

The Federal Manager

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PRESIDENT'S PAGE



*FMA National President
Patricia Niehaus*

The Power of FMA

As I write this, I am looking forward to our 2012 National Convention and reflecting on the past two years as your FMA president. They've flown by! It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as you, and I truly appreciate the opportunities this office has given me both personally and professionally. It's been great to get to know so many of our federal partners and see in an "up close and personal" way how well-represented we are by our National Office staff. They are an extraordinary group of people dedicated to our issues and I can't

say enough about their stellar performance. I also appreciate the support and guidance I've received from FMA's Executive Board. They've been invaluable resources for me and for the staff and they work very hard for our Association.

Every day I grow more impressed with the respect and credibility afforded our Association at the very top levels of our government. Members of Congress and their staff come to us with questions and requests for testimony, showing the value in the opinions of managers. Many other organizations have to ask for the opportunities we are routinely afforded. Over the past two years, I have met with top-level management in several agencies, including heads of agencies in some cases. We are working to partner with several agencies and getting the word out about FMA in areas where we don't currently have chapters. These doors would not be open to us if FMA wasn't viewed as a credible, well-respected Association.

Representing FMA on the DOD New Beginnings Performance Management Design Team (PMDT) and being appointed to the National Council for Federal Labor-Management Relations have been once-in-a-lifetime experiences for me. The former head of the NSPS Transition Office personally ensured FMA's participation on each of the four DOD Design Teams. We were the only management association be invited! As a long-time DOD HR professional, it was also a treat for me to have the opportunity to brief the DOD World-Wide HR Conference on the PMDT's progress last year. Our seat on the LMR Council, a presidentially-appointed position, is a testament to the "Power of FMA" as Immediate Past President Darryl Perkinson used to say.

I wish I could tell you that I see better times ahead for us feds but that just wouldn't be realistic. What I can and will tell you is that FMA is continuing to fight for you. We are focusing our limited resources (remember, there are only five staff members in our National Office making things happen for us!) on making sure our voice – your voices – are heard. But we need your help. Our National Staff cannot do this without YOU. When the Government Affairs staff sends out an Action Letter, PLEASE take the time to respond. I have been shocked to hear some on Capitol Hill say they don't have federal employees in their districts! There are federal offices in EVERY congressional district but the constituents in some areas aren't making themselves known to their Representatives. In the current climate, this type of inaction is a disaster waiting to happen. We ALL need to make sure that our elected representatives know that we are constituents and we vote! Take action today! ■

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Article Submission

All materials submitted to *The Federal Manager* should pertain to public service managers. Copy should be double-spaced, no longer than 10 pages.

High resolution color images, charts, or illustrations should be included if possible. Text should be submitted by email or on compact disc. Include a biography of the author.

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A red computer mouse is the central focus, positioned vertically. Behind it, a silver Swiss Army knife is partially visible, with its various tools extended. The background is a grey, perforated metal surface. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white band across the middle of the image.

Getting the Most from Your Training Budget

A Toolkit for Innovative Managers

A Toolkit for Innovative Managers

Getting the Most from Your Training Budget continued from page 3

By Lynn Martin and Tyler Robinson

A manager in today's federal workforce is in need of a different kind of toolkit to train his or her workers than what was necessary in years past. Not too long ago, budgets were such that employees could receive training as they or their manager saw fit. Today, those same employees are now confined to their desks, where they take courses online and often receive the grim news that the training budget was severely cut or eliminated for the year. Younger or newer workers are generally the most affected by this lack of education, since they do not have the breadth of knowledge their more experienced colleagues possess. Young Government Leaders¹ (YGL), which serves as a voice for the next generation of public leaders, recognizes that education is a topic of upmost importance to the federal government. YGL believes it is imperative that managers continue the development of their employees, and help create a culture of learning regardless of the current budget environment.

It might seem like a formidable task to a manager to train his or her employees without a training budget, but just looking at how Benjamin Franklin only had two years of schooling, yet accomplished so much in so many fields, or how Abraham Lincoln was self taught and inspired a country, one should be empowered with the knowledge that creativity and drive is enough to educate any individual. It is the innovative and imaginative manager who succeeds in educating his or her staff, while accomplishing the agency's mission, during a tight economy. An informed staff will return benefits to a dedicated manager by creating a more pleasant atmosphere in the office, improving retention rates, and increasing competency in their jobs.

YGL has surveyed and talked with its members about what training they would like to see, and the majority can be done at little to no cost. Five great, low-cost training options every manager should explore are: Mentorships, Job Shadowing, Brown Bag Lunches, Book Clubs, and Outside Resources (professional and non-profit associations/websites). All of these can be initiated by employees or their manager, but this article will focus on the manager initiating these options. If the promotion of earning a dollar for every time one hears the buzz words, "transparency" or "gov 2.0" was not offered at your office, please see the suggestions below for free or nearly free ways to train your staff.

Mentorships

*"Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction."
— John Crosby*

Mentorships are a great way to train employees without spending extra money. They are also quite popular among younger workers. YGL surveyed its members and asked, "How effective are formal mentorship programs?" Seventy-nine percent thought they were effective or very effective. In addition, 78 percent of respondents thought that formal mentorships should be part of the federal government's new recent grads program, which is an initiative to bring in more individuals right out of school into federal service: www.opm.gov/HiringReform/Pathways.

Mentorships generally come in two flavors: senior-to-junior and peer-to-peer. Both provide excellent learning opportunities and benefit both the mentor and the mentee. An effective mentorship can be accomplished with as little as a one-hour meeting a month, though more

frequent contact is recommended. In an example of a senior-to-junior mentorship, managers can act as mentors to their employees by taking the time to periodically sit down and talk with their employees about their work processes, career goals, and other topics. These discussions can lead to mentees discussing how their manager can more effectively manage them. Managers may feel as if they lack appropriate time necessary to serve as a mentor; however, they should keep in mind that by serving as a mentor, they may free up some of their own time and resources. Taking time to train a mentee in an appropriate and enriching task, allows the mentor to then delegate that task as the responsibility of the mentee. This provides a win-win situation where the mentee assumes new duties and learns new concepts, and the manager actually receives more time as a result of spending his/her time training on the front end.

Peer-to-peer mentorships are often overlooked, but can be just as valuable as senior-to-junior mentorships. In a peer-to-peer relationship, colleagues train each other, perhaps in a specialty or shared focus they have, or even in their lessons learned from a recent project. Benefits of mentorships are innumerable, but stronger bonds amongst coworkers may prove to be one of the highest benefits that any training session can provide.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has put together a great, free resource for procedures concerning a mentor program (www.opm.gov/hrd/lead/Mentoring.asp). While it is quite formal, it may provide guidelines for an ambitious manager to follow.

Job Shadowing

"Every man who observes vigilantly and resolves steadfastly grows unconsciously

¹ Young Government Leaders is a professional organization whose mission is to educate, inspire, and transform the current and future leaders of government. YGL's membership is comprised of over 2,000 federal employees nationwide from various agencies.

into genius.”

— Edward G. Bulwer-Lytton

Similar to mentorships, but with less long-term commitment required, job shadowing provides a way for a manager to provide educational opportunities for his or her employees at no extra cost. In this context, one employee would follow around a coworker, manager, or an employee in a different office for a certain amount of time, which could range from a one hour-long meeting to a week-long work experience or beyond. Most commonly, the shadowing employee learns through observation. At the completion of the shadowing, the experiences can be critiqued, analyzed, and discussed to provide an even deeper learning opportunity. As a manager, one would have the opportunity to arrange a job shadowing day for several employees, or if a manager wanted to start on a smaller scale, he or she could simply invite an employee to shadow him or her at a meeting held at a level at which the employee would not normally have access. YGL found that both job shadowing opportunities and meetings with higher officials, including SES, were quite popular with 81 percent and 77 percent respectively, of respondents to the survey saying those elements should be included in the recent graduates program.

Rotations, from several weeks to a few months, are also quite popular among younger employees. YGL asked its members, “How effective are rotational assignments?” Ninety-two percent said they were effective or very effective and 85 percent of respondents thought that rotations should be part of the recent graduates program. Rotations are extended and enhanced job shadowing opportunities, because they give the employee more time in the new environment and they allow the employee

to do more than just observe. A rotational experience gives employees the opportunity to learn a new skill or expand their current abilities by working temporarily for another office. This can be accomplished by sending an employee to a different office individually or in exchange for an employee in the other office. An employee rotational exchange provides that both offices benefit from the added competencies an employee gains through a rotational experience, while at the same time, ensuring that the office has comparable help and does not fall behind on achieving their mission.

Brown Bag Lunch

“If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples, then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas.”

— George Bernard Shaw

This technique is a wonderful way to maximize learning opportunities for all involved. The concept is to have one employee put together a quick, informal presentation about the latest project he or she has been working on to share with his or her colleagues during a working lunch. The manager should encourage a relaxed atmosphere of sharing, rather than a more critical one, where speaking skills or the level of complexity depicted in the PowerPoint slides might be judged. When done correctly, the Brown Bag Lunch benefits both the speaker and the audience. The speaker is able to practice his or her public speaking skills, gain familiarity with presenting in front of an audience, and gain a deeper grasp of the project information since he or she has to teach it to others. The audience learns new ideas and concepts, and rapport can be built between the spectators and the

speaker as they learn more about each other. Presentations can be as short as ten minutes, but a key feature of the Brown Bag Lunch is having a group question and answer session. The questions session helps to build bench strength for a team because it takes the pressure off of the presenter to have all the knowledge related to a particular project or process, and opens it up to the team to contribute by raising questions and examining problems while considering answers and providing solutions.

Book Club

“No entertainment is so cheap as reading, nor any pleasure so lasting”

— Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

Starting a book club is a cheap way for managers to encourage employee growth and interaction. Books can be chosen on any topic, from technical volumes specific to the staff’s field, to inspirational books, and anything in between. Even a biography of someone who worked in the staff’s area of focus or at their agency might be an appropriate and motivational tool for learning.

A book club can be operated in various ways depending on the budget available. For large offices with many employees interested in participating in the book club, smaller groups may be formed so that the books can be rotated and fewer copies bought, thus making the book club group more economical. A manager would most likely spend some start up time to organize the book club, but once it is begun, the club would gather on a regular basis (weekly, monthly, etc.) to discuss the chapter or selection they were to have read since the last meeting. The manager could choose to provide targeted discussion questions for the meeting or allow the conversation flow naturally in a

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more organic and unguided manner. Most important is to encourage employees to examine what they have read and appreciate the different opinions shared. Some titles to start off the book club or library:

- *The Bureaucratic Entrepreneur*, Richard Haass
- *Getting Things Done*, David Allen
- *The Primes*, Chris McGoff
- *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, Jim Collins.

Non-Profits, Professional Associations, and Other Organizations

“The more you lose yourself in something bigger than yourself, the more energy you will have.”

— Norman Vincent Peale

Non-profits and other organizations generally have a lot of resources to offer managers and their employees. A manager has only to find an organization in his or her area of focus to find a wealth of information. Professional associations can have membership dues, but even those with fees tend to have free information available as well. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), for example, has a plethora of information available on their website at: www.shrm.org. SHRM features categories such as “Templates and Tools,” “Publications,” “Research,” and “Education.” Managers can find plenty of articles to share new concepts with their employees to create valuable discussions. A membership with SHRM, which is \$170 a year, claims to allow its members to “Do More with More,” and includes such benefits as a monthly HR magazine, a supervisory newsletter, advocacy, a knowledge center, and various tool kits with information. These could be great

resources to raise the awareness of one’s employees and promote an atmosphere of learning.

The contracting field similarly has the National Contract Management Association (NCMA), www.ncmahq.org, which can help acquisition professionals stay up to date with the ever-changing rules of acquisition. Even if training dollars are low, knowledge should not be sacrificed for an employee in this field because he or she serves as a business advisor for the federal government and spends taxpayer dollars. In acquisition, facts and data on current legislation and procedures are always changing, and it is crucial that a manager maintains a flexible and astute staff. Having access to acquisition resources could increase the awareness and ability for accommodation for new procedures by a manager’s staff. For \$150, the general public can receive a membership, while new professionals (those aged 33 or younger) pay only \$100. Benefits include webinars, the NCMA magazine, and a local chapter affiliation, all valuable resources to becoming an expert in acquisition.

Similar professional associations are available in other fields:

- Financial Professionals: Association of Government Accountants (AGA), www.agacgfm.org
- Information Technology Professionals: Association of Information Technology Professionals (AITP), www.aitp.org
- Intelligence Community: AFCEA International (AFCEA), www.afcea.org
- Project Managers: Project Management Institute (PMI), www.pmi.org
- Public Administration (general): The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), www.aspanet.org

In addition to occupation specific associations, there are groups such as YGL (<http://younggovernmentleaders.org>), the Federal Managers Association (www.fedmanagers.org), and the Senior Executives Association

(www.seniorexecs.org), which target employees at different levels in their career to allow members to network and learn from a variety of individuals.

Outside of professional associations and non-profits, there are a multitude of resources available online which can be utilized when trying to increase a staff's skill set. One competency YGL believes is under-emphasized is the development of soft skills. In a time when scarce training dollars are used for technical training and other hard skills, it is still important to focus on improving one's staff's soft skills. Soft skills are competencies which are used to navigate interpersonal relationships and refer to personality traits, courteous behavior, habits, character, and outlook. While these abilities might be dismissed as "just people skills," they are actually key competencies which are crucial to improving negotiation, strategic thinking, team building, and creative problem solving skills.

Soft skills might be even more important for workers in today's world than for employees of past eras. Todd Smith's *Little Things Matter* book and blog (www.littlethingsmatter.com), is an excellent resource to use when trying to develop soft skills. Mr. Smith states, "Businesses are becoming less dictatorial and more social, [therefore,] the understanding and value of soft skills to an organization are growing daily" (www.littlethingsmatter.com/blog/2011/02/08/the-growing-importance-of-soft-skills, Oct. 24, 2011).

The Little Things Matter website is just one example of hundreds of websites that offer free information on improving one's soft skills. An innovative manager might utilize Mr. Smith's Top 10 Soft Skills to Master (www.littlethingsmatter.com/blog/2010/12/21/top-10-soft-skills-to-master-in-2011) to create a dialogue within his or her staff. It is also worth noting that Mr. Smith archives his blog posts by topic and date (www.littlethingsmatter.com/archive), therefore, if an office is having a particular difficulty with, say, time management or

decision making, a resourceful manager could highlight a blog post for his or her staff and use that as a training opportunity.

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, in regards to providing training on a tight budget, a manager is only limited by the boundaries created in his or her imagination. Encouraging staff members to teach each other through mentorships, job shadowing, brown bag lunches, and book clubs; utilizing the internet; or providing mentorship themselves, are just a few ways a manager can provide unlimited (and generally free) learning opportunities. In many cases, the training might require a start up effort from the manager, but within a short period of time, should be running on its own through the enthusiasm of its participants. However, be forewarned, the learning sessions might be so productive and the energy so contagious, that the manager might want to stay involved – and learn a thing or two as well. ■

Lynnie Martin is a Contract Specialist for the Federal Acquisition Service (FAS) of the General Services Administration (GSA). She is the National Public Relations Manager for the Young Government Leaders. In this capacity, she shares YGL's message to educate, inspire, and transform the current and future leaders of government. Having entered federal government service through an internship herself, she has both personal and professional interest in the development and implementation of the new Pathways Program.

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