

BusinessManagement

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DAILY

Costco's famous fish story & other tales

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Recounting stories around the company campfire is a big deal in corporate culture these days.

You can see why. As bonds of loyalty loosen with layoffs and vanishing pensions, employees need some reason to stay connected to their employers.

Telling stories about an organization's earliest beginnings, along with stories of current employees' valor and dedication to customers, helps rejuvenate people.

Take these two examples:

In 1987, the warehouse club Costco decided to offer skin-on salmon fillets for \$5.99 a pound. The salmon team wasn't satisfied. Next, excess parts were removed from the fillets and the price lowered to \$5.29. Then came fully trimmed and skinless fillets at \$4.99. In their fourth attempt, buyers started importing salmon in bulk and cut the price to \$4.79, and on take five, they improved the cut at no extra charge.

Costco created the Salmon Award to recognize outstanding performances by employees and suppliers. Each award, of course, celebrates a new story and creates new lore.

Another company, Medtronic, started as a hobby and grew into a worldwide designer and manufacturer of medical devices. Every year, the firm throws a party for employees, inviting six patients and their doctors who tell how the company's products helped them.

Their stories are inspiring, like that of a Parkinson's patient who reversed 10 years of

physical deterioration by undergoing an implant for deep brain stimulation. “It was literally a miracle,” he told employees.

Here’s how to identify your own organization’s proudest moments:

- **Remember an experience** that sums up the purpose of your enterprise—its heart and soul.
- **Write it down.** Perfect the tale using a simple, conversational style, honing it down to one page and keeping the moral of the story front and center.
- **Name names.** Your employees need recognition for what they accomplish that’s above and beyond the call of duty. This is your chance. Give them their day in the sun.
- **Keep looking for new stories.** Each new victory refreshes the lifeblood of your organization.

“What else have we got besides stories?” asks Costco co-founder and Chief Executive Jim Sinegal. “It’s what brings meaning to the work we do.”

—Adapted from “Telling tales,” Steve Fisher, *The Costco Connection*.