

Look for Opportunities

By Brian Hazelgren

I could come up with hundreds of examples of looking for opportunities that turned into something incredible. Since we have limited space, I'll bring up a couple of examples with a few ideas to consider. Although my examples are business opportunities, the same principle applies: Stuck in rut? Look for other ways of achieving your goals and objectives, and include the team.

Many companies today have consolidated their operations into hubs that influence their efficiency and effectiveness in delivery of goods and services. As an example, most major airlines follow this system of "hubs" that cut down on costs and make travel more efficient for their bottom line. It's not as efficient for one traveler to get from Seattle, WA to Charlotte, NC when there may only be 19 people from Seattle wanting to go to Charlotte on any given day. However, with hubs in Salt Lake City and Atlanta for example, the airline can carry 200+ people on one large plane from Salt Lake City to Atlanta, and then have the traveler take a commuter flight from Atlanta to Charlotte, with 20-30 people on a smaller regional jet. The 20-30 travelers came in from other parts of the country and caught the regional jet going to Charlotte. Very efficient.

Airline carriers have created this hub system major cities in the US to keep costs low and efficiency high. They had to look for opportunities to partner with smaller regional carriers to provide the human capital at the gate and on board the plane – while the major carrier provides the equipment and their brand.

I'm not going to try to keep up with the latest mergers and acquisitions, I just want to illustrate how this hub system works to build in efficiencies in travel. This is one example of corporations seeking out opportunities to become more efficient and effective in their business structure. It also creates more jobs in multiple areas of the country, and not just in one city.

Another example of looking for opportunities is found with Children's Miracle Network Hospitals (CMNH). CMNH is one of the finest charitable causes in the world focused on fund raising for children's hospitals. The organization is made up of a cohesive team of 135 people at the national office; 170 children's hospitals; 120 corporate partners; and over 350 media partners – all with one goal in mind: raise as much money as possible to help improve the lives of sick and injured children.

I witnessed first-hand how looking for opportunities can benefit many people. I was very fortunate to lead the team that was actively looking for ways to improve and generate more funds for children's hospitals. Our goal was simple: raise more funds and awareness for sick and injured kids. Seeking out additional opportunities was a constant focus for me and my team of 85 amazing fundraisers.

Keeping our eye on the primary focus of raising funds for children also required ingenuity and innovation, which in turn required a conscious effort of looking for other opportunities.

When forced to look at other innovative options due to a difficult economy, I asked the Development team to look at what they do best: connect corporate sponsors with their employees and customers to raise funds for children's hospitals - and then to come up with some strategic, innovative ideas to look for new programs. Once armed with this idea, the sky was the limit in coming up with creative, effective, and efficient ways of raising funds with a variety of programs. In one year, the total amount raised jumped by \$10 million dollars by strategizing and executing on three new programs.

New partnerships were formed, and current partnerships were strengthened. During the seven years I was there, our team went from raising \$80 million a year to over \$250 million annually, and a total of over \$1.3 Billion raised. This process works with for-profit companies and non-profit organizations alike, and we asked ourselves:

- How is our organization doing in seeking new opportunities?
- What new innovations can we come up with to drive new income streams?
- What new programs, products or services are waiting to be born within our own organization?
- How can we motivate our team to do better?

Keeping your eye on the primary focus requires ingenuity and innovation, which in turn requires a conscience effort of looking for other opportunities.

The opportunities are out there, and an afternoon spent brainstorming with your team, your board, your advisors, and your suppliers can help you figure out what the next innovative product, service or program should be.

Make certain that you train your executives, managers, and employees to seek out new opportunities. And, don't forget to provide incentives to those who come up with new, innovative, efficient ways to make your organization better.

A few ideas of incentives that will pay off big dividends include:

- Paid days off
- Gift Cards
- Dinner and a movie for two (throw in the popcorn as well!)
- Tickets to a local professional game
- Trip for two to Hawaii
- A Gym pass for one year
- A Trophy or Challenge Coin
- Points/Dollars towards a catalog of items
- Peer recognition and some kind of reward
- Company paid family events
- Paid group lunches
- A special note to the employee from the CEO

Providing incentives to encourage and reward your employees' success sends a powerful, affirming message of positive acknowledgment and recognition. It also sends a powerful message to the rest of your employees about the performance you'd like to see from them at work. Do more of it to foster your organization's success.

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