

Here's Activity IV from last week's XChange.

1. Concern - Staff feel that they are not valued. Staff are expected to be active participants in achieving our Mission and Vision, but feel that they often receive messages that they are of little value.

Staff tell me that they feel devalued by decisions to stay open in hazardous weather and by the proposed elimination of staff restrooms. They say that decisions impacting front line staff (such as the 15 minute change) are reactionary and made by fiat. Other decisions, such as Themed Programming, are made without including those with the most experience or knowledge, in this case those with experience presenting, developing, and building up programs. They feel that this is a strong message that their knowledge and experience are not valued.

I've personally heard people say, "So-and-so better be careful, we're the only game in town!" That's somewhat true, but saying it in this way comes across as a threat. Being the only game in town is not an advantage. Good people have options and will exercise them. I've also often heard it said that, "we don't make jobs for people, we fill jobs with people." This actually is true, but again, saying it like this strongly implies that staff are not valuable, they're interchangeable, and we should not make use of, or encourage, their individual talents.

a. My action: Tap into the talents of individual staff as far as possible. Increase the scope of their decision making authority as far as appropriate, e.g. aides and circ clerks can decide in many cases when to withdraw an item. Form work groups among the staff, give them a problem to solve, and let them solve it. Actively encourage staff participation and solicit input in meetings and decisions. Encourage them to seek opportunities to work with their colleagues across the system - on committees, etc. Make sure that good work is recognized - kudos in Monday Memos, at staff meetings, and on the Kudo Board.

b. Staff's action: Not sure. Hopefully staff will recognize the positive changes and respond accordingly.

c. Supervisor/Admin action: One of the good things mentioned in our group was the fact that Library Managers are getting more authority to do their job, for example the Business Plans and Budgets. I think we're starting to move in a positive direction. We need to keep working to balance System vs. Local needs.

2. Concern - "Corporatization" of the library. The application of metrics to services; the focus on costs and bottom line; the veneer of business language. There's a fear that what we have traditionally done is no longer of value.

a. My action: Many of the current changes simply bring us more in line with the rest of our field. I try to communicate this to our staff in a way that doesn't disparage the past. Are the metrics perfect? No, none are, but we have to start somewhere. We can always fine tune them as we go.

b. Staff's action: Express their concerns (this is obviously happening more), ask questions.

c. Supervisor/Admin action: Keep explaining how the measurements help us to work more effectively and to have a greater impact on our communities.

3. Concern - Communication. Yeah, communication is a mess. It's never easy in any organization.

a. My action: Make a conscious effort to communicate as clearly as possible. Follow up on staff questions in a timely manner.

b. Staff's action: encourage staff to ask for clarification.

c. Supervisor/Admin action: Much of our time appears to be spent clarifying or correcting miscommunication. Maybe spend more time and effort on the front end of communication?