Best Practices for Teaching Technology to your Community of Users

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"Best Practices"

- Commonly accepted/adopted ways of doing things

- Can be innovative or traditional, but must increase efficiency, return on investment, or ease

- Arrived at via independent means (not just chosen 'because everyone else is doing it')

"Technology"

- Can be hardware, software, or even a process

- Ideally, has universal design (to work with all platforms and devices; if not, specify the preferred uses up front)

- Ideally, has accessibility for all users (in other words, is for users with a variety of disabilities)

- Should be identifiable by others by name or brand; if not, brand it yourself

"Your Community of Users"

- Staff and patrons are two distinct communities; many sub-communities within these, by department structures, ages, needs, etc.

- Each is a little different in interest and ability

- There are some early adopters, reluctants, and never-evers in every community

- Identify how the 80/20 rule applies, or explain why you're serving a niche market

Best Practice #1

Suggest that a change is coming EARLY on in the process.

This helps feed/manage the rumor mill, and gives staff time to prepare mentally and technologically. This also allows for everyone (including patrons) to discuss the proposed initiative with others outside of your organization (and thus, to validate or improve on your idea!)

Best Practice #2

The originator of the idea does not have to be the messenger.

This re-assigns activities to those inclined to do them naturally, and helps everyone use their preferred skills for the good of the group. In other words, the most personable trainers and explainers should shepherd the implementation step, not necessarily the techie who set it up.

Best Practice #3

Do your homework!

(No half-baked ideas!)

This insures your staff that you have thoroughly investigated an idea before taking up a lot of their time (and energy to change) in learning it. Know the pros and cons that will be brought up by others, and have a ready answer for them.

Best Practice #4

Set up a trial period, but don't necessarily advertise it that way.

This allows enough time for a good idea to percolate and for users to adjust, but doesn't label the idea as a 'fly by night' trial. If you've chosen a strong technology practice to implement, everyone should know that it isn't going away easily and that we're 'all in this together' to make it work.

Best Practice #5

Identify and celebrate benchmarks in the idea's (and team's) life cycle.

This forces reflection and analysis at appropriate times. Good ideas will get used, promoted, and recognized spontaneously; bad ideas will identify themselves by lack of user understanding, a lack of 'buzz,' or lack of use. Don't be afraid to let an idea fade away… or be replaced by users' upgrades!

And Even More
Best Practices Identified by Workshop Participants:

❧ Be sure to train staff in advance of users.

❧ Anticipate infrastructure issues.

❧ Clearly articulate benefits to users, especially daily benefits like saving them time.

More Best Practices:

❧ Test a new tool yourself in enough detail to appreciate its features.

❧ Involve many other people at the idea-generating stage of a project.

❧ Ask for needed tweaks throughout the process.

More Best Practices:

❧ If something is free, point that out; communicate that many (if not all!) resources and services from the library are free.

❧ Be sure that library users realize the library is a place to get help, ask questions, and to try new tools.

More Best Practices:

- Prepare for disaster.

- Let people discuss what's uncomfortable for them about a change; listen to these complaints with empathy, and help them manage the process.

- Keep notes on all feedback and suggestions, both positive and negative.

More Best Practices:

❧ Have patience!