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Review of Staff Development on a Shoestring

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Budgets are tight, yet it remains important for library staff members to keep current with evolving technologies and improve their skills in providing services to library users. Staff development programs can spark creativity, increase motivation, and augment productivity. In these lean times, Marcia Trotta provides guidance on how to maintain library staff development opportunities. Trotta is a consultant and adult program coordinator of the Connecticut Humanities Council. She is a retired public library director and has written a number of books on library management-related issues.

This book begins by explaining how staff development programs can benefit a library’s vitality. Following that is an overview of how to design programs, from reviewing library policy and conducting a needs assessment to marketing internally for the chosen event. Trotta emphasizes in-house training for libraries on a limited budget that, nonetheless, would like to continue providing staff development opportunities. Four chapters address various aspects of this topic: homegrown training, a manager’s responsibilities in training, best practices for in-house programs, and mentoring programs within the library. Drawing on the knowledge and abilities of library employees can improve staff confidence, for those who present, and strengthen relations between those who participate.

Just one chapter is devoted to staff development beyond homegrown programs. For those on a tight budget, Trotta advises to draw on relationships with colleagues, state and regional libraries, professional associations, similar agencies (e.g. schools and museums), chambers of commerce, or local companies. Brief paragraphs explain how to network with these groups.

Trotta goes into some detail with suggested topics for staff development classes. One chapter provides five sample training programs, for which example session outlines and handouts are provided. There is a chapter on learning and working with advances in technology. Using performance evaluations as a development tool is addressed in another chapter. The importance of recognizing staff efforts, including recognition strategies, and staff motivation is discussed in one of the final chapters. The last chapter of the book is a resource directory, which includes links to professional and research organizations, skill development websites with free to low-cost resources, and a list of suggested readings.

The book is easily browsed for those who don't need all the details, but would like an overview of the topic. Sidebars, boxes that emphasize key points within chapters, and sample policies, outlines, and handouts are scattered throughout the book to break up the chapter text. Chapters are organized by subheading, which are delineated in a sidebar at the beginning of each chapter.
This book starts with the basics of defining and creating staff development programs. Some of the information may be too elementary for veteran staff development coordinators, but a wealth of programming ideas are provided throughout the book that will breathe fresh air into many training programs. Staff development programmers who are new to the role, are looking to lengthen their list of topics for sessions, or need to think creatively to continue providing such services due to limited funding would benefit from reading this book.

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