1. We in our library structure are lucky to have employees with various educational backgrounds. For example, I believe we have workers with BA's in history, architecture, English, communication, and even a few support staff members with Masters Degrees. Why don't utilize these backgrounds in our day to day jobs? For example, the one with the architecture degree can lay the foundation of our sense of community. While communication, psychology, and social work backgrounds may suggest how we should treat one another in the work setting. Do we want to strive for Theory X or Theory Y style of management? I personally say Theory Y, treat people well and they will go the extra mile for you. By treating people with Theory X it will potentially destroy our community. A concerned worker. 6/14/2006 2:48:31 PM

As with most issues, where competing philosophies are at work, many managers will probably opt to draw on both to varying degrees. Theory Y is a more broadly participatory approach but is not truly democratic; at the end of the day, the UL will make the final decision, but if she follows the tenets of Theory Y, she will have gathered a much wider spectrum of advice and insights throughout the library. The downside to this approach is the time and the effort needed in efficiently gathering such a large amount of data, not to mention having to digest and interpret it.

I think in times of financial stress when everyone is so busy and many performing two or more functions, officially or not, it is harder to find the time and enthusiasm for such a participatory approach. When decisions have to be made "yesterday," there is no real opportunity for a full scale Theory Y approach.

But one hopes that managers realize that utilizing the various skills of the workers instead of going to outsiders makes a lot of sense. People who work within an environment have more ties to the organization than outsiders. Also money can be saved by utilizing the skills of insiders, rather than those coming from outside of the environment. When the input of staff is not sought and their expertise is ignored, they tend to feel like cogs in a machine, and morale suffers. All things being equal, and they aren’t always, the participatory approach of Theory Y leavened by some real world restrictions on time and bureaucratic complexity from Theory X may be less than ideal but the most realistic approach in an imperfect world.

Teauria Brown and John Cullars

[Editor's Note – Because we are so new, let us take a moment to explain the organization of the Library Support Staff Advisory Committee (SSAC). The SSAC is composed of seven elected staff members and the University Librarian (UL). Each of the staff members serves on a subcommittee, either the Staff Development Committee or the Sense of Community Committee (SOCC). Faculty and academic professionals are represented on the SOCC by five members appointed by the UL. Jay Jurek, 08/25/2006.]
2. I would like to make a suggestion concerning the Employee Development Program (EDP). Instead of viewing this annual evaluation as a "report card" where the supervisor only evaluates their subordinates, I suggest that it should be a two-way street. In other words, during this meeting subordinates should also have the opportunity to evaluate their supervisor. After all, there is almost always room for improvement. However, it is important for both the supervisor and the subordinate to offer constructive criticism. When someone is doing a good job make sure you tell them so that they feel appreciated. Consequently, if someone made a mistake or an error in judgment; deal with the problem instead of making it personal. Always remember both the supervisors and subordinates are human beings with feelings. Unfortunately, I suspect that most subordinates see the evaluation process as a one way street. They are happy when the whole process is over. Even when supervisors do step up to the plate and ask is there anything the evaluatee would like to talk about, often times they receive a simple no. Therefore I suggest that we have an anonymous suggestion box dedicated to this issue. Feedback is extremely important. I think that it is true to some extent when people say that we don't see ourselves as others see us. After all how can an individual work on weaknesses if they are not aware of them? A concerned worker. 6/14/2006 10:07:07 AM.

Dear A Concerned Worker:

Thank you so much for your suggestion regarding the Employee Development Program (EDP). Your views are very much in line with the goals of the Sense of Community Committee and we will convey them directly to the University Librarian.

Please understand that the EDP is a University of Illinois system-wide program so changes in the actual form will require a significant amount of time. However, your suggestion regarding about allowing both the supervisor and those being supervised to refer to the goals and work performance through-out the year is something we are discussing.

We will keep you apprised as we work with the Library Support Staff Advisory Committee to initiate broader changes that will restore trust and integrity into our library.

Best wishes and thank you again for your participation!

Aimée Quinn

[Editor’s Note – The SSAC is now exploring models for a kind of 360-degree evaluation, one in which the employee evaluates the supervisor and one which may well find its way into our current EDP procedure. Jay Jurek, 08/25/2006.]
3. I am a firm believer that we need a stronger sense of community around here. In order to build that sense of community, all members of our community have to subscribe to the golden rule: Which is to treat others how you would like to be treated. For the record, I believe student workers, support staff, academic, administrative and building service workers are all part of our community. Our library structure tends to be more top down rather than bottom up. People in our community approached me and told me that by in large, middle management tends to be a "challenge" to get along with. According to these sources almost whenever they ask permission for something the answer tends to be no. By automatically saying "no" middle management isn't being fair to their subordinates. Instead give a concrete justification for saying no. It is much easier to say no then to forward a question or concern to their supervisor. After a while subordinates learn not to even ask for things because they know the answer will be No. Instead of having a top down hierarchical structure I propose that we strive for a middle of the road structure. Furthermore we have people in our community that are extremely hard to work for. If we don't build a foundation by treating even one with respect and dignity that they deserve then our sense of community activities will mean next to nothing. I always tell people treat me like you are a real estate agent and I was buying a million dollar home from your mortgage company. Of course, this person would be nice to the client because between the agent and the mortgage they would be splitting 10% commission or a hundred grand. Likewise I'll treat you the same way. A concerned worker. 6/13/2006 9:45:10 AM.

Dear AConcernedWorker: Many around here feel the same as you, that is, we sure could use a stronger sense of community around here. I can think of at least nine people; namely, the University Librarian and the members of the Library Sense of Community Committee. With so many people of like mind, how is it that we do NOT have a stronger feeling of commonwealth?

Certainly, one component of the problem is effective communication. I think your examples touch upon this fact. Interestingly enough, problems surrounding communication were identified by the Employee Recognition, the Sense of Community and the Staff Development Task Forces. These groups were, as you may know, ultimately reconstituted into the Library Support Staff Advisory Committee (SSAC).

It follows, then, that one of the first steps of the LSSAC was to try to improve the flow of conversation within the library and, at the same time, to lessen the effects of the hierarchical structure which you mention by creating a virtual Suggestion Box. The virtual Suggestion Box ensures that even those at the bottom of the pile are heard by those at the very top.

For this reason, I wanted to take a moment to say thanks for being one of the first employees to make use of this new medium.

Jay Jurek
4. Let's start a U of I Library bowling league. We can compete against other U of I sites or it can be regulars workers vs. supervisors. If the sites are involved we will either have to utilize our video conferencing or they would bowl at a separate time and record their scores. A concerned worker. 6/6/2006 2:49:29 PM.

Thank you for your wonderful suggestion. We are sharing your suggestions with administration and other interested parties. With the current state of our community as it stands, there remains some concern about the level of active participation for any proposed activity. While we continue to solicit suggestions and to determine the degree of interest in these suggestions, we are also continuing to explore alternatives. This point brings us to your next suggestion.

Chris Wadle

5. In order to promote a higher level of sense of community I suggest that we should have an online games club from 5 to 6 PM on a regular basis. In particular, Yahoo offers a variety of online games. I'm partial to Literati which is a Scrabble like word game. Furthermore, since 5-6 isn't prime work time we as library workers should be given the option of using work related computers so we are not competing with library users for public computers. After all part of the Sense of Community charge was incorporating all U of I library employees not just the ones who work in Chicago. The Internet offers people around the state to play in real time. In order to effectively implement this event the SSAC would have to know the screen names of all participants prior to playing. I suggest grouping individuals by level of game experience such as beginners, intermediate, and advanced. Furthermore all participants should be in the same Social Lounge ("room") to play the game. Literati has the ability of accommodating up to five people per game. In addition to playing, players can chat to each other to further build a stronger sense of community. A Concerned Worker. 5/19/2006 9:59:55 AM.

Again, you make a great suggestion. In this case, gaming represents an area of current interest to many in library careers. For this reason, a gaming-session may be able to double as a community-building activity as well as a training or developmental activity. The SSAC and SSOC are currently exploring opportunities for a developmental or training session of this kind.

Thank you for making your suggestions known to us and please do not hesitate to make further suggestions.

Chris Wadle
6. Staff development provides training and tips for areas that we work in everyday. If we had more workshops and training it would give us a renewed excitement about what we do. I really love my job. I think training would give me more insight and tips on how to do it even better. Meeting with other circulation supervisors would give us time to compare notes and give each other suggestions to be more affective in day to day operations. I have had to learn my job by asking a lot of questions and everyone has been great about this but I think workshops on different aspects of our job would help keep us fresh. 5/19/2006 7:03:03 AM.

Taking pride in our jobs and doing them well helps not only us as individuals but the greater organization as well. Thanks for your suggestion.

The Staff Development Subcommittee has created a web page to centralize and advertise training opportunities available to staff. You can find this developing space on the SSAC webpage, located at the following URL:

http://www.uic.edu/depts/lib/staff/commwork/ssac/

Jacqueline Leskovec

[Editor’s Note – Current training opportunities available to staff are already being compiled at the above link. The SSAC will continue to identify these opportunities and to post them there. Moreover, the Suggestion Box remains available to receive other items of interest for training and development. Jay Jurek, 08/25/2006.]