

TOURING STRATEGIES AND HOW TO DEAL WITH CHANGE

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I had an overflow table. I let the table members decide what they wanted to talk about and we pick two that seemed to be of interest to most of the docents.

I. Touring Strategies

- One of the things that all of them agreed upon is the importance of asking the right questions of the audience.
- The questions are important because the docent can determine the level of the audience and can adjust what (and how) she/he says to the group. It is important to be able to interact with people of diverse cultural and educational backgrounds.
- Visual Teaching Strategies can help give guidance in this.
- Some of the docents talked about the different kind of tours and having to be able to balance the quest for the facts about an object to discussing and getting at an emotional reaction to the object.
- They noted that some people are resistant, especially adults, to talking about the feelings generated by the object.
- Using the compare and contrast method is a good way to break down resistance to learning new ways to look at objects.
- Each period of art has different modes of how to be introduced to an audience. It is helpful, if docents ask the audience what their interests are so that they can emphasize those interests in the objects. In this way the tour is more personalized to that particular group.
- Some docents suggested that the docent could ask for a brief evaluation at the end of the tour.
- It is also possible to ask the tour, if there is anything in particular the visitors want to see. If the object is something the docent knows little about, it is ok to say “I don’t know much about this, but let’s see what we can learn together.”

II. Difficulties in Touring Strategies

- Of interest at this point was some discussion by docents regarding “canned talks” and “have-tos” by museum staff. Some of them expressed dismay that they were told that there were certain things they had to say about an object and they couldn’t vary what they said even though they felt there were better ways of giving the tour.
- They felt they weren’t trusted by the educational/tour director to know about the object and be able to approach the audience in the best suitable way.

- The docents as a whole wanted the freedom to suit their tour/talk to the audience that was before them and not give the same tour to everyone.
- One of the biggest frustrations was a too crowded area in which it was difficult to move around. The solution was for better communication between docents and between docents and the tour scheduler.

II. How to deal with change.

- There are various kinds of change that some docents have difficulty dealing with including a change in technology, change in staff, change in scheduling and a change in museum layout due to renovation.
- Maybe some of the resistance is due to the need to be heard and a loss of control and a loss of ownership over the way they are to handle the situation.
- Listening and empathizing with fears and anxieties can be a start to making a person feel more comfortable with change.
- Enlisting docent in a solution to the problem can give a sense of ownership to the outcome.
- The biggest problem seems to be when the solutions or change is imposed from outside with the notions that “this is now going to be how it’s done.”
- The biggest component to dealing with change is communication and being candid with the docent body.

III. Conclusion

- Both these questions and the stories the docents told during the discussion seemed to be related, in the main, to the docent organization’s relationship with the staff.
- Those docents who were respected by the staff and involved in the docent decisions in the museum seemed to be the happiest and most fulfilled docents.
- None of them expressed a fear of peer review and having standards, but they wanted have some say in the way docents were used at the museum. They especially wanted to have the flexibility to adjust their tours to the audience they had right now in front them.
- They wanted to be respected for the abilities and training they have.
- But please note that their comments were not negative and they were not complaining about their museum staff. They were expressing what they would like.