



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Corporate Storytellers

In today's ever changing economy, organizations need to understand what real teamwork is – keeping promises and keeping commitments.

To foster exactly this kind of an understanding, Nike launched a “corporate storytelling program.” The program, first started in 1970, has become an intrinsic part of its corporate culture. A number of senior executives at Nike spend much of their time as ‘corporate storytellers,’ explaining the company heritage to everyone, from vice presidents to hourly workers at Nike stores.

Nelson Farris, director of corporate education and the company's chief storyteller, says, “Our stories are not about extraordinary business plans or financial manipulations; they are about people getting things done.”

These stories about the organization can shape the future. The best way for organizations to create a prosperous future is to ensure that their employees understand the company's past.

The stories at Nike are about coach Bill Bowerman, Nike's co-founder, and how Nike's famous ‘waffle sole’ was born when Bowerman went to his workshop and poured rubber into the family waffle iron after deciding that his team needed better running shoes. The stories reflect the spirit of innovation and Nike's commitment to helping athletes. “We are connecting what we are doing today back to Nike's heritage,” says Dennis Reeder, training manager at Nike.

Nike's storytelling extends beyond their employees. Each ‘Ekin’ (Nike spelled backward), an employee of the organization, is responsible for telling the Nike story to salespeople at all major retailers that carry the Nike product line. “When people understand why we exist, what our foundation is, and who we are today, then they understand that all our products are still rooted in improving an athlete's performance,” says Dennis. As Nike grows, the mission of its storytellers is becoming more and more critical.