

# Are You Following Me?

In today's libraries, training is paramount, and that calls for leadership

# Me?

by Lori Reed and Paul Signorelli

**M**ary Lou Brown works on a busy circulation desk. One minute she is teaching patrons to use the new self-checkout stations, the next minute she is answering questions about how to download audiobooks to an iPod. Later this afternoon Mary Lou will go to a meeting to discuss how customer service can be improved within the library—through training.

## We have reached the point where nearly everyone working in libraries needs some basic knowledge on how to provide effective training.

Welcome to the 21st-century library. Everyone is a trainer; and trainers, under an increasingly wide variety of job titles, are assuming leadership

roles. Without even noticing that it has happened, we have reached the point where nearly everyone working in libraries needs some basic knowledge on how to provide effective training—what many involved in professional organizations such as the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) refer to as “workplace learning and performance” opportunities—and leadership skills are crucial to our ability to deliver what is needed.

Training is more important now than ever as library staff and library users find themselves immersed in a Web 2.0 world and need assistance in learning, using, and coping with new technology.

“Learning is to libraries as breathing is to air,” says Helene Blowers, director for digital strategy at Columbus (Ohio) Metropolitan Library. “Libraries, because of both their vitality as community connectors and the vast storehouses of knowledge they contain, are in my mind homogeneous to learning, just as hydrogen and oxygen combined are essential” to sustain life.

“I believe that a strong emphasis, both formal and informal, on organizational and employee development programs is essential to a library’s health and well-being,” Blowers continues. “When employees are continually encouraged to grow and learn it has a compound effect of doing the same to the community. The emphasis on continually developing and building employees’ skill sets goes beyond just the trainer’s or training department’s responsibility. Employee development is an emphasis that every leader should pay attention to.”

At the heart of the situation is a basic shift from trainers-as-implementers to trainers-as-partners and even leaders-as-trainers in short- and long-term strategic planning, budget discussions, marketing, and every other issue facing library administrators and management teams.

American Library Association President-elect Camilla Alire has no doubt as to the “critical” importance leadership skills play for trainers. “I would probably have a hard time hiring somebody in [a training director] position if I didn’t think they were already a leader,” Alire explains. “If I had my druthers and could hire somebody, it would definitely be a trainer as leader . . . somebody who can bring a breadth of experience which includes a record of leadership.”

The way training is perceived and promoted, and the

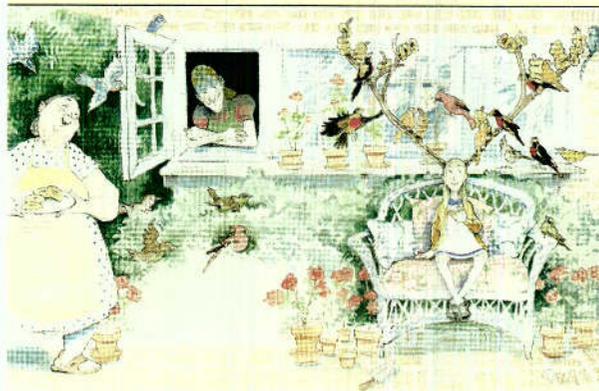
titles used to describe those working in the field, show a profession in flux. Many libraries rely on staff with myriad other responsibilities—

human resources, IT, Web design, reference, or even branch management—to also play key roles in providing training and inspiring learning within their organizations. For those libraries with staff formally designated to oversee the workplace learning and performance function, the range of titles can be wide, as shown by a quick informal survey: “training officer,” “learning manager,” “staff development and training coordinator,” “staff development manager,” “staff development librarian,” and “organizational development manager” were among those we encountered.

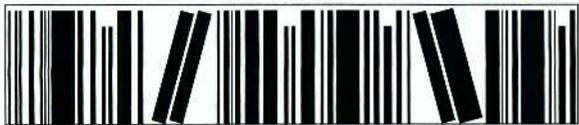
The training-teaching-learning function is receiving a lot of attention throughout the United States, as Scott Wilson, international relations manager for ASTD, told members of the Mt. Diablo (Calif.) Chapter of the organization at their July 2008 meeting. Training, he ex-

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Former City Librarian, The Seattle Public Library

plained, is developing as a profession in its own right. Through ASTD, it has a national organization that speaks on its behalf, a formal code of ethics, a defined body of knowledge, a means to use applied research to develop the field, and a credentialing mechanism. ASTD's goal, Wilson told his audience, is to define workplace learning and performance as a stand-alone profession no longer seen as a stepchild to other divisions. If ASTD is successful, workplace learning and performance will be listed as a separate profession on the national census in 2010. The leadership elements of the profession are under discussion nearly every month in the association's monthly magazine, *T&D*.

Those active in ALA's Continuing Library Education Network and Exchange (CLENE) Round Table have no doubt that leadership is an integral part of what they do.

"There's great overlap in the skill sets between trainers and leaders," says CLENE board member Peter Bromberg, and he models that behavior through his work as assistant director for the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative, based in Gibbsboro, New Jersey. "Good trainers have a strategic outlook. What I mean is 'beginning with the end in mind.' It's a trait and a skill that is shared by all good leaders and all good trainers. Trainers need to see what the end result of a workshop or class is going to be and then work backwards. . . . They have to be able to see the big picture, the end result, and see how the pieces fit together to achieve that result."

Bromberg, himself a graduate of a master trainer program, sees significant numbers of people following the same path he has made from trainer to recognized leader. "In New Jersey, many people in positions of leadership at the state library, the regions, and the more dynamic county and municipal libraries have gone through the New Jersey Train the Trainer program. Whatever training they got there seems to have served them well," he observes, adding that his own master trainer experience "was transformative for me."

The continuing evolution of trainers as leaders goes even deeper than that, according to training consultant Mary Ross, who managed the staff training and development program at the Seattle Public Library for eight years: "I want to make a distinction between trainers and managers of learning. If you use the title 'trainer,' that puts them into a certain category of delivery. We're not simply deliverers of training. It's a function that's much bigger than training. It includes many other solutions, such as coaching, self-directed learning, performance management, and mentoring in addition to training."

Ross continues, "If you are in charge of staff development and you're limiting it to training, you're missing the point completely." Those involved in workplace learning and performance will increasingly be working as members

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of management teams and other decision-making bodies, she believes; they need to be working at the organizational development level, involved in strategic planning, and taking a much broader view of what is needed when someone asks for a customer service workshop or any other learning opportunity.

### Facilitation, not decision-making

Not all trainers see themselves making key decisions. "I see myself as being more of a facilitator, doing some training, but I don't necessarily see myself saying, 'This is what we have to do,'" says San Diego County Library System Web Services Manager Polly Cipparrone. Having been part of Infopeople's Master Trainer project in California in 2002 and recently completing Infopeople's Eureka! Leadership Program workshops and weeklong institute, she sees her full-time training position as "a collaborative thing. Part of my leadership role is to help put people together and facilitate discussions. I want to work in partnership with everyone."

As the field of workplace learning and performance—or what we used to call training—evolves, library employees at

all levels and positions stand to play a larger role in leading their libraries. As we move beyond the role of a "trainer-order taker" to a role of influencing critical business decisions, employees involved with

learning stand to emerge as leaders within their libraries and the library field.

One conclusion we can draw is that if everyone in libraries is becoming a trainer, and if trainers have a leadership role to play, then everyone is potentially a leader. Some potential leaders bring their voices to the table through membership on staff-development committees, ad hoc committees designed to resolve specific training issues within an organization, or committees that approve the expenditure of training funds so members of staff can participate in workshops, conferences, and other special learning opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible to them.

As training programs evolve to meet the needs of those they serve, their very nature is shifting in ways that can only be good for all of us. A critical question, then, for those who provide training is: Are we following, or are we leading? ■

## DUAL DROP SYSTEMS

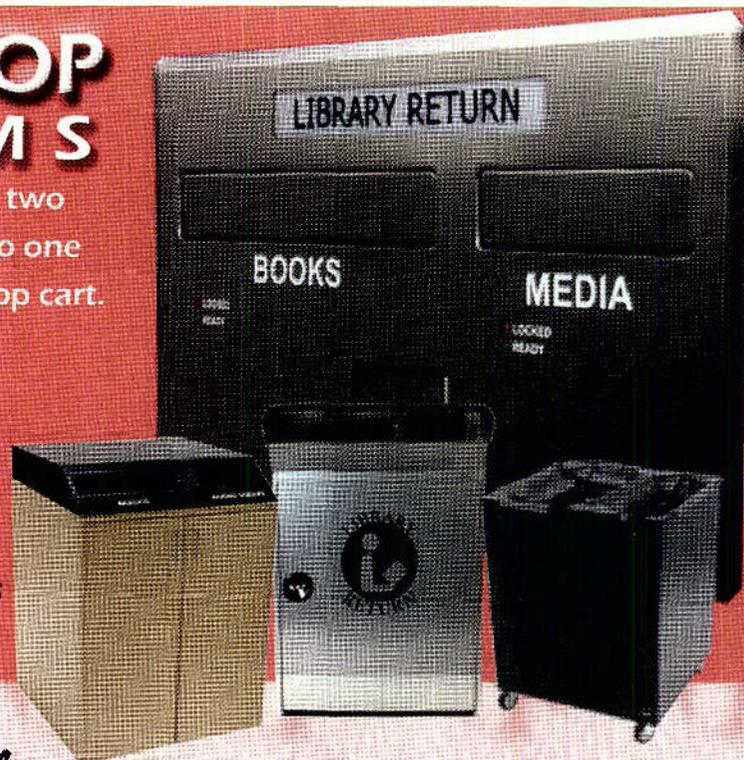
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