

Solutions

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Go from Good to Great— Develop Tomorrow's Leaders

BY PATRICIA CUMBIE

You probably know the people you can turn to for results in your organization. Good leaders understand that they cannot reach their goals without participation and support from others. Many people believe up to 90 percent of a person's effectiveness comes from the people around them. This is as true on the job as it is in our personal life—people who support your dreams and aspirations will certainly help you achieve them. Surround yourself with people who take action and create results, and that's what you'll get.

It's possible to accomplish even more by consciously drawing on the people around you by actively developing their capacity to do more. As a leader, you will be that much more effective. By developing your management team and tiers of management in your co-op, you'll create the ultimate human resource tool that can accomplish truly great things.

When food co-ops enter into an expansion phase or development of an additional location, it's a given people will be called upon to do more. "As stores get bigger or take on second locations, people in middle management have to be ready to be effective in a larger context. This won't be as hard if there's a consistent learning process," said Mel Braverman, operations consultant for CDS. Management needs to be sure it isn't promoting people who are not ready, or giving them added responsibility without training or authority to implement.

Of course, not everyone wants to or is capable of leadership capacity, and that's ok, said Braverman, but "offering everyone the opportunity to see the bigger picture is a



People's Food Co-op in La Crosse, Wisc., completed a major expansion that called upon its leadership team to change their ways of thinking.

healthy approach for any store."

Braverman said the focus of a good management development program is to ultimately create "mentors and leaders as opposed to just managers." He discussed what components should be in place to do this:

- Business literacy training
- Authority to achieve stated goals
- Communication systems
- Incentive programs

In order to carry out an ambitious expansion project, Michelle Schry, general manager of People's Food Co-op in La Crosse, Wisc. knew it was imperative to develop her management team's capacity. They completed a major expansion last fall—adding 18,000 square feet of retail, new offices, a deli kitchen and restaurant. Schry said she spent two-and-a-half years preparing her management team

Gaining Perspective on Growth

In the formation of a positive work culture that embraces change, it's the systems department managers create for the day-to-day operations that have a huge impact on your co-op's ability to grow and develop.

In this issue of Solutions, we look at how a number of food co-ops work with developing their management teams for an expanding business. All sources mentioned the variety and number of formal training opportunities currently available to enhance the leadership capacity of co-op management teams: CoCoFiSt, CCMA conference, trade shows, and local and regional meetings with other cooperatives.

Taking the opportunity to get away from the store was also a resonant theme, whether it involved meeting other cooperators to share expertise, or having management retreats outside the store. James Watts, operations manager at Weaver Street Market, said getting away from the store has helped people at his co-op see their role as leaders with more clarity. It allows people an opportunity to be challenged or ask more questions.

Plus, Watts said, he doesn't underestimate the importance of informal communication that arises when people are on retreat. "There's a lot of perspective to be gained from sitting around a campfire and talking."

As we learn in this issue there are many good approaches to staff and co-op development, but don't forget to schedule the campfire.

—Patricia Cumbie

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Our Mission

CDS is dedicated to building and strengthening cooperative businesses by providing consulting, training and development services.

CDS includes a network of independent consulting professionals experienced in all aspects of developing food cooperatives. CDS consultants have worked on over 500 projects and will tailor their services to fit your needs and deliver results.

Expansion and Growth of Cooperatives

CDS provides a full range of services to assist your cooperative in growing your business and in the planning and implementation of expansion/relocation projects.

Leadership Development

CDS works to support and strengthen the leadership team—governance and management. Our work builds organizational alignment and enhances the working relationship between board and management.

Improving Performance

CDS identifies areas for improvement and develops strategies for results in organizational and business improvements.

Strengthening the Cooperative Advantage

CDS believes that the cooperative difference is your competitive advantage. We help co-ops build member investment and loyalty. We contribute to co-ops benefiting from collaborative networks while retaining local ownership and control.

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and staff to manage the transition.

Along with hiring consultants and acquiring technical expertise, Schry said a management book called *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't*, by Jim Collins, became another source of guidance for her. "What I learned most from that book was that I needed to look at who the people were in what positions, and figure out the best use of their talents," she said.

Like anything worthwhile, this was easier said than done. A lot of the management team at People's Food Co-op had been with the organization a long time, and ways of thinking and doing business had become entrenched. She wanted to move the group beyond "a stuck point" of individualistic approaches to greater collaboration.

By working on management development through programs like CoCoFiSt and CoCoGap, sending people to the Consumer Cooperative Managers Association (CCMA) conference, having managers create personal development plans and participate in quarterly management retreats, Schry fostered a level of inter-dependence and teamwork among department managers. The experiences people had working together allowed them to be more comfortable with change, and subsequently move the whole organization toward a culture of change.

"Managers need ongoing development. Just because you've been promoted in your job doesn't mean you know it all," said Shry. "The training budget is an investment we believed would pay off."

When Larrane Hartridge became general manager at New Leaf Market in Tallahassee, Fla. in 1997 she also inherited a staff with a lot of long-term employees, some of whom were not carrying their weight. Her initial goals were to raise the professionalism of the team and co-op staff, and her approach from the get-go has been to improve systems for communication. Before Hartridge became general manager of the co-op, she worked at a Canadian financial institution and brought

with her a strong understanding of the value of management and communication training.

Hartridge said training has always been a focus in her work with her management team, but now that she's established a strong team poised to expand the co-op, she's been working more specifically on communication skill development. This includes all-staff attention to customer service, as well as department managers learning to communicate with a number of constituencies.

"It's important for everyone to understand the big picture," Hartridge said, especially

when you're preparing to expand. "This information needs to be filtered down through all departments."

Hartridge also encouraged her managers to take a leadership role in communicating the goals of the organization to a number of audiences, developing their presenta-

tion skills. "Our management team did a presentation to the board and at our annual meeting. They told people what they are doing to prepare for the expansion and what they envision for service levels in the new store."

"Doing this raised the bar for the middle managers," Hartridge said. "They are taking a leadership role in this expansion and promoting of the goals of co-op."

New Leaf Market's communication doesn't stop at the doors of the co-op either. They are working to promote the co-op as not only a good place to shop and join, but a good place to work, because they'll be needing more staff soon. "We go out into the community all the time," Hartridge said.

Peg Nolan, CDS' marketing and membership development specialist, noted that this approach to staff development and co-op outreach is congruent with the overall goals of cooperation. "The whole idea of cooperation is to be connected to our members. To do this, there has to be a commitment to training on all levels, be it staff or members. That's how we build a future together."

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CASE STUDY

Developing Management Tiers

Weaver Street Market is well aware that their market trade area is the entire Chapel Hill-Carrboro area, and they're not shy about moving into it. Currently, two Weaver Street Market food co-op locations, as well as Panzanella, their restaurant, are serving that population of 80,000 people. The co-op is now actively seeking yet another new grocery store location.

James Watts, operations manager at Weaver Street Market, said the co-op's ability to seek growth that can position them to saturate their trade area is directly related to the skills within their tiers of management. Developing a strong management team and their assistants has been a long-term strategy of the co-op, and one that is carried out in a systemic way. Watts said they've used a variety of approaches over the years: management retreats, finance and operational training, and department business plan development.

"All of our programs are built around the professional development of middle management," Watts said. Developing a department's assistant managers is a big part of that. "We seek to expose them to more and more, and ask them to participate in things beyond their function." Watts said he does this for two reasons. He seeks their thoughtful participation, but also because he believes it enhances the level of leadership demonstrated in the department. "They know why change is important and can answer questions better for staff, get buy-in. To me, the worst case scenario is for someone to tell someone to do something 'because James said so.'"

Collaboration is also one of the most important elements Weaver Street Market incorporates to develop its managers. Watts



Weaver Street Market

said this is especially important as they continue to build new locations. He said they learned from building their first additional location that there's often a perceived lack from staff on which location gets more attention and resources. "As you grow you have to put more and more resources into communication. Informal communication channels don't work as well with a staff of 200 or multiple locations. Systems are important to keep everyone on the same page."

Of course formal training opportunities are important and necessary, but Watts said probably one of their most effective ongoing development tools is their biweekly management team meeting. "Education and professional development is woven through our meetings all the time," Watts said.

This year, Weaver Street Market decided to have all its managers add onto their sales and marketing goals changes to their departments they think will have the biggest impact on improving levels of service to the customer. "We asked them for real ways to make change," Watts said. He said striving for excellence on service is as much about management development as customer satisfaction. "Don't underestimate your people. Be willing to put as much in front of them as you can, and then some. They'll surprise you."

Weaver Street Market

Carrboro, NC
 Year founded: 1988
 Number of members: 8,500
 Equity investment: \$75-\$175 per household size
 Number of locations: 2 grocery co-ops, 1 restaurant
 Number of staff: 210 total

CoCoBEEPP

Continuous Connected Board Effectiveness Eastern Pilot Program

CDS is currently developing CoCoBEEPP so strong local co-op boards will play a key role in the success of thriving local food co-ops. Co-ops have many talented and dedicated board leaders whose effectiveness can be enhanced with access to resources and support structures. Twenty-four co-ops are currently enrolled and receiving CoCoBEEPP services.

Each participating co-op receives:

- Ongoing, regular consultation for each Board President (or other board leader, if appropriate). Up to 20 hours of consultation per year for each co-op.
- Facilitation of and planning assistance for a full day retreat for each co-op board at a site selected by the board.
- Cooperative Board Leadership 101. Topics will include board roles and responsibilities, basic financial understanding, cooperative principles and economics, overview of Policy Governance, and current issues facing food coops.

Consultation and training services are provided by the Cooperative Development Services (CDS) Leadership Development Team: Marilyn Scholl, coordinator, Linda Stier, Peg Nolan, Michael Healy and Mark Goehring.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at BoardTrain@cdsfood.coop.

The logo for CDS (Cooperative Development Services) features the letters 'CDS' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered within a dark red square.

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