What a Great Place to Work!

Robert F. Moran Jr.

Recently, after enjoying a Wallace and Gromit film, my wife and I were taking advantage of an added feature showing the clay animation process with interviews with the studio employees. While explaining how the figures are made and changed to accommodate the script, one underling in the studio bubbled over in delight. Clearly, he enjoyed his work and was thoroughly committed to achieving the goal of the studio—the telling of a story through lifelike clay sculptures. I turned to my wife and said, "There is no reason why people working in a library can't be as enthusiastic for and fulfilled by their jobs." My wife said nothing, knowing that if she said anything she would receive one of my lectures about the shortcomings of organizations. So, I have saved it for you.

Most people seem to accept employment as a chore, something they do because they have to make a living. While many find satisfaction in parts of their work, for instance from a job well done, helping a person, or the periodic creation of something new, these experiences are neither important enough nor frequent enough to make people excited about their jobs in general. Usually people look forward to the end of the work day and the pursuit of more enjoyable activities.

On the other hand, there are people like the Wallace and Gromit technician who do find joy and fulfillment in their work. Luckily for them, personal fulfillment, achievement of personal goals, and personal needs coincide with the goals of their workplace. Creating clay figures to tell a story is satisfying and thus exciting to the technician. Can this coincidence exist in a library?

What Have We Learned About Personal Fulfillment and Satisfaction in the Workplace?

During my thirty-five years as a manager, I found that there is validity in the value Maslow gives to personal fulfillment or self-actualization in his hierarchy. People do feel good when their efforts lead to a significant accomplishment. "I was able to deal with that problem on my own!" "I had to work really hard, but the new policy is proving quite effective."

I also learned that because there is so much emphasis on problems and failures, staff often don't recognize and take pleasure in their accomplishments. For instance, the special collections librarian who worked with me was incredibly effective in finding personal and organization papers of historical significance and convincing the owners to donate them to library's repository. Yet, my meetings with him focused mostly on support and budget problems. It was important that periodically I told him, "Step back for a moment. Think about all you have accomplished in the last three months and feel good about it." It was similar for all my staff. Each of them needed to have their accomplishments brought to their attention.

Also, if a manager takes the time to look for ways in which structures, policies, and rules unnecessarily impinge on staff, she will find ways to make their work life less burdensome. Changes in unnecessarily stringent rules on time-off and make-up-time can remove some of the conflict between work and personal life. Flexible schedules and work-at-home options can reduce the experience of work as an obstacle in life. A trusting environment established and encouraged from the director's office down can lead to shared responsibility throughout the library. As a result, staff can feel more human and less like unthinking tools.

Each of these behaviors and policies can reduce the tension between work and life and lead to sufficient satisfaction at work so that, at least, it becomes less burdensome. But they are unlikely to create sufficient satisfaction to result in a staff as enthusiastic as the Wallace and Gromit technician. There needs to be regular, consistent congruence between library goals and the fulfillment of personal needs. It may be worth noting here that personally satisfying does not mean happy. Fulfilled, worth the effort, successful are more accurate understandings.

Organizational Goals and Personal Needs

For libraries, this congruence exists. However, it is the lack of awareness of the similarity between the purpose of a library and a personal source of satisfaction that keeps many libraries from becoming the dynamic institu-

Robert F. Moran Jr. (rfmoran@anet.com) is a library consultant.

tions I conceive. Libraries are about service, about helping people. They exist to help children learn about the value and satisfaction in reading and investigation. They exist—in conjunction with schools—to help teens develop their minds and discipline through reading and research. They exist to help adults solve problems and to grow intellectually. They exist to provide enjoyment of mind and heart for seniors. They exist as a bonding force in the community, a growing force for the community. I have heard more than once that people who work in libraries do so because they are service-oriented because they certainly don't work there for the money. I don't know whether the second part of this assertion is true, but my experience supports the first part. The majority of people I have worked with are interested in life that is broader than themselves; they find satisfaction in helping other people.

The Congruence Exists. Why Doesn't the Awareness?

First, people will not see a relationship between their work and personal life as long as they are treated like cogs in a machine. Industrialization initially required this and the traditional hierarchical structure incorporated it. In addition, distinct roles and departmentalization focus attention on internal portions of a library to the exclusion of the whole operation. While specific jobs, departmentalization, and the clear establishment of authority remain important, treating staff as though they are workers on an assembly line does not. Where this vestige of bureaucratic organization remains, it needs to be removed. Long held maxims such as moving decision-making to the level closest to the activity, asking staff for their opinions on how their work is done and listening to this advice, and making sure staff is fully informed on all important library issues will help remove the impression among staff that they should not use their minds while at work.

Second, a positive relationship between a staff member's personal goals and the goals of the workplace is not expected; it has to be learned. There must be a process through which all staff can come to understand this relationship. One such process is the development of a shared vision. A shared vision is radically different from a vision statement, mission statement, or any other attempt by the library administration to create an umbrella text incorporating the library and its purpose. Most significantly, it does not come from the top. It begins at the bottom and works its way up.

Hold unit level meetings for the stated purpose of developing a vision for the library that incorporates ideas from staff at all levels. A vision is a description of the kind of library they would like to create. Start by discussing why people in dynamic organizations are so involved and committed. Viewing the Wallace and Gromit short referred to here or a similar video of the workings of a dynamic organization will provide a good beginning for the discussions. Move each discussion to the question, "What is it about working in a library that can be fulfilling to you, personally fulfilling?" Then offer a set of articulations that describe the library in these terms. For example, "The library will be a workplace where everyone's skill and energy is focused on helping its community members meet their learning and recreational needs." Then take the proposed visions from each of the groups up the ladder through departments, divisions, and senior staff and back down again until a vision with broad acceptance emerges.

After the process has developed a shared vision—a vision that has general acceptance—make it as visible as possible. Refer to it frequently. Put it in the library letterhead, at the top of evaluation forms and on internal library communications. Conscientiously and continually relate it to all activities, whether those that directly assist users or those support activities often not seen by the users. Bring it up regularly when problem solving and planning. Make it part of the fabric of the library.

These cautions need to be kept in mind. First, this is not a strategy to con employees; be honest and direct. Tell staff that the process seeks to see whether what they do can be more meaningful to each of them. Second, this process will take a long time; because it involves everyone it will take time in terms of months. Patience is needed; any attempt to hurry the process along will make the process worthless, and the time spent lost time. If it seems impossible to commit this amount of time, don't start. Finally, don't use the process or the resulting vision as a public relations gimmick. A shared vision is internal to the library. It is personal in the sense that it is about who you are as a work community.

There are other methods for developing a shared vision, a vision most if not all are committed to as something to which each wants to contribute. The critical elements of the process are, first, a method for allowing all staff to personally commit to the vision that accurately reflects the purpose of the library and, second, the incorporation of the vision into the fabric of the library.

A systematic presentation of the development of a shared vision can be found in the eleventh chapter of Peter Senge's, *The Fifth Discipline*.[1]

I will appreciate hearing from those of you who work in a dynamic library where staff is enthusiastic and fully involved. What contributed to your ability to create and maintain this atmosphere? What suggestions do you have for others? I will share your observations in a future column.

Reference

1. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and the Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).