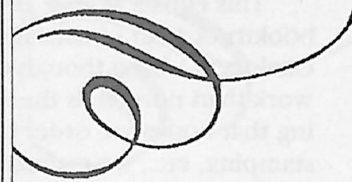


## ONE GOOD THING LEADS TO ANOTHER

by Diane Moore



We must admit the thought of three intense days of “Continuous Improvement Training” didn’t do anything to gladden our hearts. When our small group was assigned to look at our procedures for the process “Select Books,” we all uttered words like “You’ve got to be kidding,” “Oh brother,” “Surely, you jest,” and “It will just be re-inventing the wheel.”

Once we got together and really started working on the task at hand, we realized we had some real issues to discuss, think about, and that we could perhaps even offer new ways to do old things, even though “we had never done them that way before.”

Our group consisted of the reference librarian in charge of collection development, the outreach librarian who dealt primarily with day care centers, homebound patrons, and senior citizen centers, an acquisitions technician who did ordering and a cataloging technician who also was responsible for database management and took care of adds and withdrawals. We asked a branch manager to join our group, so we had additional input.

Our first shocking realization was how many different ways we add items to our collection. The one area we felt would be the simplest to define was the most complex. We realized that we have several

different processes—“Select New Books,” “Select Replacement Books,” and “Select Gift Books.” We set as our boundary “Drop Off Gift Books.” These are books which we have not solicited or have received through grants or special funding. We emphasized that there are no controls on the volume, timing, or condition or selection of what comes to us.

We then proceeded with the Continuous Improvement Plan steps outlined in the Process. They helped us as we worked through the Key Steps. The Parking Lot concept was a real hit and is being used throughout our system for all sorts of problems and concerns.

The step we felt was the least helpful and added to our confusion and frustration were the “A Charts.”

Our final product “Flowchart of Selection of Gifts for our Collection,” was tested on three fairly new employees and they felt the procedures for these items were clear and easy to understand..

Many staff had no idea of the quantity of books that are donated. In the discussion, many thought it might be a waste of time to deal with sorting the good from the bad and felt we probably didn’t benefit enough to make a difference in our collection. However, our small group already knew from their jobs that gifts were an important part of our collection.

Figure 1: Gift Books Received August 15-September 2 (15 days)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number</i>
Rack books (fiction paperbacks)	584
Fiction	205
Non-fiction	170
Large print	2
Reference	1
<b><i>Sub-total items added to collection</i></b>	<b>962</b>
Items trashed	12
Items donated to the Friends for booksales	2428
<b><i>Total gift books</i></b>	<b>3,402</b>

We decided to keep track of the number of drop off gift books the Library received from Aug. 15-Sept. 2 (15 working days). (See Figure 1).

This equals at least 10 booktruck loads. (A booktruck load is considered a day's work for our catalogers.) Even though our processors must do more work than normal as there is none of the pre-processing that books we order have, e.g.: jacketing, property stamping, etc., we estimated that the retail value of the gift books added to our collection during three-week period would be approximately \$11,021 which would translate into \$7,442, if we took into account our discounted price from vendors. These were amazing figures for us to digest when broken down to work hours and to dollar amounts. Also, amazing was the fact that we did three studies all for 15 working days and how closely the figures came to being the same.

Our immediate attention was drawn to the rack books. Over 75 percent of the rack gift books were romances. We looked at our current standing orders for romance rack books and found that we received approximately 167 books at a cost of \$500 a month, or \$6,000 over the course of a year. We immediately cancelled our rack romance standing orders and switched that \$6,000 to rack standing orders in other categories of Christian fiction, mystery, science fiction, true crime, and other popular genres. This was the first concrete change for our process.

We also learned from the other areas of "Select a book" Processes.

But more than WHAT WE LEARNED, WAS HOW WE LEARNED!

We learned by communicating together as staff from different areas, as we each brought a different perspective to the group. We learned by listening to each other. We learned by gathering and evaluating data. We learned by trying something different. We learned by letting go of some things.

Two years later, as we reflect, we see we are receiving more and more gifts from our grateful patrons. We have recently discontinued all rack book standing orders, and we order only if we need particular items. We have added an area for "Bestseller Express" books and are expanding our leased collections to meet our patrons' needs for new titles.

These were all started because we began to see new ways to do the services we offer. The people on the "Select a Book" team continue to work together in acquiring our collection. We each feel ownership of this process, and we have a convinced staff that "drop off gift books" are an asset we cannot overlook.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diane Moore came to work at the Vigo County Public Library as a co-op student from Indiana State University. What started as a 10-hour-a-week job in technical services turned into a full time position as a cataloging technician over the past 28 years. She is a past chair of the Support Staff Division of ILF and has presented programs at ILF, MFLA, and PLA.

