HOW TO: Empower Your Employees to Make More Decisions

Ever wonder why staff members hesitate when you ask them to make a decision? Some aspects of your workplace culture may create unintentional barriers to independent decision-making by employees. But it doesn't have to stay that way. Here's how to foster a culture of independent decision-making at your nonprofit.

Involve employees in the decision-making process from the start of an idea.

Rather than rolling out a new initiative with a game plan already set, give your team a goal, then ask for their input on how to get there.

Spell out what employees can and can't decide.

A great deal of hesitation by employees to make decisions comes from confusion on this point. Communicate to all team members who will make certain kinds of decisions, who needs to be consulted on the decisions, and who doesn't. It also helps to communicate what kinds of decisions you're OK with people making quickly and learning from, and what kinds need more time and thought.

Recognize employees' strengths and build your team's approach around them.

Focus on employee strengths in one-on-one meetings. As you learn where team members excel, build project assignments around the things they do well.

Coach managers on how to make good decisions for the organization.

Make sure they know they can count on your support and advice when they need it. Help them build their skills at problem solving, assessing performance, and evaluating risk.

Give employees independence, but don't disappear.

Make sure employees have clear assignments for initiatives and decisions they hold responsibility for. Let them know you're available to help problem-solve if they run into issues along the way.

Define your nonprofit's strategy well, and share it with your team often.

It's easier for employees to make decisions when they understand what everyone on the team should strive for.

Mentor and support your team.

Ask team members about their career goals. Provide training and development opportunities to help employees build confidence, as well as desired skills and experience.

Want employees to take risks? Change how you evaluate them.

Organizations that seek to encourage a culture of bold decisions should evaluate their performance management and training to reward—or at least not punish—well-reasoned bets that just don't work out.

Reinforce positive behavior.

When employees make a decision that benefits the team, tell them so—in a conversation, in writing, or publicly in front of the team (if the employee feels comfortable with public praise). Make sure any recognition you give is personal, specific, and timely.

Helpful Resources.

Why You Should Prioritize Employee Empowerment - Asana

5 Ways to Empower Your Team to Make Decisions - Wharton Business School

For Smarter Decisions, Empower Your Employees - McKinsey