

7.8: Green Teams at Work: The Case of New Seasons Market

Figure 9.13



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Teamwork is important at New Seasons Market Inc. (a privately held company). This is a relatively small chain of upscale grocery stores in the Pacific Northwest that are built on the ideas of local identity, quality products, and employee freedom to meet the needs of customers. Formed in 1999 by a group of people with similar goals, New Seasons Market operates nine grocery stores in various Portland area neighborhoods. Though the look and products of the stores are consistent, each store is predominantly staffed by individuals that live in the local neighborhood, enabling each store to know the needs of its customers and create an internal identity all its own.

One of the ways each store creates that identity is through Green Teams. These teams are typically composed of up to 13 paid employees from various departments. Teams join together to address social and environmental issues of sustainability within each store and its surrounding community. The idea for Green Teams originated from a group of employees in one store that assembled to tackle “green” issues in their store. Corporate managers (who also have their own Green Team) agreed that it was such a good idea that now every store is required to have a Green Team. Each team meets monthly and reports to the company sustainability coordinator. Team leadership structures vary from store to store, with some Green Teams having a single chairperson who serves the team for more than 1 year, while other teams regularly rotate leaders or even elect two cochairs to lead the cause. Teams act as liaisons between their department and the Green Team, help educate staff, and make recommendations to management. Store Green Teams also initiate community service projects and help maintain the waste diversion program.

Through this flexibility, each Green Team has accomplished a variety of projects in their store and local community, including wilderness and wetland cleanup, painting and weeding at a local elementary school, and helping plant gardens for low-income families. One suburban store even developed an intricate car pool program for employees to encourage a reduction in drive-alone car trips. As long as the Green Team’s focus is on their local store and community, they are granted freedom and support from corporate management. Safety and Sustainability Manager Heather Schmidt explains, “If there were too many rules, it could hold back creativity and passion. Having a balance is the key.”

Participation in Green Team initiatives has developed a friendly competition between stores and rewards employees who participate with incentives. For example, every time an employee joins in the staff car pool, his or her name is entered into a monthly drawing for a gift card. These values of support and encouragement are consistent throughout New Seasons company

culture, where employees are valued for their personal contributions. As their Web site explains, “To be a truly great company means that we continually evolve to meet the changing needs of our customers, our staff and the world around us.” With these values, New Seasons Market has created “a workplace that truly believes that taking good care of our co-workers, our customers and our environment is what drives the success of our business.”

Based on information from Schmidt, H. (2010, March 12). Personal communication; Information retrieved March 20, 2010, from New Seasons Market Web site: <http://www.newseasonsmarket.com>; Private company information: New Seasons Market Inc. (2010). *BusinessWeek*. Retrieved April 3, 2010, from <http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?privcapId=12004234>.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways has New Seasons Market followed the steps for creating and maintaining a cohesive team?
2. What types of teams are the Green Teams?
3. How can we tell if the Green Teams are successful or not?
4. What types of problems might the Green Teams encounter?
5. How would you recommend Green Teams resolve potential conflicts?

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