

Solutions

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Meet our newest CBLD consultants

Stronger Boards Lead Stronger Co-ops

BY PATRICIA CUMBIE

CDS Consulting Cooperative is growing. Many of our support programs have increased in scope and depth over the years, including long-term mainstays like CoCoFiSt and our expansion and relocation services. Our services in these areas have focused on finance, market share, and physical plant development. These programs have raised the bar on performance and professionalism for many food co-ops, and have provided valuable benchmarks for many co-ops to operate sustainably and profitably.

That same approach to innovation and excellence has also been applied to working with our food co-ops boards of directors. In 2004 we developed the Cooperative Board Leadership Development (CBLD) program to extend the leadership capacity of volunteer boards long on passion, but sometimes held back by not being connected to current practices, or, worse yet, derailed by inadequate governance systems. By giving these boards and their co-op general managers the support they need to define roles, create structure, ensure accountability and plan for the future, they govern more effectively and that leads to stronger co-ops.

As more co-ops have experienced the benefits and rewards of a strong board of directors, our program has grown exponentially. We've doubled our capacity from five board leadership development experts in 2006 to 10 this year, serving over

70 food co-ops around the country in the CBLD program. Co-ops can be assured that all our consultants on the CBLD team will give them advice backed by years of experience, and that individual consultants have the benefit of full team support as they do their work. All our CBLD consultants are trained experts and practitioners in the use of Policy Governance, however co-op boards

will benefit from our services whether or not they use that particular system. We support effective governance however you choose to pursue that.

CDS Consulting Cooperative is very thoughtful and careful about whom we invite into our co-op and participate in our programs. We have 20+ years of experience of providing expert and objective consult-

ing services for the food co-op community and are committed to the success of food co-ops. We are thrilled to introduce our newest group of CBLD consultants. Nina Johnson, Joel Kopischke, Art Sherwood and Todd Wallace are highly talented people who have already contributed a lot to our sector's governance capacity. They have a passion for co-ops and for good governance. All of them have deep connections to their local food co-ops and have devoted their careers to the growth and enhancement of mission-driven organizations. Nina, Joel, Art and Todd each has a compelling individual story, and we'd like you to get to know them as part of our group.

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Finding Inspiration

The artist Chuck Close is famous for saying that inspiration is for amateurs. There's a lot of truth to that hard-core stance; you wouldn't be able to get anything done if you waited for revelations to appear before you got to work. The truth is they come along because we are working instead of waiting.

Yet, no matter how hard you work, inspiration is necessary. It's that thing that provides the X factor, makes things fun and interesting, takes problems and challenges and sets them apart from the daily grind to reveal new insights. That's why so many of us go in search of it—through meditation, walks, or workshops. These are some of the tools that help us access it.

We are so proud to welcome Nina Johnson, Joel Kopischke, Art Sherwood and Todd Wallace to the CDS Consulting Cooperative as members of our CBLD team. This is a truly inspiring group of people. Through their work for their local co-ops and their clients located around the country, they are instrumental in delivering the professionalism and excellence you have come to expect from everyone in our consulting group. We hope you are as excited about working with them as we are. In these pages we invite you to get to know them.

—Patricia Cumbie

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Our Mission

CDS Consulting Co-op is dedicated to building and strengthening cooperative businesses by providing consulting, training and development services.

CDS Consulting is a network of independent professionals experienced in developing cooperatives. Our consultants have worked on over 500 projects and will tailor our services to fit your needs and provide solutions.

Board Leadership Development

- CBLD—Cooperative Board Leadership Development
- Board training and facilitation
- Hire, evaluate and compensate your GM
- Policy Governance® and Accountability
- Member owner linkage

Expansion and Relocation

- Expansion planning
- Financial pro forma
- Capitalization and member loans
- Business strategy
- Market, location and site analysis
- Trade area and market penetration analysis
- Project management
- Store planning and design
- Consumer research

Improving Operational Performance

- Business planning, goal setting and monitoring
- Audit and strengthen operational systems
- CoCoFiSt workshops
- Margin enhancement
- Labor controls
- Merchandising
- Management training, coaching, and support
- Customer service training
- Employee surveys
- Human resource systems—assessment, planning and training
- Supervisory skills and training

Meet Our Newest Consultants continued



Nina Johnson

Nina Johnson grew up in Massachusetts, but has spent most of her adult life living in St. Paul, Minn. She went to Minnesota as a student at Macalester College and afterward settled into

home ownership as a mom raising two children. During her college years she joined Mississippi Market when the co-op was very small and located on St. Clair Avenue (now it has two locations on Selby and West 7th) and has been an active member ever since. “The co-op is all tied up in my sense of community in St. Paul. I’m involved in co-ops because I believe in them as a way for human beings to heal themselves and their communities. I feel strongly about the importance of community and people helping each other,” she said.

It was this strength of purpose that led her to run for the board of Mississippi Market in 2005, although she admits that she’d decided to do so because the co-op was contemplating closing the Randolph location, the one closest to her house. After she was elected, she learned more about the proper role of a board member—to protect the

co-op’s assets on behalf of the membership as a whole. She realized that her personal agenda as a board member was misguided. “It was a shift in understanding I had to make. It wasn’t my duty to make sure I could walk to my grocery store. I needed to work to ensure that what the community needed—a locally owned co-op—would remain viable, sustainable and successful.” After the decision to close the Randolph store, she became the board’s president and worked to ensure the successful development of the new West 7th location.

Nina recognizes that the transition away from individualistic thinking to considering the common good is a necessary part of good governance. “The board is an entity whose goal is to provide for the ongoing existence of the co-op. Part of leadership is taking a broader view,” she said. Her experience as a board member in a co-op going through major development challenges has given her a lot of experience and insight regarding what is possible for food co-ops when the board functions at a high level of efficiency. “This is the help I can offer to boards—to provide guidance and reassurance to embolden boards to do the important work of governance and to help the membership understand and be involved in their decisions.”



Joel Kopischke

Joel Kopischke calls himself a “process improvement geek.” As a 20-year member of Outpost Natural Foods in Milwaukee, Wis., he served on Outpost’s board from 1998-2007 and was

board president for five years, during 1999-2004. He has worked his entire career on organizational improvement. He was drawn to the co-op initially to do something to change his diet, but after a number of years as a member he was recruited to be on the board, in part because he had worked as an improvement consultant in a variety of industries.

Outpost’s board was the first board he’d ever been elected to and it was an eye-opening experience. When he was first elected, the board had gone through a lot of turnover and disagreement. “I had no clue what my job was. I think there are a lot of people out there who have been in a similar situation, well-meaning, but don’t know what to do,” Joel said. He was determined, with the assistance of the co-op’s general manager, to

learn how to do the job most effectively, because, well, he loves improvement projects. “What drew me into the governance process was finding best practices,” he said about serving on the board. “Board members turn over way more often than the co-op’s general manager position will. We have to build an ongoing culture of skills and continually educate ourselves to do our jobs well,” Joel added. “My passion is to get more boards functioning well, which will lead to greater viability and functioning of the co-op as a whole.”

Joel also knows the value of inspiration on leaders in organizations. He grew up in a theatrical family, and still regularly sings and performs. He likes to connect the dots regarding the important synergies that develop when you have a system for utilizing the best of people’s skills. “I love working with people who care so much about healthy food, sustainability, local agriculture. It’s always invigorating. When co-ops grow, we inspire other people and other co-ops, and that starts the process of building our movement. The more people who know their role and are better trained are just better served to deliver that to the co-op sector.”



Todd Wallace

Todd Wallace lives in Portland, Oregon, a place where he said healthy food and the concept of sustainability is a “very mainstream idea.” There is a plethora of places to have access to

local and organic food. But that doesn’t mean that every business that sells these things offers the same level of commitment to their customers or community. For Todd, that is the real value of co-ops, to give people an opportunity to participate in local ownership, and in the process foster a community focused on fairness and self-help.

One of Todd’s earliest recollections about his co-op, People’s Food Co-op, was coming across a meeting happening in the co-op’s courtyard. It was a member forum to discuss patronage refunds. “I remember people being energized about participating in the decision. What struck me was the level of feeling that members had about the co-op. I wanted to be involved.” For the past four years

he has served as the co-op’s board president.

People’s Food Co-op is remarkable for its vitality in a city already teeming with a high level of engagement on local issues. As Todd grew into his role as a board member, he was struck by how much power and potential food co-ops have to positively affect communities and create the kind of societal changes that have altered history in other parts of the world. “It’s huge. By helping boards get good at what they do, they offer so much relevance to the community and can meet those goals we’ve set for the future,” he said.

Todd’s focus in the CBLD program has been to create a general manager reporting approach that fosters connections between general manager reporting, and working toward future accomplishment that goes beyond the accountability aspect of reporting. “So often the general manager’s reports are focused on the present,” he said, “And that’s good, but in thinking ahead we also want to foster the long range thinking, conversations, and perspectives that focus on the future.”



Art Sherwood

Art Sherwood is also completely inspired by the activities of local food co-ops and their actions on behalf of community, justice and the local economy. So he’s visiting food co-ops from

around the country this summer and recording his impressions on his blog at cooptraveler.wordpress.com. Not only does he feel the need to chronicle his passion for food co-ops, he also believes that his travels in the worlds of sustainable agriculture and food co-ops have brought him full circle personally and professionally.

Earlier in his career, Art completed a number of prestigious degrees, including an MBA and PhD in business strategy. For a long time he worked as a consultant to nonprofits and small business entrepreneurs, but he felt like some of the organizations he’d worked with were not particularly aligned with his values. His involvement as a member of the board of Bloomingfoods Market and Deli in Bloomington, Ind. sparked a new professional direction for him regarding his interest in sustainability and community. In 2003, he and his wife decided to start farming and today, they co-own a growing certified organic farm, CSA and seed company. He knew the decision would

change their lives, but the journey, so to speak, has been more than rewarding. It’s been energizing. “I am motivated by a belief and passion to work together with others to make the world better by building on good things, like food co-ops,” Art said.

In addition to his board work with CBLD, Art was instrumental in the founding of the Local Growers Guild, a marketing co-op for local producers in South Central Indiana. He is now applying all those years of business strategy experience from other sectors into helping boards of mission-driven organizations be more effective. He recognizes that there is a lot of diversity on local food co-op boards, but often they are dealing with the same problems and opportunities as food co-ops all over the country.

“Good governance accomplishes three things,” Art said, “It intentionally understands member values, it translates those values into policy, and it holds the organization and its board accountable for performance, conduct and outcomes.” From his perspective, food co-op boards have already developed a lot of systems to govern well. “I think the next evolution for food co-op boards is to foster the team relationship the board has with the general manager, and to expand the role of strategic process in taking things to the next level.”

Patronage Dividends for Food Co-ops

A Primer on Distributing Earnings and Building Member Capital



Patronage Dividend Primer Now Available for Download

This new 35 page resource is a handbook and compilation of cooperative patronage dividend best practices. This primer will help food co-ops create good systems to address the following patronage dividend decisions and considerations:

- Prepare for the future
- Build co-op equity
- Keep more money locally
- Reduce taxes, increase cash
- Treat members like owners
- Encourage shopping

Free download at

www.cdsconsulting/patronagedividend

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