

I Mean It

Julie Todaro

I just finished opening two libraries and am in the middle of finishing the expansion on a third library. I don't know if I can *ever* do this again. I mean it.

Oh yeah, I had all the pieces in place including excellent support from my administration for new materials, hardware and software, furniture, shelving and new positions; a wonderful existing staff; an excellent new staff; great support from the community; wonderful subcontractors on the job; a great architect/project manager; wonderful tech/telecom support from collegewide staff; excellent assistance from internal tech support staff; wonderful vendors; great campus support staff; and great campus leadership. So what *am* I complaining about? An embarrassment of riches you say?

Frankly it wasn't who and how they were working, it was the sheer number of those "in the process," the magnitude of all that were involved in what seemed to be the simplest of tasks. It often took so many people to get something done that it became impossible either to delegate the task to someone else *and* impossible to train any new staff in how things should get done or how things did get done.

And the paperwork . . . and the tracking . . . and the calendars . . . and the charm . . . and the phone calls (cell and land) and the e-mails. I thought our network would grind to a halt and me with it. Discussion upon discussion, word after word, request after request, memo after memo. After a point it was just more funny than anything else. So what was so bad? Let me give you an example.

If anyone says to you, "Ooo! New phone systems over a network/IP," you should run screaming.

Are they wonderful? Yes, with great displays, a great deal of customizing, more bells and whistles than you can shake a stick at, a great deal of memory, good sound.

Are they awful? Yes.

Who buys them? Who delivers them? What instructions are with them? What connections do they need? Who can install them? Are installations simple? Once they are installed, can I move them? What if they don't work? What

if they work and I just want them moved? Say, I've changed my mind or the point of service has changed . . . seriously, what happens? Well, here goes:

Who buys them? I'm not sure. Oh, I know ultimately the tech buyer does, but is the order originated by the phone people or the telecom people? And when they decided to go with these, did anyone tell you? Because their placement, adjacency, the number of outlets, and the type of outlets *will* change your layout, etc. But I digress.

Who delivers them? I'm not sure. Typically someone—usually a man—with a tool belt but better dressed than our usual group who delivers. (I mean, they are all dressed nicely, but there are those who dress in "installation casual" and—trust me—there are wide deviations in style in these categories. Sorry, I got carried away. Anyhoo . . .) This last time we got there and the library space was completely empty, wall-to-wall, but there was a multitude of phones on top of two desks (that I didn't order). I remembered our meeting with the architect and the "tech" people, so I noted all phones needed on a floor plan, but I've slept since then so I needed to go back to my last floor plan (we had seventeen for this library) and begin to identify their locations.

What instructions are with them? Well, none at first, but in the plus category, the phones are very intuitive in design and there are many shortcuts and words spelled out with a great array of buttons. In just a few short minutes I had managed to transfer a call—which frankly, I've never managed to do before—but we couldn't figure out much of anything else including how to transfer them back, so I sent a new staff member on a quest for instructions. We located brochures in the administration office, and in the absence of furniture and shelving installation (a delay of ten days) and enough chairs, I left the staff and went to get lunch and bring back something healthy to snack on (okay, donuts). I turned to say something as I left and the new staff members were calling each other and having—what I discovered later—were the last stress free hours of "play" for the weeks to come. When I returned, the brochures had been annotated (it's a great team) and, lo and behold, the phones were not all the same, so staff had gone on a quest to find appropriate brochures and instructions



Julie Todaro (jtodaro@austincc.edu) is Dean of Library Services, Austin Community College, Texas, and a frequent presenter of LAMA regional institutes.

on the Web with model numbers. (Told you they were good.) Thus we created on our first day with our first new equipment, our first grid of “tech item,” “what works,” “what is needed/what is missing,” “who we’ve talked to,” and the date and day.

What connections do they need? Apparently all of them. Clearly the world of connections and ports has changed dramatically over the years. When we peered over the desks we hadn’t ordered, we found the regular 110/220 outlet (I never know what to call it) and an assortment of “phone” connections and network connections in different colors, different sizes with different, tiny, small-numbered labels. I called our good tech support, and they had a relatively good idea of what was what but not completely so we added to our grid “network outlets” and “tiny outlets in red yadda, yadda number” and “tiny outlets in yellow yadda, yadda number.” I was told by our tech support that someone else had to move the phones when the rest of the furniture came in *and* not to move them *and* if they came unplugged there was a timing approach to plugging them back in. In all honesty, now I can’t remember if I am supposed to plug them back in immediately, wait thirty seconds, or—once installed—not at all and call some sort of telecom support person.

Who can install them? I’m still not sure. We have our tech support people, the college’s tech support, the college’s telecom group, the telecom subcontractors and the people who pull wires, and I think they are the telecom subcontractors but I’m not sure. I just know *I* can’t install them and that—after waiting about ten days after our reference desk came in—I took the law into my own hands and unplugged a phone in circulation and moved it to reference and—sit down—plugged it in myself. I followed up with noting it on the grid and sending an e-mail to my tech support person who did what he was supposed to do (as opposed to ratting me out) and told the college tech support (not telecom) who got irritated with me (not for the first time, I might add) and told me that the delay had been because someone else (by name) had *not* done their job and not to do it again. So I had to file additional paperwork noting the port switch so I did and took the blows . . . but, on a high note, we then had a phone at reference. So I guess the answer is “who can install them?” Well, not me although it does work just fine.

Are installations simple? You’d think so, but no. By now of course, we know nothing is simple. In review, and you would know this if you were paying attention, several people have to be contacted by written requests at specific times with exact information. And—a word of caution—we could come and go, I asked staff who remained to ask each person who came in and assembled or disassembled or plugged in or even stood there and stared at a plug, “Hi, what did you come in to do today?” I thought that was a fairly innocuous question but upon returning from a meeting outside the space I was told that the staff member who asked this was told, apparently in no uncer-

tain terms, “My job.” And that was that. (But I’ll cover that in another column.)

Once they are installed can I move them? Well, NO, and read what I wrote above. You can’t unplug and reinstall and I can’t unplug and install and my mother can’t either. (And I think they mentioned her by name.)

What if they don’t work? There are really two questions here. One is “What if they don’t work?” and the other one is “What if they work but not the way the brochure says they are supposed to?” Well, we have forms and work orders to complete and turn in. Thanks for asking.

What if they work and I just want them moved? Say, *I’ve changed my mind or the point of service has changed . . . seriously, what happens?* Now let me distinguish that this question relates to “moved for maybe the second time and possibly the third time.” It still stands that *I* can’t do it. It does, however, require a work order (which we have a specific process and job function for) and a wait. Odds are, they will come while you are gone, SO almost immediately you need to begin the process that I call a “securely-fastened-Post-it-note-process.” As a librarian, I love to label things, and I now accompany work orders with a series of detailed—with simple English—instructions carefully written on Post-its. (Don’t color code them, by the way.) Don’t forget, these Post-its should be on the unit itself, the wall location, the new desk location and don’t forget the wall outlet or outlets in the future locations. In addition, the request should be noted and posted publicly (like hangings). In this way we have created our very own “note left by a tech support person” because the absence of Post-its usually means something has happened.

I haven’t included, of course, the fact that all staff at all scheduled blocks of time now have to be alerted to the fact that “someone might come in” to fix something. Sometimes they stop and ask, so what happens? I fall back on the what’s wrong/what’s fixed public grid and the post-it notes and encourage my staff to study and refer to this grid as if it were the posted lottery winners board.

So are we done yet? Not really . . . we opened ten hours late, we settled the debate on “passwords for all phones have to be systematically applied” debate. We skated on thin ice for the “everyone’s phone message needs to be standardized” and finally the “you can have different ring tones on your cell phones but not turned on when you’re on duty and you can’t have different ring tones on your work phones.”

It’s a great team there. Those chosen for their ability to multitask are feeling somewhat more in charge, or shall I say in touch with reality, but those who came from non- or less-tech environments are literally overwhelmed.

What I find particularly amusing is that the point of the new phones is ease and simplicity of use as well as a multitude of features designed to make work and communication *easier*. While I get it, I still can’t help but dwell on the number of people (and paperwork) it takes to install, the number of people (and paperwork) it takes to move a

phone unit, the number of people (and paperwork) it takes to change messages and functions. Oh yes, and how did they find out about my mother?

Never content to extract just one life lesson from an experience . . . watch this space for:

- the top ten things you need to know before you create a library out of a completely empty space;

- who we need to be nice to in today's twenty-first-century library world;
- five things I wish I'd done differently in the last remodel;
- building an "A" team; and
- you can and should be leading "remotely."

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