

Punishments and Rewards: How to create a culture that supports excellent KM

What is knowledge management?

“Knowledge management is the process of choosing and using tools and systems to effectively gather, organize, share, and use information; of any topic and any type; within and between individuals, organizations, and groups.”

(Rachael Stark MSLIS, Information Librarian and Knowledge Management consultant)

How does my nonprofit manage our knowledge for success?

- **Allow individuals to benefit from the rewards that flow from the knowledge they share, rather than allowing others to gain that credit and benefit.**
 - If individuals see that they gain the rewards that flow from knowledge they share, then they are likely to share again.
 - If your organization often rewards people other than those who originally gather and share knowledge, then the original creators will cease to share.
 - This can happen when more senior or more powerful people routinely take credit for the ideas of junior people or less powerful people.
- **Reward individuals when they share knowledge, rather than rewarding them for being the only person who has knowledge.**
 - If individuals are rewarded when they “spill the beans” and share knowledge, then they are likely to spill all their knowledge beans into the common pot.
 - If your organization rewards individuals for being the only person who knows something, then they are likely to hoard knowledge, so they will continue to look like the only knowledgeable one.
- **Incorporate the work of KM into efficient overall work flow and realistic work hours, rather than adding KM to already long work hours.**
 - If knowledgeable individuals see their KM work flow incorporated into an efficient overall workflow and realistic work hours, then they are likely to keep their information current.
 - If instead they are punished by lengthy documentation tasks that are added to already long work hours, then they are likely to find ways to appear less knowledgeable in the future.
- **Reward all knowledge sharing, even sharing of uncomfortable or unflattering knowledge, rather than punishing the messengers who share it**



- If individuals see that they are rewarded and not punished for sharing all kinds of information, including information that may be uncomfortable or unflattering, they are likely to share all they see.
- If instead they face disapproval or dismissal for sharing uncomfortable knowledge, they will stop sharing what they know.
- **Allow knowledge sharing to strengthen connections between people, projects, departments and organizations**
 - If knowledge is shared easily, fairly and smoothly between different people, projects, offices and departments, then the connections between them can be strengthened.
 - If instead everyone hoards what they know, then they can become isolated, disconnected, and feel stuck in a silo.
- **Make these commitments**
 - Reward people for what they know and what they share, rather than solely for whom they know and who they are.
 - Change your organizational culture so you can “spill the beans” on your knowledge, and allow others in your organization to do so.
 - Create a culture where knowledge flows freely and is shared.
 - Provide respectful treatment and strong job security for all.
 - Make knowledge management someone’s job and give them the resources they need to do it successfully.
 - Budget some of the time of every person in your organization to allow him or her to document and share what they know.
 - Budget money and staff time for the transition to a knowledge management system, and for the maintenance and improvement of a knowledge management system to sustain it over time.
 - Hire knowledge managers who can gather and organize the knowledge of directors, managers, staff, volunteers and board members if they are unable or unwilling to document their own knowledge.
 - Seek help from knowledge and information professionals who know nonprofits.
 - Possible job titles for these people include - librarian, knowledge manager, information architect, consultant, circuit rider, nonprofit technology strategist, knowledge broker, technology implementer, applied anthropologist.
 - To find them you might have to consult web pages, journals, conferences, listservs, and communities of practice.