Employer Best Practices (According to Employees)
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The New Year is here and so is talk of resolutions. Whether or not you set resolutions, the fact remains the same: we have 365 days ahead of us. How we spend this time and what we choose to focus on is important.

Chances are you already have set clear goals (resolutions) for your organization—fundraising goals, programs you plan to create, and new staff you hope to hire. These are important considerations, but have you also set goals to improve best practices around employee management? **How well do your current practices align with the individual professional resolutions of each of your staff?** If you were to answer this question, would your answer match that of your employees? Asking these questions can provide valuable insights that can help everyone within your organization set resolutions and foster success…for all!

For some time, we at CNP have been curious about understanding the personal and professional goals of our candidates and internal staff. And given the nature of the recruiting business, we ask job seekers this question daily. Recently we took an opportunity to ask professionals in Atlanta, Chicago, and Washington, DC: **At this point in your career, which employer best practice would benefit you the most?**

From October to December 2016, we collected responses from over 540 professionals[1]. **53% of the respondents had 15+ years of experience within the nonprofit sector**, while the rest of the respondent group broke down like this:

15+ years: **53%**   10-15 years: **15.5%**   5-10 years: **16.1%**   2-5 years: **14.4%**   1 year or less: **1.1%**

As for the results, the data revealed this:
- **32.65%:** A strong internal professional development and training platform. I want to know my employer is investing time and money in growing and developing me professionally.
- **17.63%:** A strong recruitment, onboarding, and employee engagement process. Once I start my job, I want to know my employer's commitment to keeping me retained remains.
- **16.88%:** A career mapping program. If I am going to put my time and energy into my role, I want to know where I am headed within my organization.
- **13.91%:** An incentives and reward program. I like being recognized and rewarded for the hard work I do.
- **10.02%:** A clear and effective performance evaluation process. I like to know how I am performing in my job and where I can improve.
- **8.91%:** A strong succession management process. As people retire or move on to new opportunities, I want to know my employer has a sound plan in place moving forward.

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[1] Careers In Nonprofits (CNP) surveyed 544 candidates in Atlanta, Chicago, and DC, who either interviewed in our offices or have registered as candidates in our online database.

The results are clear: employees at all levels want a strong, internal professional development and training platform. To them, this is a sign of commitment from you, the employer.

Within your organization, how do you grow and develop your staff? What is your process? These questions are important to consider as we tune into what our staff wants and allow them to help us build a successful organization.

Professional growth and development = a solid internal training platform.
Implementing an efficient, internal training platform is not difficult, nor does it need to be expensive. Your platform should satisfy the training needs of all staff, while remaining adaptable to an individual employee's needs. At CNP we work with our staff to understand their personal learning style, as well as ask them where they feel they need more training as they progress on their career path within the company. We invest on the front end with our on-boarding training, which lasts for 3 months. From there, we continue to discuss training with staff one on one. By having these conversations, we can focus on what topics are most necessary and essential for them to perform well at CNP.

When we asked our internal staff about the type of training that has worked best for them, a majority of staff said role-playing has been most beneficial to their professional development and growth at CNP. "I find **role-playing to be the most effective form of professional development because it forces me to actively engage** in the learning process," says Yehwroe E., a Division Manager in our Washington, DC Branch. She continues, "I appreciate opportunities that force me to actually think while I participate." Alexandra H., a Recruiter in our Chicago office agrees: "We receive a lot of training, with great tools and tips. When we role-play, it gives us **the opportunity to actually put the tools to work**."

Our staff also shared that training webinars, workshops, and conferences have been beneficial to their own professional development within CNP. Shanelle S. mentioned that she has "found webinars and short events really helpful. They help [her] **stay on top of developments** and have been a great way to see the way that other people are using specific tools in their professional development."

It's also important to create a culture of opportunity. Are your employees using their skills and talents in their current roles? When it comes to leveraging these talents, are you thinking outside of the box or sticking to the way things were done in the past? And what if you allowed staff's interests, passions, and skills to drive their career path within your organization? **Work with your employees to set goals that help them achieve success for the organization, as well as help them continue to advance and grow professionally.**
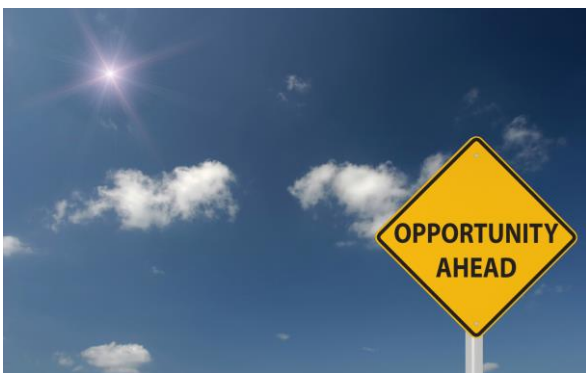
Make these growth opportunities clear and known to staff; we tend to take for granted who we already have on our staff and we make assumptions about employee satisfaction and commitment. Losing sight of these areas within our own organizations can stall progress and limit potential for growth. So why not get ahead of it instead? What if you offered a career mapping program internally to map out a dynamic career path for your employees? From there, empower your staff to explore these career paths and responsibilities within your own organization. In the end, it's really a way for everyone to grow.

Within CNP and our client organizations, we have seen successful matches by hiring and promoting staff internally. Again, do not lose sight of who is around you. Begin committees so that employees can tap into other skill sets. Cross-train staff so you are prepared for promotions, retirements, or allowing people to shift roles within the organization. Taking these steps will also satisfy those employees who feel it is important to **have a succession plan** implemented.

Retention = strong recruitment, on-boarding, and employee engagement processes. Professionals are clearly asking their employers to show commitment and investment in their professional development and well-being. In our **Nonprofit Hiring Toolkit** we provide resources on best practices around recruitment, on-boarding, and employee engagement. To offer a few highlights and insights:

During the on-boarding process (within a new hire's first week):

- ✓ Stress the company values and history.
- ✓ Review an organizational chart with your new employee to educate them on structure within the organization, how to communicate with colleagues, and introduce them to other staff members they will interact with regularly.
- ✓ Set immediate professional goals and share insights to help them achieve success within their role. At CNP, we share a goal sheet with new employees in their first week so that they are clear on where to focus their efforts and time.
- ✓ Reiterate why they were hired and review job description and current/upcoming projects.

> *Signs of Employee Disengagement:*
> - **Reduction** or shift in work hours
> - **Atypical** attire or odd lunch hours
> - Frequent talk about **burnout**
> - **Withdrawal** from coworkers
> - **Loss of interest** in work-related topics
> - **Reduced** productivity
> - Repeated **complaints** from the past
> - **Increased** absenteeism

As for an internal employee engagement process, why is it important to have one? Simple: staff want to be engaged and find fulfillment in their work. By focusing on employee engagement, you will see more buy-in and better work quality from your staff.

Career Mapping = helping your employees visualize their future within your organization. Another resourceful employee engagement tool is career mapping, which our survey results show professionals also find beneficial. Keep an eye out for our April 2017 white paper, where we will take an in-depth look at career mapping.

There is room for improvement at any organization. As employers, while we need to focus on our mission, donor relations, and budgets, let's not overlook the needs of our staff who make all of this possible. Implementing or improving these best practices within our organization is not hard. Yes, it takes effort and strategic thinking, but the processes can be quite simple. For instance, you can start an **employee recognition program** by highlighting team or individual accomplishments every week. Saying "thank you" when a staff member turns in exceptional work goes a long way. At CNP, treating our staff to an in office breakfast or lunch has served as a great motivator and an appreciated reward when goals were met.

Keep in mind that rewards and incentives don't have to be expensive; perhaps you let an employee leave the office a few hours early on a Friday or send them to an external training conference. Of course, as a nonprofit organization, be sure to review the Association of Fundraising Professional's Ethical Code when you are considering what bonuses or incentives offer to your staff.

The performance evaluation process some professionals desire is also straightforward to implement and manage. At CNP, each employee has an individualized goal sheet that they create with their direct supervisor, which is reviewed between the supervisor and employee every three months. **Both you and your employee should be clear on what their goals are within in a certain period of time.** You should also schedule a date you will meet with your team members one on one to conduct a performance review.

And when it comes to the review:

o **Come prepared.** What do you want your employee to take away from the conversation?
o **Outline your agenda** for the meeting and ask your employee what they would also like to discuss with you.
o **Be honest and provide clear, constructive feedback** when discussing challenges *and* successes.
o **Discuss** ideas for development and **understand** the professional goals of your employee.
o **Create specific actions** to be taken by each of you. Be sure to set achievable, valuable goals, including set deadlines.
o Summarize the performance review and **say "thank you".** Be sure the employee knows they have your full support.

While a smaller percentage of professionals see value in implementing a **succession plan** within an organization, it should not to be overlooked as you continue to grow and develop best practices around employee management. **Having a succession plan:**

o Helps to identify future leaders among current staff and internal training opportunities.
o Mitigates the cost and decrease in productivity caused by turnover and vacant positions.
o Ensures key positions remain filled, as well as saves money and/or time on external recruitment and training.
o Identifies your vulnerabilities as an organization, allowing you to assess areas that may be at risk and helps you plan action steps to identify and train successors.
o Maintains business effectiveness by keeping key roles filled and staff trained for any unplanned resignations or terminations.

Again, developing and implementing these best practices is not difficult, but it does require you to prioritize them. Our employees are asking us to maintain and focus on these efforts within our organizations. Having these best practices in place will create a happy staff, happy donors, and ultimately a successful organization. **What could be better than that?**

What's next? An in-depth look at Career Mapping.

Stay tuned, stay strong, and keep an eye out for our quarterly whitepapers.