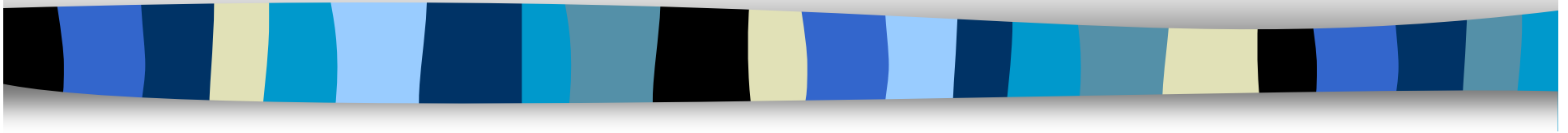


Communication Between Techies and Non-Techies



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Today...

- Definition of the problem
- What my library did
- Tips and pointers when talking with “The Other Side”
- Lively discussion



Horror Stories?

- New Library Catalog...
- Didn't know how to read email...
- IT deleted someone's email...



What's the Problem?

- Techies are, well... techie
- Non-techies don't know squat about xml, SQL, or propagating domain names
- ... and never the twain shall meet



The Techie

- Job based on technical skill sets
- Not hired for people skills
- Tends to attract people more interested in technical skills than in people skills



The Non-Techie

- Job is based on non-techie skills
- Job occurs after tech part is in place





My Library

- 13 person IT staff
- 300 person library system
- 27 member library consortium
- We heard “bad things” about ourselves
- We decided to do something about it!



ITS Visits

- I visited each branch and department
- I asked for issues, concerns, and suggestions that staff had about ITS and technology
- I wrote it all down



What “they” said about IT:

- Doesn't respond quickly – 2-4 months to solve problems in some cases
- Staff accused ITS of taking the helpdesk phone off the hook so we didn't have to answer calls
- Some of ITS aren't nice/aren't helpful/have an attitude



What “they” said about IT:

- ITS answers the phone “helpdesk” and then staff have to ask our names
- Not all ITS staff have equal knowledge
- ITS needs customer service skills
- “your problem has been resolved”
- Staff get conflicting information



OUCH!!!

- Decided that we needed outside help
- Found customized customer service training
- We have improved!



Things we did to improve

- “Just asking” helped
- Reorganized our department
- Started watching our attitudes
- Learned about customer service and communication from training
- Started “communicating” with staff



Tips for Talking to and Teaching Non-Techies



Ditch the Jargon

- N.O. A.C.R.O.N.Y.M.N.S.
- If you use them, define first
(whatis.techtarget.com)
- simplify when possible



Talk about the Right Things

- Don't talk about systems and code
- Talk about what the user will do
- Don't describe the process – describe the result the user sees
- Always explain from users point of view



Multiple Forms of Communication

- PowerPoint
- Handouts
- Props
- Pictures
- Stories
- Paper prototypes



Organization is Key

- Organize into steps
- Go from one to the next
- Not as easy as it seems!
 - Don't leave out a step thinking "everyone knows you do this"
 - Describe EVERY CLICK



Provide a Tipsheet

- Simple summary of thing you're trying to describe
- Include glossary with words, descriptions, and links for more info
- One page is more than enough



Eat Some Humble Pie

- No flinching, snickering, etc. when someone admits they don't understand!
- Nobody is born knowing this stuff!
- Put yourself in the user's place – remember what it feels like to be clueless



The Other Side: Non-Techies Talking to Techies



Same Stuff, Really...

- Most of my previous points apply to techies AND non-techies
- Do you have jargon?
- Learn the “Other Side’s” jargon
- Creative communication is essential
- Hold more than one meeting
- Learn something about each other’s job



What to do when...

- Calling the Helpdesk
- Planning a new database, updating the website, etc.
- Planning a new building
- A problem occurs



Calling the Helpdesk

- Explain the problem completely
- Write down **EVERYTHING** that happens
- Write down error messages
COMPLETELY
- Be willing to work through the problem when you call



Planning Something New

- Hold a “pre” meeting to figure out what you need
- Describe the new program, database, idea, etc.
- Focus on results rather than on specific technology



Planning Something New

- Make sure everyone understands what functionality is needed, on both sides
- Get some specifics:
 - When can you start?
 - How long will this take?
 - How much will it cost?
 - Is it do-able?
 - What do we have to do?
- Plan the next project meeting!



Planning a New Building

- We moved into a new building 2 years ago
- Let the techies do their thing – networking, infrastructure, servers, bandwidth...
- You do your thing – what services do you want?



A Problem Occurs

- Try RESPECT first (it just might work)
- Use Good Communication skills:
 - Not about power, control, or winning
 - Instruct, don't punish
 - Based on honesty and sincerity (no venting)
 - Doesn't always result in agreement/compliance



When All Else Fails

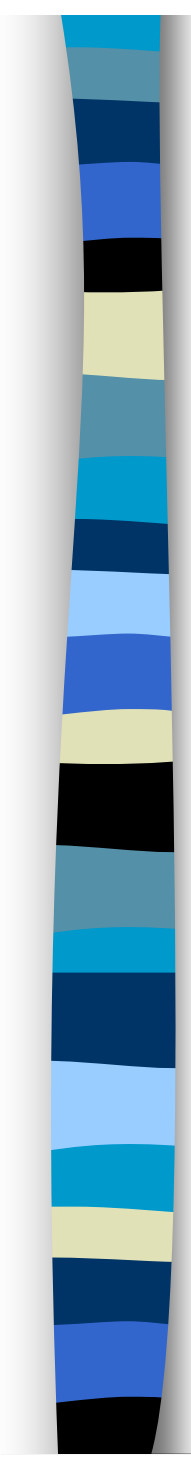
- Keep supervisors in the loop
- If you need a decision, go to the person who can say “Yes”
- “My supervisor can chat with your supervisor”
- Get over it and move on to the next challenge!



URLs

- **Articles on Techies and Non-Techies getting along with each other:**

<http://www.davidleeking.com/2006/04/19/articles-on-techies-and-non-techies-getting-along-with-each-other/>



Other Ideas and Questions