



Money Really Can Grow on Trees

Are you ready to transform your organization into an income-generating money tree? Here's where to start.

By Linda Keefe

In today's economy, every organization needs to capitalize on its strengths and eliminate its weaknesses to ensure long-term growth. With resources tight, there's no room for second chances or "trying again next month." There may not be a "next month." Your organization must produce results today if you want to stay competitive tomorrow.

Unfortunately, too many executives and managers are stuck in the mentality of slashing budgets and making cutbacks to increase revenue. What they fail to realize is that rather than trimming away critical elements of their organization, they need to focus on growing it — on nurturing their money tree.

The Four Keys

To grow an organizational money tree, you need four key elements: communication, skills, motivation, and empowerment. Most managers

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mistakenly believe that everyone knows how to communicate, how to do their job, how to stay motivated, and how to make decisions. On the surface, that may be true; however, when you probe deeper, you usually find that people need additional guidance to make their knowledge relevant to the organization and to their role. Without that guidance, they become organizationally indifferent, believing that their contributions don't matter to the group's success.

The Three Steps

Here are steps to turn your organization into a strong, sturdy money tree that towers above the competition:

Step One: Ensure your money tree has a direction for growth.

Every tree needs light to grow. Your money tree is no different. Its light source is your organization's vision.

The problem is that too few

people know what a vision statement really is. Although you often see the words "vision" and "mission" touted as being important, it's hard to get your hands around what they do for you, how to make them dynamic parts of your endeavor, or how they differ from each other.

Here's the difference: Your mission is what you do. Your vision, on the other hand, is that guiding star that tells you whether you're on the right path. A compelling vision takes what you do (your mission) and transforms it into something the entire team can strive for. So while your mission may be to provide food and medicine to the inner city, your vision would be to become the leading provider of health services to those most in need. Your vision then gives everyone in the organization something to strive for rather than simply providing food and medicine.

Very often when you ask employees, "What's this organization's vision?" they all give different answers — most of which revolve around what the organization does, not how it needs to be positioned. Others will say the vision is some behavioral trait, such as to be courteous to clients. That's a good value statement, but it's not a vision.

To uncover your organization's true vision, you need to find out why people come to you. You may think they come to you because you provide the best services in town, but it may actually be because of other factors, such as your level of client service, your hours of operation, and so on. Find out the precise reasons by hiring a consultant to survey your clients. An outsider will typically get more information, as people tend to open up when an objective third party conducts the survey. Use the information you receive to refine your vision statement.

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Step Two: Give your money tree the proper nutrients.

Once you get the necessary information to refine your vision into something that's actionable and followable, the next step is to have each employee define three to five specific goals that tie to the vision. For a volunteer coordinator, one goal might be to retain more volunteers. For an administrative assistant, a goal might be to reduce office-supply expenses. Such goals nourish the vision and enable the money tree to grow.

Branching off from the goals are the objectives that will make the goals attainable. So after establishing goals, each person should then state clear objectives to make the goals reality and fulfill the vision. To retain volunteers, one of the volunteer coordinator's objectives may be to personally thank

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each volunteer for a job well done at least once a week. To reduce office-supply expenses, one of the administrative assistant's objectives may be to print documents in "fast draft" mode to reduce ink usage. These objectives provide the building blocks that enable the tree to grow toward the vision.

Step Three: Water your money tree regularly.

In order for your money tree to sustain its growth, it needs regular care. Schedule monthly meetings with your team so you can all discuss what everyone's doing in regard to the objectives, goals, and vision. Ask each person to turn in a monthly status report. Next, have managers consolidate the information from their team's reports into a document showing what goals their team achieved.

At the next meeting, share the consolidated information with staff members. Encourage them to count how many times each contributed to an accomplishment, whether it was making phone calls, researching information, stuffing envelopes, or assisting clients. The objective is to have people understand how their activities — however small they may appear — contribute to the organization living its vision and attaining its goals. This is an important step, because if people don't see how they're contributing, they'll feel unimportant to the group's success. Your employees will experience a renewed sense of commitment when they discover how much their work truly matters in the grand scheme and how their input helps the organization thrive and grow into a money-generating tree.

Unlimited Growth

With a vision (the sun's guiding light), goals and objectives (the

nutrients), and regular meetings (the continued care), your money tree can grow beyond your wildest dreams. When you revise your vision according to client feedback and communicate that vision to your team, you'll motivate your employees to excel because they'll know what to strive for and how they contribute to the organization. As a result, you'll foster an environment that eliminates organizational indifference and works diligently for the group's good. This is one formula for success you can bank on. ■

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Resources

Brinckerhoff, Peter, "Using Surveys & Focus Groups to Gather Market Data," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 13, No. 3.

Fisher, Allan H., Jr., "A Quick Way to Tell If Your Organization Is Meeting Its Goals," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 9, No. 3.

Jenson, Donna, "Sharing the Vision: Every Leader's Obligation," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 8, No. 5.

Ray, Darrel, "The Key to Building Productive Teams," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 21, No. 4.

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

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