Technology

Overcoming Technophobia
Technology is everywhere. Unfortunately, however, so is fear of technology. And school people are far from exempt. The best way to overcome technophobia, like most fears, is to plunge right in—like Margaret.

Margaret is a school principal who was tired of seeing her school's computer lab sit vacant for several class periods a day. Oh, half of her teachers used it occasionally with their classes, but she wanted to see more of them using the technology available to them, technology that parents had clamored for over the years. She also wanted the lab used more often for a wider variety of activities. She had a plan.

Margaret began by selecting a core group of teachers representing all content areas in the building to form a school technology committee. She selected particular teachers for their reputations as effective teachers, and for their prior successes with technology, or for their willingness to innovate. The new committee discussed how the school's technology was currently being used, suggested short- and long-range goals, and then presented their plan at a faculty meeting to encourage discussion and establish goals.

Next, the core group participated in staff development activities with the district's director of computer-related instruction. Members attended workshops on computer operations, applications software, productivity tools, and evaluation methods. Margaret provided classroom substitutes for workshops held during school hours; for workshops held after hours or on weekends, she paid participants hourly stipends.

Within their own disciplines, the teacher core group became catalysts for effective technology use. First, they tried out new skills for themselves—lesson planning, correspondence, class handouts, and content applications. Then they talked informally to colleagues about their accomplish-

ments, often inviting individual teachers into their classrooms to observe and participate.

One Monday morning a computer station (from the lab) appeared in the faculty lounge, complete with printer, productivity tools (word processing, database, and spreadsheet programs), and sample applications software. Core group members used the station informally to encourage colleagues to experiment with the technology for their own purposes. They demonstrated a graphics program, for example, that would create banners, posters, greeting cards, and calendars. Soon teachers competing for time on the lounge computer were drifting into the computer lab during their planning periods, often working among students who were using the lab to receive instruction.

Later, core group members planned and helped present inservice activities for the entire faculty: (1) introduce unfamiliar technologies, (2) demonstrate the uses of technology to enhance personal productivity, (3) examine content curriculums and match with appropriate media materials, (4) preview and evaluate media materials, and (5) illustrate ways for integrating media into content teaching.

To encourage informal interaction and reduce machine anxiety during inservice activities, core group members scheduled frequent breaks, with beverages and snacks. These informal interludes allowed teachers to continue working with the technology, to walk away from the lab for a while, and to chat informally with colleagues. They also provided the "processing time" the teachers needed to absorb new information about the hardware and software.

While her teachers became comfortable with technology, Margaret was becoming a technology advocate. She appeared frequently during inservices to participate in activities with the faculty. She began composing memos and other office communications on a computer rather than delegating the task to a secretary. She even invited parents to use the computer lab to produce the monthly PTSA newsletter. By offering some volunteer teachers flexible time in their daily schedules, Margaret arranged for lab facilities to be open before school and after school for student, parent, and teacher use.

Over a period of six months, lab use increased dramatically. As teachers learned to use computers to make their daily administrative tasks easier, they began to try out software with their classes, too. Eventually, some booked the lab so far in advance that the technology committee had to develop a shorter term scheduling system which provided more equitable access to all teachers. Today Margaret can boast almost continuous computer lab use during the school day and frequent use before and after school. Her core group remain models, mentors, and advocates for the faculty, and Margaret continues to model computer use herself.

Like Margaret, more and more principals are recognizing that the best way to overcome fear of technology is to forge ahead undaunted—with a sound plan, of course. Fear often turns to enthusiasm when teachers see technology as a tool to enhance personal productivity. But time, resources, and an informal setting are also critical for learning anything new. Not only did Margaret help her faculty develop positive lifelong skills and attitudes that can only enhance her school's program, but she also accomplished a personal goal. You see, Margaret used to be a technophobe.

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