

MCLS Virtual Dialogue
Staff Morale During Stressful Times
August 28, 2020 – 11:00 am EDT

Participants were placed in small groups in the breakout rooms for 15 minutes of conversation.

1st Breakout Room Conversation Questions:

What are some things that you have done at your library, or your library has done for you during these trying times, to help maintain or increase staff morale? Did it help improve your morale? If so, how?

- 11:26:19 From Kelly Jacobsma: I shared this article
<https://elemental.medium.com/your-surge-capacity-is-depleted-it-s-why-you-feel-awful-de285d542f4c>
- 11:26:36. From Cathy Lancaster: I came across this article this week and it was just fantastic....
<https://elemental.medium.com/your-surge-capacity-is-depleted-it-s-why-you-feel-awful-de285d542f4c>
- 11:26:44 From Patricia VanArsdale:
- Five summer reading t-shirts, each staff got four and then could pick an additional shirt; let staff wear shorts
 - Full pay, will continue to get paid; some suffered unfairness because some are working all the time and some working less and everyone still gets paid the same
- 11:26:50 From bmcnaair:
- At my library we have had a variety of food events such as individual pizzas, ice cream treats, taco day, etc.
- 11:26:56 From Cathy Lancaster: @Kelly! Jinx!
- 11:27:00 From Julie Garrison:
- We discussed areas where we are trying to build community and morale - some are working better than others
 - keeping some of the normal “celebrations” (like birthday) alive via new way - e.g. prepackaged treats
- 11:27:03 From Sandy Petrie - Noble County:
- Communication really important.
 - These type of meetings help all of us not feel alone.
 - Projects staff can rally around and get excited about (parking lot Halloween)
 - Positive energy
 - Active listening
- 11:27:33 From Julie Garrison:
- trying lots of ways to keep community - opportunities to meet and talk, meetings, etc.
- 11:27:44 From Julie Garrison:
- virtual retirement parties

- 11:27:58 From Dillon Geshel, PLDL:
- Now using a chat app for staff, which includes channels for non-work related fun memes and other posts, and a kudos channel for celebrating our wins
 - virtual chats for staff every week, sharing good news in these meetings
 - hazard pay bonus for all front-line staff
 - daily huddles to talk through anxieties
 - therapists made available for library staff for one-on-one sessions
 - niche academy tutorials that helped with motivation.
- 11:28:13 From bmcnair: Why your surge capacity is depleted article:
<https://elemental.medium.com/your-surge-capacity-is-depleted-it-s-why-you-feel-awful-de285d542f4c>
- 11:28:16 From Julie Garrison:
- weekly "trivia contest"
 - yoga
 - other ways to keep well-being at the forefront
- 11:28:22 From Kristin Shelley:
- Most of us said it is hard to get a read on staff right now.
 - Mixed bag of staff who want to be open and who do not want to be open.
 - LCC and ELPL did staff virtual get togethers--virtual teas, video games via zoom, trivia night.
 - Lots of Zoom staff meetings--mixed on staff participation
- 11:29:11 From Patricia VanArsdale:
- Friends supply a once a month surprise for staff, prepackaged lunch from area business, next month is pie, something planned every month through December
 - Mailbox treats, partnering with local orchard to give away apples and then prepackaged popcorn for national popcorn month
- 11:30:05 From Beth Johns: I forgot to mention in room 7
- we have one staff member who puts out a monthly "morale" message via email
 - Meditation, breathing exercises, etc.
- 11:30:12 From Stephanie Olson:
- mindfulness techniques on a tip board including breathing exercises
 - cupcake day
 - food rewards where allowed
 - HAPPY NEWS.com
 - Invite Staff to outdoors breaktimes more frequently
 - funny cartoons and YouTube Videos
 - food from the gardens shared as well as flowers
 - practice kindness
 - share "love" letters from customers
 - flexible schedules

- talk to each other about non-COVID and patience to allow a work slow down....wow add if I missed

11:30:54 From Beth Johns: We call it "Wednesday Wellness" because it's always on Wednesdays. She started doing this last fall.

11:30:54 From Eva Davis:

- Flexible scheduling
- one-on-one phone calls ahead of reopening to checkin after several months off to discuss personal challenges and answer questions about what reopening and welcoming students back would be like which helped make connections again.
- Staff zoom game nights helped maintain social and work connections.
- Important for directors and managers to express gratitude for their staff and their hard work. Food!
- Individually wrapped sweet, savory, and frozen snacks.
- Assuring staff that there are supports available to them--their manager, HR, various leave and scheduling options, employee assistance program.
- Library was able to pay staff during closure, add time off to leave banks.
- Friends donated money to library which allowed us to pay for food/treats, reusable silverware packs since staff kitchen dishes are unavailable.
- Was able to pull January 2021 raises into this year, which was a huge morale booster.
- Let staff know that none of us is functioning at 100% and letting them know "good enough" is ok.

11:31:14 From Stephanie Olson:

- Forgot to maybe suggest that staff reduce listening to news too much....

11:32:51 From krothley: A Library board member just dropped off donuts and cider!!!!

11:33:17 From Cathy Lancaster: @krothley Yum!

11:33:55 From Cathy Lancaster: Slack, Teams, etc.

11:34:02 From Kelly Jacobsma: Ooooh - donuts and cider.

11:35:43 From Milan Public Library: I think that's goodnewsnetwork.com

11:36:22 From Dillon Geshel, PLDL:

- we end all of our daily huddles with "who has positive news to share", and staff are always excited to share something. It helps us start the day on a positive note.

11:36:24 From krothley: There's also Some Good News by John Krasinski

11:36:26 From Cathy Lancaster: So many sweet treat ideas. COVID 19 lbs... ;)

11:37:00 From Dale Parus, Ionia Community Library: Yes, agree on the love letters, we do that, too.

Participants were then placed in small groups in breakout rooms for small group conversation.

2nd Breakout Room Conversation Question:

Imagine that it is 6 months from now, and our situation with the pandemic has not changed, but what has changed is that you or your staff now feel generally good about going to work each day. You still have struggles, but for the most part you're able to thrive despite the struggles, and you really feel that your workplace has made the "human element" a priority. What support is your library providing that is helping you and your co-workers thrive?

- 11:59:46 From Cathy Lancaster: The positive of all of this is the flexibility and imagination of all libraries in response to connecting with and engaging our communities the adaptations and inspiration has been amazing
- 11:59:50 From Patricia VanArsdale:
- Not limiting who can come to work when
 - Hazard Pay
- 11:59:56 From Cathy Lancaster:
- Challenging staff to list some personal and work goals, and then asking "how can the library help you achieve those?"
 - Delaying new strategic plan and operating in a "let's just keep the wheels on" mode.
 - Changes in work space - physically as well as in job duties.
 - Ask this breakout question with our staff directly.
 - Loss of income, workplace safety, short-staffed - all seem almost too overwhelming to answer this question for some.
 - Support to make a better workplace: Empower staff to reimagine programs and letting some traditions go is a silver-lining to look forward to.
 - "The positive of all of this is the flexibility and imagination of all libraries in response to connecting with and engaging our communities the adaptations and inspiration has been amazing."
 - More transparency from administration can support a more positive workplace, for example sharing COVID exposure, and consistency in decision making.
 - Flexibility for work schedules for those with families who are dependent on staff.
- 12:00:47 From Lauren Weddle:
- Being flexible and meeting one-on-one with them to see what will work for them (especially if parents, caretakers, etc.)
- 12:01:28 From Beth Johns: Hi -- I need to cut out, but this has been interesting and fun. Nice to meet you all. Best wishes!
- 12:01:45 From krothley: bye Cathy!
- 12:01:48 From Megan Buck: Room 7 - Our note taker had to step away so I am filling in!
- We talked about the things like extra cleaning, tech struggles, and self pressure as things that are causing people not to feel good now - so things

like more custodial staff (or daytime custodial staff)

- having a go bag ready for a quick change to working from home
- finding out to how reach people (text/email/zoom)
- We talked about "chill breaks" and mindfulness to keep people from burnout.
- We also talked about surveys to make sure staff feel heard! .. and maybe a bunch of other things I forgot!

12:01:50

From Dillon Geshel, PLDL:

- provide a plan for service based on the changing needs of our patrons
- continued increased communication for staff
- collaborative decision making when it comes to budgets, big changes for staff
- checking in with staff one-on-one often
- some sort of rewards program that rewards staff for sharing self-care ideas with each other
- therapy dog for staff
- letting everyone on your team know it is OK to not be 100% on 100% of the time
- having the library board step-up
- be more vocal
- consider new benefits like hazard pay and a good telecommuting policy

12:02:46

From Lauren Weddle:

- Support for staff-patron interactions/making sure all staff are working from the same rule book in a consistent manner
- communication, kudos, praise, and recognition even for the small things to make sure staff knows they and their work are appreciated
- emotional support
- being there to discuss and let go of bad interactions

12:02:50

From Stephanie Olson:

- Tailgate storytimes
- book crates for classroom collections
- recognizing we are all in this together
- wishes and hopes for vaccine
- getting out of the building to take services out more
- reminders to Boards and Management to recognize and support staff
- REALM study results and maybe some more specific guidelines might be possible rather than "findings"

12:02:55

From Eva Davis: It is difficult to answer this question when every day feels like triage and we don't feel confident in predicting the future.

- We will continue to check-in with staff and take the time to fine-tune plans that were made in haste when the pandemic started.
- Seek out staff feedback, continue to assure them, communicate and give them certainty where you can, even though you may not feel very certain.

- Take the opportunity to redefine libraries and our services, think about our spaced and how we can serve the community differently.
- Encourage ideas and give people a feeling a purpose and hope.
- It is very hard not to have answers--we are librarians and want to have answers. We need to acknowledge that things are different now, try to be comfortable and flexible within uncertainty.
- Try to find a way to reconnect with our "regulars" and re-establish connections to our community, which may not be in the traditional library setting anymore.

12:04:08

From Jim Ratliff:

- One librarian said, "We're more task oriented now, but we still need to ask staff: What would be meaningful for you in your daily work life? What is burdensome to you?"
- The idea that Action is a good antidote to anxiety, which suggests positive can happen around group work.
- Here's a new kind of Library Outcome/Goal: in 6 months, no one getting sick in library.
- I believe we will be more accustomed to the unknown of "living with the virus", as part of the stress has been the unprecedented nature of the situation.
- OK for Library Admin saying: We don't have all the answers. And I can't make the decisions, even as the library director, so be patient.

12:06:22

From Patricia VanArsdale: I love the honesty when a library director says, "I don't have the answers." This lets staff know that no one is withholding information or just not communicating. As we all know communication does not always filter down or takes a lot of time.

12:08:46

From Stephanie Olson: Staff Loss is a big issue!

12:14:11

From Kelly Jacobsma: Sorry, I need to leave. Good seeing everyone.

12:14:18

From Jan Davidson, MCLS: Thanks, Kelly!

Participants were then asked a final reflection question.

What is one small step you can take in the coming weeks to help improve the morale of your library staff, or your own morale?

12:14:25

From Dillon Geshel, PLDL: Over communicate clarity.

12:14:42

From Kristin Shelley: tap into local therapists.

12:14:43

From Bill Bowman: Take a few minutes to listen better. Proper listening.

12:14:46

From Yvonne: Be more intentional about regularly thanking staff individually.

12:14:52

From Amy Beckman: Checking in with staff to see how they are feeling at work/how their morale is

12:14:53

From Patricia VanArsdale: writing or typing a heart felt letter, not an email to a staff member. Maybe even invite some regulars to do this.

12:14:54 From Megan Buck: I am planning a survey for next week (we've done 2 prior) and I have been making furious notes with great questions to add/change!

12:15:05 From krothley: a note of appreciation goes a long way

12:15:07 From Kristin Shelley: Even more communication

12:15:12 From bmcnair: take intentional time off to help recharge

12:15:14 From Vickie Weyand, Brighton, MI: To smile more, find the positives in the day and share them with everyone

12:15:15 From Ellen: remember that self-compassion gives one the strength to be outwardly compassionate

12:15:21 From Julie Garrison: Make sure to be available to our staff, to listen, to provide them with tools and mechanisms to feel confident, to maintain flexibility

12:15:36 From Patricia VanArsdale: I had a letter that said 3/3 summer volunteers said they do not deserve me and say that I am awesome.

12:15:49 From Patricia VanArsdale: what do the colors mean again?

12:16:13 From Lissa Krull, MCLS: The chat and video will be available next week.
<https://www.mcls.org/training-events/presentation-slides/>

12:16:13 From Tina Russette: I'm one to follow the rules and regulations more than my fellow staff members. so one way I have been trying to reduce this for myself is just to worry about what I'm doing to keeps safe.

12:16:14 From Dale Parus, Ionia Community Library: We do a monthly shooting star award. One random drawing wins and we publish all of the letters to all staff

12:16:15 From Sharon Crotser-Toy: Regularly acknowledging accomplishments; thanking people for all of the amazing things they are doing.

12:16:16 From Ellen: still aqua

12:16:18 From Stephanie Olson: Thank the staff in a meeting where they can talk about anything they want and remind the Board to do the same.

12:16:19 From Megan Buck: Mood check - I am feeling really motivated with new ideas to work on boosting morale... Hoping that some others on the staff will get a boost from my energy and keep it going --- so bluish green!:)

12:16:22 From Dillon Geshel, PLDL: blue but tired!

12:16:22 From Kathi Wittkamper, Anderson PL: BLUE

12:16:27 From Stephanie Olson: BLUE

12:16:39 From Sharon Crotser-Toy: Probably red

12:16:40 From Julie Garrison: Thank you, this conversation made my day!

12:16:44 From Trista Smith: my mood is beagle:)

12:16:47 From Dillon Geshel, PLDL: thanks everyone!

12:16:51 From Lissa Krull, MCLS: The chat and video will be available next week.
<https://www.mcls.org/training-events/presentation-slides/>

12:16:53 From krothley: thank you, this was very helpful

12:16:55 From Megan Buck: Thank you! This was great!!

12:16:55 From Patricia VanArsdale: I love these webinars. Thank you so much!

12:16:57 From Michelle Bunte, Lawrenceburg: Very helpful! Thank you so much!!

12:16:58 From krothley: it was nice to be able to connect to others

12:17:00 From bmcnair: Thank you for the discussion

12:17:03 From Yvonne: Thank you so much!
12:17:04 From Tina Russette: thanks so much
12:17:09 From Sharon Crotser-Toy: Thank you so much!
12:17:21 From dkristoff: Thank you
12:17:21 From Terry Rheinheimer (Middlebury Community PL): Thank you
12:17:28 From meb: Thank you!!
12:17:29 From Kristin Shelley: Thank you
12:18:23 From Dave Ewick: My kids would've done that, but now they are having kids of their own!