Nonprofit Risk Management Center

Remember to Share

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From time to time one overhears the parents of boisterous or bickering children pleading with their offspring to "share." The admonition to "share with your siblings" is advice that many of us heard repeatedly from our wise parents, particularly when a beloved toy or a favorite treat was up for grabs.

Although nonprofit leaders are generous in sharing their time and talents to improve the quality of life in our communities, some remain a bit stingy when it comes to sharing the highly prized "treat" in a modern workplace: *information*.

A conversation with a participant at a workshop last week reminded me about the tension between giving employees what they "want to know" versus what the leader perceives they "need to know." In an article titled "Love and Politics" featured in the October 27, 2011 edition of this *eNews* we encouraged readers to be generous when communicating with staff:

Be generous; err on the side of communicating openly. Many nonprofit leaders adopt a "need to know" approach when it comes to sharing information with staff, not wanting to "burden" staff with information that may not be "needed" to tackle today's "to do" list. Yet employees who are in the dark about the nonprofit's plans and challenges are far more likely to find frustration and doubt, rather than comfort, in the dark.

In their article "Creating Sustainable Performance" in the January-February 2012 edition of the *Harvard Business Review*, Gretchen Spreitzer and Christine Porath write about the link between sharing information and inspired performance in the workplace. Spreitzer and Porath explain that "Doing your job in a vacuum is tedious and uninspiring; there's no reason to look for innovative solutions if you can't see the larger impact."

As I read about the findings of research on employee engagement, a handful of conversations with disillusioned nonprofit employees came to mind. Over the years I've met several professionals who brought extraordinary enthusiasm to their new jobs in the nonprofit sector, but later became frustrated when their positions failed to offer the "connection to mission" they had assumed or been told would occur.

It seems like every week a new study is released warning that many employers will soon face a stampede for the exit. Why? As economic conditions continue to improve across the country, a growing number of business and nonprofit employers will begin hiring or hasten the pace of ongoing efforts to staff up. Unhappy staff will have the opportunity to move on to workplaces that value their work, keep them "in the loop," and help them see how their efforts advance the employer’s nonprofit mission or business goals. Will your nonprofit be among those facing the stampede… or on the list of fortunate employers able to select from an applicant pool of capable, high-performing professionals eager to help you advance your mission? Don’t wait until you discover your most capable staff cleaning out their desks before taking a closer look at what the members of your team truly value and *how you value your team*.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your ideas about any risk management topic, feedback on this article and questions about the Center’s resources at Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org or 703.777.3504. The Center provides risk management tools and resources at www.https://nonprofitrisk.org/ and offers consulting assistance to organizations unwilling to leave their missions to chance.