A Tiered Approach to Staff Development

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The University of Central Florida (UCF) Libraries supports almost 72,000 students. With just over 100 library faculty and staff, opportunities for collaboration are abundant. While professional development is expected of faculty, finding meaningful opportunities for staff of all departments calls for a revised approach. The UCF Libraries is reigniting conversations of staff development and forming new programs and strategies in an aim to encourage cross-departmental teamwork.

The UCF Libraries has many past and present professional development programs. The Information Exchange, a week-long event of presentations by various library departments, showcased innovative methods to support our academic mission, how increased workloads are handled, and the overall impact of each person and each department. Cross-training allowed participants to work in other departments up to four hours a week. Special Collections & University Archives (SCUA) was a popular choice, and these volunteer staff could learn to process, arrange, and describe archival collections. The Stay Savvy with Scholarly Communication is another popular series of presentations on hot topics such as Digital Afterlife and are open to all library employees.

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A Tiered Approach to Staff Development
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Most often, staff participating in these activities are enrolled in an MLIS program. Although collaboration in the UCF Libraries has been strong, remote work in the pandemic has curbed new ideas.

One typically thinks of staff development as undergoing training in the form of attending presentations, workshops, and conferences – all of which assume passive learning. It is difficult to measure how effective these modes are if the topics are not related to job function. One also assumes professional development requires funding, despite the growing conversation of open source in academia. With this in mind, we are shifting our focus to include learner-centered approaches and activities that require little to no expense. In pedagogy, learner-centered learning is characterized by the self-guided creation of projects. The UCF staff employee would explore topics that interest them and choose their method of deliverable, such hosting a lightning talk, presentation, or workshop.

To identify effective staff development opportunities, we are implementing a tiered approach. As a first step, we distributed a survey to library staff to gauge the level of interest and expectations. With these results in mind, we will relaunch the first Information Exchange post-pandemic. Both faculty and staff will be encouraged to participate to generate as much conversation as possible. From there, interested staff can propose topics for self-guided projects or request to cross-train with or shadow a library professional. In time, the more people who get involved, the more we can change the concept of staff development as a costly endeavor to an accessible reality.

In step with this tiered approach, we plan to form a committee with the objective of formalizing the process of professional development endeavors within the UCF Libraries. It will be a platform where faculty and staff can connect on projects, voice their thoughts and ideas, and access free learning materials. With this, we hope to open a new channel of communication between staff and higher ups and foster a sustainable and enriching culture of learning. ☟
While visiting a good friend in early December, we took a trip to her local public library. On the way, she commented that I was “actually a kind and helpful librarian”. Although I know her comment was meant to be a compliment to me, it felt more like a criticism of my profession. Don’t all library workers strive to be nice to customers and coworkers, providing services and assistance needed? Well, yeah, usually. But are we always kind?

Thinking on this more, I remembered some recent articles from my news feeds about leading with kindness. Several stressed the importance of kindness in leadership, recommending leaders incorporate it into business strategy and make it a core tenant of the organization. One author claimed it is the new “superpower” for leaders. Another article highlighted The Kindness & Leadership Leading Lights campaign, which since 2018, has recognized leaders in the UK and Asia for their generosity, compassion, dedication to supporting the well-being of others, and fostering a spirit of collaboration. After some additional sleuthing, it was obvious that the concept is gaining traction in the business leadership literature, and for good reason. Kindness in leadership is less about the what - and much more about the how. How do we respond to individuals who are under-performing? How do we treat coworkers whom we simply dislike? How do we respond to customer requests that irritate or inconvenience us?

What if we could find a way to embed kindness into our organization? Kindness is more than just being nice. Being kind requires intentionally and voluntarily showing empathy, acceptance, grace, and performing kind gestures. Imagine how making kindness the default response in everyday situations could impact everything from customer service to performance reviews. As leaders in library learning and professional development, we can provide opportunities for our teams to think about including kindness in their strategies, procedures, and best practices.

Sending kindness, joy, and laughter to you this holiday season!
Leadership Perspectives – Vision
Doug Crane, Library Director
Palm Beach County Library System

"Where there is no vision, the people perish” Proverbs 29:18

Throughout history, humans have sought meaning both in the moment and in the larger scope of events. When times are tough and the world is confusing, people look to their leaders for clarity about the future. This makes casting a vision perhaps the most important skill a leader can master and also the most challenging.

At its basic level casting a vision is the ability to paint a future from the many factors that make up today. In ancient times, it was commonplace for people to seek out oracles, shamans, and mystics to appeal for divine direction. In our complicated world, this need for guidance has not disappeared. If anything, our leaders must be more dynamic with their visions to cut through the clutter of information noise.

One way is through a vision statement. Companies around the world have them; but only a few reach a clear level that inspires action. Here are a few examples of ones that are spot on:

• Alzheimer’s Association: “Our Vision is a world without Alzheimer’s disease.”

• Avon: “To be the company that best understands and satisfies the product, service and self-fulfillment needs of women - globally.”

• Norfolk Southern: “Be the safest, most customer-focused and successful transportation company in the world.”

• Microsoft: “Empower people through great software anytime, anywhere, and on any device.”

• Amazon Kindle: “Every book, ever printed, in any language, all available in less than 60 seconds.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered one of the most famous visions of modern times on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. The “I Have a Dream” speech resonated because he described in simple yet powerful detail what a racially integrated world would be like.

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The goals are straightforward to understand, such as:

"We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote, and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.

“I have a dream that one day down in Alabama with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.”

What constitutes a successful vision? First of all, the vision must inspire. A vision by its nature exists first only in the mind of its crafter. To give it life, the leader must explain the vision in enough detail to allow others to see it. For example, if a leader is reshaping an organization, they must articulate the intended results of the changes and how it will make everyone’s life better.

Once a group is inspired, the vision must provide direction. A dream remains unfulfilled until real actions are taken in the physical world. The leader helps their team understand the path forward, knowing that there will be challenges that threaten to destroy the delicate vision. However, if the group is inspired, they will continue to strive for the goals, even in tough times. As Dr. King said in the speech:

“So even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.”

When done right, a powerful vision creates a natural feedback loop. A leader can inspire and point the way forward, but without constant adjustment the group could spin into circles. An aware leader is constantly refining the vision based on real world results. Feedback both from the team and those outside of it shape the path in the direction of success. Quite often our early visions are like impressionist paintings, filled with broad emotional brush strokes while fuzzy on details. The closer to the destination, the more refined the vision becomes until it is a pixel perfect photograph.

Ultimately, the leader must be the custodian of the vision. Without constant nurturing the vision can die. The leader who stands true to the vision is someone that others will gladly follow. In the end it is the vision that provides meaning to our daily work and its guiding principles. Therefore, seek out leaders who inspire you. Write out their visions. See how they are designed. Once you understand the principles, you will be ready to craft your own vision.
The key to our library’s high caliber patron services and welcoming atmosphere is a work environment focused on developing skills and ongoing training, combined with flexible policies that protect both staff and patrons. The North Liberty Library (NLL) staff, consisting of one library page, seven part-time library assistants, and 10 full-time librarians, work together to deliver exemplary services and create a place of belonging for our whole community.

Located in a small, fast growing community (pop 20,083), our library relies on our part-timers to not only check-in and shelve materials accurately, but also to serve as part of our frontline team. They are often the first faces our patrons see when they walk in our building.

Ensuring staff understand and uphold our library’s mission ‘A place to be, connect, enrich, create, and thrive’, begins with consistent, efficient onboarding for our part-time team. Staff members as unique as our library assistants aren’t by coincidence; every phase of the process is intentional. Included is a two-week onboarding practice, with three primary focuses: shelf-reading, customer service, and team collaboration.

The ability to shelve materials accurately is an essential skill for library assistants. Early in training, our newly hired staff members are sent out with a stack of random materials and asked to shelve the items to the best of their ability and slide a bright pink bookmark, an exercise we call ‘pink-slipping’ next to each shelved item to enable accuracy checks.

Front desk shadowing is an integral second step in our onboarding process.

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As the opening page of our training manual proclaims (pictured below, on right), our patrons come first. Witnessing patron interactions, listening to staff handle phone calls, observing conflicts, and practicing these skills is all a part of preparing our staff for working with patrons.

Meeting with full-time staff individually is the final phase of onboarding. The dialogue between our seasoned staff and our newcomers is essential in creating a cohesive work environment among colleagues. This also provides opportunities for library assistants to help our senior staff with any projects they are working on and act as support during programming and large events.

In addition to consistent onboarding, working with our team to provide the tools to deliver quality services also includes opportunities for all staff to continually hone their skills with ongoing training and what we call pilgrimages – daytrips to nearby libraries (paid time including meals and mileage) to seek best practices they might implement at our library.

We know well-developed onboarding coupled with ongoing training builds confidence and connectedness to forge a positive work culture. It follows, then, that the library’s training budget covers the cost for workshops and events, local and national conferences, and a subscription to both Niche Academy and to Ryan Dowd’s online Homelessness Training, which is required for all staff members. Our library’s success is directly related to providing all staff, part- and full-time, professional development opportunities throughout the year.

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Welcome to the North Liberty Library!
We are excited to have you join our team!

This manual will serve as a guide during your first few weeks at the library; however, training should be viewed as a continuous process. There will be a variety of training methods used including reading, talking with staff one-on-one, software and process training videos, job function shadowing, and role playing scenarios. The training has a flexible timeframe to accommodate your schedule and prior customer service and library experience.

Here’s a few handy guidelines on how to make the most of your NLL training experience:

- **Patrons Come First**
  Each of our NLL team members is empowered to do what they can to assist our patrons so they have a positive experience at our library. Please don’t hesitate to talk with your supervisor when you have ideas on how we can improve the patron experience.

- **Feedback is Essential**
  We are continuously improving our workflow and seek employee feedback to facilitate this process. From your first day, we appreciate and welcome suggestions on how we can continue to make onboarding a smooth journey!

- **We Love Questions**
  Do not hesitate to ask any of your team members whenever you have a question or need clarification; we are all here to help and support you.