



## **Empowerment**

by Julie Mikuska

In a culture of engagement, we like to talk about empowerment. It means giving people in your organization permission to act and the tools to act appropriately.

Have you seen this in your organization or perhaps experienced it in another? A person approaches a reception desk. They say they want to talk to someone about making a donation. The receptionist tells them there's no one in that day who can answer their questions, and to come back another time.

*What are the chances that person will actually come back?*

Empowering that receptionist means he will be equipped to take a donation, provide a receipt, and answer questions about donations. If he doesn't know the answers, he commits to the potential donor that he will find out and get back to him, or have someone with the answers get back to him within a short timeframe. He thanks that person for her interest in the organization and takes her contact information.

The organization's leadership gave the receptionist permission to engage the potential donor. They gave him the tools to act – equipped him with enough information to feel confident in talking about donations, and a good customer service orientation. They made him feel he was an integral part of the culture of engagement, as they did with all staff.

Empowerment means demystifying the development office. Staff, board members and volunteers understand it and why donors are important to the organization. They understand that engaging donors is not the sole responsibility of the development staff. They understand that donors want to see the impact of their gift and how they as empowered staff or volunteers can show them.