.

Empowerment in Action

You'll know your team is empowered when their daily actions and words put the organization in a positive light. An example of an empowered employee is the receptionist at the Raleigh, North Carolina, Chamber of Commerce who researched the answer to a visitor's question and e-mailed him the answer the following day. She could have simply responded to his question with an "I don't know," but her organization empowered her to go further.

In this example, the empowered employee gave the organization positive press without even knowing it. She became a mini-marketer.

Begin Today

As you strive to empower your workforce, take the time to detail

the latitude each person has, the processes in which to channel new ideas, and ways for managers to show their support. The more empowered your employees are, the greater rewards your organization will reap in terms of positive press, effective programs, and increased funding. ■

Resources

Keefe, Linda, "Overcome Organizational Indifference," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 24, No. 2.

Lauer, Larry, "Using Your Organization's Culture to Build Productivity and Reputation," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 11, No. 6.

Mitchell, Mark & Donald Yates, "How to Use Your Organizational Culture as a Competitive Tool," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 20, No. 2.

Natoli, Vincent, "The Organizational Personality & Employee Performance," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 21, No. 1.

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

Linda Keefe is CEO and co-founder of Shared Results International (linda.keefe@sharedresults.com, www.sharedresults.com), a consulting and training firm focused on helping organizations achieve faster growth and higher productivity.

Nonprofit World • Volume 25, Number 6 November/December 2007
Published by the Society for Nonprofit Organizations
5820 Canton Center Road, Suite 165, Canton, Michigan 48187
734-451-3582 • www.snpo.org

Advertisers' Index

Alliance of Nonprofits for Insurance.....	19
American Bar Association.....	Inside Back Cover
Ausco.....	5
Cougar Mountain Software.....	9
eTapestry.....	3
FundraisingInfo.com.....	Back Cover
Irwin Siegel Agency Inc.....	Inside Front Cover
Print Art Etc.	23
Shore Bank	11



MOVING? Let Us Know!

Send old AND new address, with mailing label if possible, to:

The Society for Nonprofit Organizations
5820 N Canton Center Road, Suite 165
Canton Michigan 48187.

The post office WILL NOT forward copies of **Nonprofit World**.

So let us know BEFORE you move so that you won't miss any issues.

