

Mentoring Magic:
Creating Mentoring Relationships
for Powerful Transformations

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Knowledge Transfer and Succession Planning are two sides of the same coin that can, when successfully implemented, work together to create a dynamic staff and environment. A successful mentorship program begins with knowledge transfer and ends with succession planning. Through mentoring, knowledge transfer can work to overcome hurdles that stem from miscommunication between generations, cultures, and technological adeptness. However, in order to create a successful mentorship program, it is essential to understand how knowledge is transferred and create strategies to promote knowledge transfer.

Knowledge Transfer

Knowledge Transfer is the communication of information that has an organizational purpose. While all knowledge is composed of data, not all data rises to the level of knowledge (Stevens 2010, 78). To transition from data to knowledge, information must have a purpose beyond being a set of random facts. Generally, knowledge or the transfer of knowledge can be categorized into two areas: explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge, which utilizes the direct transfer method, is easily codifiable, observable, and less complex than tacit knowledge. This type of knowledge can generally be seen in an owner's manual, training guides, and cheat-sheets. Explicit knowledge works best in transferring simple or less-complex instructions, tasks, or ideas. The direct training approach used with explicit knowledge is easily scalable to individuals or groups of varying sizes. Tacit knowledge, however, is what Polanyi described in the statement "we know things, and important things, that we cannot tell"

(1966, 22). While explicit knowledge is unambiguous and easily scalable, tacit knowledge is the exact opposite in its ambiguity and not readily transferred state: it is also seen as the knowledge that everyone knows; knowledge that is “taken for granted” (Sveiby 1996, 302). Tacit knowledge works best on an individualized level as knowledge is transferred indirectly and intuitively between the transferor and the transferee. Tacit knowledge transfer, by its nature, cannot be scaled up to large groups or transferred on a specific timeline.

Knowledge Transfer works to assist in maintaining a competitive advantage whether in a Fortune 500 company or at a local public library. It is accepted that knowledge transfer can be an expensive, complex, and a long-term issue, so why should companies, or more specifically, libraries, practice knowledge transfer? In one word, tenure; the tenure or amassed knowledge of long-term employees. The creation of a successful knowledge management system is imperative to successful knowledge transfer, or as Elizabeth Lank stated in an interview, “managing knowledge is expensive, but the cost of not managing knowledge is enormous” (Simonin 1999, 614). Without the creation of a Knowledge Management program that includes knowledge transfer, knowledge remains at its best, inert, and at its worst, it is lost. The tacit knowledge that Lank is referring to is easily lost and less recoverable. In the public sphere, the cost is monumental owing to the general long-term tenure of public sector employees; thusly, the amount of data and knowledge gained or loss is compounded exponentially. The benefits of retaining these workers and their connection with the community should not be underestimated. Mentoring, whether formal or informal, is a successful method to implement a knowledge transfer management program. However,

there are barriers to a successful mentorship program - intergenerational, cultural, and technological. The following paragraphs will examine each barrier as well as provide strategies to overcome those barriers while creating a successful knowledge transfer program. As Jeffrey Mann states, "Knowledge Management is something you do, not a system you buy" (Booth 2008, 23).

Intergenerational Mentoring

Mentoring has a long history of practice in libraries as a means of career advancement, yet mentoring can serve as a retention strategy particularly suited to the different generational needs of a library. The graying of librarianship coupled with a progressively younger student body in master's programs may form a future library workforce skewed at both ends of the age spectrum with Generation X in the middle.

A public library is one of the few employers that hire teens and seniors to do the same job. Library Directors and Branch Managers have to cope with the opposing attitudes and communication styles of people with generational differences in their staff. New technology or work patterns that mix multi-generational library staff can exacerbate the issues, but the following mentoring suggestions will use the generational differences for positive growth.

Bi-Directional Mentoring:

Younger staff members can provide a new outlook on current procedures, perhaps streamlining them with new technology, and older staff members can offer the wisdom from their experience of working at a library. Since Millennials appreciate cooperative environments, having them work with older staff that have life experience and established relational skills make arranged group work and small team projects

great situations (Keegan 2011, 222). Millennials also prefer goal orientation and a collaborative style. They are more flexible and assertive and don't want to emulate the old stereotype of librarians. In fact, they try to look the opposite. They are also the first generation to join the workforce who are digital "natives" instead of digital "immigrants" which makes them very unique, especially in comparison to Traditionalists and Gen Xers who once used a card catalog (Stueart 2013, 443-4).

Progressive Mentoring/Cross Training:

Progressive mentoring allows employees to progress through a series of mentorships as they acquire skills and competencies (Bloomquist 2014). Cross training takes advantage of the knowledge already in your library by letting employees spend time working with different coworkers in different departments. This offers a whole new set of skills for your employee that they wouldn't gain from sticking to the same routine.

Peer Mentoring:

Peer or group mentorships may appeal to the flatter organizational style and equality that Generation X and millennials prefer. This type of mentorship, also known as a "community of practice", partners employees at the same or equal level within an organization, allowing them to exchange knowledge and emotional support while under the loose direction of a senior employee (Bloomquist 2014).

Members of the Boomer and Traditional generations often prefer more traditional methods of librarianship such as using print resources, paper copies and newspaper clippings. This is not necessarily bad, but if directors do not implement new technologies, Generation Xers and Millennial librarians with technological skills lose the

opportunity to gain experience in an area that promotes their career advancement (Cooper 1998).

Task management is another area that differs between generations. Millennials are comfortable multi-tasking, while Boomers often favor explicit instructions and prefer to do one thing at a time (Keegan 2011, 223). There is a need for employers to recognize different value sets and varied expectations of different generations at work. Changing policies and procedures are a way to foster a culture that celebrates the differences to accommodate everybody's needs (Calgary Herald 2005, 11).

Open communication with the entire staff regardless of generation allows the staff to be heard and lets the director or manager know what issues need to be addressed (Wall Street Journal, 2009). To encourage better communication, management with multiple generations on their staff should discuss the best ways to provide suitable feedback to one another (Lancaster, 2003). Most issues between the generations are due to lack of understanding. It isn't necessarily the age that separates them, but their experiences. A manager should address and utilize the variances in principles and expectations of each generation while avoiding stereotyping them. Just as managers must consider intergenerational issues when staffing their library, they equally must consider communication issues stemming from a culturally diverse staff.

What is Diversity/Inclusion and Why Does It Matter?

The United States Office of Personnel Management, Office of Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan defines inclusion as, "a set of behaviors [culture] that encourages employees to feel valued for their unique qualities and experience a sense of belonging (2014, 5)." The plan goes on to define inclusive diversity as, "a set of

behaviors that promote collaboration amongst a diverse group” (5). When we talk about diversity in this paper we are referring to age, size, race, color, ethnicity, (dis)ability, sex, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, and military status. The American Library Association 2015 Strategic Plan cites increased diversity as a Key Action Area. Specifically, the report states, “In the library workforce, programs of recruitment, training, development, advancement and promotion are needed in order to increase and retain diverse library personnel who are reflective of the society we serve” (2). In addition, Record and Green (2008, 197) argue that gender diversity in libraries, “may be stifled by a concentration of men in high-level management and director positions.” A diverse workforce enables us to better understand and meet the needs of the diverse populations we serve, diverse perspectives and knowledge enhance our decision making, and by valuing diversity we can attract talented employees that know we will appreciate and utilize the skills, background, and knowledge they bring to the table.

What is Diversity Mentoring?

Diversity mentoring is “a developmental process of open dialogue that aims to achieve both individual and organizational change through shared understanding and suspending judgement within a relationship of mutual learning in which differences that exist are perceived as integral to learning, growth, and development” (Clutterbuck 2012, 1). Diversity mentoring differs from other types of mentoring, such as sponsorship mentoring, in that the relationship is symbiotic. Power differentials are left outside the relationship. The mentor learns and grows along with the mentee by engaging in open dialogue that challenges assumptions and actions. Rather than seeing difference as an

obstacle, diversity mentoring uses difference as a resource that can be leveraged for learning. For example, ignoring a source of difference, or over emphasizing it, can be demeaning or uncomfortable (9). Diversity dialogue is not easy. It is a skill that can be strengthened with activities that encourage respectful conversations across barriers of difference. To begin, build agreements that allow mutual feedback about language. Each of you have a responsibility to share with the other person if you are offended. Develop a greater awareness of your mentor/mentee reactions to the language you use. Recognize and respond to your stereotypes. Admit the stereotype to yourself, admit it to the person you are dialoguing with, reflect on your stereotype, and talk it through with a trusted advisor. These skills will help you as you move through diversity mentoring activities.

To help address differences you can initiate an ice breaker exercise where the mentor and mentee quickly state three unreflective assumptions about the other person, such as their hobbies, what kind of car they drive, or how clean they keep their home. The mentor and mentee then discuss how accurate the assumptions were and what lead to their reasoning. Another activity is to discuss the Diversity Awareness Ladder, which shows the stages of awareness we move through when first getting to know someone. The ladder moves from fear, to wariness, to tolerance, to acceptance, and finally appreciation.

To build a strong mentor/mentee relationship begin with work related issues, identify common interests, make an effort to learn about the other person, show empathy, be clear about your needs and expectations, avoid assumptions, and be willing to risk discomfort to make the relationship work (Clutterbuck 2012, 7). Diversity

mentoring is not simple, but the “good news is the more people get to know peers from other races or backgrounds, the more positive their attitudes tend to be toward them” (10). When managed properly, these relationship building mentoring practices that consider both intergenerational and diversity issues will allow for positive interactions and the facilitation of knowledge transfer.

Technology and Libraries: Mentoring

As important as considerations of intergenerational or diversity concerns are to knowledge transfer, the impact of technology on libraries and staff likewise demand consideration in an effective knowledge management system. Technology can be viewed as a driving force behind the need for evolution and shifts in terms of service provision in libraries. All library staff deal with technology innovation’s considerable impact on providing library services and patron assistance with access and use. For the majority of library staff, it’s difficult enough to keep up with current technology, much less stay abreast of that which is emerging. The constant pace of technology changes necessitates a library workforce that embraces change, anticipates emerging technologies, and has technological competencies and workforce skills that allow for incorporating adopted technologies into existing schemas. Peer mentoring and peer training is recommended as an effective means for developing staff skills and competence.

Technical competencies for all library staff are critical, and are as important to have and cultivate as other workforce skills. The need to develop these competencies is ongoing and should be a part of continuing education for library staff. As new technologies emerge, our skill sets must adapt and adopt. Technological competencies

for non-systems librarians and staff include both “hard skills,” specific technology competencies, and “soft skills,” those skills that ensure librarians and staff can cope with technology changes (Thompson 2009, 46-8). Patrons have expectations that library professionals can, regardless of the format, support their information needs and be experts at online content and interconnected devices (Feldman and Rich 2015, 37). As well, staff is more and more expected by administration to be capable of supporting library technology to include learning the technology on their own (typically without even the help of a manual) and troubleshooting equipment issues and breakdowns. Often, by the time mastery of a specific technology is achieved, the technology has a new version, is obsolete, or a new emerging technology is in the adoption phase. Possessing soft skills such as inquisitiveness, flexibility, and acceptance of pressure helps to counter the frustration and fear that often cause paralysis when encountering new technologies.

Libraries employ staff with varying degrees of digital and technology history, experience, and savvy. Ongoing staff training is key to keeping libraries adaptable and relevant. Once the desired core competencies are identified and defined by employers, they can be used to “inventory staff member’s technology skills” (Koep and Felkar 2015, 18). These identified competencies can then also form the basis for development of a training plan and curriculum.

So where does mentoring fit in? There are several great approaches to mentoring and training. Reverse or Bi-Directional mentoring, as mentioned above, is ideal when providing technology training to staff. In “reverse mentoring,” newer to the field staff mentor senior staff on new technologies (Bell 2013, Sponsor section). Pair up

your most embracing, experienced techie person as a “technology mentor” with your least, most resistant, techie person. Merkley (2014, 59) suggests that libraries should identify potential peer mentors among staff and give them the necessary time and tools to support their colleagues. Providing staff with the time to learn and then practice will help to encourage learning and knowledge to further build upon.

Peer training can be very informal such as occurring during day to day work, i.e. hints, tips and one on one problem solving. Ideally, though, peer training would be regularly scheduled for weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly sessions. Overall, staff studied considered peer training the most effective method for receiving training and most enjoyable when done using a hands-on approach (Robertson 2014, 10). Peer training is more collaborative and practical in the sense that learning opportunities can be short and “on the fly.” Workplace learning using peer training is of benefit for being “contextualized,” more flexible, and time and money saving (14). Peer trainers need to be “experts” on the subject that they’ll be training others on so they can effectively answer questions and provide confident, accurate guidance (Houghton-Jan 2010, 65).

Staff led workshops for face to face training are another suggested method and make use of staff with strengths in technical skills and encourages learning by teaching, an additional benefit. Combinations of self-directed training, such as webinars, manuals, and online tutorials are of great benefit and give staff the opportunity to fit them into their schedules. Encouraging the development of confident and innovative staff requires a culture of learning within our libraries, and technology training is the tool for empowering staff (Koep and Felkar 2015, 22). The Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County developed an adaptable program called 23 Things that includes 23

exercises designed around a specific technology such as social networking, blogging, photo editing, 3D printing, etc. that has been much duplicated by library systems (Stevens and Lillevig 2009, 118). Stevens and Lillevig (118-9) describe their library adaption's successes and point out numerous benefits for both "early adopters and the late bloomers" including seeing staff working together that normally would not and emerging leaders develop through the process of teaching others.

Staying on top of emerging technologies is difficult for library staff. Koerber and Sauers (2015, 105) suggest staff read, play, and teach as primary means for staying on top of emerging technology. Read journals and articles, take opportunities to try out technology, and try figuring out how to teach someone as a means to learn and build knowledge. Be open to mentoring and being mentored to become a confident, early adopter and cheerleader for technology innovation. Implementation and facilitation of a technology mentoring program must be part of a strong knowledge transfer management program for complete succession planning.

Succession Planning

Ultimately, each of the previously mentioned processes and practices are entered into as attempts to preserve consistency and functionality in the quickly evolving, yet equally compressing, public library world. However, all of these efforts are easily hampered if they are unable to withstand changes in staffing and administration.

The concept of succession planning, once foreign to public library staff training, is becoming a more necessary part of the discussion. The inevitable retirements of Baby Boomer librarians are beginning and will continue in large numbers in the years to come, leaving the following, less-populous generations in a quandary: "It will be a very

competitive time. We are not seeing a plethora of members of the Generation X community ready and waiting in the wings.” (Singer and Griffith 2010, 88).

Likewise, a phenomenon often closely aligned with library administrative hiring practices is the “new broom theory” using “upper level staff openings as an opportunity to bring in new ideas and people that can implement creative strategic changes” (Nixon 2008, 256).

It would stand to reason that retaining qualified, entry-level staff that could be developed and trained to become exceptional administrators in the later years of their careers with the same library is a worthwhile goal. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that few if any public libraries have programs in place to ensure that this occurs.

Nixon (2008) wrote an article aimed at those employed in the specialized discipline of business librarianship making parallels between the need of libraries of all varieties to consider succession planning in much the same way as multinational corporations. She specifically gave the example of the death of McDonald’s Corporation Chair and CEO Jim Cantalupo and how his replacement was named within days of his demise, presumably from a cadre of formally-trained, in-house candidates who had been prepared to assume the top job in just such an instance (250). Nixon, channeling business specialist William J. Rothwell, defines succession planning as “anticipating changes in management, creating a strategic plan to identify potential staff members, determining the gaps in their knowledge, and providing training and coaching, special assignments, and experiences so that they are ready to step up when the time comes” (256). She lists four basic steps to follow when attempting to formulate a codified succession plan that can be adapted to public libraries. They are: analyze the demographics of your key positions, identify potential employees for lead positions, assess candidates’ strengths and weaknesses,

and develop a training program to build competencies (256). It must be noted that Nixon's perspectives, while well-articulated and universal in theory, were heavily informed by her work and research conducted for business libraries (ie: special libraries).

Rothwell, along with his colleagues Mark Bernhard and James Alexander, warn of the coming "brain drain" in a piece they compiled specifically addressing case studies of succession planning in government agencies. As most public libraries fall under the auspices of some types of local government agencies, it is plausible in assuming this drain will extend to libraries very soon (Alexander, Bernhard and Rothwell 2008, 273). Nixon went even further, quoting numbers from the American Library Association's Office for Research and Statistics that state that 45% of existing librarians will reach retirement age within the current decade (Nixon 2008, 256). Combined, these statistics speak to the urgent need for public libraries in particular to begin to administer their organizations in a more business-informed manner, starting with the instituting of succession plans aimed at retaining and nurturing staff for as long as possible in their career.

Conclusion

For these reasons, and those stated above, it is incumbent upon public libraries to begin a comprehensive mentoring plan. The objective of the plan being to facilitate knowledge transfer and technology training while addressing intergenerational and diversity issues in the workplace. This needs to follow through with succession planning in order for the library to continue to exist in its current or a more thriving state in the future.

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