About a year ago, I spoke to Janice O’Donnell, former director of Providence Children’s Museum, about training floor staff. Janice shared an experience she had at the InterActivity conference years ago: during a rare moment of quiet on a bus to an evening event, Janice shouted, “Floor staff!” All of a sudden the bus was abuzz, everyone talking about the challenges of hiring, working with, and retaining the team of part-time, entry-level staff who may be the only museum staff members most visitors ever meet.

What can a children’s museum do in order to have floor staff who are knowledgeable, engaged, and invested in the museum? For years I thought of this as a retention challenge: When you find wonderful staff, and their jobs are part-time and underpaid, how do you retain them for more than a year? But now I think of this as a cultural question. How do you create a museum culture in which these valuable staff members are engaged and invested? When there is turnover, how can new staff members quickly become a part of this culture?

What Is Engagement?

Kevin Kruse, founder & CEO of LEADx, an online learning platform that provides free leadership development, has noted that employee engagement is not synonymous with happiness or satisfaction. Rather, it is “the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals. This emotional commitment means engaged employees actually care about their work and their company. They don’t work just for a paycheck, or just for the next promotion, but work on behalf of the organization’s goals” (Kruse 2012). According to Kruse, engagement is driven by strong communication, opportunities for job growth, recognition, and trust.

When we think about bringing in new staff, we often focus on training: what do they need to know to do their job? In part this is practical—staff need training in order to have the necessary tools and knowledge to admit visitors to the museum, clean toys and exhibits, or sell memberships. It is also efficient, and most museums have developed formal or informal training modules that can be easily repeated when new staff come on board.

While cleaning is critical, it does not lead to an emotional commitment to the museum. It is not why we do what we do. Megan Dickerson, senior manager of exhibitions at the New Children’s Museum, describes the dichotomy between training staff to clean and engaging staff in the museum’s mission as “efficiency vs value.” We often prioritize teaching staff practical skills, like cleaning...
and resetting, because we know how to do this efficiently. Engaging families in playful learning is of critical value, but we cannot necessarily train efficiently for this. Engagement is individual and emotional; it is not essential for staff to operate the museum at its most basic level, but it is essential in creating a museum that offers visitors and the community a wonderful experience and true value. How do we deeply engage part-time floor staff in our missions, in the importance of the work we—and they—do?

There are as many ways to engage staff as there are organizations. The Peoria PlayHouse Children’s Museum went through three phases in its experience pursuing staff engagement. The first phase was a grant-driven experiment limited to one of our exhibits; the second was an expansion to all staff. The third, which we are still in the middle of, is an exploration of how far we can push it: what can an engaged floor staff contribute to the museum’s programming and exhibits, and how collaborative can we truly be?

Real Tools: Developing Our Model

In 2017, the PlayHouse was awarded an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant to improve Real Tools, our makerspace. We worked with our evaluation partner, the University of Illinois, to think about what visitors were learning. Time and time again, we returned to the importance of staff in the space, both as facilitators and as experts in the visitor experience. With this in mind, Adrienne Huffman, the PlayHouse’s education coordinator, held monthly meetings during which staff visited children’s maker-spaces around the region, read articles, discussed successes and challenges, and identified prototype solutions to these challenges, all rooted in staff experience and informed by readings. Rather than telling staff how to do their jobs, Adrienne developed a space in which staff told us and each other how to do their jobs and improve the exhibit.

On the one hand, this sounds obvious. On the other, most of us know firsthand this is not how many organizations work, or how entry-level part-time staff are often treated. It captures three of the four drivers of engagement Kruse identifies: strong communication (bolstered by monthly meetings), recognition (asking staff to share best practices, and acknowledging they are experts in their work), and trust (allowing staff to drive changes in the Real Tools exhibit).

The results of these monthly meetings exceeded expectations. Because staff were able to prototype different solutions quickly, this exhibit continues to change and improve. Visitors comment on how much they enjoy some of the new solutions, including, for example, information posted on the walls, changes to exhibit signage, and the transformation of individual work stations into a collaborative work table.

Staff began to take ownership of the space in new ways. One staff member, Haley, noted that children often looked at the finished projects on the walls, and wanted to copy what other children had done. She decided to experiment with what we hung on the walls, taking down the finished projects and replacing them with materials samples that could inspire kids. Haley described this as akin to looking at clouds and seeing forms—what can a piece of foam become? An egg carton? Collectively, staff also designed a new drop-in maker program offered monthly on a weekend morning, each dedicated to a specific tool or practice. The first three focused on bookmaking, embroidery, and wood burning.
Shaping and honing the employee workplace experience takes a tremendous amount of time and effort, and it isn't for the faint of heart. As a director, you have to be willing to make tough calls, admit when you are wrong, clearly communicate expectations, and often get in the middle of the muck.

When you walk into a business, it doesn't take long to figure out how engaged a company's employees are. Museums are no different. Your team is sending a loud and clear message to everyone who visits, and it is either: we love working here and you are going to love being here, or we can't stand working here and you will not enjoy being here either. Shaping and honing the employee workplace experience takes a tremendous amount of time and effort, and it isn't for the faint of heart. As a director, you have to be willing to make tough calls, admit when you are wrong, clearly communicate expectations, and often get in the middle of the muck. Dealing with problems is hard, time consuming, and sometimes uncomfortable—but the alternative is worse.

Michael Shanklin
Explore! Children's Museum

Ask [the Right] Questions, Gather [Honest] Answers, ...and Then What?

You Won't Know until You Ask

When I began work as executive director of Kidspace earlier in 2011, I was welcomed by outstanding staff who were passionate about their work. I've heard that an effective CEO should come to a new organization and act as a "cultural anthropologist" to learn about the organization and understand how things work. With this approach in mind, one of the first things I did was to create an employee feedback survey to gauge where the staff was and what needed my attention. After conducting a quick internet search on "best HR questions to ask," I just made up the questions myself. I asked questions like, "Is the museum a safe and comfortable place to work?" "Rate your level of satisfaction with training," and open-ended questions like, "What do you like best about working at the museum?" "Most important elements of employee engagement?" The questions were not terrible, but I didn't have a plan for addressing what we learned from the answers. At best, my ready, fire, aim approach had mixed results. My baseline read on the homespun survey was that, on the whole, my team was not happy and likely not engaged.

Creating an effective HR plan to address the museum's needs was clearly beyond my experience. We were also in the process of working through some worker's compensation challenges, so I sought advice from our insurance broker, specifically asking for recommendations for a local human resources consultant.

Our broker recommended Eric, and the two of us hit it off right away. I shared my survey results, which gave him a basic understanding of the team climate. He agreed that we not only needed to ask the right questions, but we also needed to create a plan to address the issues that emerged in the answers. He recommended starting with the Gallup Q12 employee engagement survey, which is based on the theory that the more engaged your employees are, the happier they are and the better your business will be.

The Gallup Q12 uses twelve basic questions to measure the "most important elements of employee engagement." By choosing a tool developed by Gallup, "a global analytics and advice firm that helps leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems," we were able to take advantage of their years of research. This helped us obtain an excellent overview of what was working, and most importantly, what was not. To Gallup's twelve questions, we added an additional thirty-two questions measuring Kidspace-specific things, such as the effectiveness of the management team, employee concerns about working at Kidspace, and whether they felt their opinions mattered. The complete survey contained forty-four questions, which were designed to evaluate the team's thoughts regarding the management team, their individual supervisors, how passionate they were about the museum's mission, and whether they thought they had the resources they needed to do a good job.

While the exact Q12 questions are proprietary, a few are pretty basic. Some asked museum staff to rate something on a scale of one to ten (e.g., "I am fairly compensated for what I do.").

Is It Worth It?

Specifically, how would this effort help the organization? Would it be worth the time and energy invested? Creating the survey cost a minimal amount, but it would take time to review the data with the consultant, formulate a plan to make improvements, communicate both the results and the plan to the team, then make and monitor the needed changes. The timeline to accomplish all this took approximately three months. Some changes were made right continues on page 15
Hand to Hand: Association of Children’s Museums

HR: Leadership’s First Cousin
An Interview with Anne Ackerson and Joan Baldwin, co-authors, Leadership Matters, the books and the blog
Interviewed by Genevieve Nadler Thomas, Knock Knock Children’s Museum

Anne Ackerson began her career as a director of several historic house museums and historical societies in New York. She served as director of the Museum Association of New York (MANY) from 1997-2012, while at the same time launching her consulting practice.

Anne has worked with a wide variety of cultural organizations on a range of projects, from board recruitment, membership and fundraising programs, to strategic planning. She writes regularly about the management and leadership issues faced by cultural institutions in her blog, Leading by Design (leadingbydesign.blogspot.com). Anne currently serves as communications and development coordinator for the Council of State Archivists.

Joan Baldwin, also a past director for several house museums, served on the museum program staff of the New York State Council on the Arts. She authored several publications on leadership and staff development for MANY. Joan’s article “Who’s Next? Research Predicts Museum Leadership Gap,” was published in the journal Museum Management and Curatorship in 2006, and “Who’s Next: Museum Succession Planning in New York” was published in History News (Autumn 2007). Baldwin is currently the Curator of Special Collections at The Hotchkiss School.


Along with Jessica Ferey and Marieke Van Damme, Anne and Joan are co-founders of the Gender Equity in Museums Movement (GEMM).

Genevieve “Genny” Nadler Thomas is currently director of human services and organizational development at Knock Knock Children’s Museum in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Prior to her work there, she operated GNT Organizational Development, a consulting firm working with all areas of nonprofit organizational management, including leadership and team building, and served as the executive director of the Louisiana Association of Museums.

While all three women have extensive experience in HR-related issues, none claim to be HR professionals, a position shared by many children’s museums leaders today who have assumed the HR mantle out of necessity. As Joan puts it: “We came at [HR] because we have a longstanding interest in leadership—or the lack thereof—within the museum field. HR is sort of the stepsister or the cousin of leadership. It’s hard to talk about one without talking about the other.”

GENNY: What are the current top HR issues in the museum field?

JOAN: Unionizing of urban museum staff; open rebellion over salaries which often precedes unionization; EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) and #MeToo complaints; and issues with visitor behavior versus staff.

GENNY: What key HR policies should all museums, from emerging to operating, have?

JOAN: Any museum that employs people needs to have policies in place that manage its employee culture and behavior. An HR policy is a set of guidelines for how employees and management should conduct themselves, and if the guidelines are written well, they’ll also provide resolution tactics for conflicts and misconduct. (See sidebar on p. 9 for resources.)

GENNY: Most children’s museums are not large enough to have a dedicated HR staff position. Any advice for other museum staff who typically handle this?

JOAN: In a museum without an HR department, the CEO/ED typically handles HR, sometimes in collaboration with a board committee. A controller or bookkeeper might be tasked with compliance issues (maintaining timesheets, making monthly or quarterly payments for insurance, keeping insurance up to date, etc.)

Our advice: Your staff is your museum’s most important asset. Know what you don’t know. If you can’t hire an HR professional on staff, get access to one. Some institutions contract with HR services; some HR firms do pro bono work.

GENNY: A key challenge in the field right now is building a more inclusive workforce. How can museums develop broader diversity—age, race, culture, gender, and more—among staff?

ANNE: Let’s start by looking at who is working in museums now. In the spring of 2018, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that there were 338,000 people working in the museum field. Of that number, 82 percent were white, 10 percent were African-American, 14 percent Hispanic, 3 percent Asian-American. In 2017, the American Alliance of Museum Salary Survey reported that the average age of the respondents was forty-five, with the majority of directors and CEOs older than that.

Clearly, there’s a lot of work to do on the diversity front. We usually think about diversity in terms of age, race, and gender. But diversity comes in many shapes and sizes. One of the interviewees in the 2019 edition of our book, Leadership Matters, talks about the fact that there are 200 different types of diversity. The combinations are almost endless.

How do museums increase broad diversity? By paying equitable wages and ad-
versting positions widely, well beyond the
typical channels. Museum employers need
to hire what they need based on the values
that are part of organization’s diversity and
equity policy. However, most institutions
don’t have a diversity and equity policy. So,
first and foremost, an organization needs to
be able to identify and articulate their values
and then everything flows from there.

A museum also needs to write job de-
scriptions and position listings in ways
that avoid biased language. Pay particular
attention to the actual title of the job and
the opening paragraphs of position list-
ings. Finally, consider “blind hiring” where,
throughout the hiring process, from initial
materials intake up to the actual person-to-
person—or team-to-person—interviews, the
candidate’s name and location are removed
from application letters and resumes.

JOAN: We may all think we’re the kind-
est, most generous, egalitarian folks in
the world. But we all bring unconscious bias
to everything that we do. Bottom line: your
museum from top to bottom, from the
trustees to the front-line staff, should reflect
your community. If it doesn’t, it shouldn’t be
any surprise if huge parts of your commu-
nity stay away because they don’t see them-
sest in your museum, instead seeing it as
cold, uninviting, or worse.

ANNE: Boards play a really important
role in setting the tone and modeling be-
behavior. In 2017, AAM worked with Board
Source to produce a publication entitled
*Museum/Board Leadership 2017: A National Report* which found that more women than
ever before are serving on museum boards.
It also found that board makeup tends to
mirror staff makeup in terms of race. Boards
also tend to skew a little older than the me-
dian CEO/ED age of forty-five years. A
board’s values trickle down throughout an
institution. If a board is not committed to
diversity in its own ranks, it’s very, very dif-

- **GENNY:** Regarding wages and salary, what is the gender pay gap in the museum industry for women?

JOAN: Well, it’s pretty the same as every-
where else: roughly 20 cents lower on the
dollar for white women compared to white
men. It’s further divided by race and even
gender identification: African-American
women make roughly 61 cents on the dollar,
Hispanic women roughly 53 cents, and the
lowest are transgender women, who make
under 50 cents if they can even get a job.

ANNE: Part of the pay gap problem is
compounded by the fact that many women,
particularly salaried employees, leave money
on the table when they negotiate a salary or
ask for a raise. We have heard this again and
again, from headhunters to hirers. Just re-
cently, at the American Association for State
and Local History annual meeting in Phila-
delphia, a female museum professional hir-
ing for staff positions said she couldn’t be-
lieve how many women candidates did not
negotiate harder for their salaries. But that,
too, is a reality, which makes talking about
gender pay gaps even more complicated.

JOAN: To further complicate things,
many emerging professionals come in with
student loan debt the size of a mortgage. If
you come in with $100,000 worth of debt,
it takes a long time to pay that back. So, if
a woman starts a job making less, over time
she’s going to continue to make less, which
doesn’t help with anything, including that
debt problem.

- **GENNY:** Millennials seem to have no
problem talking about salaries—comparing
salaries among different employers and with
their peers, in person and on social media. Do
you think that all salaries or raises should be
transparent within the institution?

JOAN: Millennials are also more likely
to job hop to build their careers. Generally
speaking, social media is fueling more mu-
seum employee activism that is not going
away. Employees here and abroad are strik-
ing for better wages and benefits, investi-
gating unionization, and weighing in on a
variety of social and political issues affecting
museum funding, governance, and commu-
nity relevance.

On one hand, the more people talk
about salaries, even in generalized terms,
the better it is for everyone and for the field.
It’s hard to make decisions about which job
pays more or has more benefits when you
have little to no comparative information.
Of course, a lot of other data goes into de-
termining whether or not you can afford to
take a position, such as the museum’s loca-
tion, but comparative information does help
you determine your own worth.

There are very few organizations outside
of government that have published salary
scales. Whether your organization chooses
to publish its salary scale is up to the board
and museum leadership. If you are posting
a new job, it’s helpful to include a salary
range. That way, neither you nor the inter-
viewee will feel misled or disappointed.

Many applicants use a combination of
the AAM salary survey, the Arts + All Mu-
seums Salary Transparency 2019 inspired by
Kimberly Drew *(see link and article in side-
bar) and the MIT Living Wage Calculator, along with salary information on Glassdoor and statewide nonprofit associations.

That said, I have mixed feelings about full transparency. I prefer a banded system that spans a range delineated with letters. An A is at the top of the salary scale, but no one knows the exact number an A makes; a G is at the bottom. That system preserves a little bit of privacy around actual offers. As an employer, you want some wiggle room, particularly in areas where there is transferability from the museum world to the rest of the nonprofit or business worlds.

**ANNE:** The size of the institution’s budget also drives salaries. There are lots and lots of data points that play into it.

**GENNY:** How do new (or small) museums navigate setting up employee benefits?

**JOAN:** A museum must use its mission and values to determine what benefits it would like to extend to its employees, beyond what is mandated by law. There are many options, but most will ultimately be determined by what the museum can afford. Will employees be asked to share in the cost of benefits? Can you join a local group plan to lower your costs and possibly expand the scope of benefits? Run the numbers. Commit to extending or expanding benefits as a tangible recognition of your workforce’s value.

**GENNY:** What are the typical benefits offered by museums?

**JOAN:** Individual medical insurance is by far the most common. In 2017 (the most recent AAM salary survey), slightly more than three-quarters of reporting museums offered employer-sponsored health insurance to their full-time employees. Almost 54 percent of museums with budgets less than $250,000 offered health insurance for their employees. Of the 226 institutions that offer benefits to part-time employees, slightly more than three-quarters require a minimum number of worked hours in order to be eligible.

Currently, the United States has no national paid family leave law or program—a significant departure from the rest of the industrialized world. Museums with at least fifty employees are required to extend job-protected and unpaid leave for qualified medical and family reasons under the Family Leave Act. Under the FLMA, eligible employees can take up to twelve work weeks of unpaid leave during any twelve-month period to care for a new child or a seriously ill family member, or recover from a serious illness. Eight states and the District of Columbia now offer their own options for paid family leave.

**GENNY:** The majority of children’s museum staff are women. In a field dominated by women, are there particular issues that might come up more than in a field with a greater gender balance? Are there advantages to women working in a field dominated by them?

**JOAN:** It can mean a more empathetic, supportive environment where emerging museum professionals can grow quickly, but having a woman boss doesn’t guarantee this environment will exist. However, it’s important to understand that female-dominated institutions, as well as female-dominated professions, tend to pay workers less overall. Female-dominated professions and institutions also receive less respect, because the work is considered “women’s work” and “women’s work” is considered less important than the work men do. The goal is for all our institutions to be diverse as much as possible in every way conceivable.

**GENNY:** Museums—especially small, understaffed ones—have a tendency to overextend staff with too few people doing too much work. Do you have any advice on guiding staff to find a sustainable work/life balance?

**JOAN:** Unless additional responsibility comes with a new title and more money, learn to say no. Nonprofit does not mean a 24/7 commitment. If you are salaried, you will be expected to work beyond forty hours/week, but if you have a very busy week, take some time for yourself the next week. If you’re hourly, you should be compensated for hours beyond your contract.

Supervisors need to be aware of when staff are working too much, and they need to intervene. Supervisors who reward staff (and volunteers) for long hours and successful project completion need to recognize the effort made and the value accrued to the organization. Recognition can take many forms—time off, an office celebration, tickets or gift cards, a meaningful “thank you.”

**GENNY:** Many museums conduct performance evaluations. Why are these important, and how can we improve them to support staff?

**ANNE:** There are at least two schools of thought about annual employee appraisals. The first says that they’re a critical part of the employee’s annual workflow. The second says that unless they’re constructive and involve an honest give-and-take conversation, they can be really destructive. Whenever a performance appraisal comes around for me, even at this late stage in my life and career, I’m always on pins and needles. I’ve had good ones and bad ones. But I remember the bad ones. If the appraisal is only there to look back and focus on what an employee did not do, then it’s not doing much to constructively develop an employee’s ability to do their jobs better. These conversations need to be constructive and trust-building to really move an employee forward.

**JOAN:** The most constructive and valuable reviews, for both the employee and the organization, focus on goal-setting by connecting an employee’s personal work goals to organizational goals. That may mean the employer will commit to professional training or development opportunities or to changing up the work environment.

Growing your staff and contributing to their professional development nurtures the organization as a whole. If a museum leader doesn’t have strong relationships with their staff that are built on trust and include levels of empathy and understanding, good luck! You’re all serving the organization. Everyone has personal goals which can lead to their development, but to move the organization forward together, you need to understand what part you play in that.

However, if you’re not regularly touching base with your staff, something’s wrong. Quarterly or biannual staff evaluations at least specify a dedicated time for a sit-down with no interruptions. It’s not a hallway conversation.

Finally, employers need to understand the difference between a mistake and an ongoing behavior or performance problem. If you can’t correct a mistake in twenty-four to forty-eight hours, you have a problem, not a mistake.

**ANNE:** Let’s face it, very few organizations do annual performance reviews. If they’re mandated, these reviews often tend to be very circumscribed: Take an hour, go through the hoops, stick it in the file, breathe a sigh of relief and say, “OK, I don’t have to do that for another twelve months.”

Like everything else, performance appraisals need to flow from the values of the institution. If the institution says that it values its employees and volunteers, wants...
to see them grow and will do what it can to help them, then the “appraisal” needs to reflect that.

GENNY: How can staff move up to leadership positions? Is there more to it than just doing their current job well?

ANNE: Yes, there is more to it, and once again, it flows from the values of the institution. If a museum cares about nurturing its staff and volunteers, it should recognize that some staff will want to move up. An employee’s professional goals should emerge in ongoing conversations with their supervisors. If a staff person expresses the desire to take on more responsibility and learn new skills with the hope of moving up in the organization, or going somewhere where they can, the institution ought to support that as much as possible.

JOAN: On the other hand, too many entry-level staff minimize their role in this process. It’s not like the heavens will open, a big finger will point down and say, “You, you’re going to get a raise” or “You’re going to get a change in job description.” They have to want to advance and demonstrate that by taking stretch assignments, modeling leadership wherever they are in the institutional food chain, seeking out mentors, getting advice.

GENNY: For museums with limited professional development budgets, could you suggest resources to help their staff acquire the skills to move to higher positions?

JOAN: Rather than trying to do all the training yourself, collaborate with other organizations in your community, such as the local community college or the Chamber of Commerce—particularly for frontline staff who are dealing with the public. People in all service industries share commonalities. Pay for transportation to get staff to local or regional meetings. Not only will they get something out of it, but this investment tells staff that their institution cares about them as employees.

ANNE: Many state and regional museum associations offer all kinds of educational programs, annual conferences, webinars, workshops, most of which are pretty cost-effective. There is a lot of interesting leadership training available, including certificate courses, one-off workshops at colleges or universities, and a range of very affordable online options.

GENNY: The #MeToo movement has shed light on sexual harassment as a very ugly problem in almost all organizations. How should we manage sexual harassment problems that arise in children’s museums, where even if a situation did not involve children at all, can be very damaging to the museum if the incident becomes public knowledge?

JOAN: Zero tolerance sexual harassment standards should be part and parcel of every institution’s HR policy. There’s just no excuse not to deal with this. Any board that is resistant to addressing the issue should think about the financial cost of being sued. It’s a cost that affects your brand, your PR, and your pocketbook. Even if a reported situation is found to be untrue, this is not a place any museum, especially a children’s museum, wants to publicly go.

Everybody’s dealing with this. Be ready. Understand the laws in your particular state and align your organization so that at least you’re following them. Be sure your staff is comfortable and aware of the laws. They all know what they should and shouldn’t do, and most importantly, that the organization will back them up in difficult situations.

ANNE: It’s all well and good to have a policy at the museum, but if employees and volunteers aren’t taught how to act on that policy, then a lot of behavior can slip through the cracks. The first line of defense is background checks on who you’re hiring, but employee training is a close second.

Have a harassment policy in place and use it as part of the employee and volunteer onboarding process. Schedule refresher conversations at staff and volunteer meetings; bring in experts to speak about it. Offer access to counseling or, at the least, make time for victims to attend counseling. This applies to boards as well. In a recent survey, board members or donors harassing staff was one of the main issues reported. A museum’s code of conduct should apply from the board level through staff, volunteers, and visitors.

JOAN: Recently we’ve heard about young staff who deal with the public every day and are often mistreated by them. But they’re not sure what the museum would think of questionable, sometimes egregious behaviors, and they don’t feel comfortable taking on a visitor in a public space. A recent example took place at a civil rights museum where two young staff women of color were subjected to visitors using the N-word and telling them, “Well, you know, it would be better if it were 100 years ago and then you would be my slave.” They didn’t know what to do. Radio for help and say to the offending visitors, “I’m done with this tour, you have to leave”?

Everybody should feel safe in their workplace. There is a huge area of vulnerability for staff: if you call someone on their behavior you have to know the institution’s going to back you up. This can be particularly acute when it comes to an important donor—there’s a lot at stake there.

ANNE: Additional security procedures can specify staff pair up in certain situations so that they can back each other up. Higher-level staff can come out of their offices periodically, making themselves visible throughout the institution throughout the course of the day so that frontline workers don’t feel alone on the job. That also can deter some bad behavior from happening.

GENNY: The second edition of your book, Leadership Matters: Leading Museums in an Age of Discord, just came out. What parts of the original volume were updated to more accurately reflect the current state of the field?

JOAN: Nine of the interviewees in the original 2013 edition were replaced with nine new interviewees, many of whom are known for their social justice work, including LaTanya Autry, Lisa Lee, and Sean Kelly. These new interviews underscore the importance of relevance, equity, and access and that diversity must be seen as a spectrum of attributes and perspectives. The new foreword was written by Melanie Adams, director of the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum. There are new sections on museums, diversity, equity, and intersectionality; transition planning; lack of board engagement and outmoded governance structures; staff turnover; lack of time; scarcity and abundance; and updated and expanded information on training programs.

GENNY: The chapters on “ten myths” and “ten truths” of museum leadership were very helpful. What is the most difficult museum leadership myth to overcome?

JOAN: “Compensation is secondary because the work is its own reward.” While that may have been the case forty years ago, I hope we’ve left that idea behind. Being a nonprofit doesn’t mean you need to work for nothing. Talented, creative staff are a valuable resource that needs to be nurtured.

ANNE: “Building collections takes precedence over building talent.” While many
What Are the Top HR Issues We Face?
Marijuana and Living Wage

New laws in Illinois legalizing marijuana and increasing minimum wage highlight different challenges for small nonprofits across the United States. HR staff from three Chicago area children’s museums share how their museums are responding to these changes—and how the field as a whole may respond.

Annie Rosenstock
DuPage Children’s Museum
Catherine Patyk
Chicago Children’s Museum
Cheryl Crawford
Kohl Children’s Museum

Legalization of Marijuana

In June of this year, Illinois governor JB Pritzker signed HB 1438, legalizing the recreational use and sale of marijuana (effective January 1, 2020). How does this new law affect employee standards? On the surface, the solution seems simple enough: just remove “cannot use marijuana” from your drug and alcohol policy. However, for employers, the overlapping, and in some cases conflicting rules (state versus federal) make marijuana legalization a more complicated issue. Once you dig in, there are details and complexities that need to be addressed.

The first involves measuring for marijuana in a standard drug test. Alcohol is water-soluble, and will only appear on a test if you have recently consumed it and are still under the influence. In contrast, marijuana is fat-soluble. Traces can remain in your system for up to thirty days after consumption. Since test results are not time-specific, most organizations that conduct drug tests in places where marijuana is legal have simply removed it from the drug test panel.

The second local complexity stems from the Illinois Right to Privacy in the Workplace Act (820 ILCS 55) which prohibits discrimination against any employee by their employer for legal consumption of lawful products, including marijuana, during non-working hours.

The third complexity that may affect museums in many states emerges when an organization either has a federal contract of a minimum of $10,000 or receives any amount of federal monies via grants. In this situation, the organization would therefore fall under the Federal Drug Free Workplace Act. All three authors of this article work at nonprofit institutions that receive federal grants—meaning our museums must abide by the Federal Drug Free Workplace Act or risk returning all federal monies received via grants. Employees convicted of a criminal drug violation have five days to report the conviction to their employer, and the employer then has ten days to report to the grantor of the federal money. (Since marijuana is not legal nationwide, even in states where it has been “legalized,” local authorities still have discretion to charge marijuana possession, although this scenario is unlikely.)

So, how can children’s museums in Illinois and other states deal with these intertwined complexities? The first solution, while not ideal, is to wait for case law to iron out the details and the seeming contradictions between state and federal laws.

The second, and most practical, is to broaden the museum’s drug and alcohol policies to treat marijuana similarly to alcohol, i.e. an employee is not to report for work under the influence. (See a sample of a drug and alcohol policy below.) Finally, whether an organization has a drug testing policy or not, employers are expected to have a “good faith belief” that an employee violated the employer’s employment policies regarding cannabis before they call anyone on it. So, the focus on employee performance is key. As it can be difficult to determine if an employee is “under the influence” either in the absence of drug testing or because drug testing for marijuana does not precisely determine if an employee is under the influence or not at the time, all employment actions should be made based on employee performance and conduct.

Bottom line: the laws are evolving. Talk to a lawyer about relevant state laws before setting your organization’s policies and testing rules.

Minimum Wage Increase

Joining other states such as California, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York, Illinois is rais-

Sample Drug and Alcohol Policy

Applicability

[Organization Name]’s drug-free workplace policy is intended to apply whenever any employee is representing or conducting business for [Organization Name]. Therefore, this policy applies during all working hours, whenever conducting business or representing [Organization Name].

[Organization Name] explicitly prohibits:

The use, possession, solicitation for, trade, and/or sale of narcotics or other illegal drugs, or prescription medication outside prescribed use or without a prescription on [Organization Name] or customer premises or while performing work duties.

Employees are prohibited from the possession, sale, purchase, or consumption of alcohol on [Organization Name] or customer premises or while performing work duties. The exception to this alcohol prohibition occurs in connection with events hosted or sponsored by [Organization Name] or in which [Organization Name] has been invited that involve the sale, serving, or consumption of alcohol that has been pre-approved by management. When attending a pre-approved event, alcohol consumption is expected to me moderate such that the employee does not become intoxicated and/or endanger their own safety or the safety of others or their own reputation or that of the museum.

Special note on cannabis: Despite Illinois state law, cannabis (marijuana) for medical or recreational use is a Drug Enforcement Administration listed Schedule I controlled substance. [Organization Name] may receive federal grant money and must comply with the Federal Drug Free Workplace Act of 1988; therefore marijuana falls under [Organization Name] policy.

Employees who violate the Drug-Free Workplace prohibition may be subject to a range of actions. These include, but are not limited to, requiring satisfactory participation in a drug/alcohol abuse assistance or rehabilitation program, sanctions, and disciplinary action up to and including termination.
ing minimum wage to $15 per hour by 2025. While this wage increase to a “livable” amount is a good thing for workers, especially floor staff and other typically low-wage museum employees, it does pose some problems for small nonprofits.

The first is how to appropriately structure equitable wages for all staff, and not just front line/entry level staff who will most likely be affected by the minimum wage increase. Let us take a look at the math using the Illinois minimum wage increases as an example. Assuming front line/entry level staff are paid at $10.00 per hour, a 50 percent increase spread out over five years will result in the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Effective 1/1/2020 12% increase</th>
<th>Effective 7/1/2020 8%</th>
<th>Effective 1/1/2021 10%</th>
<th>Effective 1/1/2022 9.1%</th>
<th>Effective 1/1/2023 8.4%</th>
<th>Effective 1/1/2024 7.7%</th>
<th>Effective 1/1/2025 7.2%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current</td>
<td>$8.25</td>
<td>$9.25</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
<td>$11.00</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
<td>$13.00</td>
<td>$14.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the front line/entry level staff team leader currently earns $15 per hour, do you plan a 50 percent increase over the next five years for this staff member as well? This would place their hourly rate at $22.50.

Then, what about the next level of museum employees, lower level managers? Assuming an annual salary of $44,172 (based on a national average of children’s museum full-time staff titles with the word “manager” in them from the ASTC-ACM 2016 Workforce Survey), this equates to an hourly rate of $21.24, which would be lower than the proposed new rate of your front-line team leader.

Tracking the math of the 50 percent pay increase’s “trickle up” effect, it starts looking unsustainable for most institutions. So, what is sustainable? Is it 50 percent for front line/entry level staff, 40 percent for team leads, 30 percent for managers, etc.? This question leads us to the second problem: how will an institution fund this new wage structure, whether it applies to all or some staff?

There are three main ways to fund higher wages: increased earned income, increased donated income, and decreased expenses. Earned income options include, but are not limited to, an increase in membership prices or numbers, an increase in visitor (non-member) prices or numbers, and new or increased revenue streams, such as birthday parties, facility rentals, programs, traveling exhibits, etc. An increase in contributed income can come from current donors and grants as well as an expanded donor base and new grant opportunities. A decrease in expenses can be achieved by careful monitoring and reduction of expenditures, including a possible reduction of staff. Decreasing expenses can come at a cost though and may have an impact on income. For instance, you can eliminate a program or reduce museum hours of operation, but how will that affect dollars coming in the door?

Museums and other businesses and organizations are currently facing these difficult questions in at least five states, plus additional counties or city municipalities across the nation. In the Chicago area, it will also be a challenge to compete for top talent with larger for-profits, like Target, grocery store chains, and Amazon, which are already paying well above minimum wage, as well as private employers in the City of Chicago that choose to comply with a proposed accelerated minimum wage structure. How do we remain competitive by leveraging our work culture and benefits to compete with this compensation?

Over the next five years—and beyond—the challenge will be to strike the right balance between creating new revenue streams while managing expenses and striving to be an employer of choice. Most nonprofits will soon face these questions. How each organization responds depends on its culture. If you take the stance that the organization should support a living wage for all of its employees, then the next step is to have discussions with people in all parts of the organization. If there is universal buy in, then creating a sustainable plan will be more likely. No doubt this is a difficult process with hard decisions and occasional sacrifices to be made.

About a year ago, DuPage Children’s Museum’s senior management decided against annual pay increases for everyone, instead giving a significant increase to floor/visitor service staff. This decision was carefully thought out and ultimately well received by all staff. Clearly, as minimum wage continues to increase, and that impact is felt at all levels in the museum, achieving wage parity is a bigger undertaking. As we move forward, the hope is to engage all parts of the museum in the decision process, attaining full buy-in and ultimately creating a more rewarding place to work for everyone.

**HR RESOURCES**

- American Alliance of Museums provides Tier 3 members with sample HR policies: [https://www.aam-us.org/programs/resource-library/](https://www.aam-us.org/programs/resource-library/)
- The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) has a wealth of resources at its website, including policies.
- Association of Science-Technology Centers Diversity Policy Toolkit

**Unconscious bias:**


**Gender pay gaps:**

Hand to Hand  Association of Children’s Museums

Playing Together continued from page 2

These weekly meetings were successful in truly engaging Real Tools staff, and improving their work with visitors. It did not stop staff from leaving. We still had staff who graduated, or were hired for full time jobs elsewhere, or moved away. But when new staff join the Real Tools team, they are quickly engaged in the mission of the museum, the seriousness of the work, and the importance of their own voices in making this work better.

Play Facilitation: Expanding the Model

Inspired by the impact of the Real Tools monthly meetings, and supported by PNC Grow Up Great funding, we began to use monthly all-staff meetings to explore play facilitation. Previously, PlayHouse job descriptions classified “playologists” (our term for floor staff) as staff who engage children and families in play, along with straightening, cleaning, and troubleshooting exhibit and visitor problems. However, discussions about play facilitation were not a regular part of our dialogue with floor staff. During training and supervision, the emphasis was on efficiency rather than value, cleaning and resetting rather than learning through play.

In the fall of 2018, we launched a meeting series on play facilitation, led by the museum’s education manager, Courtney Baxter. Staff were trained in reflective practice, and encouraged to experiment. They were given free rein to try things that failed, and share these failures, along with their successes.

During 2018 and 2019, we dedicated seven two-hour meetings to different approaches to play, and the role of adults in children’s play. We learned about playwork from the New Children’s Museum, theatrical improvisation from The Engaged Educator, play therapy, Montessori education, Reggio Emilia education, and Kaboom’s approach to working with Imagination Playground. (See above sidebar.) At the beginning of each meeting, staff shared the successes and failures they experienced when experimenting with these new methods. After each presentation, the group brainstormed ways in which these new ideas might apply in our context. For example, staff found the improvisational approach of “yes and…” to be a good tool for building on a child’s creative imaginings. They also valued the play therapy idea of not correcting a child, but rather entering their world. Other approaches were more difficult to relate to daily interactions in the museum, but inspired staff to think about staffing patterns and possibilities in new ways. For example, the Imagination Playground presentation was inspiring, but our playologists were unsure about how to incorporate these methods in the current way we use this interactive block set at street festivals. Perhaps there are other ways we can staff or present Imagination Playground?

This series has helped staff to think about play and play facilitation. Perhaps even more importantly, it has sent a clear message that all staff are empowered to offer visitors the best experience possible at the PlayHouse. This has led to unexpected results. Floor staff have taken responsibility for creating grassroots programming, including staff and visitor dress-up days and storytimes. And staff have created solutions to real problems, such as setting up a scavenger hunt of objects hidden near the entrance in order to keep kids occupied while parents pay or fill out a membership form.

Further, the dialogues that happen during these staff meetings have helped managerial staff get to know part-time, front-of-house staff better. We are learning about their individual strengths and interests, which allows us to find ways to leverage individual talents and passions for the benefit of the museum. This is good for the PlayHouse, but also key to staff engagement: allowing staff to use their personal skills deepens their emotional and intellectual connection to the museum. We can rarely offer promotions in our small museum, but we can work with individuals to tweak roles in ways that are beneficial for everyone.

Co-Creation: Pushing the Model Further

The PlayHouse now has a new structure for all-staff meetings: they are monthly, collaborative dialogues. Of course, sometimes we share information about upcoming exhibits or programs, or conduct safety-related trainings. But we also use these meetings for
discussions such as, are the props currently out on the floor working, or should we rethink some of them? If we are able to grow our volunteer program, how do we balance offering volunteers engaging tasks working directly with visitors, while still respecting the interests and abilities of the floor staff who want to engage visitors in educational activities? What are ideas related to programs for next year?

We are finding that by opening up discussion and asking for feedback we can expand the work we do. For example, while planning an event called Enchanted PlayHouse, one floor-staff member decided we needed an area that looked like a pirate ship. So she enlisted her husband to build a pirate ship with her. Visitors loved it.

Not surprisingly, we have unleashed a host of new challenges through this approach. One of the most critical is communication. When staff decide they want to do something—for example, a themed dress-up week—management staff need to know about the event, have the opportunity to voice any concerns, help promote it, and be able to answer questions about it. We used to worry that front-of-house staff were not getting all the information they needed; now we need to address this in the other direction as well.

Another challenge is capturing the results of staff experimentation. We know from discussions during staff meetings that staff are indeed experimenting and finding new ways to interact with visitors on the floor. How do we capture this information, and learn collectively from what has worked and what has failed?

Perhaps the biggest challenge is financial cost. With the new structure of our all-staff meetings, we have committed to gathering and paying part-time staff for two or more hours every month to engage in discussions that, in other museums, are the job of full-time or back-of-house staff. We are always looking for ways to cut expenses, and to many this might seem like an unnecessary one. However, the positive impact on our staff, and then on our visitors, is apparent. And we believe that, in the long run, the cost of an unengaged staff is much higher.

Despite the challenges of continued turnover, communication, or financial strains, a staff that is committed to the museum leads to improved experience for everyone involved. When management demonstrates that all staff are valued and essential to the success of an organization, and that each person has the autonomy to influence that success, we create a culture of fulfillment and engagement. We strongly believe that engaging all staff creates a vibrant and visible culture of valuing individuals that is palpable to visitors. Our mission is to help children become explorers and creators of the world. We engage our staff in this work by empowering them to be explorers and creators of the warm and captivating environment of the PlayHouse.

Rebecca Shulman Herz has served as the director of the Peoria PlayHouse Children’s Museum since 2015. Previously, she spent fifteen years in art museum education at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Noguchi Museum, both in New York City. Kristin Vannatta was the operations manager of the Peoria PlayHouse Children’s Museum from 2015 until August 2019. Previously, she worked for six years as the volunteer coordinator and operations manager for the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust in Chicago, Illinois.

REFERENCES

Salary transparency:
• Started by Kimberly Drew, the Google doc below now contains over 3,100 entries of museum salaries posted voluntarily by museum employees around the world. It has inspired similar spreadsheets in the library and archives fields.
  docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14_cn3af0as7NhKvHWaFKqQGkaZS5rvL6DFzGqXQa6o/edit#gid=0
• MIT Living Wage Calculator: http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/51540

Professional development:
• The Society for Human Resource Management
  www.shrm.org

Harassment:
• Workable: resources.workable.com/sexual-harassment-policy

Performance management:
Any company or institution is only as good as the people who work there. This is not a revelation, but as CEO of the Bay Area Discovery Museum (BADM), I see proof of this every day. Investing in staff is the best investment a museum can make. This is easy to say, but often difficult to implement in the lean environment in which most children’s museums operate. Yet it is critical to identify ways to support staff, as often we are promoting people early in their careers into positions of great responsibility.

All museums must make careful and strategic decisions about where to spend their resources. Based on our successful experience at BADM, I recommend that children’s museums focus the bulk of their professional development efforts on the manager level group. The work of mid-level or management staff requires the ongoing development of core management skills, as well as specific job function expertise.

**Focusing on Key Staff: the Managers**

Throughout the year, BADM employees have the opportunity to participate in anonymous surveys seeking feedback on the institution’s culture. Asking staff what motivates them to do their work and what they think of internal communications prompt many discussions about culture, values, and norms. Through these discussions, BADM’s leadership team concluded that not all teams felt empowered to contribute to the museum in the same ways.

Why did some teams seem to have all the information they needed, demonstrate greater levels of trust in the institution and in senior management, appear happier at work, take more risks and come up with more new ideas, while other teams did not? The difference was in the strength of the team’s manager.

Managers with strong leadership skills provided significant leverage to senior leadership by helping to identify problems and then implementing solutions. Strong managers impact everything from hiring and retention, to communications, to productivity, to job satisfaction, to overall culture.

BADM saw significant benefits in supporting managers’ professional success and growth, however, we have found no one single way to provide it. Rather, through experimentation, we have identified three approaches to help our managers and staff develop the basic management skills needed to help everyone perform their jobs well and, in the process, help the museum achieve its goals.

**LEVERAGE STAFF EXPERTISE**

- **BADM University**

Every September, an all-day, all-staff meeting replaces our typical forty-five-minute monthly staff meeting. In the past, outside speakers—some paid, some working pro-bono—led half-day workshops on topics such as presentation skills and public speaking, customer service best practices, and diversity and inclusion. While helpful, we needed a broader range of topics to be addressed.

A few years ago, we created BADM University to tap the considerable in-house expertise already present within our own talented staff to contribute content, in addition to that offered by outside speakers.

The leadership team (CEO, CFO, deputy director, and four department directors) and our staff of more than seventy people source ideas for the four to five top-
ics offered at each year’s all-day meeting. Together, we identify staff members who can develop and lead an hour-long training on each one. Each presenter offers two training sessions on their topic, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, keeping the sessions to a reasonable size and allowing staff to attend more than one. Each topic is also offered twice more throughout the year, for people who weren’t able to attend a particular session at the annual meeting.

Staff have led sessions on topics such as Influencing Others (conversational strategies that can lead to yes or no when requesting support), Interviewing Best Practices, Delegation & Prioritization, and Data-Driven Decision Making. The BADM University structure has been a great way to highlight and share existing expertise, while giving staff members opportunities to assume leadership roles they might not have otherwise. People also get to spend time with members from other departments with whom they might not interact regularly, which in turn strengthens staff relationships across departments.

• Monthly Manager Professional Development

Based on the popularity of BADM University, the museum now offers this type of professional development for a smaller subgroup of staff through a series of bi-monthly professional development sessions just for managers, a group of sixteen to eighteen people. Throughout my career, I have seen how important managers are to the overall success of teams and organizations. Prior to joining BADM, I vowed that if I ever became a boss, I would do everything I could to lead well, starting with a consistent, museum-wide focus on developing key management skills. With utmost respect for all staff, I develop and lead these sessions myself.

For these sessions, managers are further subdivided into two smaller groups, each meeting every other month to dive into topics that help develop basic management skills. These ninety-minute sessions are held during the regular workday and typically include an assigned reading as the backbone for discussion. Past session topics include how to run an effective meeting; managing up, down, and across; and effective delegation. These meetings allow managers to create an informal support network for each other while offering different perspectives and opportunities to get to know managers from other departments.

As I prepare to step away from my role as CEO at BADM at the end of December, we are currently in the process of refining these trainings. Building on what we believe is a sustainable foundation, members of the leadership team will now lead them.

• Bi-Annual Manager Off-Sites

Twice a year, the leadership team and manager level staff gather as a group at off-site locations. These off-sites are opportunities to bring in outside speakers, build trust among managers from different departments, and delve into current challenges facing the museum. Resulting discussions have elicited broader input and insights into how the leadership team might approach specific problems.

• Online Professional Development

BADM makes use of free or low-cost professional development offerings through various industry associations and resources, such as the Association of Children's Museums, the American Alliance of Museums, the Association of Science-Technology Centers, the Association of Fundraising Professionals, and Blackbaud. Their offerings can be particularly good for programmatic and topic-specific professional development. For example, our communications manager attended a webinar on caregiver attitudes toward museum signage and was able to incorporate some key takeaways into her approach for program-specific signage.

These industry trainings are also valuable for staff interested in expanding their network within the field. To encourage them to take advantage of these resources, our HR team sends out a monthly reminder that lists upcoming professional development offerings.

• Free Local Professional Development

Fortunately, the Bay Area’s active nonprofit and cultural scene supports an organization called Cultural Connections, which offers evening sessions several times a year on topics from exhibit design trends to tips on learning from your mistakes. Sessions are open to all of our staff and include opportunities for them to get involved as volunteers within the organization. In addition, several local community foundations also offer trainings open to nonprofit staff in the Bay Area.

• Personal Networks and Board Expertise

Don’t overlook your board when leveraging your personal network for professional development resources. Board members come from a variety of backgrounds and are often flattered and happy to share their expertise with staff as another way of contributing to the institution. Board members may be asked to lead a staff training directly, or invite museum staff to join one of their company staff’s trainings. Recently, a museum trustee who works at a large financial services firm arranged for BADM’s manager group to participate in a half-day training focused on simplifying business practices.

• Industry Conferences

We encourage staff to submit session proposals and attend industry conferences, particularly when they are held locally. These conferences offer content that is especially well-suited for early- and mid-career staff while senior leaders value networking opportunities and sharing their expertise by giving presentations.

• Tailored Individual Professional Development

Lastly, there are times and situations when a staff member will benefit from specialized, individual training in the form of executive coaching or specific group trainings. For example, leadership training may help a newly-promoted a department director, while team-building exercises may help a new management team, and specialized early childhood math training could benefit a program manager. Once we have identified a specific need, we look to find the best possible course or training available to fill it. (Many training providers offer significant discounts for nonprofits—you just have to ask!)

• Performance Reviews

At BADM, annual performance reviews include opportunities to discuss professional goals and career advancement. This ensures that at least once a year people have the opportunity to talk about their evolving needs and goals (although ideally this happens on a more regular basis).

Beyond career development, the review process also provides a healthier approach to transition planning. Working at the museum may be just one of several opportunities a person has over the course of their career. When someone chooses to move on, we seek to help them succeed in their new role when possible. We also look to them for guidance
on how we can improve the role they are leaving at BADM for the next person who fills it.

Impact on the Staff

Professional development is only worthwhile if it actually benefits the staff it is designed to help. The managers who have participated in the professional development opportunities described above report gaining practical skills and strategies that support them in becoming better leaders.

In particular, the monthly manager professional development sessions have been an important resource for managers across the institution. “When I first started in my role as a manager, I was entirely focused on how to be a leader for the staff that reported to me,” said a manager in BADM’s education department. “I didn’t consider that part of my job is also to ‘manage up.’ After attending Karyn’s professional development session on Managing Up, Down, and Across, it changed the way I thought about my relationship with my own supervisor. Focusing on the relationship with the person who manages me has helped me to become a better resource for those who I manage.”

BADM’s many professional development offerings are valuable simply as opportunities for staff from different departments to be in a room together. Prior to implementing the manager off-sites and monthly professional development sessions, there weren’t many opportunities for a manager from the education department to be in a room with a manager from the facilities team, or for a manager from the visitor experiences team to brainstorm institution-wide initiatives with all of the senior leadership team at once. Now, there are multiple combined sessions like these built into the institutional calendar.

Why did some teams seem to have all the information they needed, demonstrate greater levels of trust in the institution and in senior management, appear happier at work, take more risks and come up with more new ideas, while other teams did not? The difference was in the strength of the team’s manager.

Growing Staff, Growing the Museum

Every museum, regardless of size, must hire and manage the right people for the right jobs and create a productive, efficient staffing structure. However, even if you are able to achieve those goals, no museum stands still. Since BADM implemented a multipronged approach to professional development, we have seen our employees grow more empowered to take on new challenges and propose new ideas. Rather than leaving the institution to grow in their careers, our managers see opportunities to grow within BADM. And they are better equipped to identify gaps in BADM’s current staffing structure which they can fill.

By investing in our staff, we have created more leverage within the organization, ensuring that more people are equipped to identify and solve problems that ultimately help us meet our strategic objectives and fulfill our mission.

Finally, better managers mean a better experience for the staff that report to them. Because of the strong working relationship they have with their managers, more junior staff feel more invested in their work and in the museum. A greater commitment to staff is the most important investment we can make for our own institutions, the communities we serve, and the field at large.

Karyn Flynn is the CEO of the Bay Area Discovery Museum in Sausalito, California.
Ask [the Right] Questions
continued from page 3

away, while others took several months and even years to complete.

Ultimately, we determined that the survey offered four primary benefits.
• Survey results would allow me to statistically determine how engaged the Kidspace team was at the organizational level, at the departmental level, and on individual levels. We measured results from the programs team, the operations team, and the combined (due to their smaller sizes) administration and development teams.
• Asking the right questions of the entire museum team gave them a voice to let me know what was going well, and more importantly, what needed improvement. Having a voice within an organization really matters—having a voice that suggests changes and then seeing those changes happen is huge.
• The survey could increase engagement by providing our team with data to help establish an action plan after identifying strengths and opportunities at the departmental and organizational levels.
• Finally, the survey would give us a platform to benchmark results. Now, the entire museum team takes the Q12 survey every two years so we can assess our progress on priority issues. Being able to benchmark that progress confirms that our investment of time and energy is paying off.

The Survey Process: How It Worked & What We Learned

We sent an email to every Kidspace employee with a link to the engagement survey. Responses could be sorted from a number of different vantage points, including employment status (part-time versus full-time) and employment longevity (fewer than three years versus more than three years). Questions were further tailored to elicit responses from individuals as opposed to entire departments. The survey took approximately twenty minutes to complete, depending on how much folks had to say in the open-ended question portion. All answers were completely anonymous with no possibility of repercussions, particularly for replies to open-ended questions that called out other teammates for certain issues.

Eric and I reviewed all of the survey responses, paying close attention to any responses critical of specific departments or individuals, but separating sensitive information from the rest of the results. Next, the senior staff met and reviewed responses to the empirical questions (true or false or one-to-ten rating questions). Based on all of the responses, Eric then created a report that made a series of short and long-term recommendations to address needs and leverage strengths and included a number of action items that we could start on right away. Two key recommendations were: 1) focus on negative, disengaged employees who were bringing others down with them and 2) begin “stay interviews,” a proactive approach to find out what could lure away my top talent and then ensure that didn’t happen.

Out of all the findings from the full museum team’s responses, one of the most rewarding is how passionate our team is and how much they believe in our mission. Few people work at Kidspace simply to have a job. The vast majority are here because they care about children, education, and how the children’s museum supports both.

Responses to the question, “If you were Michael Shanklin for one day, what is the first thing you would do?” were, of course, fascinating. Some contained words of encouragement while others were critical. They ranged from, “Ask members of the board to volunteer on the floor” to “I would spend a good deal of time on the floor observing interactions and [the] set up of the museum.”

While providing us with a clear roadmap on changes that needed to be made, the data and accompanying report were by no means a cure all. Some issues, like employee pay, did not have simple solutions. However, the survey process gave us confidence that by improving our overall engagement, we could improve our guest experience, resulting in more—and more engaged—visitors. In the end, a more engaged team equaled a better guest experience, which positively impacted our balance sheet which enabled us to raise wages over time.

Assume Nothing, Question Everything

As Kidspace prepares to administer its fifth employee engagement survey in 2020, we look forward to seeing what has changed in the past several years, where we have improved and where we still need more work. We always receive a few surprises, some good and some bad.

In 2017, we were pleasantly surprised to see a 26 percent increase from 2015 in positive responses to this true/false question: “At work, my opinions seem to count.” We think this shift occurred in large part due to a number of staffing changes made based on feedback from our part-time team. Another improvement we saw that year: employees thought the senior management team consistently demonstrated the Kidspace values. This number went up by 12.4 percent from 2015 to 2017.

On the room-for-improvement side, part-time employees reported a growing frustration over a lack of feedback and training, which directly affected how much they were getting paid. We responded with an increased emphasis on providing all employees with constructive feedback and professional development opportunities.

Low pay has absolutely been the most challenging issue to address across the board. The Los Angeles area is a very expensive place to live. The significant minimum wage increase in the county in recent years has been a good thing for our employees, but has been hard to absorb from a non-profit business perspective. As we create our 2020 budget, we must raise admission prices again to offset the dollar increase in minimum wage. It can be frustrating because museum employees, especially part-timers, often do not fully understand how hard it is to balance the budget, however, we hope they will express positive responses regarding rising pay levels.

With human resources, you are never “done.” There is always something—or someone—that needs your attention. But once key issues or problems are identified, positive efforts can turn situations—or people—around. Conversely, ignoring these same scenarios can create unwieldy challenges that consume your time and resources.

Seeing the new engagement survey results every other year is a bit like Christmas morning: you hope that your hard work and efforts to make the museum a better place are rewarded with a nice present, in the form of a happy and engaged staff. At the same time, you hope that your efforts did not fall short, causing Santa Claus to drop a piece of coal in your stocking. But you’ll never know until you open that employee engagement “gift” of data.

Michael Shanklin served as CEO of Kidspace Children’s Museum in Pasadena, California, for eight years. In October 2019, he began work as the new executive director of Explore! Children’s Museum in Washington, DC.
Defense Against the Dark Arts  
Position Opening  

Dear Adam & Paula,

Lately I’ve felt like I’m hiring yet another replacement for my Defense Against the Dark Arts position. They seemed so good in the interviews and their references checked out well. I’m seriously losing my hiring confidence and a Butter Beer isn’t going to help. Maybe you can?!?
—Dumbledooped

ADAM:
Dear Dumbledooped,

One Butterbeer wasn’t helpful? How about two? But seriously, finding the right candidate can be exhausting. Let’s start with references, which, in my humble opinion, are not a great indicator of future performance. Who in their right mind is going to provide a reference from someone who would say not-so-nice things about them? No, the key is in the interview.

Think about the types of questions you are asking.

Q: Do your interview questions require a “yes” or “no” answer or are they open-ended?

A: Most of your questions should be open-ended.

If you are hiring someone to read stories to children, instead of asking, “Do you like to read stories to children?” try, “Tell me how you would read a story to children.” Then, pull out a storybook, hand it to them, and make them to show you how they would do it. Most children’s museums are interactive, why should our interview processes be any different?

I like situational questions as well: “What would you do if...” I also like questions that make interviewees think: “So when we walked through the museum to my office, what did you notice?” I get the usual answers—children playing, etc. But once in a while I’ll get an answer that is outside of the realm of the standard replies. “I noticed you have a lot of diversity here among your guests,” is a recent one that stands out.

When I was hiring an administrative assistant a few years ago, I ran the candidates through a battery of questions. Near the end of the interview, I sat them at a computer workstation and told them, “Okay, so we received a $500 donation from you. Here is letterhead and MS Word is up. Please write a thank-you letter to you from me and when you are done bring it back into my office.” You will learn really quickly who used a resume service for their resume.

I have one final question that I ask every candidate. “Why you? Out of all of the candidates I am interviewing, why should I hire you?” It’s a tough question and I’m not always looking for a specific answer.

PAULA:
You may be making the classic mistake of looking at what was wrong with the candidates rather than what was wrong with what you are doing. If multiple great-in-the-interview candidates are no longer employed at your museum, only two pieces are still there: the job and you.

Start by reviewing the job description. Is it an accurate description of what the job is really like on a daily basis? Forget references—who is going to put someone down that would not vouch for them? Look at your interview questions. Do they offer candidates a chance to give useful, telling responses to problems that might arise in museum scenarios that they will routinely experience? Think of specific questions that will make them dive deep into past experiences and not easy ones that will tell you what you want to hear…and keep you “dooped.”

May I introduce you to our new staff member, Judas?

Dear Adam & Paula,

We are a small museum in a small community. On the recommendation of a board member/major donor, we recently hired their nephew, who, with a background in early childhood, expressed interest in the field. He is underperforming, to say the least, and when we discuss ways in which he might improve, he seems agreeable. Then he goes back to his uncle and complains about how poorly the museum is run. Our board president asked me to make it work in order to retain support of the board member, but resentment is building among other staff, and steam is coming out of my ears. How do I navigate this minefield?
—Stuck in the Middle with You

ADAM:
Dear Stuck,

As soon as you read this, draft a board policy that states the museum cannot hire family members of board members. Our museum had a very similar situation years ago with a board member’s son. I resisted the pressure to hire and once I explained it to the full board, they understood that it wasn’t a good idea. The board member father did, as well…eventually.

If a board member is adamant that you hire their child or relative, tell them the only way you could consider it is if they stepped off of the board and at that point, the relative can go through the interview process.

PAULA:
If you did not know who he was beforehand, would you still have hired him? With his early childhood background and interest in the field, sounds like you would have. Treat him as you would any other employee. Try one more time giving him specific examples of what is not working along with specific things you need him to do, and put it in writing. Make sure that the board president is aware of the opportunities you are giving him to improve. Or, is there another area of the museum that would be a better fit for him, such as an internship with the board president, who you could also ask for specific guidance as to how you should proceed?
1,001 reasons why I’m late for work

Dear Adam & Paula,

Is there some website somewhere that lists reasons to choose from when you’re late for work or miss it entirely? I swear, I have heard everything, from the “bus had a flat tire” (ho-hum) to “I accidentally stuck my eye with a pin while separating my lashes after putting on mascara while driving here in my car.” (True story!) When this employee is here, her work is very good. But her chronic tardiness and last-minute absences are making me nuts. Am I a control freak, or should I take the bad with the good?

—The Teetering Taskmaster

ADAM:

Dear Teetering Taskmaster,

I once terminated an employee for dress code violations (after more warnings than I should have really given her). Your staff are watching how you handle this. If you don’t document, warn, and write-up the employee, what credibility will you have when another employee pulls the same thing?

(Hint: the answer is none.)

Consistency in how you handle issues among all of your staff is important. Now, I’m not saying zero tolerance, but if you don’t make being on time important, neither will anyone else.

PAULA:

If one of your “crazy” job requirements is that an employee is supposed to be there at a certain time and/or actually show up for work when they are supposed to, and if that employee cannot meet that requirement then you will have to do something equally “crazy” and let them go. If they are that good, when they finally make it to work, have one final meeting. Show them their attendance record and the part in the handbook that says staff need to be here at a certain time. Then let them know what the outcome will be if they are late or no call/no show again.

Just passing through. Give me the gist.

Dear Adam & Paula,

Our CEO is well known and frequently travels to conferences, speaking engagements, and related professional consultations. He’s gone at least 50 percent of the time. While we understand that he makes valuable contributions to the field, and his reputation reflects very well on our museum, the back-of-house operations are a mess. Senior leaders perform aspects of museum management very well, but a feeling of consistent, cohesive direction is missing. When he’s here, he likes to hear updates about things that are going well, but blanks on the problems. Is it feasible that all staff get together and request that he “spend more time with his family”?

—I Got a Plane to Catch

ADAM:

Dear Plane to Catch,

I wouldn’t stage a gang intervention on your CEO, but if there is a feeling that operations are suffering it would behoove the staff to create a list of things that need the his attention and have one person meet with him to say, “We got together while you were out of town and here are a list of things staff need addressed. Can you and I spend some time going through this and make some decisions?”

The other possibly good thing to consider here is that your CEO trusts the team to just handle the operational part while he is away. This is a lot better than working for a micromanager! Remember, he doesn’t know what he doesn’t know and it’s up to you (or someone on your team who has his ear) to tell him.

PAULA:

Embrace the traveling ambassador CEO model and let the senior leadership crew decide what is and is not working for the team. Schedule weekly leadership team meetings to check in with all the departments; come up with a list of what’s not working along with suggestions for solutions. Figure out what you can do to solve your own problems and what you need CEO approval for. Then book a monthly check-in with the CEO.

You are all working for the same museum, and its mission should be in everyone’s mind when making decisions. Regularly scheduled connections with your CEO should smooth out staff grumbling, while allowing him to still make his...connections.

When I was hiring an administrative assistant a few years ago, I ran the candidates through a battery of questions. Near the end of the interview, I sat them at a computer workstation, and told them, “Okay, so we received a $500 donation from you. Here is letterhead and MS Word is up. Please write a thank-you letter to you from me and when you are done bring it back into my office.” You will learn really quickly who used a resume service for their resume.

I’m in with the in-crowd...and you’re not.

Dear Adam & Paula,

A small group of museum staff have worked together and been friends for years. When new staff come on board, they are polite, professional, and work well with the new hires. But they never involve them in any of their outside socializing, details of which emerge later in office conversations. I don’t want to be in charge of everyone’s life 24/7, but this clique is palpable. Should I say something, or just go Darwinian here?

—I Think I Should, But Do I Have to?

ADAM:

Dear Clique Buster,

It actually does sound like you want to be in charge of everyone’s life 24/7. Please stop. I’m guessing you are upset because you are not included in this after-hours socializing? Here’s an idea: organize your own after-hours socializing event and invite everyone.

PAULA:

Easy answer: do nothing. If, when new staff are on-boarded, your team is polite, professional and works well with the new hires, your job here is done. You are not serving recess duty. What people do “outside” is not your issue.

A slow death by dress code!

Dear Adam & Paula,

I am so sick and tired about issues with our dress code. I think the team wants a policy for everything and it is driving me crazy. We are trying to balance being fair and consistent with dress code judgment calls and not having to spell out every single detail. What do you suggest?

—On My Last Nerve

ADAM:

Dear Last Nerve,

Do you have staff with control issues? If the dress code says “tan pants” and they are arguing about the shade of tan, just tell them any shade. For those demanding more specifics, I’d invite them to sit down with you and have a chat. “Why is this important to you that the shade of tan pants be so specific?” You’ll only get to the root of the issue by having those candid conversations.

PAULA:

You could post this quote from management guru Glenn Shepard, “If you would wear it to the state fair, don’t wear it to work.” As much as you think “professional attire” or “business casual” should be easy to understand, sometimes they’re not. You
could try rewriting the policy to be more specific: what they can wear—e.g., “if you are into the baggy style, wear a belt”—and what they can’t—e.g., no jeans or pants with holes. If the time invested in fielding too many wardrobe questions is stressing everyone, then adopt a uniform and provide polos or t-shirts for everyone.

Good enough for government.

Dear Adam & Paula,

What can I do with staff who are not excelling, but not failing badly enough to be let go? How do you work with staff who do the bare minimum, often forcing more motivated staff around them to hustle just to “get the job done”? —Will Rogers (“Even if you are on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.”)

ADAM:

Dear Will,

Merit reviews and merit pay. Those who excel at their work with specific goals get higher raises than those who do just average. I know that we live in a world where people feel like they should get the same raises as everyone else, but why would top performers keep carrying the slack of the underperformers if they both are getting paid the same? I wouldn’t. I’d take my overachieving formers if they both are getting paid the same.

PAULA:

I am not sure why you think it has to be a certain degree of failing. If they are failing at all, they should be let go. But if your question is what to do with team members who consistently do an adequate but not great job and never step up to do “extra,” then the answer is nothing. We all need good worker bees—people who are reliable, consistent, and good with visitors. “Hustlers” who want to do more should be given more—more responsibilities, more opportunities, and more money.

Batter up!

Dear Adam & Paula,

Our museum has had three directors in the past five years. The latest comes from outside the field with a background in business. She regularly asks me to “bring her up to speed” on children’s museums, while doing my own job. These meetings can be lengthy, sometimes after hours, and often require additional research and reports. As a senior manager, I held things together in the interims between directors, so I am very familiar with the organization, and the field. I understand she wants to succeed (we all want her to!) but she takes all the credit for this new knowledge and never acknowledges my contributions. I love the museum and my job, but how do I set some boundaries within the organization without looking uncooperative?

—Pass the Excedrin, Please

ADAM:

Dear Pass the Excedrin,

First of all, keep doing what you are doing. Being a team-player is important. But ask your new director to set up a weekly “bring you up to speed” meeting on both your calendars. This is a great way to set those boundaries. It says, “Here is what we are going to do and here is when we are going to do it.” You could even theme these meetings. For example, “Next week let’s focus on finance. Why don’t we invite the board treasurer to be a part of it?” Then as you are sharing your knowledge, the treasurer will likely share with other board members that it was “nice that Pass the Excedrin was able to share this information.” That might also get you some of the acknowledgment you feel you are missing.

PAULA:

Yes to regular, short meetings during working hours that still allow you to complete your own tasks! Her success is the organization’s success. Being a team player and supporting her can show up in your evaluation. It does sound, however, like you have the skills and talent to be a museum director. Think of applying for the position yourself next time one opens up in another community organization or perhaps again soon in your own museum. (Thinking back to earlier replies to “Dumbledooped,” who is interviewing these directors anyway?)

Welcome to my (lily) pad

Dear Adam & Paula,

Our museum has adopted a mascot that is an active component of daily exhibits and programs. Floor staff take turns donning the Freddie the Frog costume and croaking greetings to children and families. The costume is heavy, hot, and often fragrant from repeated use (it’s hard to wash a frog costume every day). I’m also shy and find it so draining to cheerfully offer my webbed frog hand to visitors over and over. I want to be all in with my team, but what reason can I give to get out of this part of the job?

—Help Me Before I Croak Again

ADAM:

Dear Croaker,

Don’t try to get out of it. Instead, start suggesting ways to keep that costume cleaner and more froggie-fragrant. As to being shy, guests can’t even tell who you are unless your face shows as part of the costume. All they see is the happy frog.

We had a similar situation at my institution. Senior management compromised by asking the staff to wear the costume in ten-minute intervals. This way, nobody is in it for very long. Ribbit.

PAULA:

Kermit was really singing the “blues” when he moaned, “It is not easy being green.” I am not sure there is a prince at the end of this tale. If hopping for joy was included in the job description when you interviewed and accepted, then you may not have a lily pad to stand on. You are shy and find it difficult to engage visitors as a costumed character? How comfortable and confident are you as yourself? Is this the job for you? If it is, you are probably not alone with the issues with the costume itself. Maybe you and the rest of the frog chorus could come up with some solutions to make it better for all the faux-amphibians in your pond.

Adam Woodworth is the executive director of the Children’s Museum in Oak Lawn. He graduated from Western Illinois University in 1993 and questions to this day his decision to major in human resource management, among other life choices. Adam is also a player on the Quarried Away Improv team out of the Limestone Stage in Lockport, Illinois.

Paula Burdge is the current chief operating officer at The Magic House, St. Louis Children’s Museum. She is a graduate of St. Louis University with a bachelor’s degree in education, according the diploma, but she would say she also graduated with a degree in working with people. She has worked at The Magic House since 1989, her freshman year in college. Paula is also the second oldest of ten children, a family odyssey which has contributed to her people-managing experience.
Exploring the Role of Children’s Museums as Community Anchors

Nicole R. Rivera, EdD, North Central College
and Sarah Wolf, Discovery Center Museum

The Children’s Museum Research Network (CMRN) was formed in 2015 as a community of practice to examine field-wide research questions. Since 2017, a group of Chicago area children’s museums have gathered to build on this process at the local level. During initial meetings, participating museums shared CMRN research and highlighted their own research and evaluation efforts. These conversations led to a local investigation about the role children’s museums play as community anchors.

The goal of this modified participatory action research study was to explore how children’s museums support children and families in their communities, as part of the larger learning and social ecosystem.

Leaders from seven museums (DuPage Children’s Museum, Chicago Children’s Museum, Kohl Children’s Museum of Greater Chicago, Wonder Works Children’s Museum, The Peoria PlayHouse Children’s Museum, Children’s Museum in Oak Lawn, and Discovery Center Museum) participated in semi-structured interviews to examine their museum’s role within their communities. Before the interviews, they had opportunities to comment on the questions, and after were provided with copies of their transcripts for final review. The group was presented with initial summary data at a meeting held in August 2018 and asked to give feedback regarding coding structures and interpretation of the data.

Defining Community and Responding to Community Needs

The children’s museums that participated in this study represent seven unique communities, ranging from small to large, and serve a large urban environment, surrounding suburban communities, and two cities located up to two hours away from metropolitan boundaries. The museums described their communities in terms of demographics, specific sub-groups, and larger identified needs. Specific subgroups included families with children with disabilities, parents of infants/toddlers, fathers, families with lower socioeconomic status, LGBTQ families, and parents who have lost custody of their children because of legal issues such as divorce or incarceration. Community needs included threats to safety, shifting economic conditions, poverty, stress, and academic pressures.

The theme of “family stress” threaded throughout multiple interviews. Several interviewees noted the general stressors that families face in simply parenting young children. Those museums noted the value of children’s museums in providing a space for families to engage in shared time to “depart and detach” from daily challenges. From the stresses of academic achievement to daily concerns about safety in communities with high levels of poverty and violence, children’s museums can provide safe places for children and their caregivers to play. Communities that have lost manufacturing industries—and the resulting tax revenue—face challenges with educational opportunities. Children’s museums are supporting afterschool programming, supplemental science education, and teacher professional development to enhance the quality of educational experiences. They are also supporting early education experiences aimed at kindergarten readiness and open-ended learning experiences that may be missing from formal education settings.

Partnerships are essential to the work of a children’s museum in any community. Partners provide expertise about and access to specific groups. Children’s museums bring valuable assets to these relationships, including fun and playful exhibit environments, physical meeting spaces, and experience working with young children and their families. Representatives from children’s museums participate in early childhood collaborations, serve on committees and boards, and actively engage in business and government committees. Individuals from the partner organizations serve on boards and advisory committees for the children’s museums. This reciprocal engagement opens opportunities for children’s museums and their partner organizations to mutually shape policy and practice to best meet community needs.

When asked to describe what makes an effective community anchor, some of the survey participants referenced other local organizations that take a holistic approach and intentionally create access to their services. Overall, people described the importance of understanding the needs of the community and actively working to engage the assets of the organization to meet them. However, community needs are not static. An ongoing monitoring of needs and a willingness to shift directions to meet them is key.

A Community Anchor in Action

One study participant, Discovery Center Museum (DCM) in Rockford, Illinois, provides an excellent example of an institution that is part of community transformation. The museum’s mission is to create opportunities for joyful learning and discovery through hands-on experiences in the sciences and arts. Operating with the understanding that early learning is vital, DCM serves as a community resource for child-
Hand to Hand
Association of Children’s Museums
2550 South Clark Street
Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22202

When asked to describe what makes an effective community anchor, some of the survey participants referenced other local organizations that take a holistic approach and intentionally create access to their services.

hood education, establishing groundwork for development that impacts learning and success far into the future.

Helping to meet the needs of the community is integrated into the museum’s strategic plan. Staff members participate in community initiatives and projects. The museum offers free regular meeting spaces for local organizations such as the Early Learning Council of Rockford Area, Alignment Rockford, Transform Rockford, the local chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers, and United Way.

In addition to facilitating community events at the museum, DCM participates in hundreds of outside events annually, including festivals, programs, and neighborhood block parties. Through partnerships with local school districts, the museum is engaged in grant-funded and data-driven afterschool programs, Early Head Start, and Head Start.

DCM serves all demographics and is a top tourist attraction in the Rockford area. However, community data further shapes access to the museum. The museum is free to the public fifty-two days per year, provides free family passes to the 3,000 children who visit the museum on field trips with their early childhood classes, provides free family nights, and offers free and reduced cost scholarships for summer camps and family workshops.

Through its thirty-seven-year history, DCM has worked to create a better quality of life for families in the Rockford area, through long-term relationships with community partners to resolve local issues and build a stronger voice for collective impact. The value of a children’s museum includes both the learning that happens in the museum and the impact that the museum has in its community.

Building off the work of the Children’s Museum Research Network, this study allows us to share in examining how an institution defines and serves its community and what it means to be a community anchor, ultimately using this knowledge to shape future efforts.

Nicole R. Rivera, EdD, is assistant professor of psychology at North Central College and a participant in the Children’s Museum Research Network as an academic research and evaluation partner for DuPage Children’s Museum. Sarah Wolf is the executive director of Discovery Center Museum in Rockford, Illinois.