

# News from the SAA Archives Management Roundtable

March 1994

## 1993 Roundtable Meeting in New Orleans

The SAA Management Roundtable met in New Orleans on Friday, September 3 from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.. The Meeting featured a presentation on effective use of consultants in managing an archives by Admiral James Whitaker (USN Ret.). Admiral Whitaker served as a facilitator in the recent National Archives and Records Administration strategic planning effort.

At the Roundtable's business session, SAA Council member Tom Hickerson gave the group a review of SAA's Strategic Plan. In addition, participants discussed program ideas for the Indianapolis meeting, as well as topics for the next session of the Roundtable. The topic for the next Annual Meeting is "The Archival Core in the Information Age."

## Improving Work Processes

As is happening elsewhere in the Federal Government, NARA has begun investigating opportunities for improving service and dealing with declining resources. NARA is exploring a methodology now used in private industry called business process reengineering. With the assistance of the Department of Defense, which provides assistance to civilian agencies with this methodology, NARA will determine the feasibility of reengineering its reference service processes.

In brief, reengineering and business process improvement involve the use of process and data modeling techniques, together with the use of standard techniques available in industry (such as total quality management, activity-based costing, and prototyping). The goals of reengineering are to achieve a better understanding of existing processes, determining how much they cost, and identifying ways in which processes can be improved.

A brief status report on this project will be provided at the Indianapolis session of the Roundtable.

## 1994 Session Proposal Submitted

The Management Roundtable has joined the Committee on Status of Women to co-sponsor a proposal for a session on "Managing Real People in Hard Times" for the 1994 meeting.

## Management Quote of the Day

"No plan survives contact with the enemy."  
--Field Marshal Helmuth Carl Bernard von Moltke--

## Research Libraries Group Calls for Thematic Grant Funding

Research Libraries Group (RLG) Whole Discipline Preservation Task Force met at the Library of Congress on December 4, 1993. Whole discipline means cutting across traditional disciplinary lines to track inter-institutional and multi-media information. The Task Force was created in response to criticism that the current guidelines, used by the major funding organizations, such as the National Endowment for the Humanities, to pay for preservation activities, exclude large bodies of books, documents, films, and tapes. The "Great Collections" approach has dominated national preservation programming. Current grant funding tends to be given to individual institutions to preserve specific, unique collections. The granting institutions attempt to avoid duplication of effort by funding "great collections" projects. The Task Force is seeking to design an inter-institutional, multi-media program for the preservation of valuable, at-risk documentation relating to various topical areas.

At the December meeting, the task force agreed that users of research collections should be surveyed to identify important bodies of primary source materials which need preservation. The group decided to survey researchers by theme; i.e. The Great Depression, 19th Century Architectural History, and American Popular Music; to identify bodies of research material documenting the "theme." The collections may be in various repositories and in a variety of physical formats. The Task Force will meet again in February 1994 to sort out themes and design a customer survey.

#### Management Roundtable Sponsored Session at New Orleans Conference

The Management Roundtable sponsored a session on "Accommodation: The Impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act on Managing an Archives." The session featured presentations by Sheila M. Foran, Trial Attorney with the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division and Barney Singer, Assistant Chief Counsel for Labor Policy with the U.S. Small Business Administration. Frank Serene, an archivist with the National Archives and Records Administration, was unable to attend. Jack Saunders, Chief of the Motion Picture, Sound and Video Recordings Branch (and Frank's boss) read Frank's paper. Cynthia Fox chaired the session and gave a brief presentation on the National Archives experience in accommodating challenged employees.

Some tips in interviewing and hiring were shared with the group.

1. Don't ask questions that assume a stereotype of a disabled person: "I guess you wouldn't be able to . . ." Explain the essential functions of the job. Ask if the person can do it or if some accommodations would be needed to do the job. You may ask the person to demonstrate how he or she would accomplish the job. Don't assume the person can't do it just by looking. Limit inquiries to the actual mental or physical demands of the job.

2. Bring job descriptions up to date. Determine which functions are essential and which are not. Some attorneys prefer written job descriptions as more defensible in court; others prefer unwritten descriptions but a clear understanding of what is needed.

3. Ignorance is bliss. An employer is not obligated to provide an accommodation for a disability of which he or she is unaware.

4. The best defense is always to try to accommodate a job candidate with a disability. Even if the person doesn't work out and must be let go because he or she can't do the job, the employer can show in court that an effort was made to accommodate the person's disability.

5. Don't assume what the "reasonable accommodation" must be. Ask the candidate. Most often, what the person needs is cheaper and simpler than what the employer envisions.

6. Base hiring decisions on a candidate's ability to do a job, not on his or her disability.

7. Document what you do.

#### ADA Resources:

• Clearinghouse for Disability Information  
Part of the office of Special Education and Rehabili-

tative Services, U.S. Department of Education, Room 3132 Switzer Building, Washington DC 20202-2524. Provides information and referrals about services for individuals with disabilities at the national, state, and local levels. Publishes the booklet "Americans with Disabilities Act: Questions and Answers." 202-205-8241.

• National Center for a Barrier Free Environment, 1140 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Suite 1006, Washington DC 20038. 202-466-6896

• U.S. EEOC Commission  
1801 L St. N.W., Room 9024, Washington, DC 20507. Provides ADA regulations regarding employment and enforces these regulations. 800-669-3362.

#### *You Just Don't Understand Me: Women and Men in Conversation* by Deborah Tannen

Review by Paul McCarthy

"Uh Huh", "I never thought of it that way," or "How could we think so differently" might be typical reactions in reading Tannen's study of the differences in conversational styles between women and men. Tannen's study of the differences in conversational styles between women and men. Tannen's study is thought provoking, done in a very readable style based on solid scholarly effort. Any manager, male or female, could benefit from a careful reading of and thorough discussion of her book.

Tannen's thesis is that women and men have fundamental differences in the function of conversation that are unconscious and unspoken. While avoiding a doctrinaire approach she maintains that most women generally approach the world "as an individual in a network of connections . . . conversations are negotiations for closeness." "Life, then is a community, a struggle to preserve intimacy and avoid isolation." Men generally see the world as "an hierarchical social order in which he is either up or down. . . . conversations are negotiations in which people try to achieve and maintain the upper hand if they can." "Life, then is a contest, a struggle to preserve independence and avoid failure." The tension between connectedness and independence leads to significant conflict and misunderstanding.

This work draws upon her earlier study *That's Not What I Meant* which dealt with different conversational styles based on differences in ethnicity, class, background or gender. She launched on this further study when she found that 90% of the comments on her first book focused on gender differences in conversation. She uses a sociolinguistic approach in

her research. She weaves theory very effectively with many, many specific examples drawn from personal incidents, analysis of video or audio taped conversations of children and adults, literature and other research studies.

Tannen maintains a rigorous balance in her approach and often reminds the reader that men and women have "different but equally valid styles." Her analysis of play and conversation patterns of same sex play groups of two and three year olds indicates significant differences in patterns of behavior and speech among girls and boys that last a lifetime. In fact, she concludes that two year old girls have speech patterns and ways of relating that are more typical of young women in their twenties rather than similar to two year old boys with whom they occasionally play. Women and men are essentially brought up in different worlds hence, much of the conflict between the sexes is the result of our assumptions that we are speaking the same language with similar perceptions and views of life. Apparently, nothing could be further from the truth!

As she discusses the function of conversation (rapport talk vs. report talk) giving and receiving advice, interruptions (who interrupts whom more often and when), Tannen uses specific examples that range from comic to tragic. Her discussions of why men find it difficult to stop and ask directions when apparently lost and why women tend to share "troubles" but resist well intentioned advice to solve their problems are classic. It is easy to recognize your own personal and work situations in the many examples and to begin to understand how easy it is to misinterpret intent when it is masked by different conversational styles.

These different approaches often cause mistrust and conflict if they are not recognized from what they are - different but valid. "When people who are identified as culturally different have different conversational styles, their ways of speaking become the basis for negative stereotyping." It then becomes easy to make the leap "from ways of speaking to character" which further impairs the communication process.

In her concluding chapters Tannen suggests ways of recognizing and being sensitive to this asymmetry in conversational styles. Any manager interested in exploring style differences between supervisor and employee where gender is a factor and the interaction of women and men in group processes in the business world would find this book quite helpful.

#### Personnel Management Bibliography Available on Internet

Over the past year the National Archives has developed an annotated bibliography of articles dealing with employee relations and personnel management as part of a management training program. The articles focus on archives and libraries. Almost all articles date from the 1980s and 1990s. The bibliography was compiled by several staff members in the archivist training program.

To access the bibliography, FTP to FTP.CU.NIH.GOV (128.231.64.7). Log on as an anonymous user; press enter at the password prompt (or type in "guest" or your internet address). The bibliography is in the directory NARA-MANAGEMENT. Use the FTP "GET" command to retrieve the document.

#### Distributing Information Via Fax-on Demand

The Nontextual Archives Division of the National Archives has just begun offering electronic versions of pamphlets and other descriptive materials to researchers via fax. The system must be called from a fax machine. The caller then receives a voice mail message with instructions to enter certain codes. There is no fee for the service except for any long distance phone charges that the caller might incur. The items currently available are from one to twenty pages in length. The first item, General #1, is a list of documents available on the system which can be reached on 301-713-6905.



#### Management Mailbag

In future issues, I would like to include letters, articles, suggested reading and tips from everyone. We

are our own best resource. Please send any article, letter, tip, or suggestions to: Cynthia Fox; Acting Director, Preservation Policy and Services Division (NPN); Office of National Archives; Washington, DC 20408. Or fax it to me on 202-219-1543. If possible, a Wordperfect version on disk would be much appreciated.