



*funding research, education and innovation
to expand ownership opportunities for employees
and honoring Corey Rosen for his 30 years of
dedication to the employee ownership community*

Pay It Forward

Like you, I learned recently that Corey Rosen will soon be changing roles at the NCEO from executive director to senior staff member. I thought about the impact he has had on thousands of companies and an untold number of employee-owners and decided to take the initiative to find a way to honor the work that he and the NCEO have done. After talking with NCEO board and staff members, it was clear the best way was to create a fund that Corey, along with a committee of people active in employee ownership in all its forms, would use to sponsor projects that move employee ownership and ownership culture forward; projects that could not be funded within the normal operating budget of the NCEO. We're calling it the Rosen Ownership Opportunities Fund, or ROOF.

Let me tell you a story that explains why I think ROOF is so important. I was raised in a very low income family with my father and all of my relatives working in the lead mines in South East Missouri. When I was 15, my father abandoned my mother and me, leaving us with no means of visible support. My mother had always served in the role of mother and housewife, so any future family income depended on my finding employment. I immediately secured two jobs as a sophomore in high school and within a month had three jobs.

I later went to a local junior college for two years, again carrying three jobs. A class I was in had us draw names out of a hat to find work experience. I drew the local bank, and that was my first fortunate turning point of fate. I entered the banking business full time in 1971 and after working for two different banks, I was hired by Emma Lou Brent in 1986 to work at Phelps County Bank. That was my second fortunate event of fate.

Meeting Corey was my third fortunate turn of fate, and that is why I am so committed to this project. In 1986 Phelps County Bank had an ESOP that owned 13% of the bank. Emma and I knew little about employee ownership, but she often mentioned this guy in Oakland, California, who managed an organization to promote the growth of employee ownership companies. We called him. During that short conversation with Corey we began to understand the potential power of our ESOP and a path we might take to realize that power.

Over the next several years we gained more ownership, talking with Corey at the major decision points, until we became 100% employee owned in 1993. What we have experienced has been beyond our wildest imagination. Our stock value has increased from \$24 to \$400 per share over the past 30 years. Our employee-owners have average balances in their accounts of over \$300,000. *Inc.* Magazine picked us as the top service company in the U.S. in 1993. The *Wall Street Journal* selected us as one of the top 15 small workplaces in 2007.

When I look back at all the accolades we received, the wealth of the company and its owners, the pride in our workplace, and our ability to truly change the lives of our staff, I realized that Corey was the cartographer. He told us the best way to incorporate an ESOP and the culture needed to be successful. He provided the tools we needed to take a good company and make it great. We never would have arrived in the good place we are in now if it had not been for Corey—and we probably would not have even known that such a good place was possible.

My involvement with employee ownership and NCEO changed my life, through the change in my thought process, my commitments, my family, my future, and most importantly my past. If you look at your relationships with employee ownership, I hope you can see my story in yourself, your staff, and, more importantly, in your company.

But the important part of this is that we have the responsibility to carry on Corey's 30-year mission and provide for those who continue to follow behind us. The success of employee ownership is not just financial success. We need to provide a generational change in our companies and our country. You have made the decision to follow Corey's example in what you do day-to-day. I'm asking you to support the Rosen Ownership Opportunities Fund so that others have the opportunity to make some of the same choices you have.

If you have met Corey, you will know that this money will be spent efficiently. Know too that once Loren Rodgers becomes the NCEO's executive director, Corey will still be working close to full time on an essentially volunteer basis for many years. None of this money will pay him. You can find attached a sample of some of the projects this fund could support, and we are open to new ideas.

Please join us in establishing a fund that will provide the future road map well beyond Corey's passion and commitment. It is our turn, it is our commitment, to provide that next event of fate for the bank teller, the line worker, the tree trimmer and many others who will benefit from your financial gift today. We are all beneficiaries of the pioneering work that Corey and others have done. No one wants that debt to be paid back, but it is not just important, it is necessary to "pay it forward."

Sincerely,

Bill C. Marshall
President, Phelps County Bank

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