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Book review: technology training in libraries: the tech set 6

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Sarah Houghton-Jan (2010) *Technology Training in Libraries. The Tech Set 6. Facet Publishing. London. ISBN: 978-1-85604-726-5*

I often approach technology books with an air of caution, knowing they date very quickly. However, the editor of this series of books is Ellyssa Kroski the US Librarian, information consultant and author of a really informative blog I regularly read called the *iLibrarian* (<http://oedb.org/blogs/ilibrarian/>) which is always full of up to date relevant information. The series are designed to be 'fast paced guides' that claim they will help you 'implement all the essential technologies and tools ...to deliver outstanding new services and remain relevant in the digital age.' Facet have re-published this series of American books originally published by Neal-Schuman of which this is book number six. I was impressed to see that in order to address the issue of the 'fast pace' of change each book has a wiki available at: <http://techset.wetpaint.com>. Even if you decide not to buy the book, the wiki is a great source of information to complement the books but also provide further information such as a nice photo of the author and some extra content. From reading the wiki I realised that Sarah Houghton-Jan is also the author of a blog I read regularly, *The Librarian in Black*. The wiki certainly convinced me to read on!

I have been running a digital literacy training programme for around 4-5 years and wondered if a book on running technology training could really tell me anything new. As its just over a hundred pages, so I felt it was worth spending time finding out, and I was pleased I did. It has a sensible structure, providing some 'technology training basics' in the introduction, then moving on to planning, implementation, marketing, best practice and finishing with 'measures of success' or evaluation. The book also has some recommended resources a bibliography and an index.

The book focuses on what it terms 'technology training' which covers a whole range of IT training that can be offered to library staff, as well as sessions that are run for library users. However the book largely focuses on library staff development. In the introduction it outlines the importance of up-skilling library staff with a range of appropriate IT skills to help them work more efficiently and deal with queries from users. Technology training for library staff will also reduce pressure on what Sarah terms the 'tech pack mules.' The 'mules' are staff who have a high level of IT skills and often end up serving as technical support for their colleagues, which can taking them away from their regular work, but also lead to frustration on their part. I knew instantly the people Sarah meant – every library has these people. In her first chapter she also clearly outlines how to measure the 'return on investment' in technology training, drawing up a skills list for different groups of staff based on the needs of the organisation and different ways of organising training.

Chapter two covers planning training in more detail and is essentially aimed at library managers. It introduces the ADDIE (Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement and Evaluate) training model and stresses the importance of ensuring that job descriptions accurately reflect the IT skills that library staff require. It also covers how to develop a skills list and then how to develop the list into an organisational technology training plan. All along the way the author provides tips on how to keep staff engaged, such as involving them in brainstorming sessions and getting them to self assess their skills against criteria. She is not keen on words such as 'information literacy' and competencies but advocates creating staff learning and innovation plans. She stresses the importance of assessing the current skills of your library staff (either anonymously or on an individual basis) and to ensure that new employees have the skills to do their job effectively. There are some useful tips from experienced trainers throughout the book which really enliven the text. It also uses lots of bulleted lists which provide a useful summary of a topic.

Chapter three focuses on implementing training and it is packed full of ideas, including the 23 Things model of training from Helen Blowers, running lunchtime 'brown bag' training, running peer training and creating a train-the-trainer program. Some of the jargon in this book is very American, such as the 'technology petting zoo' idea, but I can't fault the author's enthusiasm, nor the volume of content that is included in this book. The chapter finishes by considering online training and self-paced tutorials and I really liked the quotes from key library writers. On page 85 for example, she quotes from Stephen Abram who advocated that all library staff should spend 15 minutes a day learning something new.

Chapter four on marketing is fairly brief but encourages you to always consider your audience and to choose an appropriate marketing vehicle. Meanwhile Chapter 5 on best practice considers different learning styles, dealing with difficult learners, scheduling classes and creating a learning environment. Chapter Six is entitled 'Measures of Success' and emphasises the importance of evaluating your training programmes, but also using metrics to measure the impact of your training. It explores how to measure both individual and group learning outcomes and considers using re-assessment to measure the impact of a training course. Many of us circulate questionnaires to evaluate our training and there is a useful list of questions to include in such forms on page 102-3.

Finally the book has a list of recommended resources for technology trainers and a bibliography. I found the list of library training blogs on page 110-111 particularly useful. The book is a mine of information and I can see myself using as I plan, implement and evaluate the training on offer at LSE. I would recommend this book for anyone involved in staff development activities in libraries. It is also really useful for information literacy coordinators and those who manage training programmes.

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