



Making the Finance Department a True Team Player

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In our recent article, [Key Steps to Building a High-Performance Finance Staff](#), we examined some of the key steps involved in building a strong finance team. While this is critical, it's equally important that the finance staff be viewed as an integral part of the overall team. The fact is, the finance department is the center of information at any company — but the finance staff must be proactive in ensuring that they are viewed as a valuable organizational team member.

Instead, the finance department is too often thought of throughout the rest of the organization as a “necessary evil.” Other departments sometimes view finance as the people who are always nagging them for information or telling them they have to do things a certain way. And they often feel like they don't receive the meaningful financial information they need in a timely manner, if at all. So your finance staff may have their work cut out for them in order to change this mentality and foster a true team approach organization-wide.

From Self-Centric to Others-Centric

The key is for your finance staff to shift the way they view themselves and the department from self-centric to others-centric. In other words, they should view other departments as their internal customers and their role as one of providing outstanding customer service to the departments they serve and being responsive to their needs. This is the first step toward making the finance department a true team player within your organization.

Many of the staff in other departments rely on the finance department for critical information required to perform optimally. So finance staff should strive to make employees *want* to work with them by building the same bonds with these internal customers that they do with external customers. Once employees realize that the finance staff is committed to helping them succeed, the team-building process is well underway.

Here are three steps you can take to help make this happen:

1. Identify and understand what your internal customers want or need. The best way to do this is by clearly communicating with them. The information they *actually* want or need may be quite different from the information you *think* they want or need.

If you deliver the information you think other departments need, they probably won't share your view of the value or benefit of what you provide — and therefore won't appreciate your efforts or use the information. Worse, they may tune you out going forward. By communicating with other departments and delivering the information that is useful to them, your department will start the process of true teamwork.

2. Keep the information you provide to internal customers simple. Presentations, reports and other information disseminated by the finance department can be lengthy, complex and confusing. So strive to keep information concise and easy to follow — for example, by using graphs or pictures to illustrate key points or indicators and thus help non-financial people better understand the message. This will also save time in meetings by helping you communicate complex financial information more clearly.

3. Think carefully about your communications and questions before you initiate them. The goal should be to deliver useful information concisely and on time. Sometimes this requires getting out of your chair and walking over to the other department to have a face-to-face chat instead of just sending another email. This will help build and foster personal relationships, which can lead to other departments becoming more responsive to the needs and requests of the finance department as well.

What about strengthening teamwork within the finance department itself? You can follow these same steps but take a slightly different approach. You want to create a culture within the finance department in which your staff believes that the finance team truly is the information center for the organization. Therefore, establish goals for the finance team that help achieve this status. Finance team members should exemplify this thinking by the way they conduct themselves every day.

One way to achieve these goals is to engage an outsourced CFO services provider to act as your finance department team leader. An outsourced CFO has seen many of these scenarios at other companies, so he or she will be in a good position to help instill the kind of culture described above in your finance department.

Concluding Thoughts

The finance department is the center of information at any company. Unfortunately, though, finance is too often thought of throughout the rest of the organization as a “necessary evil.” Other departments sometimes feel like they don’t receive the meaningful financial information they need in a timely manner, if at all. The key is for finance staff to view other departments as their internal customers and their role as one of providing outstanding customer service. This is the first step toward making the finance department a true team player within your organization.

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