

Plan Ahead for Efficiency: This Thing Called Plan of Work

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TOM McCORMICK, writing in the January-March 1970 issue of *ACE*, hit a rather sore point when he wrote that editors need to get more mileage out of the work they do. I'd been thinking about the following ideas because I continually experience the exact thing McCormick suggests needs to be done. My beef is what is happening, namely retreading the same story for various outlets, should be a pre-planned thing rather than an afterthought.

The information specialist is charged with the responsibility of assisting the subject matter specialists (entomologist, plant pathologist, agronomist, etc.) in the effective dissemination of knowledge. In the working situation one views bulletins, news releases, slide strips, radio tapes, TV programs, charts, exhibits, etc. This is the technical angle or the point of production departure, after the foundation of use of the most effective tool for the dissemination of a specific bit of information to a specific audience. This, however, is not the base of information work or the launching pad, but rather the rocket fuel and the rocket used to move this bit of knowledge to the next planet. The launching pad is the theoretical base which dictated the technique or tool as effective in a particular situation.

An appropriate aside to this discussion at this time might be the consideration of the protective layer which is established over the launching pad. The protective layer is the common phrases, "we've always done it that way; it seems effective; I don't have the time to." What the protective layer is really saying is that lack of planning, lack of initiative, or lack of imagination is forcing one to use the same tool to achieve various educa-

tional objectives. The author is in no way implying that procedures that have been time-tested should not be used; rather, that each educational program is different and the tools used for the specific educational project should be those which will be most effective. When the appropriate tools are the old tried and true ones, the author would be the first to recommend them. The base for any effective dissemination project must start with an information specialist who can advise the subject matter specialist on the most effective tool or tools to use for the most effective teaching. Procedurally, the subject matter specialist and the information specialist must review the program of information dissemination to be used in a particular program of the program plan of the subject matter specialist. These two must explore the tools available for the job and the expertise needed to use these tools.

Planning starts with an overall understanding of communication theory. The information specialist must be completely aware of these theories and the situations in which they are effective. He must also know the pitfalls contained in the application of the theory. The subject matter specialist needs an awareness level of the communication theory and a working knowledge of the tools which might be used.

One assumes that the specialist in information has the working knowledge of the communication theories and tools to effectively advise the specialist on the program concerned. Ideally, each specialist has such a total working knowledge, or has ready access to a specialist in a particular field of information work who can advise the subject matter specialist on effective use of that particular specialty.

The "name of the game" is reaching people with information to help them in their decision making. The initiation of such an educational program may begin at the grass roots level when clientele request certain information or it may come from a researcher who has new knowledge of which the citizen is not aware. Some programs of education are the result of research on the level of knowledge or use of some practice, a need to communicate exists. It is the job of the information specialist and the subject matter specialist to review this need and develop a course of action which will resolve the problem.

Extension work is not done in a vacuum and should not be planned there. Each specialist develops a plan of work and

allocates his time to the plan he has established. This plan should be explicit in the communication efforts that will be employed to achieve the goals established in the plan. Also included in the plan should be very specific plans for evaluation of the individual line items.

Once the projects of the plan of work are established, the subject matter specialist and the information specialist can review the plan. Together they look at the problem, audience, and the alternative methods which can be used to reach that audience. They also look at the evaluation procedures which will test the effectiveness of the communication tools used.

In some instances the audience may come to the source. In horticulture, for example, clientele may call a specialist for advice. The question here is how best to use the specialist's time to answer these calls. In some cases the specialist may want to second-guess the caller and reach him before he calls.

Other programs require that the specialist "beat the drums" for his audience. If the audience is general, the question becomes one of saturation of general audience media to effectively reach a large percentage of clientele. If the audience is specialized, one looks for the communication lines available for reaching a specialized audience.

The end result of such planning and review by the subject matter specialist and information specialist should be a plan of work for each and a guide to follow in reaching the specific clientele.

With the establishment of such procedural planning, the information specialist will be able to establish his plan of work. In the plan requiring considerable funding for the production of communication aids and equipment, the establishment of such a plan allows for administrative approval for the completion of this particular project. More important is the fact that time allotments can be made within staff schedules for the plan of work, thus avoiding difficult deadlines for the production work.