

Sept 20, 2002 Tech Coord

Electronic Janitor. What a descriptive phrase, to which I can certainly relate. I might agree that one of the toughest jobs around is "tech support"...and it sounds like Dr Reilly had an especially bad experience.

My first reponse to this article is one of empathy: I have been in those shoes and know what it is like to be unable to accomplish my job because work "issues" keep interrupting. And, frankly, even when there are mechanisms in place to handle those emergencies, Tech Support can be an ugly, unpredictable business.

From the sound of it, Dr Reilly took a position in an organization that had a bad (nonexistant?) Technology Plan. As we have just completed our evaluation of a Tech Plan, it appears to me that many of the troubles and complaints voiced by the Electronic Janitor might have been avoided, if there were a plan. Hiring a Tech Coordinator without a plan, job description or list of expectations certainly would result in such chaos. Further, I would say that a teacher with technology experience would not be the best choice for District Coordinator in a district with a poor tech plan. If there were an initiative to name a Tech Coordinator to assist with burgeoning technology growth, somebody more experienced in the harsh realities of Tech Support would have been a better equipped candidate; there would have been a better outcome and there would have been more satisfaction on the part of the Coordinator. Perhaps I am stating the obvious, but seems to me that the laundry list produced by the Electronic Janitor really summarized the points that should have been addressed in a Tech Plan. (Not to say that a teacher cannot be a tech coordinator, just that for effective outcomes, the choice of a tech coordinator must be made carefully, with goals and outcomes in line with experience and expectation.)

Tech Support and Tech Support Management are really difficult things to pin down. Things change so fast and the field is so new, that Tech Managers, perhaps more than other managers, need to be in close touch with their users/customers and staff. My own experience has shown me that Tech Management is an evolving endeavor. A person cannot walk in and think that it can all be handled and smoothed over. The field is influx, and frankly, educators are a challenging set of users to support. I mean that, Tech Support in other industries is a very different experience from Tech Support for educators and for the purpose of integrating technology into education.

(Not the same as teaching Business Execs how to run a powerpoint presentation. There are skills in common, but the environments, users and expected outcomes are VERY different.)

Being an Electronic Janitor is not a fun experience, but I would suggest that with effective leadership and proper planning, the outcomes will be more successful.

Catherine