

# Culture: The Path to Reaching Your Organizational Goals

## Interview with Priscilla Moore



BCWI: Please give us a brief description of Upward Sports and your tenure there.

P.M.: Upward Sports is the world's largest Christian sports program for children. Our mission is to "Introduce children to Jesus Christ by creating opportunities to serve through sports". It was also created with a vision to provide the best sports experience possible for every child.

Each year some one million people around the world play, coach, referee or volunteer in Upward Sports Leagues and Camps hosted by more than 2,400 churches. These churches have taken Upward Sports Programs to 67 countries on mission trips. Anyone – children and volunteers of any faith or no faith – can participate in Upward Sports. Specifically designed for children in K5- sixth grade, Upward Sports aims to bring out "the winner" in every child – regardless of the game's score.

There are 84 team members who work at Upward Sports. The majority of the staff works on our campus at either the Corporate office or Destruction Center in Spartanburg, SC. We also have 11 reps in the field that live and work in their regions of the country to service our churches in those areas.

I've worked at Upward Sports for

almost 6 years as the HR Director.

BCWI: Do you remember how Upward Sports found out about the Best Christian Workplace survey and what was your interest in participating?

P.M.: Shane McKenzie, who at that time was our Vice President of HR, was at the CLA (Christian Leadership Association) conference several years ago. One of the speakers was a founder of Amor Ministries - Gayla Congdon. Her organization was one of the ministries highlighted that year in an article. The article described the positive changes happening with that ministry and how the BCWI survey had influenced that change. Shane was intrigued and attended the class in which Gayla discussed the survey administered by BCWI and how that provided a litmus test of where there were areas for growth. Thus, the organization began to work on those areas and great results occurred.

This so intrigued Shane that he called up you all at BCWI when he got back and we signed up shortly thereafter. It has been a great way to measure the culture of our organization and provides opportunities to address areas to improve.

BCWI: In Upward Sport's most recent staff engagement survey, the most improved question related to the fact that Upward met its goals.

BCWI: You mentioned that over the past several years you have implemented WIG's or Wildly Important Goals throughout the organization and for the organization overall. Please describe the concept of implementing this goal setting process?

P.M.: A Franklin Covey Representative introduced us to a process called the "4 Disciplines of Execution". How it works is the management team creates one or two corporate goals, at the most, with clear measurement of the goal by a certain date. Then each department or cross-functional team creates 1 or 2 goals that can assist in making the corporate goal possible. Then each person on that team owns a portion of that team goal. Thus, everyone is focused on the main goal with their own individual goals needing to be reached by dates and with certain measurements achieved. It's very energizing and everyone wants to win. Knowing what they are doing each day brings the team closer to the overall goal.

BCWI: This summer you achieved a special organizational goal. What was the goal?

P.M.: Our Corporate Goal was to increase player participation from 520,00 to 548,000 by 5/31/2010. Each department worked on their goals to see how they could help increase player participation.

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Following a football theme, each department created a poster board called “scoreboards” with their own WIGs/Goals listed. They were visible for anyone walking by. Each week we reported to the Corporate dashboard how we were doing. We were either green – moving forward, yellow - being held up or red – missing the mark. The competition was fun and challenging.

We had a half way mark during the year called “half-time celebration”. This was a motivating celebration to award some mile markers that showed we were on track to win the game. It was an hour of fun, highlighting people who were making a difference and making sure everyone got the recognition deserved.

We, as HR, even got in the game. Our HR WIG was to “Increase our BCWI engagement score from 66% to 70% by 2/1/2010”. We felt that if we could work with the staff in ways to increase engagement, they would be more motivated, empowered and committed to achieving the main Corporate goal. The BCWI survey revealed areas that could be improved such as: companywide communication, trust, interdepartmental connection, empowerment, etc. We addressed those areas specifically in various ways. We could hardly wait until our new BCWI survey scores came back. What had our goals done to

raise the score? Our engagement score did not only reach our goal of 70% but went over by 13% points! We had an 83% engagement score. So we surpassed our goal and we believe we were thus able to have a part in the success of the overall team’s corporate goal.

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Even through obstacles, we were able to stay on course even on the down days, when things weren’t going well. The keys to success were staying focused and on target, being accountable, reporting our weekly numbers or changes and moving our own scoreboards as the days passed to show we were on track to win. With one eye on the goal and the other working out how to get there, you have a good chance to hit it every time.

BCWI: Once you achieved the goal, Upward planned a special event to celebrate it. Would you please describe it to us?

P.M.: At the end of the WIG challenge, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010 when the goal was met, we had a “victory

celebration”. We took a half day and celebrated. Our President and Executive Vice President emceed the show. The Senior Vice Presidents who championed the WIG process acknowledged all of the teams and their captains (managers). Then the managers each recognized their team and how they achieved their own WIG (goal) to meet the main WIG. It was so apparent by the end that each person at the company had a part to play and that everyone was a winner. There were games, food and prizes which were wonderful. Everyone got a \$100 bill and an extra day off in the year. The company win was made possible by each person there and everyone knew it.

BCWI: Between 2008 and 2011, Upward made great progress toward creating an engaged culture. The most dramatic improvements were in these questions:

Upward Sports seeks the suggestions of employees. +.48

Employees at Upward Sports are encouraged to experiment and to be innovative. +.49

Upward Sports involves employees in decisions that affect them. +.51

Upward Sports acts on suggestions of employees. +.56

Employees at Upward Sports voice

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their opinions openly in my work area. +.60

Upward Sports values diversity of cultural backgrounds, personal styles, and ideas among our employees. +.63

What were the strategies you implemented to make such a significant improvement in the engagement of your staff?

P.M.: It was suggested by our team that we switch from jeans only on Fridays to jeans every day if the appearance was still overall professional. This request had been on-going for several years. We changed it this past year to jeans every day and the staff were thrilled. They felt they were heard and appreciated through changing this policy. This change was in some ways a small change but meant so much to the team and was very well received. I think a big thing here was each team member being a part of creating, implementing and executing a goal to support corporate initiatives.

Appreciation Lunches are held almost every month and hosted by our President and Executive Vice President. Different departments are highlighted each month to share what is going on in their area and how their work is affecting our goals and mission. Our President will also communicate any other items that might be of importance or interest to the staff and states

how much he appreciates the staff and what we all do.

There is more and specific communication shared after our Wednesday devotion time when most of the staff is present. The President or Executive Vice President share company information that would help clarify issues or create more trust in the staff just to know they are being informed about areas that affect them or the organization.

BCWI: How has the improvement of staff engagement contributed to the health of Upward Sports overall?

P.M.: I think when you know where the areas of improvement are needed in your culture, you can figure out ways to address them. The BCWI survey is such a valuable tool because it points out where the hot spots are. As you openly mention that “the BCWI survey has shown us that...” or “as noted on the BCWI survey, we decided to...”, people begin to utilize this tool as a change agent. They trust it since it’s confidential and they see no backlash for their frank answers. They also trust it as the management begins to use it for the good of the organization. So once you have a tool to use that can measure the engagement of a staff, you can assist in improving it. When a staff is committed, engaged and passionate about the company’s mission and goals, it

does have a direct effect on the health of the organization. Even in this difficult economy we have not had to lay anyone off or freeze salaries and we continue to show growth in our number of players.

BCWI: From a numbers standpoint, Upward Sports has experienced good growth and healthy income to support your ministries. Do you feel there is a link between your staff engagement and your Upwards outcomes (performance) overall?

P.M.: I think anytime you have a group of people that are engaged, committed, trusting and passionate about an organization’s mission, you’re going to have people that want to make a difference, get things done, take ownership and accomplish goals for that mission which shows in the organization’s overall performance. The engagement and dedication from our staff is imperative to our mission success!!

BCWI: When you look back over the changes in the last 4 years, what other programs, events or changes would you attribute to the significant improvements?

P.M.: Leadership changes were important, specifically having a leadership team that is cohesive. Bill Palmer, our Executive Vice President, instills a high level of trust. He connects well with people and they see him as “real”. But not

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only changes in leadership but also leadership involvement and setting the tone have proven invaluable.

Another initiative that attributed to significant improvement was working with Franklin Covey who assisted us in creating main corporate goals for the entire team to focus on. Also, John Miller's QBQ training was helpful in addressing personal accountability, ownership of actions and attitude.

Last, I'd say personal recognition of team players not just the department as a whole or the manager of that department played a role in the improvement we saw.

BCWI: For the sake of other organizations that have not participated in an employee engagement survey, why would you recommend they consider it?

P.M.: I don't think there is a greater tool out there that is able to measure culture than the BCWI survey. So many organizations struggle with even how to define culture. They focus on sales numbers, or ROI on new processes. And while all of these things are vital, you need to ensure those people attempting to achieve those sales numbers or ROI are engaged, committed, accountable and desiring to raise the bar. If not, you won't have much success in the long run. People are what matters and when they are plugged in, excited about the goals, feel they

are included, trusted and know the game plan, there is not much that can stop them.

I say all of the above with the understanding that the Lord is over all and that as we work for our mission it is ultimately for our King and for His glory. This is really about the Lord and His blessing on us. He rewards hard work and effort.