Ideal Staffing Structure

A redesigned lifelong learning program must have a staffing structure that is streamlined and clearly understood. Staff need to know what their responsibilities are and they must be willing to work as a team with other staff. Each person is an important cog in the wheel and must feel important but also must be accountable for his/her performance.

For the last three years, LERN has been describing a staffing structure that has included three components, CEO/director, programming, and operations. During the last year, two more components, marketing and sales, have been added. These new components have evolved because marketing has become more complex and because the need for contract training by businesses and organizations has exploded.

This new staffing structure is being embraced by associations, recreation departments, colleges and universities, and all other types of lifelong learning programs. The structure has evolved from the successful experiences of for-profit businesses and has been tested by independent lifelong learning programs, both for-profit and non-profit. The following are the five component of this staffing structure.

CEO/Director — The CEO/director is the leader of the lifelong learning program. She is the visionary who is in touch with what is going on in the field and is committed to the program's mission, vision, values and unique selling proposition (USP).

The key responsibility of this position is marketing. This "high dollar" work is done by reaching into the program's community and searching for new market and product opportunities that are then brought back to the rest of the program to test, develop and implement.

At the same time, the CEO/director needs to focus her time on staff development. She wants to have the most knowledgeable and capable staff possible.

As the leader of the lifelong learning program, the CEO/director manages the operations professional, the promotions professional, the sales professional and the programming professional — her management team — and together

this team makes sure that the program's one-year marketing plan is followed and other policy decisions are made.

The CEO/director's job involves environmental scanning, testing, research, analyzing the competition, financial and budgetary skills, reams of paper with statistics from the program and listening.

Programming Professional — The programming professional and his staff are primarily responsible for the development of new products for present customers and selecting existing products for new markets.

The programming staff should not be involved in the day-to-day operations of the lifelong learning program. They need to be given the time to research, test and develop. The most successful programmers are those that manage customers and not products. Programmers accountable for a segment of customers are able to spend time talking to, surveying and learning from customers so they can better develop and price courses/events that will generate registrations.

Thus, the programmers must be accountable for numbers. They need to be able to justify their selections by predicting the final registration, income, operating margin and quality performance and by recommending specific marketing strategies learned while interacting with customer segments. Instructors are accountable to programmers. Programmers hire, fire, evaluate, train and negotiate with instructors.

Programmers also work directly with sales professionals when contracts are developed. The sales professional "opens the door," but the programmers work with the sales person and the client to develop a product that best meets the client's need.

Critical activities of a programmer are market research, market data collection, including extensive data collection on customer demographics and purchasing history, customer and target audience research, marketing strategies, planning, new product development, initial instructor recruitment, budgeting and analysis.

Operations Professional — The operations professional and her staff are primarily responsible for the day-to-day management of the lifelong learning program. While the

programmers focus on customer management, the operations staff focus on customer service.

"Customer service" areas include registration, promotion production and distribution, bookkeeping and refunds, management information services (reports), logistics such as room setup, tabulating course/event evaluations, scheduling repeat instructors for future teaching slots and other routine activities.

Most support staff are members of the operations staff. The operations professional is responsible for coordinating staff and setting priorities, as well as contracting out work that can be better done by someone not on staff.

An important position on the operations staff is the information specialist. This person is the primary contact for customers with questions or problems. The information specialist is trained to answer most questions and if he does not know the answer, he can contact the appropriate programmer for the answer. The information specialist is also given the authority to make refund decisions and other decisions that will give a customer an immediate answer.

A lifelong learning program with limited operations problems and challenges is better poised to grow. The operations professional is responsible for eliminating operations headaches, as well as supplying the rest of the program with information that they can use when making decisions.

Promotions Professional — The promotions professional is responsible for "think marketing." She is the one who develops marketing strategies that are implemented by the operations staff. Like the programmers, she is not involved in the day-to-day operations of the program.

Since marketing is everything we do, it has become a much more complex responsibility. The promotions professional is responsible for the program's image, as well as selecting mailing lists and deciding the number of promotions to print.

A key component of the job is looking at purchasing history and key demographic statistics. The promotions professional is the person who develops and tracks the program's market segments, making sure that the proper resources are being spent on the segments that are most valuable to the program.

She is also responsible for the design of the program's brochure and other promotional efforts. Whether the materials are printed or on the web site, the promotions professional is responsible for the image and message being sent to customers and non-customers.

Under the direction of the CEO/director, the promotions professional develops the program's one-year marketing plan. This is done in coordination with the other professionals, but it is her responsibility to get the plan produced on time. It is also her responsibility to get the one-year marketing plan end-of-year report completed.

This is a new position, but one that will make an enormous difference to a lifelong learning program. We do not think about marketing enough and this position has the luxury to do just that, as well as test various promotion options.

Sales Professional — The sales professional is responsible for selling contracts. This person is a salesperson who directly works with clients, selling contracts that meet the clients' needs/wants.

The sales professional is in the business of relationship selling. He needs to be meeting with clients, explaining the capabilities of the lifelong learning program and developing a relationship based on trust. Most contracts are sold on the merits of the salesperson and not the perceived merits of the product.

The sales professional's duties require him to develop a relationship with both the programming and operations staffs. He makes the initial client contact and then works with the programming staff to develop a product. Once the contract is signed, he works with the operations staff to implement the contract. The sales professional is not a product developer, although he is capable of explaining product options, and he is not the person who monitors each contract. He must be freed up to continue to make contacts for future business.

Sales professionals can do initial client needs assessments, as well as quality assurance audits at the completion of the contract. This person must be organized and must keep good records of past purchases, as well as needs/wants.

Ideal Staffing Structure

CEO/Director

- Programming Professional
  - Programming Staff
    - Instructors
- Sales Professional
  - Sales Staff
- Promotions Professional
- Operations Professional
  - Operations Staff
    - Information Specialist
    - Front Line Staff