

Mn/DOT NEWS

Breakout sessions add 'how' to the 'why' of improving communications

Many of the speakers and breakout sessions focused on communications—the theme of the conference.

A critical part of communication is listening, says Clayton Wifer, A.G. Consulting. But most of us are not very good at it.

There are five steps to becoming a better listener. Most importantly, we need to choose to listen. Wifer stresses that there is a difference between hearing and listening and that many of us spend our time “sleep listening”—appearing to listen, but really thinking about something else.

Putting away our personal agenda is another important part of being a good listener. Many of us, for example, listen in order to play Ann Landers and give advice instead of listening to understand another person's viewpoint.

Other steps we can take to be better listeners include focusing our attention, accepting people as they are, and acknowledging the speaker.

Another part of effective communication is getting your message across when the message you need to communicate is a difficult one. Dave Allison, Dave Allison and Associates, stressed the importance of supervisors and managers learning to communicate difficult messages when job performance is an issue.

It is very important to address performance problems quickly, effectively and privately noted Allison. When you let issues slide, you ultimately lower the standards of your organization and that lowers pride and morale in the entire organization.

Allison outlined a simple five-step process to logical confronting. An effective discussion about a performance issue

should just take a few minutes, he explains. Once you have identified the problem (for example, being late to work,) and explained why it is important, the magic step is asking, "How do you feel about this?" followed by, "What can we do about this?" These questions establish a cooperative atmosphere and most of time the issue can be resolved.

Technology was another focus of the conference.

In a breakout session, "The good, the bad, and the useful: Information searching on your desktop computer, Anne Macerethand Pam Newsome, Mn/DOT library, shared ways to search for information in cyberspace. "There is a wealth of information available on the Internet. Learning how to search and navigate cyberspace and recognize good information from bad information can bring it all to you."

The library has access to additional databases and information resources and can help you with your information needs. For help getting started, contact the library staff at 612/296-2385.

The same advances in technology that makes useful information available to you at your fingertips, makes information about you available to others, noted Don Gemberling, Public Information Policy, Analysis Division, Department of Administration.

"Everyone has something that they don't want everyone else to know," explains Gemberling. "Not only are we collecting new types of information, but increased government efficiency in collecting and disseminating this information, using tools such as the Internet, can present a new danger to liberty. It makes it a lot easier for others to find out information about us."

"As government employees we should think carefully about the ways we are collecting and using information," Gemberling adds.

Library seeks feedback on 'Business Database'

Due to increasing costs, Mn/DOT's library may drop its subscription to the Business Database. The service is reached by connecting to the library network via the Mn/DOT network. Similar business information is available to employees who have network access to the Internet by using the WebPALS on-line catalog at <http://www.pals.msus.edu>.

Reaction to dropping the subscription and whether or not users prefer access through WebPALS may be directed to Pam Newsome, 612/296-1494, GroupWise news1pam or e-mail library@dot.state.mn.us.

Library will end lending audio-visual equipment

Due to the widespread availability of audio-visual equipment and a decrease in demand, the Mn/DOT Library will cease loaning equipment to its patrons after its move to new quarters on the Transportation Building's first floor.

"To free up library staff to better serve customers in other areas coupled with our change in services and the move to the first floor, the library will stop the audio-visual lending service," says Jerry Baldwin, library director.

The change, he adds, should have little effect on patrons because the new library will have a new audio-visual viewing room. Customers will have access to overhead and slide projectors and a VCR with a monitor for viewing materials and preparing presentations.

Moving the library from the basement to the first floor is planned for early May.

ORA, Library will merge, move into new quarters

The Mn/DOT Library and the Office of Research Administration (ORA) will merge to become the Office of Research Services and occupy new offices on the first floor of the Transportation Building.

The move is set to begin the week of May 11. The library is in the basement of the Transportation Building; ORA staff are housed in the Ford Building.

There will be some interruption of normal services during the move. The library staff will be unable to access the collection of print materials during the week of the move.

"We will try to maintain our services as much as possible throughout the week," says Jerry Baldwin, library director.

The library's voice mail will remain in service to enable customers to leave messages.

"Voice mail for ORA might be down for a while on May 13 due to its move from the Ford Building to the Transportation Building," reports Kim Wiebusch, telephone services coordinator.

Hatchell receives Special Libraries Association Award



Sheila Hatchell, technical services, Mn/DOT Library is the first recipient of the annual Kathi Kohli Memorial Award, from Special Libraries Association (SLA). The scholarship presented at an awards ceremony at the College of St. Catherine on June 28, was established in memory of Kohli, a Cargill, Inc. librarian and active SLA member. Hatchell was chosen from a nation-wide pool of applicants, based on her exceptional resume as a librarian and numerous SLA volunteer activities. Hatchell will take a leave from her library duties this summer to complete a Master's Degree in Library Science at Dominican University, Chicago. The degree will be granted through a joint program of the College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, and Dominican University.

Sherkow accepts post with Mn/DOT library

Shirlee Sherkow has joined the staff of the Mn/DOT Library. Sherkow's previous experience includes work at the Minnesota Law Library and agency libraries in the former planning and education departments. She holds master's degrees in sociology and library science.

Research Services celebrates new space

New offices on the first floor of the Transportation Building, including bright new quarters for Mn/DOT's Library formerly housed in the basement, served as the basis for a week-long celebration in Sept. by the Office of Research Services. During dedication ceremonies, officials from several agencies including the Center for Transportation Studies, the Local Road Research Board and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) noted the office's contributions to research and inter-agency cooperation.



CRAIG WILKINS

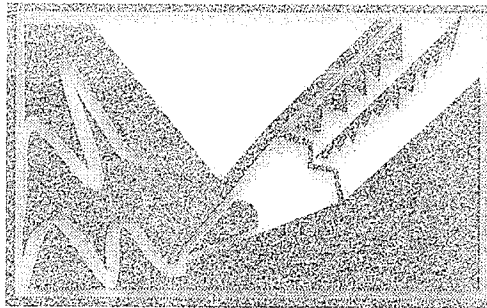
(Above.) Nelda Bravo, manager of the FHWA's Local Technical Assistance Program, converses with librarian Shirlee Sherkow during a tour of the new library facilities.

Hatchell, Korsgaard earn masters' degrees

Two Mn/DOT employees; Sheila Hatchell, Research Services, and Kay Korsgaard, Communications, earned master's degrees.

Sheila Hatchell, a librarian, graduated from the College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, with a master's degree in library and information science. Kay Korsgaard, an information officer, graduated from Hamline University, St. Paul, with a master's degree in liberal studies with an emphasis on writing.

Viewpoint

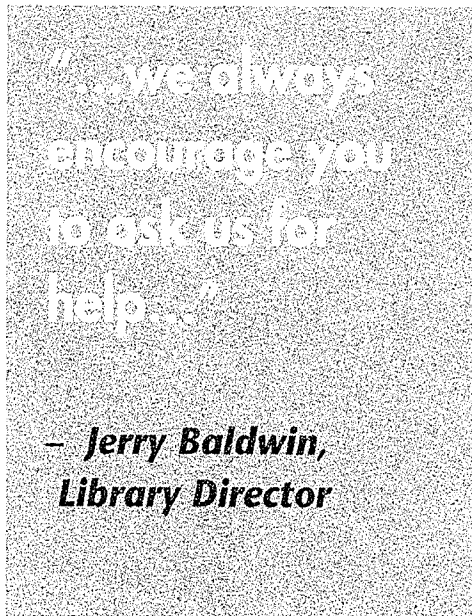


Where is the Mn/DOT Library? And who's that in the glass cage?

Jerry Baldwin, Library Director

As Central Office remodeling draws to a close, Mn/DOT library staff members, along with many others in the Transportation Building, are settling into new quarters.

We have learned that first-time visitors to the new Mn/DOT Library space are sometimes confused by the layout. The entrance and lobby of the library contains two reception desks and what some have called the "glass cage." The desk closest to the entrance is the library's circulation desk. Most often, that desk is staffed by John Pantelis. He can direct you to materials in the library and check items out for you. The second desk is the reception desk for the Office of Research and Strategic Services (ORSS), usually staffed by Carol Cully. She can help with ORSS administrative issues and locating ORSS staff.



This brings us to the "glass cage" or, as it is officially labeled, the reference desk. This office provides a quiet, comfortable space for you to discuss your information request with the reference librarian on duty. Its design allows you talk a bit with a librarian and explore your information needs and ways to address them. From experience we know the value of discussing a project or question with our customers. When we can get

a clear understanding of our customer needs, we can better provide the information and resources they need.

Whether you're in the library or working at your desk, we always encourage you to ask us for help or information. The glass walls in the reference desk area allow the librarian on duty to see the catalog terminals and other public areas of the library. This allows us to watch for that tell-tale look of confusion on a customer's face and offer help, even before we're asked.

If you haven't seen our new space yet, you may well ask, "Where is the new Mn/DOT Library?" In many ways, it's on your desktop! Mn/DOT's library subscribes to a number of fee-for-service information resources. Many of these, and other information resources, are available to you through the library's intranet pages. The pages also give pointers to "essential links" on the Web. To use these services, point your browser to our intranet site at <http://www2.dot.state.mn.us/trim/library/libhome.html>.

Whether you visit the library in person or via the intranet, we want to hear your reaction. We're always trying to improve our services, but can't do it without your feedback and ideas. Contact us at LIBINFO on GroupWise, library@dot.state.mn.us via e-mail, or 651/296-2385.

Working, learning on-line

In the mid 20th century, science fiction writers tantalized readers with a future where people would travel no farther than their computers to get to school or go to work. The notion may have seemed far-fetched. But technology developed faster than even science fiction writers anticipated.

As technology and the century advanced, changes were also taking place in the work force. Numbers of available employees declined and employers began to scramble for ways to attract employees.

Mn/DOT is viewed a leader in transportation due to careful application of advances in technology. But Mn/DOT also utilizes these advances as a way to retain quality staff.

Anne Mackereth and Mitch Webster are examples of Mn/DOT employees who learn and earn through their computers.

In 1997, Mackereth, a librarian in Mn/DOT's Central Office, considered furthering her education. But the time commitment of returning to school wasn't appealing.

"I just didn't want to give up my weekends and evenings to attend classes," she says. In addition, the college program Mackereth leaned toward required two summer session stays near Chicago to fulfill her residency. She knew she couldn't quit work to further her education.

Then an advertisement in the "Library Journal" caught her eye. The University of Arizona at Tucson offered a master's degree in information and library science via the Internet. By January of 1998, Mackereth was in her first course, she says.

“We had on-line class sessions that operated much like a chat room. Lectures were posted on a bulletin board as well as discussions and readings. Completed assignments were sent to the instructor as attachments within software used for the course.”

Mackereth cites many advantages to learning on-line. But she notes this isn't for everyone.

“It takes discipline to keep up with the reading and assignments,” she says. “This style of learning is better suited for graduate students or students who are self-starters and don't require a classroom setting to flourish.”

Mackereth says going back to school, even through the Internet, wouldn't have been possible without the support of her supervisors and co-workers. “Bob Benke, director of Office of Research Administration, was extremely supportive throughout. My co-workers

helped fill in while I took educational leave in the summer 1998 and 1999.”

Mackereth earned her degree on May 13. With her master's degree secured, Mackereth talks about how she will apply her experience at work.

“I see the librarian's role to gather and evaluate the sources of information for accuracy, depth and legitimacy. I will be able to better disseminate viable information from information that is merely available for patrons.”

Mitch Webster, transportation planner, Office of Investment Management, also faced a career crossroad. “I had been working at Mn/DOT since 1988. When my wife, Nancy, was accepted into the medical school at the University of Minnesota, Duluth we thought, ‘Now how are we going to do this?’”

A comparable position wasn't available in the Duluth office, but Webster was firm that his spouse be able to pursue her career goals. He found himself on the brink forfeiting a career he truly enjoyed for an uncertain future.

"I approached my supervisors Linda Zemotel and Al Schenkelberg and raised the idea of a two-year telecommuting position," he says.

"As a transportation planner, much of Webster's work is done via computer.

Mitch's first assignment was to work on the State Transportation Plan. He was responsible for all of the

detailed graphics. He would send us his examples of his work for our review. From a mobility standpoint, it has worked well," says Schenkelberg. Webster discovered telecommuting full-time requires a certain amount of flexibility.



Librarian Ann Mackereth helps Kevin Walker, Communications, find reference materials at the Mn/DOT Library

"You don't have the advantage of information sharing with co-workers. You spend additional time in research.

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You change the way you think about work," he says.

Webster knows his level of success during these two years will weigh heavily on Mn/DOT's offering similar opportunities to others in the future.

"I realize this mode of work isn't for everyone or suitable for every discipline. I needed to establish trust and confidence of my supervisors that I was capable of maintaining quality and quantity of work without an immediate supervisor near by. Maintaining that trust means a lot to me," he says.

Mn/DOT Library offers new customer ID code

Customers of the Mn/DOT Library in St. Paul may now check their library records without having to call or visit the library. Employees may request their own bar code ID from the library and obtain 24-hour access to their records via Mn/DOT's intranet.

To request your bar code ID, go to the library intranet site at: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/trim/library/use_your_id.html.