

Elaine Z. Jennerich

# The long-term view of library staff development

## The positive effects on a large organization

**S**o what difference does a staff development program make in a large library organization? The University of Washington Libraries' staff development and training program has been in existence for more than ten years. The program has had a full-time libraries staff development and training coordinator, a part-time student employee, a staff volunteer Web coordinator, and a Staff Development Advisory Committee made up of librarians and classified/professional staff. The program was recently expanded to include an additional half-time professional to assist with training and development when the role of the coordinator changed to director of organization development and training.

The program has a healthy, stable budget thanks to strong continuous support from the library administration. Travel funding is not included in this program. Approximately 76 percent of the staff of more than 450 take advantage of at least one development/training opportunity each year. A hallmark of the program from its inception is that it is intended for all staff members, including librarians, professional, and classified staff.

The program has several important components, which include the following:

- New employee orientation
- Classes and workshops delivered in the libraries
- Customer service training
- Funding for any staff member to take a advantage of opportunities for development (computer, training/development classes on campus or eLearning classes at the desktop, for example)

- Consultant services such as coaching, facilitation, etc.
- Support and coordination for organization development initiatives, such as strategic planning and communication enhancement
- Ergonomic health awareness and assistance
- Scholarship program for student library employees
- Neutral resource for individuals and departments

At one end of the spectrum are staff members who are profoundly changed by what they learn, and incorporate techniques and concepts into their daily work. At the other end of the spectrum are staff members who participate minimally (or not at all) in training and development opportunities. Even the minimally engaged staff members change over time, however, as the overall culture and organizational environment matures.

The long-term effects of such a program cannot be understated. In fact, they are more positive and far-reaching than one might think.

### Results of a staff development program

**Enhances the new staff experience.** A vibrant, interesting, and informative new staff orientation sets the stage. It conveys to new employees how welcome they are and

---

Elaine Z. Jennerich is director of organization development and training at the University of Washington Libraries, e-mail: [jenneric@u.washington.edu](mailto:jenneric@u.washington.edu)

© 2006 Elaine Z. Jennerich

that they are expected to take advantage of training and development opportunities as part of their jobs. As each group of new employees is integrated into the organization, the climate for learning and self-improvement is enhanced.

**Improves external and internal customer service.** Because all new staff and all student employees who work with patrons are required to attend customer service training, everyone understands the service philosophy and expectations of the organization. Our customer service ratings are very high on our triennial surveys of faculty and students.

**Increases expectations/decreases anxiety.** Staff members come to expect training, especially when it comes to technology. The anxiety previously created by learning new technologies or new skills is mitigated by knowing that training will be provided or that it is important to ask for training when one needs it.

**Improves group communication skills.** Over time, staff members learn and use important skills to enable them to communicate well in groups, whether it be work groups, committees, task forces, etc. Such skills include: managing meetings more effectively, getting active participation from all members, and being a productive contributor. "Are we on the road to Abilene?" you might hear a staff member ask in a meeting when it is apparent that there is mismanaged agreement.<sup>1</sup>

**Gives tools for tackling problems creatively.** By observation, training, and participation, staff members learn to recognize and use some fundamental facilitation tools to help groups reach consensus and decisions. Brainstorming, nominal group technique, fishbone analysis, and force field analysis are among the basic techniques staff may acquire.<sup>2</sup> The serials division made important changes that affected everyone in the division by using small task forces chaired by staff who received basic training on managing meetings. For a very complicated decision, they decided to have *two*

*small groups working on the same problem* and then combined the recommendations of both to develop solutions.

Empowers individual staff members. In *The Library Meeting Survival Guide*, George Soete writes: "Library people tend to be introverts. This is not just a stereotypical view. When I administer the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to library groups, the ratio of people who prefer introversion to those who prefer extroversion is typically two to one, while the ratio in the general population is roughly one to one."<sup>3</sup>

By offering training and development in a variety of ways, by enabling staff members to take continuing education classes freely, and by making opportunities easily obtainable, an environment is created in which staff members believe themselves to be valuable to the organization. Consequently, they want to share their opinions, knowledge, and skills.

**Makes library staff valuable to the campus.** What academic administrator wouldn't want a chair/member of a search committee, a task force, a building construction team, or other group to be well-versed in how to enable or participate in moving a group forward, suggest proven techniques for doing so, and meet the deadlines? Librarians and classified/professional staff are valued members of faculty committees, search committees, university presidential task forces/committees, and a myriad coordinating teams and partnership groups.

**Invigorates the need for personal improvement.** Staff members no longer feel that they must solve their own personal puzzles themselves. "How do I build trust in my team?" "How do I deal with a difficult colleague?" "I'm feeling bored and restless in this job." "I've never chaired a committee before. Where do I start?" They feel the library has provided assistance or referred them to appropriate resources to help answer such questions.

**Instills confidence throughout the organization.** The staff of the undergraduate library knew it had the skills to put together

a retreat. A small group developed outcomes, agenda, and appropriate activities. Wonderful, amusing life-size drawings of the “freshman of the future,” fully wired and wireless, of course, emerged and helped to inform their discussion of service needs. Ten years ago, we may very well have hired a consultant to assist the group.

### Change over the long term

The effects of a staff development and training program on a large organization are gradual and will only happen with sustained effort and consistent attention. It is tempting to deliver short, intense blasts of training

aimed at an organizational problem or a group of employees. Patience, persistence and repetition, however, are the keys to engendering change and unlocking the potential within library staff members.

### Notes

1. Jerry B. Harvey, *The Abilene Paradox and Other Meditations on Management* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988).

2. Lois B. Hart, *Faultless Facilitation*, 2nd ed. (Amherst, MA: HRD Press, 1996).

3. George J. Soete, 2000. *The Library Meeting Survival Guide* (San Diego: Tulane Street Publications, 2000). ♪

---

(“New tools . . .,” cont. from page 610)

reshape many of our tools and provide opportunities to develop new ones.

### Notes

1. The evolution of scholarly communication programs through stages of awareness, understanding, ownership, activism, and transformation are presented in Joyce L. Ogburn, “Defining and Achieving Success in the

Movement to Change Scholarly Communication.” *LRTS, Library Resources and Technical Services*, forthcoming.

2. The Federal Research Public Access Act of 2006 was discussed in a previous scholarly communication column. Ray English and Peter Suber, “Public Access to Federally Funded Research: The Cornyn-Lieberman and Cures Bills,” *C&RL News* 67, no. 6 (2006). ♪

### Statement of ownership and management

*College & Research Libraries News* is published 11 times a year (monthly, combining July/August) by the American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. American Library Association, owner; Stephanie Orphan, editor. Second-class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois. Printed in the U.S.A. As a nonprofit organization authorized to mail at special rates (DMM Section 423.12), the purposes, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes, have not changed during the preceding 12 months.

**Extent and nature of circulation.** (Average figures denote the number of copies printed each issue during the preceding twelve months; Actual figures denote the number of copies of single issues published nearest to mailing date.) Total number of copies (net press run): Average, 14,553; Actual, 14,237. Total paid/requested subscriptions:

Average, 13,574; Actual, 13,250. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales, and other non-USPS paid distribution: not applicable. Other classes mailed through the USPS: not applicable. Total paid and/or requested circulation: Average, 13,574 Actual, 13,250. Free distribution by mail: Average, 71; Actual, 101. Free distribution outside the mail: Average, 0; Actual, 0. Total free distribution: Average, 71; Actual, 101. Total distribution: Average, 13,645; Actual, 13,351. Copies not distributed: Office use, leftover, spoiled: Average, 908; Actual, 886. Total (sum of previous entries): Average, 14,553; Actual, 14,237. Percent paid and/or requested circulation: Average, 99.48%; Actual, 99.24%.

**Statement of ownership, management, and circulation** (PS Form 3526, October 1999) for 2005 filed with the United States Postal Service, Postmaster in Chicago, Illinois, September 29, 2006.