

Living the Future 5

Strategically Striving and Surviving

by Raynna Bowlby

The more than ten-year process of organizational change at the University of Arizona (UA) Library to a user-centered, team-based, learning organization has been widely reported. True to their philosophy as a learning organization, the UA staff have consistently shared the knowledge gained on their journey with colleagues in other libraries. This sharing is encapsulated in the biennial “Living the Future” (LTF) conferences, the most recent of which was held in April. Again this year, the conference was enthusiastically cosponsored by UA, ACRL, and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), and was generously supported by a number of vendors.

Strategically striving and surviving

“Living the Future 5: Strategically Striving and Surviving” brought together more than 167 colleagues (a record LTF attendance) in sunny Tucson. Judy Sorum Brown, educator, speaker, consultant, writer, and poet, presented the initial keynote, weaving research on leadership with poetry and performance.

Using a video segment of *The Original Three Tenors Concert*, Brown asked us to consider the behavior of Jose Carreras,

Placido Domingo, Luciano Pavarotti, and conductor Zubin Mehta. Prior to this 1990 concert, these tenors were renowned for their solo performances; here they perform together. Brown posed the question, “When placed in a different work structure, what is the impact of that structure on individual and group behavior?” This video provides a fascinating and moving example of leadership, partnership and teams, and of flexibility and learning in action.

Rick Luce, research library director at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), also inspired us to action with the question, “Is what you’re doing today going to be relevant 20 to 30 years from now?”

In his presentation entitled “Thriving in Chaos: A Strategic Approach to Enable Organizational Innovation,” Luce stressed customer focus, product innovation, and operational excellence, impressing us with the briefest of glimpses into LANL’s systematic, data-intensive, and consistent process-oriented approaches. All this and speed, too. Luce imparted a sense of urgency to the continual adaptations and transformations that we need to lead.

He coached us in preparing our “eleva-

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tor message”: Who are your key customers? What are their top three needs? How do your products and services meet their needs? Get your story down and be able to deliver it in 30 seconds, under pressure, when you meet a key stakeholder in the elevator. Through systematic surveys, analysis, and customer focus, LANL has so delighted its users that these loyal customers insist on adequate financial support for the library.

University of Arizona Dean Carla Stoffle welcomed and challenged us in her keynote entitled “Transforming Collaborations: Partnerships that Will Change the Work of the Academic Library.” Stoffle underscored the distinction between cooperation and true collaboration. In collaboration we are truly inter-

dependent, we relinquish full ownership and control, and we make a long-term commitment to depend on collaborative partners. Such transformations need to take place in our philosophy about and approach to library programs, such as interlibrary loan, development of open access systems and national repositories, shared storage, and virtual reference.

Stoffle urged us to ask “What can we (the library) do to help the campus achieve its goals?” rather than “What can the campus do to help us achieve the library’s goals?”

Sharing through small groups

Complementing these inspirational keynotes were an abundance of dynamic small group sessions for colleagues to exchange information. UA staff presented 18 separate topics, revealing their processes for a broad range

of programs and services, such as strategic planning, electronic document delivery, information access budget allocation, and information literacy. One of the highlights of the conference was a tour of library work spaces, where staff invited conference participants to see how UA has implemented streamlined user-centered processes in all areas. UA staff further extended themselves by presenting a room full of poster sessions and informative handouts.

LTF conferences also provide an opportunity to learn from the organizational de-

velopment efforts of many other colleague institutions. Staff from 12 organizations generously and openly shared insights and lessons from their own journeys.

Three pre-conference workshops presented by ARL and by Maureen Sullivan Associates also complemented the formal learning.

LTF in 2006

Possibly one of the most effective parts of any LTF conference is the informal networking and sharing, much of which takes place under the stars on warm spring evenings. Join us for LTF6 in 2006. You’ll come away reenergized and recommitted to transforming your organization. Thanks again to the UA, ACRL, and ARL for preparing and supporting this important conference, which helps us all envision a successful future for our libraries.¹

Note

1. Much of the content of all five LTF conferences is available via the Web at www.library.arizona.edu/conference/. ■

