

# Advancing Your Cause

## Through the People You Manage

A Guidebook  
For Busy Leaders





Management Assistance Group  
**Make real change**

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# The Management Assistance Group

The Management Assistance Group strengthens visionary organizations that work to create a just world so they can persevere as powerful agents of social change. For over 27 years, we have worked in partnership with hundreds of organizations to build clarity of purpose, effectiveness in achieving goals, and powerful strategies.

Our work has taken us to virtually every state, and across the spectrum of social justice issues. We assist organizations in many areas of organizational development, including strategic planning, fund-raising, adjusting to growth and change, managing people, restructuring, and board development.

Our consultants come from the world of social change, and we are proud to play a part in building a strong social justice community and, in turn, a better future.

This publication compiles over 27 years of practical tips, tools, and insight from our work with social justice organizations. We hope you find it useful. To find out more about us, our publications, and our services, visit us on the web at [www.managementassistance.org](http://www.managementassistance.org).

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# Introduction

Almost no one goes to work for a social justice group aspiring to be a manager. They go to be great lawyers or lobbyists or organizers or policy analysts and devote all their time and energy to these pursuits. Yet just when they begin to excel in their chosen field, they are rewarded – ironically – with the very thing they’d never hoped for nor aspired to: responsibility for managing others.

These “accidental managers” accept the promotion and then have mixed feelings about it, complaining, “I just want to do the work, not manage others to do it.” Yet they know that mastering the skill of getting work done through others is crucial to expanding the impact and reach of advocacy organizations. No one will ever accomplish big social justice goals on his or her own. It takes a team of people, led by a strong manager who knows how to channel, blend, and leverage their individual talents and capacities into a whole that is bigger and more potent than the sum of its parts.

If you’re an “accidental manager,” the key is to recognize that your position calls on you to play a different role. MAG has developed some tools designed specifically for the “accidental managers” of social justice organizations. These tools will help you to get the most from your staff and will help you create a work environment in which the best and the brightest will want to stay.

- **Managing People: Understanding and Overcoming the Most Common Pitfalls** highlights ten danger zones for managers, and gives you advice on how to avoid them.
- **How Am I Doing? A Management Self-Assessment Tool** is a simple worksheet you can use to identify your strengths and uncover areas that need improvement.
- **The Three Questions All Employees Ask and Every Manager Needs To Answer** will help you understand what your employees need to know to be as effective as they can be.
- **Root Causes: Why Employees Don’t Get the Job Done** will help you look beneath the surface of performance problems to get to the real issues affecting your staff members.
- **Having Successful Staff Meetings** is a collection of easy to use tips for making the most out of your meetings.
- **Do You Want to Read More?**

# Managing People:

# Understanding and Overcoming the Most Common Pitfalls



Anyone who manages people is sometimes frustrated and baffled by the task. It was true twenty years ago, when Susan Gross first wrote this landmark article, and it's still as true today.

Human beings are complex, unpredictable, and confounding – and there's no operating manual to tell you how they work. Being a manager is demanding, and it inevitably means making mistakes. Growing as a manager requires recognizing your mistakes – and learning from them. Here are some of the most common pitfalls managers of social justice organizations fall into, along with advice on how to avoid these traps or dig yourself out if need be. If you see yourself in one of these examples, you're not alone. It is a rare manager who doesn't sometimes fall into them.

## pitFall 1 **Thinking you can manage all people in the same way.**

Employees can't be helped to change and grow unless they're told what's wrong and what they need to do to fix it.

Different kinds of people need different kinds of management. Some people work best when they can take the initiative and operate independently. Others blossom only with structure, guidance, and regular feedback. Managers often make the mistake of trying to manage everyone the same way – usually exactly as they themselves like to be managed – and then they are mystified when their approach doesn't lead to good performance. Effective managers realize that they must either hire people who can thrive under their particular management style, or they must use different approaches – finding out what works best for each employee and adjusting to the employee's needs.

## pitFall 2 **Not communicating openly and honestly with your staff.**

Many managers are reluctant to communicate hard things, especially things they think an employee doesn't want to do or hear. For example, some managers never make their expectations clear for fear of seeming too demanding or bossy. Staff members are left guessing, and troubled by a vague sense that they are not living up to some unspoken standard. Other managers bottle up minor irritations, like anger about someone always being ten minutes late, because they think they'll look small and petty, or they just want to avoid conflict. They repress their resentment, which then seeps out in other ways. Other nonprofit managers worry so much about looking harsh or hurting people's feelings that they put off conveying legitimate criticisms. Instead of dealing with each problem as it arises, these managers wait so long to confront the issue that by the time they do say something, they have accumulated a long list of never-voiced grievances. The employee is then stunned that the boss has allowed him or her to go on for months without ever being told there was a problem. Employees can't be helped to change and grow unless they're told what's wrong and what they need to do to fix the situation. Not communicating doesn't protect or support your staff – it keeps them stuck.

## pitFall 3 **Complaining to one employee about another.**

This is damaging on several counts. By not communicating directly with the people you're upset with, you disempower them; how can they be expected to correct the situation if they don't know anything is wrong? In addition, when you complain to one employee about another, it leaves your confidant insecure as well; they can't help but wonder whether you're talking behind their backs, too. This mode of operation also begins to create wedges between your employees and undermines their relationships with one another. It often sets off a destructive, hard-to-break chain of gossip and indirect dealing. Nothing leads more quickly to an atmosphere of acrimony and mistrust than a pattern of backbiting and third-party communication – particularly when this pattern is set by management.

## pitFall 4 **Having gaps between the way things really are and the way they're said to be.**

People recognize the realities in their organization; pretending otherwise only makes the situation worse.

Nothing frustrates people more than working in organizations in which the managers permit or perpetuate discrepancies between what's actually so and what's said to be. This is the manager who claims the organization is non-hierarchical and collegial, when in fact a small inner-circle is making all the decisions. Or it's the manager who claims the organization is democratic, when only he or she can cast the final, dispositive vote. Or it's the manager who maintains that the organization is staying true to its purpose, when in fact it's been chasing money and shaping projects to fit funders' interests. People recognize the realities in their organization; pretending otherwise only makes the situation worse.





## pitFall 5 **Not delegating responsibility – or delegating responsibility without commensurate authority.**

Sometimes managers are reluctant to delegate because they don't have confidence in the people below them. These managers either need to fill the positions with people they can trust or train and coach the current employees to the point where they can earn the boss's confidence. Other managers have a hard time letting go because they don't think anyone will do the job as well as they would. More often than not they're right, but the question they have to start asking themselves is not "Can anyone get the job done as well as I can?" but rather "Can someone else get the job done effectively?" If you're interested in developing people and having a whole team of players to pursue your organization's goals, you're going to have to accept the fact that some of them may do things only 80% as well as you can – and turn things over to them anyway. The worst kinds of managers are those who go through the motions of delegating – they assign responsibilities to others, but never give up tight control. They micromanage, rewrite everything, review every detail, second guess decisions, and take back the territory when the job is not done exactly as they want. They drive strong staff away, resent the remaining staff for not taking enough initiative and responsibility, and then complain about too much work and too much of the organizational burden falling on them!

## pitFall 6 **Forgetting to make sure the mission lives as a nurturing, driving force.**

Managers often make the mistake of neglecting one of the most important parts of their jobs: making sure that the organization's purpose is alive and infused into the staff's day-to-day activities. Mission is almost always clearest for an organization at its start. Then, as the organization grows, its mission tends to creep or blur or fade away. The staff's focus shifts to individual jobs and projects. People become so caught up in their own operations that they lose sight of the over-arching mission that their jobs are really about. They lose touch with the central purpose that should be shaping and driving their work, and they forget the common vision that drew them to the organization in the first place and gave everyone a sense of coherence, connectedness, and unity. Managers must periodically take the time to remind people of why they are doing what they are doing. Restoring the staff's sense of clear, common purpose can redirect or refocus their everyday efforts, revive their spirits, and lend new meaning, direction, and potency to their work.

## pitfall 7

### **Waiting too long to Fire people.**

Many non-profit managers are so worried about being unfair, or so concerned about being viewed as lacking compassion, that they put off doing something about a problem employee for months after they know he or she will never make the grade. These managers keep talking themselves into giving the person “just one more chance.” But keeping people in jobs they can’t handle doesn’t support them; it undermines and erodes their sense of value, competence, and self-esteem. People are nearly always better off if they are pushed to find positions that suit their abilities. Furthermore, nothing can be more damaging to overall staff morale than having people on board who aren’t pulling their weight. People see that the organization isn’t performing as well as it should, and they can’t help but wonder why they should continue to care so much, or work so hard, when others aren’t pulling their weight. Some managers compound the damage by trying to come up with structural solutions to personnel problems: transferring employees to different projects or divisions, redefining their responsibilities, or inserting new layers of personnel above, below, or beside them. More often than not, this leaves the organization saddled with a structure that doesn’t really fit its needs and an employee who’s still not getting the job done.

## pitfall 8 **Not putting enough time or effort into hiring decisions.**

The hiring process has many traps that can ensnare a nonprofit manager. One is compromising too quickly by hiring someone you’re unsure about because you think having a warm body is better than having no one at all. In fact, the time lost in dealing with a sub-par employee is often far greater than the extra time it would have taken to find the right person in the first place. Another pitfall is redefining a job in order to get someone you like to take it; you may add a good person, but the job that really needs to get done is probably not the one that’s being filled. Still another trap is hiring

people for positions for which they’re overqualified, like making someone with an advanced degree an administrative or research assistant. You may think you’ve made a real catch, but having a person who’s in a job that doesn’t tap their capabilities will surely leave them dissatisfied.

The time lost in dealing with a sub-par employee is often far greater than the extra time it would have taken to find the right person in the first place.


## pitFall 9

### **Not letting employees know they are valued.**

Too many managers forget to praise their staff members, thank them, or seek their input. Some fear that if they give their employees too many pats on the back, staff members will rest on their laurels and slack off. However, most people need healthy doses of positive feedback, affirmation, and acknowledgment to sustain their motivation and productivity. People who work for nonprofits know that their rewards aren't going to be short hours, high pay, and fancy perquisites, but rather the satisfaction that comes from working for an important cause. This is why it's essential for you to let them know about the difference the organization is making and how their work contributes to it. Many action-oriented managers, who have little patience with process, can also leave their staffs feeling devalued by failing to seek out employees' views on decisions that will affect them. These managers don't realize that there's a powerful pay-off in taking the time to get the input of their staff members: employees who are more motivated and more invested because they helped shape the tasks they must carry out.

## pitFall 10

### **Not taking responsibility for the fact that the organization's tone and style are probably a reflection of you.**



If everyone in your organization is uptight and on edge, it's important to look at how testy you are. If there's lots of gossip and back-biting, it's useful to examine your own pattern of communication. If there's lots of mistrust, you'd better look at how open, direct, and candid you are. If everyone is stale and cynical, it's time to examine whether the flame is still alive in you. Executive directors, in particular, can forget that how they behave serves as a powerful model for everyone in their organization. If there's something wrong with your organization's culture, the first place to look is at your own operating style.

## The Meta-Pitfall

Managing people means falling into these traps at least once in a while. It goes with the territory. That's what makes these the most common pitfalls. So the question is not whether you're going to be ensnared. Rather, the question is whether you're going to learn from the experience. This brings us to the meta-pitfall, the one that compounds and exacerbates all the others: being unwilling to admit that you've made a mistake. Some managers are so worried about failing that they refuse to recognize or acknowledge their errors. They think doing so will result in a loss of respect or undermine their authority. Yet the opposite is almost always true: few things win more trust, admiration, or loyalty from your staff than having the courage to admit your mistakes, reveal your humanity, ask for forgiveness, and show that you are growing and learning from your missteps, miscommunications, and failures.

# How Am I Doing?

## A Management Self-Assessment Tool

This tool is designed to help you determine whether or not you are engaging in management practices that help employees stay productive and satisfied. But users beware: this checklist sets standards for top performance.

No manager, however supportive and effective, engages in these practices all the time. By highlighting the management practices that you may tend to forget, avoid, neglect – or simply not make time for – this tool will help you target areas in which you can improve.

### **Use this checklist:**

- To identify where you are strong, where you are weak, and where it is most important for you to work on your management practices.
- To distribute to your staff members and request their feedback on your strengths and weaknesses.
- To keep nearby and refer to periodically as a reminder of areas where you want to make further progress.




	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
1. I set and personally uphold high standards of performance.			
2. I involve staff members when making decisions that affect them.			
3. I hold regular staff meetings that inform and involve people in planning, coordinating, and problem-solving.			
4. I provide ongoing guidance, direction, and support to help staff grow and develop.			
5. I give staff members feedback on their performance and behavior, even when it is difficult or might make them uncomfortable.			
6. I set clear expectations and hold people accountable for the goals, priorities, and deadlines we have agreed upon.			
7. I give staff positive recognition and appreciation for their contributions and accomplishments.			
8. I adapt my management style to fit the needs and level of experience of each person I supervise – giving more direction and structure to some, and offering greater independence to others.			
9. I delegate responsibilities and give qualified people the authority needed to take initiative and make their own decisions.			
10. I enable staff to feel a sense of ownership for the programs they work on.			
11. I make sure that each person I supervise has a clear understanding of their job’s responsibilities and performance standards.			
12. I base my decisions on what is in the best interests of the organization rather than on the personal preferences of me or my staff.			
13. I make decisions in a timely manner, even when they are hard.			
14. I explain my decisions when they diverge from the wishes or recommendations of staff.			
15. I am direct and straightforward in my communication, and I make myself accessible to staff members so they can voice questions and concerns.			
16. I listen in a way that makes clear that I have really heard what the other person has said.			

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	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
17. I am aware of my cultural biases and I respect the staff's diverse backgrounds, styles, and perspectives.			
18. I create an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect, and appreciation, and foster a sense of community among staff.			
19. I encourage staff to resolve differences constructively among themselves, but, if necessary, I am willing to step in.			
20. I am flexible, open to critical feedback, and willing to change my mind or do things differently for greater effectiveness or productivity.			
21. I am able to get the cooperation of people even when they disagree with me.			
22. When things do not go as expected, I ask, "What was learned?" and "What are the opportunities?"			
23. I put time and energy into making sure staff members' morale and spirits are good.			
24. I make sure that the staff draws inspiration from the vision and purpose of our work, and that they understand how their daily work advances those larger goals.			
25. I put sufficient time and energy into making sure that I am hiring the right person for the job.			
26. I set a positive, respectful tone and style, and I personally model the behavior I expect from my staff members.			
27. I will let people go if – after identifying concerns, attempting corrective action, and providing fair warning – they aren't working out.			





# The Three Questions All Employees Ask and Every Manager Needs to Answer

Do you know the three questions that all employees ask – each of which must be answered if employees are to perform well, remain motivated, and get satisfaction from their work?

- 
1. **What's my job?**
  2. **How am I doing?**
  3. **Does anyone care?**

Mark Monchek, President of CLR Associates, first observed that to manage people effectively, a manager must answer these questions not once, but over and over again. To answer each question, there are several bases managers need to cover. MAG has developed this list of answers to help you identify where it is important for you to be clearer with the people you supervise. While these are the points we feel each manager should address with each employee, don't fret if you haven't covered every base.

# 1

## Employees Ask: What's My Job? To Answer Them, Clarify:

### ① What they will be held accountable for:

- Responsibilities they are expected to assume.
- Tasks they are expected to perform.
- Results and outcomes for which they are responsible.
- Goals they should be working toward.
- What their focus and priorities should be.
- The basis upon which their performance will be appraised and what the performance standards are.
- Expectations for specific assignments.

### ② What the parameters of their authority are, to whom they are accountable:

- Whom they report to, who supervises and evaluates their work.
- Which decisions they can make on their own, and which require sign-off – and who will provide it.
- When they can initiate and produce on their own, or when they must get directions, review, or approval.
- At what point they should bring matters to their supervisor for a review or sign-off.
- What the procedures or mechanisms are for getting sign-off.
- If and when they can speak for or bind the organization.
- Matters about which they need to keep their supervisors informed – and how they should do it.
- Who reports to them.







③ **How their job fits with the rest of the organization:**

- What the mission, goals, and priorities of the organization are, and how their job advances them.
- How their job fits/connects with other jobs.
- What the responsibilities are of other people in the organization.

④ **With whom they must communicate, coordinate, or integrate their work (both inside and outside the organization):**

- With whom they need to coordinate, and why.
- Whose work they need to integrate their work with, and why.
- Who else they need to involve to get their jobs done.
- Who else they need to communicate to or consult with, and why.
- Who else they need to keep informed, and why.

⑤ **What supports they can count on:**

- To whom they can turn for guidance, direction, expertise, wise counsel, coaching, or assistance.
- What supports, resources, or assistance they can count on.



⑥ **What the organizational policies and culture are:**

- What style of operating people are expected to fit into.
- What organizational rules and policies people are expected to follow.
- What the organization's ethics, norms, and values are that they are expected to honor.
- What the organizational rituals or ceremonies are.
- What standards they are expected to keep.

# 2

## Employees Ask: How Am I Doing? To Answer Them:

### ① Provide constructive feedback on their performance on a regular, ongoing basis:

- Formal, annual performance reviews.
- Informal, continuous feedback, including both constructive criticism and positive recognition.
- Specific, precise feedback on day-to-day work.
- Open and direct communications, so they know exactly where they stand with you rather than having to infer it from your attitude.

### ② Maintain a supportive atmosphere and attitude:

- Provide an open door for getting support, advice, and direction.
- Encourage questions and be available to answer them.
- Hold mistakes as opportunities to learn; avoid blame and recrimination.

### ③ Analyze what the causes of performance problems are. Ask yourself:

- Are they clear about what the job is and what is expected of them?
- Do they lack the necessary knowledge or skills to do the job? Can that deficit be corrected with mentoring, training, or other support?
- Do they lack the motivation to do the job? Do they really want the job, and does it use their skills, interests, and talents? If not, can adjustments be made?
- Is the employee managing resources and priorities effectively? Is there just too much work coming their way too fast?
- Are there communications gaps? Are performance and cultural expectations clearly understood? Does the employee have all the information needed to do the job effectively?

### ④ Provide what's needed to correct the performance problem:

- Teach, mentor, coach, train, counsel, or adjust responsibilities.
- Set clear expectations for improvement, along with clear gauges or benchmarks for assessing improvement.
- Terminate people instead of allowing them to continue to fail.

# 3

## Employees Ask: Does Anyone Care? To Answer Them:

### ① Treat them as respected part-owners of the organization:

- Involve them. Solicit their input regarding decisions that affect them or their work.
- Let them know what the final decision is, how their views were weighed, and why a course of action was taken.
- Provide forums (such as regular staff meetings) for them to raise concerns, offer ideas, or make suggestions.
- When their issues or concerns cannot be addressed, explain why.
- Keep them informed about important developments, such as hiring, funding, and new initiatives.
- Share organizational accomplishments and progress toward goals that they'd feel proud or excited about.

### ② Acknowledge and appreciate them, as workers and individuals:

- Publicly acknowledge and thank people for excellent performance, extraordinary effort, and special contributions.
- Demonstrate appreciation for their commitment, dedication, and passion.
- Provide competitive wages, supportive benefits and personnel policies, and opportunities for growth and advancement.
- Showcase them and their work in meetings of the staff or board, as well as outside the organization.
- Let them know the difference they and their work are making.

### ③ Treat them respectfully, as professionals:

- Be flexible about meeting personal needs (within the limits of personnel policies).
- Have an open door and listen keenly to what they are saying.
- Check in on how they are doing; care about their emotional and physical well-being.
- Refrain from unprofessional behavior. Model the behavior that's desired.
- Celebrate birthdays and other special occasions.



# Root Causes: Why Employees Don't Get the Job Done

Four root causes are at the heart of individual performance problems in social justice organizations: skill gaps, motivational gaps, resource gaps, and communications gaps. Identifying the cause, or combination of causes, at work in a disappointing performance is the first step toward creating the conditions under which that person will thrive.

While there's a great deal of academic research on each of these gaps, we created this tool to give you a simple way of finding – and closing – the gaps that lead employees to underperform. The following questions will help you identify gaps, understand how they affect your employee, and figure out the best way to intervene.



# 1

## SKILLS GAPS

### Do They Know How to Do the Job?

- Does the employee's background match the skills the job demands?
- Have you trained the employee so they can do the job well? Is there time for you to train them? If not, who else can coach or train them?
- Did the job change as the organization developed? Does the job now require new skills or expertise beyond what was originally demanded of the employee?

### CLOSING THE GAP

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If an employee lacks the background, skills, or training to do the job, they have a skill gap. But take heart: training and skills development can often close the gap. Start by identifying the missing skills, then determine the best training method. Books, on-the-job training, mentorship, and external workshops are all effective approaches. When you suggest training to the employee, seek to develop a common understanding about the skills the employee lacks and the best way to address them. As you plan your employee's training, be sure to set aside time for frequent check-ins so you can monitor and support the employee's progress. If the skills required to succeed are beyond the employee's reach, it may be time to reconsider how well the employee fits the position.

# 2

## MOTIVATIONAL GAPS

### Do They Want to Do the Job – Now or Forever?

- Do they really want this job?
- Does this job utilize their skills, values, and interests? Is the job monotonous and unstimulating? If so, can you redesign the job to make it more interesting?
- Do you hold the employee accountable for meeting the goals and standards?
- Do you provide regular, effective feedback to sustain or improve performance?
- Has there been a sudden drop in performance? Has the employee demonstrated the skills in the job before? Is this drop situational (due to a personal problem or change in the employee's personal life), or is it part of a chronic pattern of sporadic performance drops? Is it temporary or permanent?

### CLOSING THE GAP

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Motivational gaps can be caused by a variety of factors, so the first step should always be to identify the source. If it's a personal problem, it is probably temporary and you can make interim accommodations. If it's boredom, you can add new challenges. If it's lack of accountability, you can apply closer supervision. However, if an employee is fundamentally unsatisfied in their position, and that's the only position in your organization that the individual is qualified for, it's best for all parties to terminate the relationship. Be sure to consult your organization's attorney about the risks and liabilities involved in termination.

### 3

## RESOURCE GAPS

### Can Anyone Really Do This Job?

- Is the employee effectively managing time, resources, and priorities?
- Is there just too much work coming their way too fast?
- What additional resources or training can you give the employee to handle these problems?

## CLOSING THE GAP

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There are two approaches to closing a resource gap. If the job description is within reasonable limits, you can help the employee set priorities or manage time more efficiently. If the job is too much for any one person, develop a new job description that scales back the employee's set of tasks and redistribute duties to others. The key is to structure the position so it both meets organization's needs and facilitates the employee's success.

### 4

## COMMUNICATION GAPS

### What Have I Failed to Communicate?

### What is Not Being Heard?

- Did you orient the employee to the workplace and culture? Did you explain how you want things done?
- Did you make clear the standards you have for the job? Does the employee know what you expect of them and how their performance will be measured?
- Did you talk to the employee to be sure your communication was clear and complete? Did you include the employee in the goal-setting process?

## CLOSING THE GAP

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When you encounter a communications gap, it's critical to ascertain its nature. There are cases when a clear-cut miscommunication has occurred, and these can be easily corrected by checking with the employee to make sure your understandings match. Often, the employee holds an underlying assumption that colors the conversation, causing the employee to walk away with a different understanding than the one you intended. You need to help surface that assumption and correct it.

Chronic "misunderstandings" about a given task or issue can sometimes mask the entrenched resistance of an employee who simply does not agree with the communication being given. In these cases, "I don't understand" functions as a stand-in for "I don't want to do that." Keep this distinction in mind as you assess communications gaps.



# Having Successful Staff Meetings

Strong managers build teams that pull together the talents and capacities of the people they supervise to create a whole that is bigger and more potent than the sum of its parts.

In doing so, few tools are as powerful as staff meetings. Often, these meetings are the only times that the entire staff meets as a group; managers can use this opportunity to motivate staff members, strengthen cohesion, improve team dynamics, and build a work community.



## **Plan your staff meetings with these goals in mind:**

- ✧ Creating a sense of community, connectedness, and being one team working toward the same mission.
- ✧ Enabling staff members to understand, appreciate, value, and support one another's work.
- ✧ Bringing a variety of voices to bear on important issues or problems facing the organization.
- ✧ Enhancing staff members' sense of ownership and importance by inviting them to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them.
- ✧ Improving the planning and coordination of organization-wide activities.

## Implementing your goals: some concrete examples

- ✳ **Ask staff members to report briefly** on the activities they have been most involved with or that are most important for the rest of the staff to know about. The challenge here is to have people briefly summarize the key aspects of their work, but not allow it to devolve into long recitation of everything they've been doing.
  - “We’ve been working to strengthen our grassroots network in Michigan, California, and New Mexico.”
  - “I’ve convinced 10 reporters to write major stories about our newest study on landmines.”
  
- ✳ **Publicly acknowledge staff members** for their individual or collective achievements.
  - Congratulate the staff attorney for winning a key motion in an important case.
  - Acknowledge the office manager for reorganizing the supply closet.
  - Praise the entire team of staff members who got out a major new study.
  
- ✳ **Solicit the entire staff’s input** on decisions that affect them all.
  - Updating the computer or voicemail systems.
  - Making major changes to benefits or personnel policies.
  - Weighing which staffing gaps are most important to fill first.
  
- ✳ **Discuss issues or problems** that staff members face, individually or collectively, that would benefit from the brainstorming, suggestions, and input of the entire staff.
  - How can we get more organizations in our network to respond to our action alerts?
  - What can we do to deal with the loss of a major grant and the gap it leaves in the budget?
  - What key questions should our strategic planning process address?
  
- ✳ **Plan or coordinate staff activities** on large projects that involve everyone, or nearly everyone, on staff.
  - Planning this year’s fund-raising dinner.
  - Releasing a major new study.
  - Preparing for the board meeting.





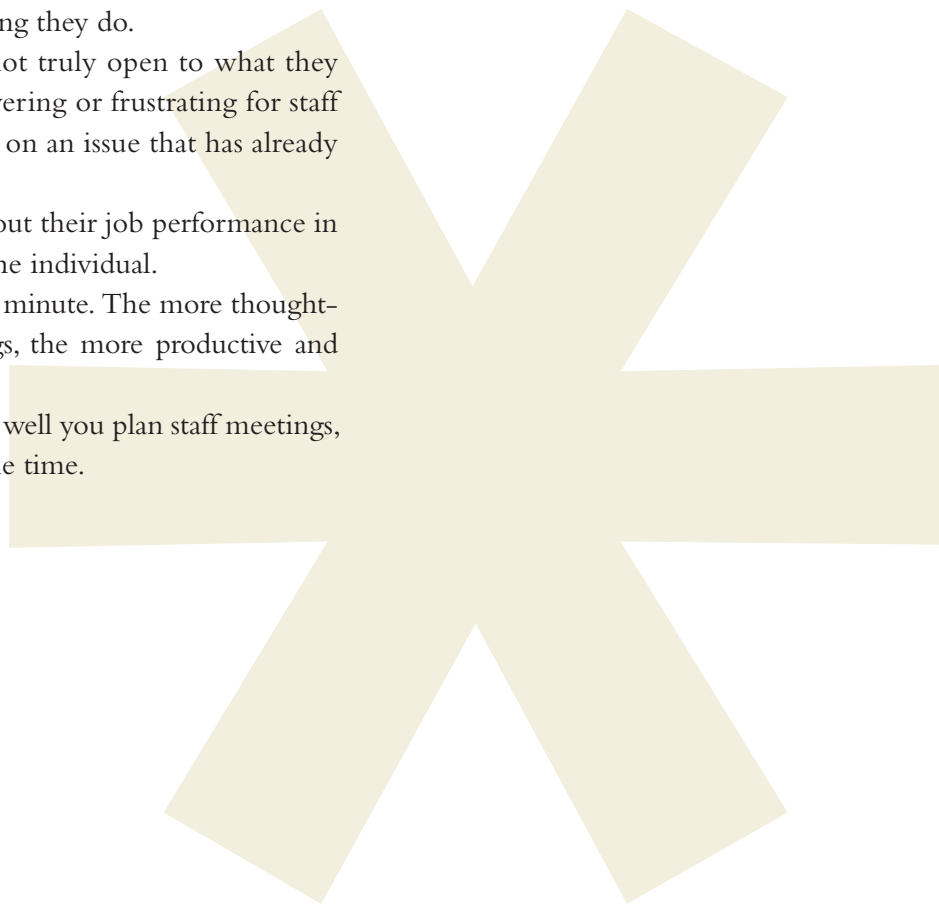
- ✱ **Share information** relevant to everyone on staff, and answer questions or concerns.
  - Updating staff on the organization's financial status.
  - Explaining a new expenditure reimbursement policy.
  - Reporting on the status of the search for a new development director.
  
- ✱ **Celebrate.**
  - Meeting fund-raising goals.
  - Winning a big lawsuit or legislative victory.
  - Birthdays of staff members.

## Tips to ensure staff meetings achieve their goals

- Using this tool, hold a meeting to discuss how the staff would like to use staff meetings. Together, agree on the goals for staff meetings.
- Plan staff meetings with these goals in mind, structuring the agenda to forward them; solicit suggestions from everyone about what to include in the agenda.
- Try to include a juicy topic that will engage the entire staff at each staff meeting.
- Focus discussion by preparing memos in advance that present background information, highlight key questions, and outline options for further action.
- Have someone lead the meeting and be in charge of moving the agenda forward. (The task can fall to the executive director, or it can rotate among staff members.) Have others on staff lead conversations about pieces of work for which they are responsible.
- Strike a balance between encouraging full discussion and keeping the conversation tight and focused on essential topics.
- Write up important outcomes of staff meetings so they are remembered and implemented. Keep track of the topics that will be addressed next time, so important items aren't lost between meetings.
- Do not hold staff meetings more frequently than once a week or less frequently than once a month.
- Start and stop meetings on time.
- Revisit your goals from time to time to see how well staff meetings are fulfilling them.

## What not to do with staff meetings

- Do not use staff meetings to supervise staff members. Do not review an individual's work or monitor whether or not they have completed tasks and assignments. That should be done in regular supervisory meetings between a manager and individual employees.
- Do not allow people to interrupt each other, monopolize the discussion, have side conversations, or crowd out less assertive staff members.
- Do not hold discussions on topics relevant to only a small portion of the staff. Use a smaller meeting for this purpose.
- Discourage the “show and tell” dynamic, where staff members try to impress each other by talking about everything they do.
- Do not ask for the staff's input if you are not truly open to what they may have to say. Nothing is more disempowering or frustrating for staff members than being asked to provide input on an issue that has already been decided.
- Do not criticize individual staff members about their job performance in front of the entire staff. Talk privately with the individual.
- Do not throw the agenda together at the last minute. The more thoughtfully you plan and prepare for staff meetings, the more productive and valuable they will be.
- Do not strive for perfection. No matter how well you plan staff meetings, they will not please all of the people all of the time.



# Do You Want to Read More?

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These are some of MAG's favorite books about management:

*The Enemies of Trust* by Robert Galford and Anne Seibold Drapeau. Harvard Business Review, February 2003, pp.89-95

*The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge. Currency, 1994.

*Leadership as an Art* by Max Depree. Dell, 1990.

*Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge* by Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus. Harper Collins, 1985.

*Managing Diversity: A Complete Desk Reference and Planning Guide* by Lee Gardenswartz and Anita Rowe. McGraw-Hill, 1998.

*The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle. New World Library, 1999.

*Team Building: Current Issues and New Alternatives* by William Dyer. Prentice Hall, 1994.

*Wherever You Go, There You Are* by Jon Kabat Zinn. Hyperion, 1994.



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