



Is Yours an Organization of the Past or Future?

If you don't use this book to help guide your organization, you may be left behind.

BY TERRENCE FERNSLER

The Organization of the Future

Edited by Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith, and Richard Beckhard. 397 pages. Hardcover. Second in the Drucker Foundation Future Series from the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management. Available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center (see the Resource Center Catalog, included in this issue, or call 800-424-7367).

While the essays in this book are written mostly by businesspeople, the lessons are right on target for the nonprofit sector. The authors, who include such well-known leaders and writers as Charles Handy, Lewis Platt, Peter Drucker, Jay Galbraith, and Rosabeth Moss Kanter, have distilled a great amount of wisdom into their concise essays. While each has a distinct perspective, they show remarkable consensus on what makes organizations work.

Successful organizations, the authors agree, celebrate innovation, self-responsibility, and self-esteem. Such organizations are flexible, work in teams, and rely on trust as their principal means of control. It's the leaders' task to develop a culture of trust. The organization can then devote itself to its mission rather than its own structures.

All we can be sure of in the future, the authors tell us, is rapid, constant change. Thus, they concentrate on showing leaders how to accept—even encourage—change. Effective leaders are, above all, versatile. They make

changes required by the market rather than waiting to be forced to adapt. They are risk-takers willing to take bold steps to meet customer demands.

Information has become our most important holding, the authors affirm. At the same time, customers have greater access to information than ever before. Thus, they demand better service, better products, and more rapid response. Successful organizations, therefore, are customer-oriented, keenly aware of why they're in business. Everyone in the organization must understand the reasons for change—to meet customer needs—and be ready to lead whenever their expertise is needed.

To meet these many changes, leaders must become lifelong learners. Their role must change from being dictators of policy to becoming resources to others

in the organization. They must motivate, educate, and bring people to their highest abilities. And they must know themselves and set a good example. Creating a positive work-life balance is the healthiest thing a leader can do and makes good business sense.

Security in the workplace no longer means a lifetime job; it means employability. Secure employees are more committed and produce better. Organizations must be willing to teach so that their employees remain employable, thus increasing their security and making them more committed and productive.

To measure up, nonprofits must become much more dynamic, high-tech, and businesslike in their planning. They must communicate clearly while mobilizing around a clear and compelling

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vision. Their leaders must constantly think in terms of servicing their customers. They must empower people in the organization so that those people can meet customers' expectations.

The empowerment of clients and employees is the most recent step in a long historical trend toward equity—steps which include the development of the printing press, the spread of universal education, and the rise of democracy. Like all these phenomena, it necessitates a change in the way we do business.

This book, like its predecessor and companion, *The Leader of the Future* (see review in September-October 1997 *Nonprofit World*) is excellent preparation for the vast changes this latest historical step will bring. The editors suggest reading each chapter separately, taking time to reflect before reading another chapter. It proves to be an excellent suggestion. The authors' writing styles and topics are diverse enough to warrant it. This means it will take you longer to read, but it's well worth the extra time.

The Organization of the Future is required reading for everyone in a nonprofit organization. If you don't use this book to help guide your organization through the changes, you may well be left behind. ■

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