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Information programs frequently suffer from minimal resources and high expectations. One way to cope with this conundrum is to hire high quality employees who are able to creatively allocate minimal resources and can pick up the slack in areas where funds are non-existent. In order to reach this ideal, managers need to focus on recruiting employees with strengths in key areas. These areas include: meeting professional competencies; strong communication and interpersonal skills; the ability to work as a member of a team; and contributions to self-development and on-the-job learning.

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES

The American Library Association (ALA) and ARMA International set competencies that must be met by information professionals with high-level degrees from accredited institutions or, in some cases, equally high-level professional experience (to be assessed on a case-by-case basis).

These competencies are essential for all information program employees; without basic knowledge in each of these areas, they will not be able to perform the job's responsibilities. The ALA core competencies of librarianship are below:

1. Foundations of the Profession
2. Information Resources
3. Organization of Recorded Knowledge and Information
4. Technological Knowledge and Skills
5. Reference and User Services
6. Research

7. Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning
 8. Administration and Management
- (ALA, “Core Competences of Librarianship”)

Though the ALA lists the above competencies as standards for professional librarians, ARMA International lists competencies in similar areas for records and information management (RIM) professionals:

1. Business Functions
2. RIM Practices
3. Risk Management
4. Communications and Marketing
5. Information Technology
6. Leadership

(ARMA International, “RIM Core Competencies”)

Some in the information profession may see RIM and librarianship as two separate spheres, but it is clear from the lists above that they both value the same characteristics in their employees. Therefore, the recommendations for ideal employee skills and abilities discussed in this paper can be applied to many different information programs. Besides the basic technical, research, and functional skills needed to perform job duties, there are additional, harder to measure skills and abilities in the above competencies which are essential to the information profession—communication, leadership (i.e., teamwork), lifelong learning, and keeping up-to-date with professional practices. Information program managers should use these lists of competencies as a starting point when writing job descriptions so they can be sure to recruit applications from employees who, at the very least, possess the basic skills to do the job at hand, and will hopefully also have the personality traits and characteristics discussed in this paper.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Information program managers need to evaluate communication and interpersonal skills when recruiting and hiring new employees. An ideal information program employee should be “positive, friendly, warm, easy to talk with...interested in other people...good listeners as well as good talkers...confidently express their own views on things but are respectful of others’ ideas” (Dearstyne 111). These skills have been proven to increase productivity and workplace morale in Ales Pentland’s article “The New Science of Building Great Teams.” Pentland and his team equipped employees in an organization with electronic badges that collected data on their individual communication behaviors (tone of voice, body language, who they talked to and for how long, etc.). They found that employees who exhibited energy, engagement, and exploration (i.e., communicating outside of formal meetings with a wide variety of co-workers) were the most productive. Pentland’s team came to the conclusion that the “key to high performance lay not in the content of a team’s discussion, but in the manner in which it was communicating” (Pentland 62). This study emphasizes the importance of communication skills in the workplace, and these skills are especially important in information programs. Information program employees work with customers on a daily basis, whether in a library setting where the customers are primarily external, or in a RIM program where the customers come from within the parent organization. Working with customers, especially with limited resources and ever-changing expectations, requires positive, engaging body language and communication patterns; exploration to find those in need of assistance; and an effort to creatively solve problems.

Communication skills are also important inside the information program. Employees should feel comfortable enough to speak up in formal meetings and throughout the office. Pentland’s “ideal” employees easily contributed in meetings and had many short, to-the-point

conversations during normal working hours. Information program employees should follow suit and constantly work to build relationships and positive communication patterns with their co-workers and, more importantly, their managers. Information program managers are expected to lead by example and engage their employees, but employees should be able to meet them half-way. One of the biggest issues with Amabile's "Mediocrity Trap" argument in her article "How Leaders Kill Meaning at Work," is that she doesn't explain whether or not the case-study company employees were communicating with management, or if their diary entries were the only documentations of their displeasure (3-4). Information programs are too fast-paced to hire people who would rather grumble behind co-workers' or management's backs when they should confront issues head on by diplomatically expressing their concerns.

ABILITY TO WORK ON A TEAM

While real teamwork is not a common practice in many organizations, and can be counter-productive in some situations, it is important that employees exhibit the qualities of a good team player. While the communication skills discussed previously are important in teamwork, information program employees should also be able to put aside their individualism and work with others towards a collective work product (Katzenbach).

Katzenbach explores teamwork and how it differs from the normal working groups modern offices are so accustomed to (and sometimes mislabel as teams) in his article "The Discipline of Teams." The values that are ideal for team members are equally ideal for information program employees, namely "values that encourage listening and responding constructively to views expressed by others, giving others the benefit of the doubt, providing support, and recognizing the interests and achievements of others" (Katzenbach 112). The ability to support others and pass up "ingrained individualism and experience" for "mutual

accountability” (Katzenbach 116) is important in a profession that needs to constantly adapt to new technologies and user behaviors. However, while teams might be useful in specific situations, such as the need for recommendations on major issues or specialized work products (Katzenbach 116-117), information programs do not need to regularly appoint teams. Programs do need to encourage “team-like” behavior or “teamwork”—an emphasis on working together on small projects or problems; supporting co-workers and managers through open discussion and brainstorming; and understanding that work products are helping the overall organization, not just individual performance reviews. These behaviors can create a positive, supportive work environment and information program managers should recruit employees who exhibit team player characteristics.

Sometimes it is difficult to recruit team players when many information professionals market themselves as “star players,” and may even admit their frustration with working in teams because “the rest of the team is seldom up to his or her standards or level of ability” (Dearstyne 148). This does not mean that information program managers should *only* recruit employees who have experience in or admiration for teamwork or a supportive work environment, since it goes many of our instincts to share our personal resources or give over accountability to a collective. Information program managers need to use their best judgment when recruiting and hiring employees who may express “disdain” (Dearstyne 148) for teamwork. If employees show that they can willingly accept assignments and delegated work; understand how vital their work is to the overall mission of the organization; exhibit positive interpersonal and communications skills; take satisfaction from the work they do; and are open to the views of others, then they will be able to transition from individualism to working in a supportive team-like environment (Dearstyne 133).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Finally, information programs need to recruit employees who are willing to take the initiative to develop their careers. Employees should want to further their professional development, take the time to keep up-to-date with advances in the profession, and think of innovative ways to support workplace learning.

Information program managers should look for members of professional associations such as ALA, Association of College and Research Libraries, Special Libraries Association, Association of Information Management Professionals, and Academy of Certified Archivists when recruiting new employees (National Archives, “Professional Organizations”). Since information programs usually can’t afford to cover membership dues, it’s important that employees make concentrated efforts outside of the workplace to align themselves with associations who will give them the resources and contacts necessary to not only build their own personal skill sets, but also add to their employer’s network of supporters. Additionally, information program employees should use these professional associations, or other venues, to find continuing education or certification classes so they can make themselves and their employers more attractive and valuable. For example, employees can work towards a PhD, becoming a certified records manager (CRM), training certificates, or other external certifications. Managers should recruit and hire employees who want to achieve higher levels and visibility in the profession. Hiring such motivated employees will ensure that information programs have the talent needed to deal with new technologies and expectations.

In addition to finding means for self-development outside the office, information program employees should also contribute to workplace learning. This includes contributing to in-house trainings and to on-the-job learning opportunities. As Garvin points out in “Is Yours a Learning

Organization?”, information program managers can only modify their behavior to a point in order to promote a “supportive learning climate,” other factors need to be changed—including employee behaviors and activities (9). Information program managers should look for employees who can cultivate a supportive learning organization and are willing to meet manager-implemented workplace learning goals such as participation in weekly round-table discussions about professional issues, contacting a peer from another program to give free trainings, helping another employee strengthen their skills in a certain area, etc. (Dearstyne 122).

CONCLUSIONS

Information program managers look for a lot of ideal characteristics in prospective employees, but they need to start with professional competencies and education requirements. From the pool of competent talent, information program managers should look for employees who have great interpersonal skills; are willing to energetically engage and contribute to discussions with co-workers and managers; possess the ability to transition from individual work patterns to a supportive environment where everyone works towards a common objective; and the initiative to self-develop and learn on-the-job. “Ideal” is the key word in this situation, as many of these characteristics are not innate, but can be learned from professional experience and growth. Information program managers won’t be able to find too many employees who perfectly exhibit these qualities; therefore, it is up to the manager to recognize employees’ potential to learn, grow, and adapt in a fast-paced profession where education requirements set the bar high, but real-world application comes with a learning curve.

Works Cited

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