

Magnify Your Mission: Inspire Customers for Life



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An article titled “Inspiring More at Gap Inc.” featured in the March 2015 edition of *HR Magazine* begins by describing the goal of the Gap’s founders, Doris and Don Fisher, to “do more than sell clothes.” According to Gap’s senior VP of HR, Dan Henkle, Gap is more than an employer: it’s an organization with a unique opportunity to enhance the life skills of the thousands of young people for whom a Gap sales position is their first real job. He believes that the company has a duty to provide a great work experience, adding that “We want Gap to offer employees their best first job.” Does your organization have similar aspirations?

Growing Mission-Support Starts at Home

Many leaders believe that building a fan base for their organization starts and ends with external outreach. Whether it’s through social media networks, advertising or direct mail, sadly many organizations focus on building external fans while neglecting their staff. Although I’m a “lifer” when it comes to nonprofit work, in my experience, our sector is losing the race to provide the best places to work in America.

I became more convinced than ever about this during a recent conversation with a former NRMC staff member who works at an Apple store. Apparently Apple’s philosophy is to treat its employees with kindness, compassion and respect—something my colleague found missing in his most recent nonprofit sector job. I was surprised to learn that a shining success of modern capitalism—the first company to be valued at more than \$700 billion—does a better job appreciating its entry-level employees than many public entities.

It’s time for public entity and nonprofit leaders to stop boasting about compassion and respect and start doing something about it. From recruitment through orientation and performance management, never forget that your staff’s enthusiasm about your mission will be reflected in every interaction with a client, consumer or donor. And long after your staff have moved on to new pursuits, they will carry with them the essence of the work experience you provided. Will they reflect on how well they were treated at your organization? Or tell anyone willing to listen that despite its mission of saving the world, employees were treated unkindly?

Tips for Turning Staff Into Life-Long Fans

- *Make meetings inclusive, not exclusive.* Most staff members appreciate being included in decision-making processes. When a staff member is not invited to an important meeting, he or she may feel undervalued

or lose the feeling of ownership over the organization. Instead of handpicking invitees to meetings to discuss new programs and approaches, try inviting anyone interested in the meeting topic. You might be surprised at who attends, and what they contribute.

- *Find out what your staff really think.* Oftentimes, staff members have limited opportunity to express new ideas at work. I recently attended a workshop where the facilitator demonstrated how to foster an atmosphere in which all staff members could express themselves. The facilitator asked members of each workgroup to brainstorm solo. Each of us wrote down our initial ideas on post-it notes. We then went around the group and each person shared their top idea. The facilitator explained that this technique is a great way to minimize anchoring bias—the tendency to adopt the first idea proposed—as well as the tendency to allow extroverts to dominate the discussion.
- *Make hiring a team sport.* One of the biggest mistakes in hiring is going through the process alone. There are few, if any, soloist roles in public service. Every employer wants to hire “team players,” whether filling an accounting position or recruiting the director of social media. To attract staff who will work well in a team, you need to involve your team in the hiring process! From the initial review of applications, to interviews and reference checks, involve the team that will be supporting and depending on the new hire. You’ll likely select a candidate that ‘gels’ with the culture of your existing team. Concerned about legal risk in your hiring process? Check out our [Staff Screening Notebook](#) for tips on smart and legally-defensible hiring.

Your employees are potential life-long supporters of your mission. Motivate your staff by inviting their feedback on the challenges you’re facing. Express sincere thanks for your staff’s contributions to the organization’s victories. Above all, treat your employees as well as you treat your best customer or most generous donor.

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