

## How an Open Door Policy Fosters an Effective Work Culture from Shane Jewell



**1** An **Open-Door Department Policy** is the foundation for a holistic understanding of an organization. It is through an informed lens that your teams will gain the necessary perspective on how each part of the company plays a role in its collective success.

- Each department fully understands not only their budget but each budget from the various departments and how they intersect
- By understanding these numbers and how they move throughout the year, teams can come together to find ways to support a department that is struggling
- This perspective empowers each department to look outside of their internal goals and KPI's

**Timeline:** This process is going to take time to adjust. You are working against the notion that each department is solely responsible for their numbers. You have to hold the team accountable to the entire budget. In year 1, the focus needs to be on this culture shift, which includes regular reporting and discussion of organizational budget during leadership team meetings.

**Who to Engage:** Every department head has to buy into this different approach to financial sustainability for it to be successful. It must start with creating an environment where people feel safe. We either succeed together or fail together.

**Success Measurement:** If this approach is successfully adopted, you will see a shift from "what I need" to "what do you need." Your leadership team discussion will be broader strategic discussion of how the departmental finances and/or initiatives intersect.

**2** An **Open-Door Idea Policy** is an important strategy to create a culture where new ideas are fostered.

- Employees understand that their ideas are not only valued but necessary to the health of the organization.
- Brainstorming sessions are focused on how to make new ideas work. There will be a time to determine which strategies we can activate, but to meet ideas with immediate criticism is to kill the culture of ideas
- Staff seeing their ideas come to fruition makes them feel their input is valued and will encourage new ways of approaching organizational opportunities.

**Timeline:** This approach will only work if leadership is proactive in seeking input from their teams. It has to be built into the strategic timeline for the year, generally surrounding the budgeting process. The teams need to know that their advice will be sought out and a timeline for that input so they can be prepared. The goal is for this to grow organically but it often must begin as part of a structured process.

**Who to Engage:** This is an organizational approach so every staff member must be engaged. Often leadership cannot meet with every single person so department heads must create this culture within their departments. It is critical in this process that we do not lose sight to credit the originator of an idea. If ideas are used and uncredited, this will create the opposite effect and dampen the spirit of your employees.

**Success Measurement:** If Leadership proactively creates this culture, they will begin to see a shift to solution-based strategic discussions. It is easy as nonprofit arts organizations to talk about what we don't have and what we need. The change we are looking for is to focus on new ideas that work within the organizational parameters that we operate in as a company. They will also embolden their teams with the knowledge that their ideas have value and will foster cross-departmental discussion.

**3** An **Open-Door People Policy** is a way that leaders can truly show how they value and invest in their teams as individuals and not just as employees.

- Leadership can make it known that they have specific and dedicated time they are available.
- Staff can schedule meetings with leadership to discuss their career, to gain a better understanding of the industry, or to get advice about outside projects.
- This is one way leadership can show staff that they are valued because of who they are and not what they can do for the organization.

**Timeline:** This may be the one policy that will take the longest to implement because it is not the approach that most people are used to, especially for the artists in your organization. It is best to share this offer at the beginning to the fiscal year and/or season, but you will need to make this offer known multiple times throughout the year and still will find people hesitant to take advantage of it.

**Who to Engage:** This is an offer for every employee and needs to be widely known. If any group of employees feel less favored than another in this, it will backfire. Prioritizing who you will meet with and when will often need to be a balanced approach.

**Success Measurement:** There are fewer concrete measurements of success for this initiative. But predominately the goal is to increase the value that we place on the people who work for us. By taking time to engage individually to discuss a broad range of topics including mentoring/coaching, you build trust and get to know your teams on a more personal level. Leaders can then take that knowledge to better understand mental maps of each employee, which is critical as management styles must be tailored to individuals as opposed to a blanket style that must be adopted by all.