

**HFA: Missouri Housing Development Commission**  
**ENTRY NAME: Effective Change Through Positive Leadership**

As an HFA, we are dedicated to providing affordable housing to the residents of the great state of Missouri. We labor over innovative programs, developments and outreach. But what about the people who make our vision a reality? If our employees are not shown proper respect and appreciation, and if morale is low, the level of output created by Missouri Housing Development Commission (MHDC) will be less, and this is unacceptable.

MHDC recently experienced significant staff changes. As with any change in leadership, new philosophies, ideas and management styles emerge, and this case is no different. New leadership is proud to focus on the betterment of employee relations through positive leadership. MHDC has been proactive in fostering improved employee relations, more employee-friendly policies, programs and benefits for the people who contribute daily to our many successes.

MHDC is proud to have recently implemented a new employee volunteer program. Each employee has the opportunity to volunteer at a Missouri Housing Trust Fund (MHTF)-affiliated agency once each month for three hours. The MHTF allocates funding to agencies in Missouri that provide housing assistance to very-low income individuals and families. Instead of asking employees to use their own leave time, management allows paid time off for volunteering so that employees can be active in community involvement during their regularly scheduled work day . We feel that it is our duty as an advocating agency to reach out and assist the most vulnerable residents of our state. Through this initiative, staff receives equal opportunity to see first-hand the good that comes from our daily work, and have been able to visit the trenches and make a personal contribution to the successes and lives of those we strive to serve. Volunteers thus far have cleaned, gardened, assisted in food and clothing pantries, assisted in the operation of a holiday store for victims of domestic violence and served lunch in shelters for the homeless. This program has garnered increased support and participation since its inception, and it is our hope to add more volunteer opportunities in the coming months.

Our new motto is “It’s the little things,” and we are adamant in our beliefs that smaller offerings are equally as crucial to employee relations as making grand gestures. For example, management recently made the decision to change the brand of coffee MHDC uses. For many years, coffee was actually a hot topic in our offices. Simply beginning to use an employee-chosen brand has brought about excitement and conversation among staff. Our employees chose a brand that was within the budget for this expense, so we were able to start purchasing flavored coffee creamers as well. This one small change started a ripple of excitement spreading throughout the organization that management builds on each week in many ways.

MHDC has recently made available the opportunity for all staff to participate in an agency-wide casual Friday program. As a thank you to staff for their continued hard work, they may wear jeans each Friday. Staff has been very receptive and appreciative of this simple program, and has continued to follow our designated dress code that states tennis shoes, tank tops, t-shirts, sweatshirts and the like are not appropriate for a business office. One stipulation that all staff has graciously accepted is that there are times when a casual Friday is not appropriate, due to meetings, conferences or office visitors. All staff unanimously agreed that, should one of these occasions arise on a Friday, business attire would be the only acceptable clothing for that particular day.

Another small change that has increased employee morale is early holiday dismissal. When appropriate, and when approved by executive staff, employees may leave two hours prior to the end of their regularly scheduled shift the day before a state paid holiday. MHDC strives to continue to provide a positive work-life balance for each employee, and it is clear to management that employees greatly appreciate this gesture. The minimal decrease in working hours resulting from this benefit has not in any way led to a

decrease in employee productivity. Management has noted that the opposite has occurred: employee morale is higher than it has been in recent history, which is leading to increased output and teamwork by all employees.

Current management at MHDC has made great strides in creating two-way communication between management and staff. The management team is fully aware that communication has previously been lacking, something that was noticed and commented on by the majority of MHDC employees. MHDC certainly understands the need for discretion in certain business situations, but also believes that all staff should be given information that will assist in career development, personal growth and a sense of understanding the intricacies of the affordable housing industry. To that end, staff updates are available on a regular basis through email or 15-minute staff meetings. Items discussed in these updates and/or meetings include but are not limited to the announcement of new hires, development progress, employee concerns, holiday-related topics, safety, resignations, thank you messages for staff and legislative and/or program updates. In addition, external business partners and staff both now receive tailored newsletter communication each month.

To increase employee morale and communication, directors pick one employee to be featured in each internal newsletter, published every other month. The profile includes fun information about the employee that he/she wants to share with colleagues as a way to foster relationships in the workplace. For example, John shared with the entire agency that he enjoys cooking, playing golf and entertaining his grandchildren. Management encourages the use of employee profiles in newsletters as a way to create conversation among employees, thus leading to a stronger sense of pride and teamwork.

Management is aware that many employees at MHDC are committed to energy conservation, and that environmental concerns are at the forefront of many employees' minds. To encourage environmentally friendly practices, management strongly supports and encourages staff in their energy conservation endeavors. For example, many staff with windows in their offices does not use artificial light, instead using light from the sun. Many staff members are also dedicated to recycling, with aluminum, paper and cardboard recycling available on-site. In addition to proactively researching best practices in being an environmentally friendly organization, MHDC recently contracted a recycling expert to hold trainings for all interested staff. The training was attended by many employees, and covered such topics as landfill use, at-home and at-work recycling opportunities, and ways to conserve energy and resources.

MHDC is invested in education, demonstrated by the volume and wide-ranging topics of internal trainings available to employees. At least one training session is conducted each month, with recent topics including "Standards of Conduct," business writing and email etiquette, safety, fraud prevention and various policy trainings. Management also encourages employees to take advantage of external classes and and/or trainings that directly relate to a particular employee's role. Purchasing books for business purposes, attending conferences and presentations are also highly recommended.

Management's most recent employee relations initiative falls within the search for new office space for our Kansas City operations. The highest priority communicated to our business partners for this search is that the new space be employee-friendly, something our current site is unfortunately lacking. Management is determined to provide office space with a central location for all staff, a location that has amenities such as shopping and dining within walking distance, and a location that is conducive to our daily operations.

To many, these changes may seem inconsequential. Perhaps many organizations have utilized these practices for many years. Whatever the case, MHDC is proud to make employee relations a priority by focusing on respect, appreciation, training, communication and good, old-fashioned teamwork!