

Do Workshops Work???

You Bet They Do!

Tom Moore

Workshops for staff are one of the best things that can happen to a library system. It is through workshops that staff become familiar with and committed to the library's objectives, goals, and mission. It is through workshops that staff learn that they are not alone. They share common problems with others performing similar jobs. It is through workshops that staff get to shine as presenters and problem solvers and leaders. Workshops are not "be alls" and "end alls," but they should be a very important part of what libraries do.

Many libraries will conduct staff institute days annually for all employees. These are excellent ways to train staff and to help them know what the system is all about. It is through institute day that the staff can learn about the library's mission. These institutes, however, should not serve as the major or only vehicle for staff training during the year. If institute day is going to become the reason for not having additional workshops during the year, I would advocate doing away with it.

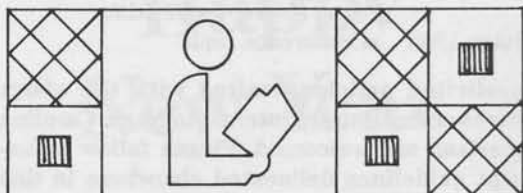
Workshops presented by a private consultant, university, state association, or national association like ALA are helpful, providing they are attended by the right people with the right motives. I frequently will send a staff member to a workshop to learn what is being taught and how it is taught. I also ask the staff member to evaluate the workshop for effectiveness. That evaluation is expected to include a recommendation as to whether we have staff in house who could present this workshop or whether we should send additional staff to the same workshop. The key to this method of workshop evaluation is to send only one person the first time. If the workshop is no good, only one person is effected. If the workshop is good, the whole library system will benefit from it.

Using conference programs as a substitute for workshops is largely a waste of time. If the program is good, there will be too many people in too small a room. If the program is bad, there will still be too many people in too small a room.

Conference programs can be a good way to meet other librarians. It is through these meetings that you are able to find solutions to problems that exist in your library. You learn that the problems your library has are not unique. Other librarians have faced these same problems and have come up with good solutions to them. You in turn have solved problems that they are facing and can offer solutions. You become the expert that you didn't realize you were.

Workshops that are prepared for and by the staff are far more likely to be successful and well attended. Staff participation as both presenters and attendees makes the workshop germane to the library system. Specific problems of the library system can be addressed by in-house staff experts or by visiting experts who are brought in to make presentations. These are the workshops that have the greatest positive impact since they clearly address the needs and wants of the particular library's staff. It is in these workshops that staff shine as presenters and are recognized as experts in their own libraries.

Workshops are successful when they are included as a part of the library's overall training program. They are not a training plan in themselves. They have to be a part of a well organized and well planned training program. I'll bet there are plenty of people in your system who could organize and plan that program today.



Tom Moore is director of the Wake County, North Carolina, Public Library System.

COUNTERPOINT

Workshops Don't Work — They Can't!

Harry Tuchmayer

It's not that workshops don't work — they just can't work. Now don't get me wrong, I like workshops. I've found most of them informative and even stimulating. So how can something perceived as informative fail to achieve its desired goal? Workshops fail because they are often designed for the wrong people, they are attended with the wrong expectations, and they are rarely, if ever, reinforced at the workplace.

Those employees who truly need the help are often the very employees who fail to benefit from workshops. The employees who lack the confidence and/or the skills necessary to perform on the job aren't going to be helped at a workshop, unless they get the help they need at work first. These employees need to be motivated and encouraged to perform before they will ever benefit from a workshop.

You see, the real failure of workshops is they are not taken seriously by either the participants or their supervisors. The employee who attends the workshop knows that nobody back at the office really cares about what they learn, nobody will ask them to teach others what they have learned, and nobody will take the time to sit down and discuss with them what they have learned.

There are always exceptions, because there are always exceptional employees. But they are not the ones who most need what the workshop has to offer. These employees could benefit from any number of creative discussion sessions at work, where supervisors and staff sit down to explore better ways of performing various tasks. More importantly, these people could benefit from a workshop, if workshops were designed for them. Unfortunately, most workshops try to attract everyone, but fail to help anyone.

It's not that workshops don't work, it's that our expectations of what they can accomplish are all wrong. At best, good workshops can only reinforce a library's commitment to excellence; they cannot produce that commitment, nor can they sustain it. At worst, they let supervisors think they have done all they need to do to provide the

employee with the necessary training to perform their jobs. Workshops can teach those who already care about their jobs, but they can't teach employees to care about their jobs.

As long as workshops are used by libraries as a substitute for an effective and comprehensive training program, they will continue to fail. They fail by addressing only a small part of a library's overall training needs. They can demonstrate how to do something, but they can't motivate the employee to do it. That requires reinforcement from supervisors and staff at the worksite.

Workshops have potential, but they are not a panacea. They provide only one important link in a complex process known as staff development and training. That process can be broken at any time if management doesn't provide an environment for growth, and it will never even take place if the employee isn't motivated to learn. Teaching management and staff how to make workshops work for them should be the first order of business . . . and the next topic for a workshop!

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Wanted: Library Photographs

North Carolina Libraries is looking for seasonal photographs of library buildings across the state. If you have a black and white photograph of your library that particularly portrays the building during summer, fall, winter, or spring, please send a copy to *North Carolina Libraries*, Frances B. Bradburn, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27858-4353.