

WAYS TO IMPROVE DOCENT AND STAFF RELATIONSHIPS

Moderator: Wendy Wiebe, Docent, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada

- I Staff versus Docents – Interpersonal Relationship Issues
 - Wanting help
 - Being listened to or being ignored
 - Wanting control or wanting to share
 - Accepting or delegating responsibility
 - Flexibility or Inflexibility

- II Challenges for Docents
 - How do docents deal with inadequate training and support from staff?
 - How do docents deal with too much staff interference when they feel qualified and eager to take on responsibilities?
 - How do docents best communicate ideas and problems to staff?
 - How do docents deal with unreasonable staff demands?

- III Challenges for Staff
 - How to deal with strong assertive docents when the staff member is responsible to gallery management ?
 - How to deal with docents who want to “take over” their job?
 - How to provide satisfactory training in both art history content and good teaching strategies? Who should do this?
 - How to monitor accountability and high standards of performance?

- IV Solutions
 - Relations are better if docents work with a staff member rather than work for a staff member.
 - Independent Docent Councils have a role to play for better communication and understanding with staff.
 - Elected Docent Councils who have committees that take on the responsibilities for recruitment, training, evaluation etc., are successful in being accepted as equal partners on the museum team
 - Staff should explain the “whole picture” of responsibilities and accountability within the museum.
 - For training both new and old docents, use the best qualified person available.....whether paid staff & curators or volunteer docents & retired teachers.
 - Staff should delegate responsibility whenever possible to make docents feel needed and valuable. It is a winning situation when docents and staff learn from each other and share activities.