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Hire With Your Values

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Throughout the past year, we've published a series of articles on the nonprofit workforce shortage crisis. Not just that the [shortage of nonprofit workers puts the public at higher risk](#) of not receiving vital services, but also: how can nonprofits attract, retain, and support talented staff members?

With [Creative Approaches to the Workforce Shortage Crisis](#), we began sharing curated resources that nonprofits can use to prioritize equity, address burnout, nurture talent in nontraditional ways, support mental health, and find more guidance about "[creating a culture that cares](#)."

But we didn't just invite experts to write articles for us to publish. We also took their advice to heart by applying their wisdom. For instance, after reading the guest article on [employer branding](#) that Atokatha Ashmond Brew of Nonprofit HR wrote for the series, the National Council of Nonprofits acted on her advice to incorporate culture and values into our own recruitment process.

Specifically, until then, we had viewed our internal culture as "just" being who we are. We work at creating and maintaining a positive team culture, and we take pride in it. But we never thought about it as something we could "brand" – until reading Atokatha's article. So when we had the opportunity this year to expand our staff by adding new positions, we practiced what she preached. We wove key aspects of our [Core Values](#) into the new job postings we developed. And though we'd never

thought about it before, it felt authentic – because it is who we are. Prospective applicants would (and should) know what they'd be joining.

We were pleasantly surprised by the number and quality of job applicants who responded and indicated that the language from our Core Values attracted their attention, resonated with them, and compelled them to apply. Of course, as with all branding, it must be real, not just hifalutin ideals. You need to demonstrate those values in action so people being interviewed see they are genuine, and then you must live your values so you can retain talented people who remain productive because they are committed to those values themselves.

In [a post about how workplace values can help with hiring and retention](#), aimed at the corporate world but applicable to nonprofit employers, Paula Kiger of Digimentors discusses **communicating your workplace values** and also making sure they're **specific** and **authentic**. This focus on values may be even more relevant to nonprofits, since so many employees choose the nonprofit sector because they are seeking meaningful work.

Hiring and retaining talented employees is extremely important in a tight labor market like today's. Still, isn't it always important? Losing an employee can cost an organization [between six and 24 months of the person's salary](#) to recruit and train a replacement, depending on the job. But there are enormous intangible costs as well: in morale, in productivity, in loss of institutional knowledge, and in many other areas, as outlined [by Chase Charaba](#) on the PeopleKeep blog.

Our own experiment incorporating relevant sections from our core values into our job descriptions was very successful. We just got back from a two-day, in-person staff retreat, where – as more than half of our team is now permanently remote – we met some of our new team members in person for the first time. We opened the retreat by taking turns reading each of our [Core Values](#) out loud and sharing about how they resonate with each of us. We were thrilled to be together in real life. We discovered how much more fruitful our brainstorming conversations are in person, as opposed to in “Zoomland.” And we were delighted by the harmony we experienced among old-timers and newbies alike, a diverse group of varied ages and backgrounds. We believe that this is, in part, due to being up-front about our values from the outset: in our job postings, in interviews, and during the onboarding process. Thanks Atokatha!

Our Series on Creative Approaches to the Nonprofit Workforce Shortage Crisis

This article is part of [a series describing creative, practical approaches to the workforce shortage crisis](#) that can elevate equity, address burnout and stress, and discover, nurture, and develop talent in nontraditional ways.

One of our five [core values](#) at the National Council of Nonprofits is “Honoring the Nonprofit Workforce,” which reflects our deeply held belief that “Nonprofits and their employees should have the respect and the resources needed to get their work done.”

That core value shapes our work creating and curating information to assist frontline nonprofits with their operations and capacity-building. It also drives much of [our advocacy work](#) promoting public policy solutions at the federal, state, and local levels to get more funds to nonprofits stretched by the combination of growing needs, decreasing revenue, increasing costs, and rising salaries.