

10 TIPS FOR PURPOSEFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF YOUR MISSION

1. ANY ROAD WILL GET YOU THERE

Most of us don't leave on a road trip without a destination. Organizations with clarity of vision and purpose, a well-thought strategic plan, and realistic implementation strategies have the basics needed for the journey...getting there. Don't forget to think through your outcomes and how you and your funders will measure them. Bottom line: how serious are you and your board in making sure the mission actually gets well done, day to day? And is getting done in the ways that your vision hopes it will?

2. TELL ME HOW YOU WANT IT

Trying to control every process within your organization or program is not leadership, it's micro-management and it doesn't work very well: a crucial part of purposeful leadership is delegation of responsibilities. Clear, specific expectations, with your own follow up and fair accountability, provide your managers with the framework and details for how the work of your mission is to be implemented. Delegate, and then let your managers' work within the parameters you set. They learn how to manage well, and you're able to keep your eyes on the environment, deal with roadblocks, and seize opportunities.

3. IT'S NOT ALWAYS ABOUT TRAINING

Customized training is a great strategy to ensure your employees keep up with best practices. However, there are frequently situations where poor performance is a result of circumstances completely unrelated to training, such as lack of procedures or inconsistent supervision. A "performance management" system is a primary tool for analyzing gaps in performance, developing remediation plans, and then ensuring clarity of expectations through all levels of the organization. Recruitment of employees, job descriptions, supervisory tools, and performance evaluations must all be in alignment, and developed carefully as part of your implementation strategy. Employees will feel they are treated fairly because they know precisely what is expected, and how they will be evaluated; and supervisors feel supported by a process that provides performance indicators and a means to assess them.

4. "THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT THE GOOD THINGS WE DO"

Employee recognition is the logical outgrowth of your performance management process. Reinforcement of positive performance by using incentives that are meaningful is your best way of ensuring that good employees stay, and stay productive. Acknowledging good work sends a clear message that you are serious about the work of your organization (and saying "thank you" costs you nothing).

5. WHO'S MINDING THE STORE?

CEOs and upper managers have to rely on supervisors to ensure that the work of the organization is competently completed. In many cases supervisors are promoted because they're exemplary employees, and for some, training and support will bring them to a level of competency. However some people are not suited to the tasks of oversight, providing employee feedback, and disciplining individuals who may have been co-workers before the promotion. There is an old saying in performance management that advises: "You can train a turkey to climb a tree, but you're better off hiring a squirrel"-- care in selection and coaching of supervisors is a key organizational task.

6. AM I MAKING MYSELF CLEAR?

Do your employees know what the organization's priorities are this year? How do you want clients treated? What to do in case of a disaster? Purposeful communication is a means to ensure that the things you consider important get to everyone in the organization. One important way to sharpen communication within your organization is to realize how important your words and attention are to your employees. Whether it's meeting agendas, memos to staff, the policy/procedure manual, or hallway discussions, the things you pay attention to convey meaning to the people who work for you. Purposeful leadership depends on everyone knowing where you're headed, what's important, and what's expected, so take advantage of communication opportunities as they present themselves.

7. IT'S JOB ONE

Continuous quality improvement, quality assurance, performance and quality improvement whatever the name of your process, it all comes down to whether or not your organization places value on getting better. In the tight financial environment that non-profits are operating in these days, it could mean the difference between staying competitive and losing a contract; for your clients, quality means something altogether different, and it's very personal. What matters is the value that CEOs put on the data, the remediation plans, and the improvement in services. Remember, what you pay attention to gets done, so asking about quality improvement initiatives will increase chances that they will succeed, as will encouraging and listening to feedback from clients.

8. PASS IT ON

With each change of staff organizations lose valuable knowledge, in addition to the disruption clients feel. Of course, continuity of care for clients is a must, but there are numerous other areas where information walks out of the door when change occurs, and that's expensive. and it's also demoralizing to staff, who realize they wouldn't have to re-create the wheel if upper management had only planned for the transition. CEOs who place an expectation that transitions will be planned and orderly whenever there is a change in staffing, programming, or agency priority will promote continuity while sending the message that you believe things can change in a good way.

9. SO YOU WANT TO BE A PLAYER.....

They say "timing is everything" and that we are lucky "being at the right place at the right time". But there is another old quotation that tells us to "put ourselves in luck's way" by seeking out opportunities. Committee and taskforce work is very time consuming, and technically you are not paid to participate. However, joining workgroups and making a contribution, can not only help shape institutional/bureaucratic change, but is also where relationships will be developed that may be helpful to your organization someday. Find ways to sit and discuss policy/procedure with governmental and private colleagues, and you will not only learn things, but others will come to know you and what your organization does.

10. IF THEY PAY THE BILLS....

Relationships with funders are crucial. Understand what is "being bought" through the contract. Be clear about what is expected, when it is expected, and how outcomes will be reviewed and deemed successful. What are the reporting requirements and time lines? Proactively provide feedback to your funders as to the progress of your work with hard data, not just anecdotal "stories", and be prepared for their feedback.