

# directions

The journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators

## Special Issue

### 3 Review

StrengthsFinder 2.0

### 4 Age Diversity in the Workplace

### 7 Dealing with Difficult People

### 8 Is it Time to Say "You're Fired!?"

### 11 Review: The Search for Extraordinary Leadership

### 13 Hit by a Truck

### 14 Green & Gold Summit August 22-25, 2007

*This Special Issue of Directions is one of the benefits of membership in ANCA. Members also receive quarterly issues of Directions, along with discounted fees for ANCA's annual Summit and other benefits (see Membership Form on page 15).*

©2007 Association of Nature Center Administrators



**PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER  
RECYCLE THIS NEWSLETTER -  
GIVE IT TO A FRIEND**

## Strategic Staffing... & we all live happily ever after!

Looking to hire the perfect staff member? Need to better understand others from a different generation or culture? Searching for your successor? Just need a small attitude adjustment? Then sit back and enjoy these articles and tips - it's all included in this Special Issue of Directions. Read on!

## Positive Self-Talk

**Rebecca Brumm, MA, LLPC  
Employee Assistance Coordinator  
Family and Children's Service of  
Midland, MI**

Shh...Do you hear that? Listen closely. It's the sound of your own voice inside your head. If you ever take the time to listen, you may become familiar with why it exists. Any decision you make can be traced back to the steps you thought about and contemplated with in your own mind.

This internal thought process is called Self-talk, which is just that, us talking to ourselves. Self-talk has a great deal of power over how we feel and what we do. It's your brain's way of creating meaning in an event. This internal conversation works overtime and can actually lead us into feeling stressed out. Since this is the opposite of how most of us want to feel let me explain how self-talk influences the way we think, feel and act.

Events, the things that happen all day long, are neutral. They have absolutely no meaning on their own. But, when an event occurs our mind immediately looks to assign meaning to it. We begin to talk to ourselves. What we decide is based on our life experiences, how you are feeling, and even what you had for breakfast that

(continued on page 2)

**"The one who says it cannot be done, should not interrupt the one doing it."  
—Chinese proverb**

ANCA is a private, non-profit organization, dedicated to promoting and supporting best leadership and management practices for nature and environmental learning centers.

ANCA Headquarters  
Jen Levy, Executive Director  
jlevy@natctr.org  
435-787-8209  
800-490-2622  
www.natctr.org

SPECIAL ISSUE 2007

## ANCA Board of Directors

### PRESIDENT

Bo Glover  
Environmental Nature Center  
boglo@aol.com / 949-645-8489

### V.P. - DEVELOPMENT

Carolyn Chipman-Evans  
Cibolo Wilderness Nature Center  
cce@texas.net / 830-249-4616

### V.P. - PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Ann Rilling  
rlazys@hughes.net / 970-375-7090

### TREASURER

Paul Tebbel  
The Wildlife Center  
paul@thewildlifecenter.org  
505-753-9505

### SECRETARY

Jimmy Paz  
Sabal Palm Audubon Center & Sanctuary  
jppaz@sbcglobal.net / 956-541-8034

Alan Barnhardt  
Carolina Raptor Center  
alanbarnhardt@carolinaraptorcenter.org  
704-875-6521

Dave Catlin  
National Audubon Society  
dcatlin@audubon.org / 417-889-1871

Bobbi Geise  
bobbijo@imt.net / 406-582-1540

Jenny Harmon  
Ozark Natural Science Center  
jennymharmon@hotmail.com  
479-789-2754

Dede Long  
Briar Bush Nature Center  
dede@briarbush.org / 215-887-6603

Bob Mercer  
Silver Lake Nature Center  
ramercer@co.bucks.pa.us  
215-785-1177

Dick Touvell  
Chippewa Nature Center  
dtouvell@chippewanaturecenter.com  
989-631-0830

Saul Weisberg  
North Cascades Institute  
saul\_weisberg@ncascades.org  
360-856-5700

Ex Officio  
Tim Sandsmark  
Lookout Mountain Nature Center  
tsandsma@jeffco.us / 720-497-7602

## Self-Talk

(continued from page 1)

day. Many factors affect the thoughts that go into the interpretations we make.

These thoughts then influence the feelings we have about the event. The feelings we have then determine how we behave. If it all seems a little too confusing let me provide you with an example. You come into work and say "hi" to a co-worker and the greeting is not returned. You may feel angry, rejected or insulted which comes not from the co-worker's lack of response, but from what you think it means.

In this situation you are assuming the lack of reply reflects negative feelings about you. It is entirely possible that the lack of response has to do with many other factors and nothing to do with you at all.

**Challenge your thoughts.** Think of other possible explanations. Possibly the coworker had a fight with their spouse, or an ill child, or simply hasn't had a chance to have their morning cup of coffee.

Again, interpretations, assumptions and thoughts about an event determine feelings and ultimately mood. Change the thought, you will change the mood.

Although many of us naturally criticize ourselves in our self talk, it can be very damaging. Negative self-talk increases our perception of stress, limits potential, and shades experiences. Replacing them with positive thoughts reduces stress and empowers us to think differently.

So, how can you begin to change your negative thoughts into positive ones? You can start by recognizing your internal dialogue. Ask yourself, "Would I say this to a person I love?" Or, "Of all the possible reasons for something to happen, how likely is this the cause?" Additionally, "Is this

thought helping me to handle this situation?"

There are also exercises you can do to become more aware of your own negative self-talk. They include things like journal writing, where you record the negative messages you catch yourself saying. Also, an exercise named Look at the Clock where you set an alarm to ring at set intervals. When it sounds you stop what you are doing and listen to the internal thought running through your mind at that time. For those who want quick results, there is one called Rubber-Band Snap. This includes wearing a rubber-band

**"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, overcivilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life." —John Muir**

around your wrist and snapping it every time a negative thought enters your mind. The pain you experience becomes associated with the negative thought and therefore makes you want to stop quickly.

Once you are aware of your negative self talk you can begin replacing it with positive messages. There are several ways this can be done. For starters, try simply substituting the message with milder or even positive wording. You can also change self-limiting statements like, "I can't do this" to questions such as "how can this be done?" Lastly, try giving your negative message a voice by telling the thought to a trusted person. Sometimes just hearing it out loud is enough for us to know it is irrational.

In conclusion, by engaging in these activities we can limit the amount of stress we experience in our daily lives. Use these simple steps to begin feeling capable, empowered and happy with the person you are. 🌿

## Book Review

# StrengthsFinder 2.0

## Now Discover Your Strengths

**Dede Long**  
**Executive Director**  
**Briar Bush Nature Center**  
**Abington, PA**

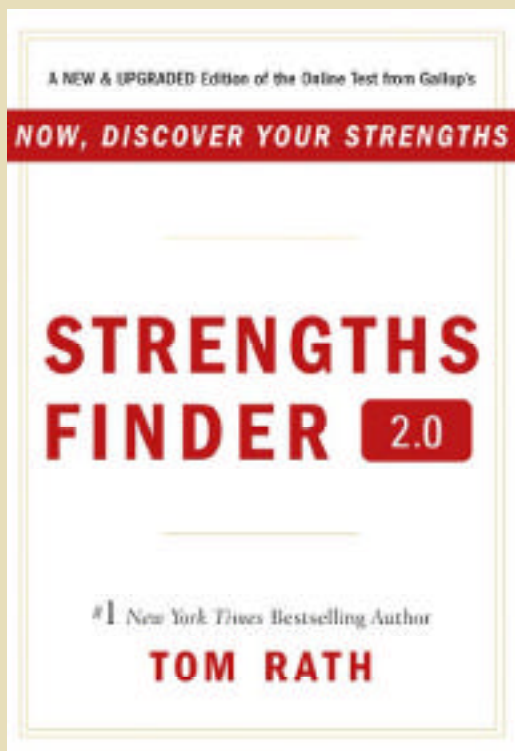
Okay, I'm a sucker for those personality types/skills/strengths tests! Just when I'm ready to tear my hair out because "John has some serious anger issues!" and "Sue has been winning the Ms. Negative Talent Contest for the past several years," I remember Linda Goodman's Sun Signs, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and revisit just how very special and different human beings really are. Underneath it all, John and Sue have some wonderful qualities and they're great teachers so... I need to relax and make the most of that!

Now, Discover Your Strengths, Marcus Buckingham & Donald O. Clifton's book came to my staff via a Chamber of Commerce Leadership course. I like the fact that the focus is discovering your greatest gifts, not fixing your weaknesses.

The authors proclaim that this is a "revolutionary program that shows you how to develop your unique talents and strengths – and those of the people you manage." It offered my staff the opportunity to focus on the positive things that each of

us brings to the organization. I found the results powerful for my own development, for my success as a manager, and for the success of our Center. "As unique individuals, we each have our own special ways of successfully approaching the people and events in our lives."

Strength in action may look like an awesome performance done in an effortless manner. If it sounds like our ANCA version of excellence, it is!



I'd encourage you to get the follow-up book, Strengthsfinder 2.0 by Tom Rath and take the online interview which reveals your top five talents. It was cheaper, shorter, and covered the same info as the original book. If you like it, buy it for the whole staff. They'll each need their own book to sign in online and take the test.

Even the reluctant ones found value and insight regarding themselves and their co-workers. In our staff of only eleven, it was clearly beneficial to collectively possess twentyseven of the thirtyfour signature themes.

Who wouldn't want to utilize people with talents such as Learner, Harmony, Responsibility, Futuristic, Discipline, Analytical, Empathy, etc.?

I'll tell you mine, if you'll tell me yours! 🍁

# Age Diversity in the Workplace

## The Benefits & Frustrations of Managing a Multi-Generational Workforce

**Ruth Lundin**  
President  
Jamestown Audubon Society  
Jamestown, NY

"Decrease the average age of the membership." "Attract more members with school age children." "Address the young, single population."

Do these directives sound familiar? Many nature center directors are striving to identify effective means of delivering their messages to today's young adults. How do we reach them when they are being bombarded by millions of messages through consumer advertising based on the most sophisticated research, striving to convince them that there are hundreds of more urgent demands for their attention than nature or the wellbeing of the earth?

To attract younger people to a center's programs, the staff should reflect the age diversity of the intended audience. However, the act of hiring younger people into an organization will not necessarily result in the intended outcomes. It can, in fact, cause disruptions in the organization, because of the world views and expectations of different generations.

This is a recognized management issue, with experts weighing in on both sides. Some say, in effect, "No problem. It's not a generational thing, just an age thing. Young adults have never had loyalty or cared about the long term. Just make your expectations clear, communicate, and reward them."

Others say, "This new generation grew

up in such a different environment that they don't even think the same way you do."

Supposedly, Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) think like a VHS tape while Generations X (1964-1979) and Y (1980-2000) think like a DVD.

Today's young adults require a new awareness from their managers. Eric Chester, who coined the phrase "Generation Why" for the Y Generation, reminds us "psychologists pretty much agree that our values drive our decisions and that our decisions forge our identities and individuality and shape our lives. They also remind us that our core values are programmed into us during our first fifteen to sixteen years of life, through a combination of five major life-shaping influences: Parents/Family; Schools/Education; Religion/Morality; Friends/Peers; and Media/Culture."<sup>1</sup>

Baby Boomers, who generally represent today's management in nature centers around the country,

grew up with Gilligan's Island and Flipper, the Dolphin and hours in the woods with friends. Generation Why has grown up with Sex in the City, the Crocodile Hunter, and text messaging with friends. They are accustomed to processing multiple stimuli at what seems like a blinding rate.

Recognizing the danger of stereotyping, one of the most frustrating differences between these generations is their means of attacking a problem. Baby Boomers take pride in their ability to work through a problem, to "logic" it out. In fact, they were taught that the best way to learn is by doing.

With their cell phones and internet access, today's young people first "ask an expert." The way to solve a problem is to find someone with the answer. Just like the "life line" in the TV show "Who Wants to be a Millionaire." One manager notes, "When I am mentoring, I have sensed that my younger staff resents it if I am not immediately forthcoming with my method for addressing an issue. I seem

(continued on next page)

### Core Values<sup>4</sup>

Baby Boomers: Optimistic, Team orientation, Personal gratification, Health and wellness, Personal growth, Youth, Work, Involvement

Gen Xers: Diversity, Think globally, Balance, Technoliteracy, Fun, Informality, Self-reliance, Pragmatism

The Whyers: Optimism, Civic duty, Confidence, Achievement, Sociability, Morality, Street smarts, Diversity

to hear "if you know the answer, tell me, and let's get on with it!"

To a Baby Boomer, this appears to be laziness, but on further reflection, is it really a question of method?

Reflecting, this manager states, "When I was coming up in the business world, I was talking to an older manager about a problem, and I said, 'look it up on the computer.' His response? 'I don't mash buttons.' Needless to say, he was gone in less than a year. Now that I am probably his age, is my refusal to get a cell phone any different? I justify it by saying it is my way to express to my staff that they are

threatening, but remember the old rejoinder "lead, follow or get out of the way." It may be time to follow the lead of our younger staff to develop new ways to reach out to the "up and comers" in the community.

According to the literature, here are some of the common characteristics coming out of the major life-shaping influences that have impacted today's young adults:

- First, which is no big surprise, is their understanding and use of technology.
- Second, is their preference for flexible jobs, which are multifaceted and changing.

### Generational Comparison Chart: Attitudes and Influences of Adolescents<sup>3</sup>

Topic	Baby Boomers (1946-1964)	Generation X (1964-1979)	Generation Why (1980-1994)
The Future	Is ours!	Sucks!	Might not happen!
Television	Bonanza	Family ties	Jerry Springer
Wealth	I'll earn it!	I don't care that much about it	Gimme, or I'll take it
Heroes/Role Models	Men of character	Men & women of character	What's character?
Kids killing Kids	Unthinkable	It's possible	It's everywhere
Employment for Teens	Hard to find	I'll work if I have to	Jobs are a dime a dozen
Loyalty to Employer	I can work my way to the top!	This could lead to the top!	If I can't take Saturday off, I'll quit!
Parents	Try to please them	Try to put up with them	Aren't around much
Justice	Always prevails	Usually prevails	Can be bought.
School/Training	Tell me WHAT to do.	Show me HOW to do it.	WHY do I need to learn this?
Communication	Via parents' phone	Via personal phone	Pager/cell phone/text messaging
Promiscuity leads to	Mono	Herpes	AIDS

empowered to make decisions in my absence. However, is it perceived this way, or rather as a sign that I wish to remain aloof and withhold the knowledge gained from years of experience?"

Finally, is it realistic to hope that Gen Y'ers may be able to help us find ways to attract young people to our programs? Bruce Tulgan, a consultant who has written books on managing intergenerational conflicts wrote: "For me the only reason to look at generational issues at all is...if looking at them through that lens helps business leaders and managers to get a better understanding of what's actually going on and how to solve the problem and move closer to an optimal position in terms of the organization's goals."<sup>2</sup>

One characteristic which lends itself to a positive answer is that Generations X & Y have little reverence for the past. Their surroundings change so quickly, nothing is sacred. This clear perspective can see new ways to attract people and effectively communicate the organization's messages. For Boomers, it is hard to look beyond traditional methods and the concern over what the impacts of change might be on the organization. It may be frightening and

- Third, is their need for constant positive feedback, much more frequently than other generations.
- Fourth is their expectation that their job will also be a source of relationship and sense of belonging.

This seems to be more so for Generation Y, the most recent entries in the workforce. It is offset by their willingness to immediately pull up stakes if a job is routine or impersonal. Although these characteristics can cause a manager headaches, they should also be viewed as an opportunity to excel.

Nature Centers should find it easier than many businesses to meet the needs of these younger employees. Positions tend to have flexible schedules. Most managers encourage their employees to develop programming utilizing his/her special skills. Most also encourage open communications as one method for increasing employee longevity in a business where pay and benefits are often lacking.

The author, a Baby Boomer, now has welcomed young people onto her staff. Have they provided new ideas for

(continued on next page)

## Diversity

(continued from page 5)

attracting others of their age? At this stage, this cannot be answered in the affirmative. However, looking at the work environment, the organization has been changed by these newcomers. They insist on fun at work. They paint the office walls wild colors. They study hard and play hard and have made great use of the new computer network both internally and for reaching out to others.


They have created wonderful, fun ways to recognize volunteers, and keep it in flux so that it doesn't get stale. They are learning the organization, and soon will be taking steps to lead it in an altered direction. It will strengthen and add relevance to any organization to listen to new entrants in the workplace, playing on their strengths and working to weave them into the tapestry of the workplace. 🌿

<sup>1</sup> Eric Chester, Employing Generation Why? Understanding, managing, and motivating your new workforce (Lakewood, CO Tucker House Books, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Tulgan, author of Managing Generation X, as quoted in Ron Zemke, Claire Raines and Bob Filpczak, Generations at Work (New York, AMACOM 2000) p. 198.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Chester, Employing Generation Why? Understanding, managing, and motivating your new workforce (Lakewood, CO Tucker House Books, 2002), p. 15-16

<sup>4</sup> Ron Zemke, Claire Raines and Bob Filpczak, Generations at Work (New York, AMACOM 2000) p. 68, 98, 132



**Director's Guide to Best Practices**  
Examples from the Nature and Environmental Learning Center Profession  
Second Edition

Leadership  
Strategic Planning  
Boards  
Staff  
Fund Raising

Norma Jeanne Byrd  
Association of Nature Center Administrators

The Director's Guide includes chapters on five essential areas: Leadership, Strategic Planning, Boards, Staff, and Fundraising. ANCA developed this book for busy directors and staff people with many roles and responsibilities. It is a handbook for those new to the profession, and will also challenge and inspire the most experienced directors and their staffs.

Cost: \$60 + \$5 shipping

Order your copy today! Contact Jen Levy at:  
phone: 435-787-8209 or 800-490-2622  
email: [jlevy@natctr.org](mailto:jlevy@natctr.org)

# Dealing with Difficult (i.e. different) People

**Dede Long**  
**Executive Director**  
**Briar Bush Nature Center**  
**Abington, PA**

Surprise, surprise! People come in complex packages! You think you've heard and seen it all and then.....

Along comes another strong/impossible/maddening personality with lots of opinions. How do you, as Executive Director or supervisor, handle it?!!! Gathering all your strength and biting your tongue, you must thoughtfully react with tact and incite; responding skillfully with diplomacy, never responding rashly.

To begin with, dealing with difficult people is a fact of life. It happens because we are different and we come from diverse backgrounds and perspectives (thankfully!). Conflicts arise when someone says or does something that is perceived as inappropriate.

A conflict becomes destructive when it: a) interferes with the task at hand; b) undermines morale; c) hinders productivity; and/or d) obstructs the goals of the organization.

Conflict may result in constructive behavior when it: a) challenges the established thinking; b) stimulates imagination and creativity; and/or c) leads to positive change.

Communicating with coworkers can be one of the more challenging parts of

your workday. Confronting and managing conflict help you and your organization maintain stability; not eliminate conflict. Understand that each conflict is unique and that its source may emanate from those who have low self-esteem and/or who lack good communication skills.

So, what can you do???  
Develop a plan!!

## Listen Well

- "Empathetic listening is a drink of water to a dehydrated soul," according to Fred Pryor of CareerTrack fame. Listen actively and attentively. If you develop your capacity to listen, then you will simultaneously increase your ability to evaluate what you hear.

## Observe Body Language

- Diffuse anger in others by modeling behavior you want to encourage. Speak softly and slowly. Maintain an open physical posture and eye contact to show your interest.

## Utilize Assertive Communication

- (Everyone wins!). Be direct! Lay all the cards on the table. In doing this, you equalize the balance of power, establish an open forum and make a positive impact on the situation. Be respectful and expect respect in return!

Know your personal strengths and weaknesses, so that you can work more effectively with others. There are a variety of personality/strengths activities that will help you to analyze yourself and those with whom you work. However, no matter what the personality type – passive or aggressive, whether the circumstance

is people-focused or task-focused, there are effective ways to cope with and handle the conflict. Therein is your challenge! (And remember, your personality and style can just as easily drive others crazy. Yes, YOU may be a difficult person to others too!)

**Mobilize** your tact and people-skills! Regardless of how complicated or emotionally charged the problem or personality, deal with the immediate situation and stick to the issues. Diffuse the anger! Listen! Be direct and respectful! And remember to be flexible while committing to a solution.

Ultimately, you will need to determine whether the source of the destructive conflict – person or personality – is worth salvaging. Question yourself. In time, can this source of conflict remedy itself? Is this person important to the future of the organization? What is in the best interests of the organization?

It all goes back to that "thing" we keep harping on: "planning."

## Remember:

- 1) Develop a plan;
- 2) Concentrate on solving the problem;
- 3) Be flexible; and
- 4) Check on your plan on a regular basis and adjust as needed.

And/or, you can do as many of us do:

- 1) Go to an ANCA Summit and vent;
- 2) Call an ANCA peer for guidance; or
- 3) Enjoy your favorite beverage!!!!

Cheers! 🍀

# Is it Time to Say “You’re Fired!?” Insights on the Process

**Dick Touvell**  
**Executive Director**  
**Eldon Enger**  
**former President**  
**Chippewa Nature Center**  
**Midland, MI**

There is certainly no shortage of excuses for avoiding the unpleasant process of firing a poorly performing employee. You have heard them all!

“Oh, give him another chance; he will change, when he realizes what’s expected of him.” “He has a family and needs the job.” “The public relations impact could be devastating.” “What if my assessment of the situation is wrong?”

Sound familiar? They should, for they are some of the common excuses for not terminating a poorly performing employee. If you are currently experiencing the stress and frustration that comes from an unpleasant employee-employer relationship, this article might help. It’s certainly not an exhaustive legal lesson on how to fire someone - after all, there’s an ocean of words written to cover all the legal aspects. However, this article might just help “tip” or “nudge” you to action, if you are contemplating addressing a negative employee situation. In other words, this just might be the time to overcome your queasiness and fears and initiate the process of discharging an employee.

## Assess your readiness to action by asking yourself . . .

- Have I been ignoring the performance of a sub-par employee?

Whether you have a recent hire who is not working out or a 25-year veteran who is not measuring up, remind yourself that the cost of continuing to tolerate the situation is too high. If the thought of initiating the discharging process evokes a feeling of queasiness, remember that is a normal way to feel. To balance that unease, why not envision how life would be without the employee as part of your organization. From our personal experience, the outcome of not having to deal with the employee will far out-weigh the temporary agony it will take to discharge them. Yes, self-doubt will enter into the picture, and you might even feel a bit weak in the knees. However, remember, you are the director and must provide leadership and vision. Isn’t it time to take action?

- Am I endangering my personal health?  
Are you beginning to lose sleep thinking about the situation? Are your eating and exercise patterns being modified? Is the situation occupying your mind when you’re with family and friends? Is the unresolved situation negatively influencing all phases of your life – from family dynamics to your ability to focus on other aspects of your

job? If so, maybe it’s time to take action.

- Is the morale of the staff being jeopardized?  
Is the behavior or performance of the employee in question beginning to impact others in the organization? In other words, staff members are beginning to notice “things are just not right.” Perhaps others (either to your face or through the grapevine) are beginning to voice their concerns or question your leadership. If so, maybe it’s time to take action.

- Who’s in charge of managing the organization?  
Step back for a moment and realize that while you are part of a leadership team, which includes the staff and board, it’s primarily your responsibility to provide the key leadership for managing the culture of the organization. That means making sure that all staff are positively contributing to the organization. You are the one that monitors and takes the necessary actions when a “bad-apple” begins to influence the culture that you have spent so much energy to nurture. Eventually, your lack of action could begin to influence the quality of programming and services that your organization offers. Since you are empowered to lead your organization, maybe it’s time to take action.

- Are you or someone else on your staff covering the job responsibility of the sub-par employee?  
Do you constantly check on an employee’s work to see if it is done or done correctly? Do you frequently rely on other staff members to cover for the inadequate performance of an employee? If so, it is probably time to take action.

## If you’re ready to take action; here are some key questions .

### 1. Should I include others in the process?

You should not “go-it-alone.” Although each nature center will have a somewhat different organizational structure, the situation should be discussed with the appropriate members of your board (President or Executive Committee, or Personnel Committee). Any action you take should not be a surprise to your board leadership. Ideally, you should have consensus regarding the action to be taken. There is also the question of involving current staff in the process. Deciding which staff members to consult is tricky and no doubt different for each organization. However, in any discussions with staff, make it clear that, although you value their advice, the final decision remains with you and the board. As with the board, the decision to release an employee should not be a surprise to your senior staff leadership. Our suggestion is to limit the number, but probably involve your senior leadership team.

### 2. Do I have good documentation of poor performance?

(continued on next page)

You should have good written documentation of the employee's poor performance; evidence that the employee has been made aware that performance is below acceptable standards, and a plan of action for the employee to follow to improve performance. Furthermore, evaluation of the employee's performance must be measured against the job description. Ideally, the employee should have acknowledged problems with the job performance by signing a document. If your documentation is in order, you then can move toward the final separation meeting.

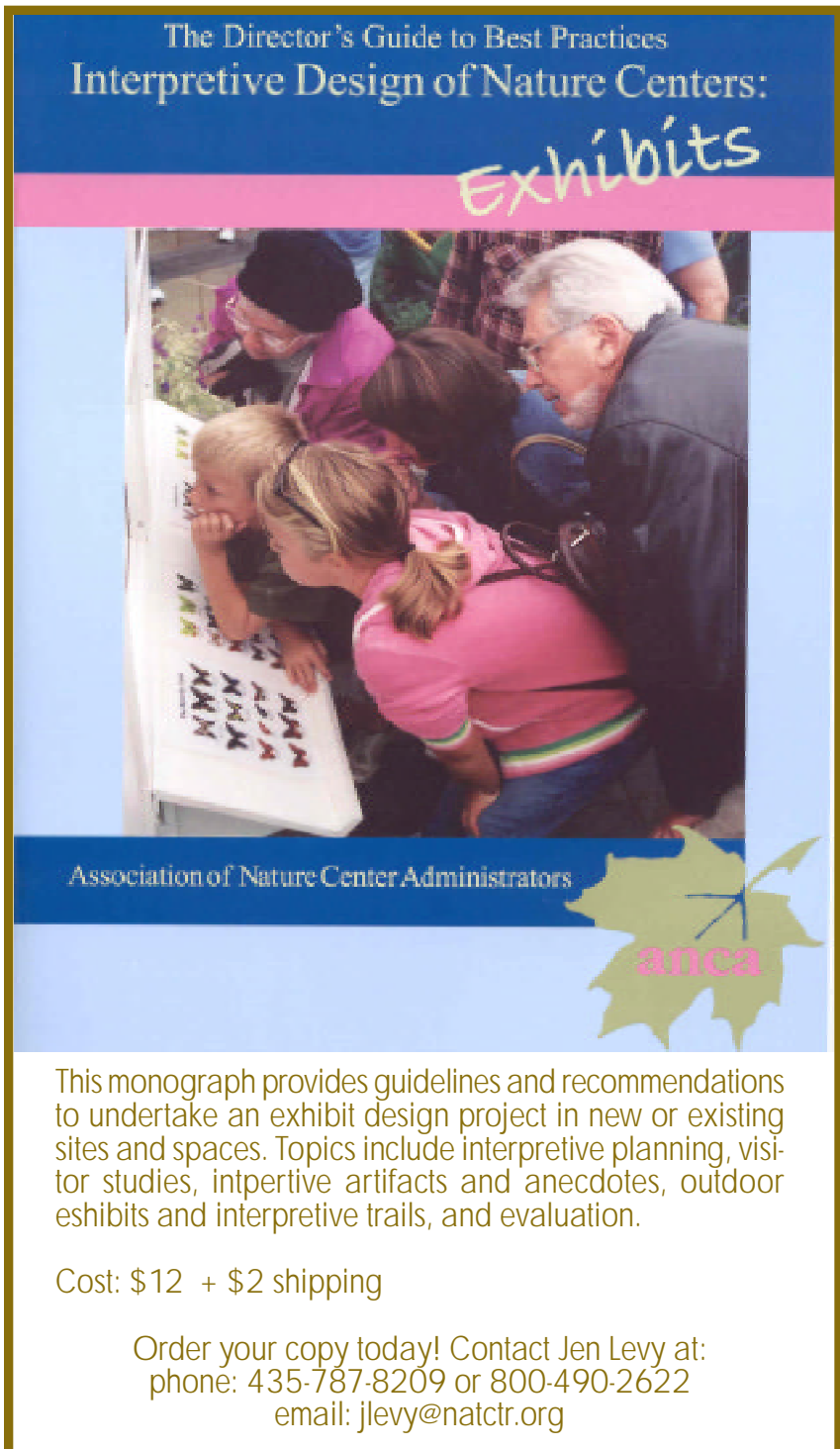
However, if your documentation is poor or non-existent, you might have to slow the process down. One common option is to put the employee on a written performance improvement plan with a "last chance" warning. Clearly state the improvement you desire, objective ways in which improvement can be documented, and provide a reasonable period of time (e.g., 30 or 60 days) for the employee to demonstrate improvements. Obtain the employee's signature to acknowledge his or her receipt and understanding of the last warning. If no appreciative changes are made after the period of time in the plan, then move toward the separation meeting.

### 3. Do I need to consult an attorney?

Yes, it's recommended that you do so. An attorney can provide advice on many aspects of the separation process and provide legal forms accepted as standard for termination of employment. An attorney is aware of specific protected groups that need to be handled in a special way. An attorney can also ask questions that will clarify whether you are prepared to proceed or not. One important thing an attorney will do is to help you prepare a "Separation Agreement and General Release Document." It's a standard legal document you can customize for your situation. The document often includes an agreement to a neutral reference. This means that the information you provide to others about the terminated employee will be limited to dates of service, length of service, title, and last annualized compensation. It's also customary to

include a statement that both parties agree not to make any disparaging statements about the other. If you decide on a severance package, it is typical that both parties agree to adhere to strict confidentiality regarding its terms. The document is presented at the Separation Meeting (see below) and typically the employee has 21 days to sign the agreement. After signing, the employee has 7 days to reconsider their decision.

(continued on next page)



The Director's Guide to Best Practices  
Interpretive Design of Nature Centers:  
**Exhibits**

Association of Nature Center Administrators

anca

This monograph provides guidelines and recommendations to undertake an exhibit design project in new or existing sites and spaces. Topics include interpretive planning, visitor studies, interpretive artifacts and anecdotes, outdoor exhibits and interpretive trails, and evaluation.

Cost: \$12 + \$2 shipping

Order your copy today! Contact Jen Levy at:  
phone: 435-787-8209 or 800-490-2622  
email: [jlevy@natctr.org](mailto:jlevy@natctr.org)

#### 4. What if the employee brings a lawsuit?

In spite of the perception that our society is litigation happy, the attorneys we talk with say that few employees bring a suit if they are discharged. However, you will want to prepare yourself in case a lawsuit is filed. Our Michigan Employment Law Handbook reminds us that "Whether you can justify and/or defend employment decisions typically depends on what is set forth in the written foundational materials regarding employment with your center." Documents such as

employment applications, employee handbooks, individual employee contracts, a listing of workplace conduct rules, and written employment evaluations will often be key evidence in any legal challenge. Your attorney will be able to assist you greatly in assessing your preparation. Ask your attorney the simple question "Do you feel we have a good, defensible case for discharging this employee?" Proceed only if the answer is "YES!"

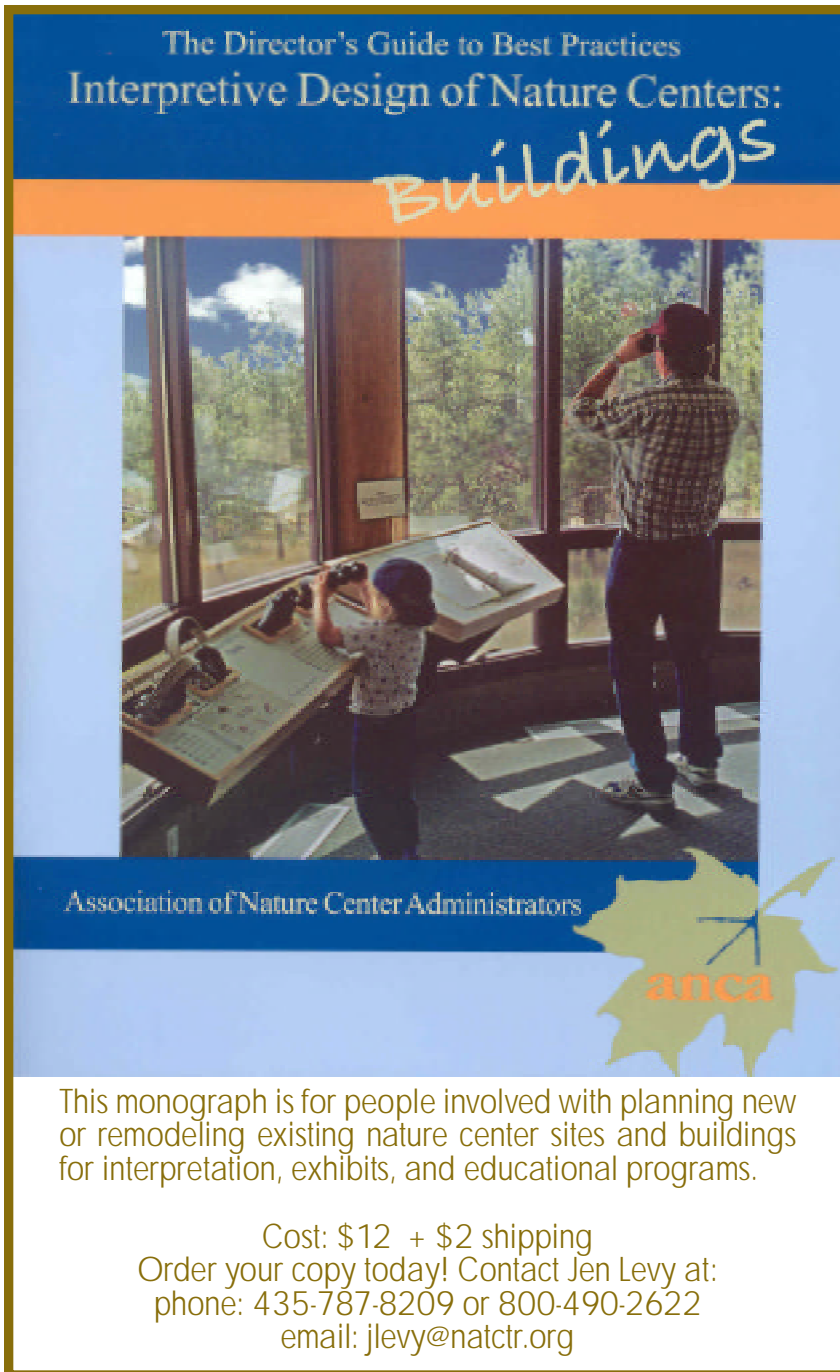
#### 5. What does the final meeting look like?

The Separation Meeting is the meeting at which the employee is actually informed that they are being discharged! It is stressful and must be carefully planned. It is recommended you have a checklist of items that act as the agenda for this meeting and provide the employee with a copy. It is easy to forget items during this emotionally charged time. Since it is also a stressful time for the employee, it is likely that the employee will not remember all the items discussed. The agenda provides the employee with a record of the things that were discussed at the meeting. The meeting should be short (30–40 minutes), since the only business of the meeting is to handle the logistics of both parties of "moving on." This is not the time or place to discuss what could have been done differently for that has already been discussed in previous meetings.

When designing the meeting consider the following: First, definitely have another person (or two) present when the employee is told their employment is being terminated. Second, schedule it at the end of the day when other staff members have left or are leaving work. This allows the discharged employee to save face. They will not have to interact with other employees as they clean out their workspace. In addition, it reduces the likelihood that confrontations will occur with other staff.

The agenda should include:  
1. An explanation of any severance pay and the mechanics of how it works;

(continued on page 14)



The Director's Guide to Best Practices  
Interpretive Design of Nature Centers:  
*Buildings*

Association of Nature Center Administrators  
anca

This monograph is for people involved with planning new or remodeling existing nature center sites and buildings for interpretation, exhibits, and educational programs.

Cost: \$12 + \$2 shipping  
Order your copy today! Contact Jen Levy at:  
phone: 435-787-8209 or 800-490-2622  
email: [jlevy@natctr.org](mailto:jlevy@natctr.org)

# Review

## The Search for Extraordinary Leadership: *Securing your next executive director*

**Saul Weisberg**  
Executive Director  
North Cascades Institute  
Sedro-Wooley, WA

After 18 years, ANCA has hired its first executive director. Jen Levy, based in Logan, Utah, will help ANCA provide even more support to the nature center profession.

The decision to hire an executive director required lengthy discussion and debate by the board of directors and consultation with the membership and peer organizations. While the decision to hire an E.D. was complicated, the process of hiring was relatively straightforward, thanks to the leadership of Corky McReynolds on the search committee, and his recently completed ANCA monograph: *The Search for Extraordinary Leadership: Securing your next executive director*.

Corky, a member of ANCA's founding board of directors, is Director of Treehaven Environmental Learning Center and Associate Professor at the College of Natural Resources, University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point. This monograph is #3 in a series that documents best practices in our profession. The purpose of this monograph is to outline best practices to engage the next generation of extraordinary leaders.

After witnessing sustained growth in the nature center and

environmental education profession, we are beginning to see many of the early leaders in our field contemplating life beyond fundraising. Many of our colleagues have retired or are planning for retirement.

As Corky points out: “Change will bring about a new, positive growth in our profession, and for the missions of our centers. ... A change in leadership is a true test of an organization’s culture, and an opportunity for growth.”

The primary audience for this monograph are those responsible for developing and implementing a search process – generally nonprofit boards and committees – as well as “parent” (federal, state, county, university) and peer organizations. An additional critical audience is existing executive directors, who may be intimately involved in the process, as well as those who aspire to become executive directors. It’s a good handbook for all of us.

Appendices include a thorough glossary, suggestions for places to announce positions, samples of position descriptions, announcements, application review, phone interview questions, reference call worksheet and on-site feedback forms.

All this in 10,000 words, 45 pages – it’s a hell of a deal.

(continued on next page)

### The Four Core Attributes of Leadership

1. **Passion for Purpose:**  
A successful leader believes in the purpose of the organization, its mission and its potential. A leader understands their role toward the purpose; demonstrates high values toward the mission; is service-oriented and possess strong self-confidence.
2. **Passion for People:**  
A leader is oriented toward people. The leader knows it takes a team of people in a caring, supporting culture to achieve the mission. Leaders create and enhance the center’s culture through communication, servanthood, cooperation and connections
3. **Vision is Vital:**  
A leader is future-oriented and can visualize a desired image of the center. The leader challenges the direction of the center and maintains the core vision, while performing multiple levels of tasks to attain the vision.
4. **Living is Learning:**  
A leader is always seeking new learning, and can transfer and apply that learning to their profession. Leaders engage in reflective thinking, understand the broader picture, and are proactive toward risk-taking and change.

**Extraordinary leaders have:**

- A systems perspective, so that they are able to establish and maintain the important connection to the center's past, its culture and its community.
- Management skills, such as developing a fund-raising plan, overall fiscal management, staff development and supervision, board development, land management, community relations, grant writing, program planning/development/evaluation, marketing and public relations.

- Process skills, such as strategic and long-range planning, coaching/mentoring, time management/tasking management, team development, group decision-making, conflict management, practices reflection and takes time to think.
- Content skills, training and experience in natural sciences, resources, environmental education or a related field.

- Personal traits, including energy, sense of humor, patience, determination/persistence, respect for self, others, and the world around us, self-confidence, but not arrogance, self-awareness of strengths, limitations, core values, flexibility in methods, strategies and goals, rock solid in core beliefs and values.

**Best practices to guide nonprofits toward a successful future with a new leader:**

1. Embrace the profession;
2. Develop expectations toward higher level tasks;
3. Discover a candidate's core attributes of leadership;
4. Search for the long term goals rather than short term issues;
5. Connect a candidate's personality to the organization's culture;
6. Assess the strategic position of the organization;
7. Assess and match change to a candidates skills;
8. The current director remains neutral in the process;
9. The search process uses consensus;
10. The board appoints a balanced committee with clear expectations;
11. The first search and screen committee meeting should affirm establish its purpose, protocol and tasks. 🌿

The Director's Guide to Best Practices  
*the Search for*  
**Extraordinary Leadership:**  
 Securing your next Executive Director

Association of Nature Center Administrators

This monograph is for people involved with planning new or remodeling existing nature center sites and buildings for interpretation, exhibits, and educational programs.

Cost: \$12 + \$2 shipping  
 Order your copy today! Contact Jen Levy at:  
 phone: 435-787-8209 or 800-490-2622  
 email: [jlevy@natctr.org](mailto:jlevy@natctr.org)

# Hit by a Truck: Operating a Nature Center to Reduce the Impact of the Sudden Leadership Departure

**Rich Patterson**  
**Director**  
**Indian Creek Nature Center**  
**Cedar Rapids, IA**

Corky McReynolds completed an ANCA monograph, titled *The Search for Extraordinary Leadership: Securing your next Executive Director*, to help boards locate inspired leadership following the departure of an executive director. ANCA anticipates the retirement of many long serving directors in the next decade.

Coincidentally, my board asked me to draft a document to help them locate and hire an effective director once I vacate the position I've held since 1978. My brief paper, for internal use, shares many points with Corky's but is much less detailed. This paper is meant to supplement Corky's information and addresses prudent preparation for the unexpected departure of leadership at short notice.

A long serving leader usually announces retirement well in advance, giving that person and his or her board time to get projects wrapped up or organized, documents in place, and a search committee organized. Time helps smooth transition and facilitates the continuance of projects and programs.

Unfortunately there isn't always the luxury of time. Sometimes jobs are vacated immediately following death, termination, or short notice resignation. A director's fatal heart attack or accident immediately challenges the organization to maintain continuity while seeking new leadership. Prudent nature centers institute measures that I call the hit by a truck scenario to lessen the impact of a sudden unexpected leadership departure.

For many years the Indian Creek Nature Center has recognized this possibility and instituted day-to-day management practices to soften the impact of a rapid departure. In early 2006 we had the opportunity to test them when I was diagnosed with cancer and underwent major surgery. For the first time in 28 years I was away from work for a month and not fully functioning for several more weeks.

Despite my unexpected absence the nature center never skipped a beat. Visitors arrived, meetings were held, projects continued, money came in, bills were paid, and programs were held.

The organization was functioning so well that it felt like I'd never left and wasn't really needed. I took this as a compliment, as a healthy nature center will operate well in the short term without a director. A director's primary job is to steer the organization toward a productive future through visioning, relationship building, and fund raising. None are short-term needs.

Other staff should be able to smoothly carry on day-to-day operations, such as programming, facility and financial management, volunteer supervision, and others.

There is no magic formula providing guidance on how to prepare for sudden leadership loss, however it is an ongoing deliberate process that includes both written policies and day-to-day practices.

## **POLICIES and PROCEDURE**

Set by the Board, Stated in the Policy Manual, and Understood by Staff

- **Clear delegation of authority.** There is a defined "chain of command." This states which employee (position - not an individual) assumes responsibilities in the absence of the director. Responsibilities include supervision, interacting with the board, approving purchases, signing checks, media spokesperson, etc.
- **Procedure for permanent leadership search.** The board has on file written guidance for locating outstanding leadership. ANCA's Leadership monograph would function excellently in this capacity.

## **ONGOING PRACTICES**

Conducted by Staff

The Indian Creek Nature Center operates in the sunshine. There are no secrets. Some personnel and donor records are confidentially maintained but all other aspects of the organization are open to staff and board members. Specific practices that will help the organization smoothly transition following sudden leadership departure include:

- **Files:** At least two staff members know the location and how to access paper and electronic files.
- **Initiatives:** Staff is regularly informed of/involved with developing initiatives and projects.
- **Board:** All staff are welcome to attend board and committee meetings. Key staff are encouraged to attend and participate in discussion.
- **Confidential donor information:** Long serving directors have personal knowledge of donors and others who interact with the organization. Although this information can be highly useful in fund raising and understanding political situations it often contains sensitive personal information that could potentially embarrass a major donor. This information would prove invaluable to new leadership but must remain confidential. For many years I have written personal information about key people and families that is placed in a confidential file. One other trusted employee has access to this file.

(continued on page 15)

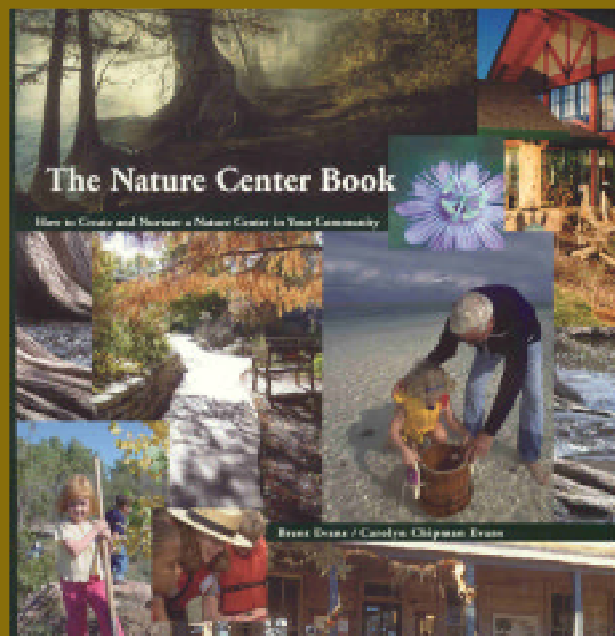
# ANCA Summit XIII Green & Gold Getaway

## Aug. 22–25, 2007

### Schlitz Audubon Nature Center Milwaukee, WI

This is the ONE conference you  
don't want to miss!

**Registration information:**  
[www.natctr.org](http://www.natctr.org)



This book provides up-to-date information and expanded discussion of topics key to nature center development - lessons learned and important developments in the field.

Cost: \$24 + \$5 shipping  
Order your copy today! Contact Jen Levy at:  
phone: 435-787-8209 or 800-490-2622  
email: [jlevy@natctr.org](mailto:jlevy@natctr.org)

## You're Fired

(continued from page 9)

2. A reminder of COBRA and the paper work necessary to continue health benefits;
3. An explanation of 403 (B) and how to retrieve monies if relevant;
4. An explanation of unemployment compensation benefits;
5. Retrieval of any keys and computer passwords;
6. An explanation of your Employee Assistance Program (if you have one) and how they might utilize it; and finally;
7. An offer to help the employee pack up personal office belongings or to return after business hours to assist with this activity.

### What about informing the staff, board and others?

Immediately after the Separation Meeting (the next day at the latest) personally call or send an e-mail to the staff and board members. Indicate that the employee is no longer a part of the organization and the effective date of termination.

Offer no additional explanation. Although you may be tempted to justify your decision, most attorneys agree that it is best to not provide explanations. This is especially true for the press and general public. Instruct your front office to inform callers with questions about the employee or their termination that the employee no longer works for your organization.

If the caller is persistent, the front office should forward calls to either the Executive Director or the President. These lead persons should remain steadfast and not divulge the reasons for the separation, or any other information.

### Reflections:

**You did it!** It has been our experience that you will feel good about having stepped up and taken action. Your health will improve, your own job performance will improve, the health of your organization will improve, and the employee that was released in most cases will move on and find a better fit for them.

Yes, the initial anger and resentment is often unpleasant, but it does fade with time and whatever wounds have occurred will begin to heal. This is in no way to trivialize employee termination for it is a difficult, potentially costly, event that can seriously impact your operations. However, we are continually reminded that good personnel are our greatest asset!

And conversely, difficult personnel can be very costly. So, why not take action now and commit to creating the best working environment possible. 🍁



# ANCA Membership Form



Membership Benefits: Quarterly Issues of Directions • Invitation to ANCA Summits and Workshops  
• Special Publications • Reciprocal Admission Program • Membership Guide

Please check the desired membership level: \_\_\_ \$70 Individual or \_\_\_ \$110 Institutional (two staff members receive benefits)  
\_\_\_ \$25 Student (copy of full-time student ID required)

\_\_\_ ANCA also offers several Business Membership options. Check here if you would like more information.

NAME 1: \_\_\_\_\_ TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL 1: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME 2: \_\_\_\_\_ (with Institutional Membership)

TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL 2: \_\_\_\_\_

ORGANIZATION: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ FAX: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

- ANCA offers a reciprocal admissions program for our members. Please check the reciprocal benefits your institution will provide: \_\_\_ Free Admission \_\_\_ Store Discount of \_\_\_% \_\_\_ Not Interested \_\_\_ N/A
- If you would like to participate in ANCA's reciprocal website link program please note your web address below. ANCA's website is [www.natctr.org](http://www.natctr.org). (Inclusion is subject to review.) \_\_\_\_\_
- ANCA provides our members with an annual membership guide. Please list my institution in the brochure as follows:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Web Site: \_\_\_\_\_

City & State: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_


Total Membership Dues: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Payment Method: Cash \_\_\_ Check \_\_\_ Charge: Visa \_\_\_ Master Card \_\_\_  
Card # \_\_\_\_\_ Expires \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to ANCA and mail with this form to:  
ANCA • P.O. Box 464 • Logan, UT 84321

## Truck

(continued from page 13)

- **To do list:** Staff annually develop a "to do" calendar that lists deadlines for filing grants, project progression, etc.

A well run nature center will have plans in place both to help the board locate long term permanent leadership and to lessen the impact on day to day operations should the director die or depart at short notice. The Search for Extraordinary Leadership: Securing your next Executive Director details the former. This brief document provides guidance on the latter. 

# ANCA Technical Consults: *YOUR FRIEND IN THE BUSINESS!*

ANCA offers consulting assistance to nature centers and other environmental education organizations at very reasonable rates. The fee includes the cost of transportation, lodging, and meals for the team, plus a \$3,250 fee that goes toward supporting ANCA's professional services and planning. Our Board of Directors, and members, provide these services with no personal financial gain, while you gain the advantage of advice and guidance from some of the profession's most respected and experienced leaders.

What can be covered? Well, just about anything involved with planning, funding, and operations. Some topics include:

- Assistance with long range and strategic planning
- Review education programs, exhibits, or trails
- Mission focus
- Fundraising and fiscal management
- Facility planning
- Starting a center
- Management strategies and use planning

We know the business, we're in it too!

## JOIN THE TEAM!

ANCA's Consult Services are a success because of it's members' participation on Consult Teams. Please consider sharing your experiences and lessons learned.

Consult Team members donate their time but all expenses are paid. Participating in a Consult is a great way to see other parts of the country, learn about other nature and environmental learning centers, and take home valuable knowledge for your own center.

So don't delay!!! PLEASE fill out the skills survey in the Member's Section on ANCA's web site at [natctr.org](http://natctr.org). Do it ASAP so we can tap into your experiences and skills!

## To find out more about

ANCA's Peer Consults, contact any ANCA board member or Ann Rilling at 970-375-7090 [rlazys@hughes.net](mailto:rlazys@hughes.net)

directions

c/o Aullwood Audubon Center  
1000 Aullwood Road  
Dayton, OH 45414

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
Paid  
Englewood, OH  
Permit No. 17

