

## The Spokane Public School Plant Department

By Steve Pappajohn & Tom Kuehn

Facilities personnel, working in support of education, have always played an important role in the educational environment. They are responsible for maintaining the vital basic requirements including shelter, heat, safety, security, food services, lighting, grounds, driving school buses and maintaining a healthy school environment. They provide support and assistance to educators and administration in managing facilities.

Because they interact with a broad cross section of people, facilities workers are often the "soul" of their districts. In many cases, facilities workers provide the most accurate measure of the *esprit de corps* of a school district. Moreover, a pleasant greeting or word of encouragement from a school bus driver, custodian, grounds keeper, or food server can make the difference at just the right moment for K through 12 learners.

At critical times, the choice of words, the quality of interaction, the ability to listen, and the spirit of intent of a non-parent/teacher authority figure could be a key in the continued development of optimal learning and functioning for a troubled child. Public school drivers, for instance, are essential school employees who interact with students, teachers,

parents, and the community every day. Drivers are the first and final link in the daily chain of events for every student in a school district.

Yet by the nature of their work, facilities personnel are often cast as incidental, rather than integral, by many inside and outside the learning environment.

Several project directors at The Pacific Institute are actively involved in working with facilities personnel in education. Specifically, the Institute is working with the leaders and staff personnel of maintenance departments in the public schools of Washington State including the Olympia School District and the Spokane Public Schools.

The goals of these maintenance department leaders in implementing The Pacific Institute's education include:

- Elevating the internal image of individuals
- Improving morale and workplace *esprit de corps*
- Improving efficiency and effectiveness
- Reducing costs

School district administrative personnel, as well as supervisors, directors and other





## A MESSAGE FROM LOU & DIANE TICE

Steve Pappajohn and his colleagues, with the excellent assistance of Spokane school Superintendent, Brian Benzel, John Mannix, President of the Washington Association of Maintenance and Operations Administrators, and Tom Kuehn, a strong supporter of ours, are working with the facilitative personnel of the Spokane School District. This issue of THE LETTER describes the outcomes of this work in a very convincing report.

The goals of the work with facilitative personnel of the Spokane School District concentrated on the value of The Pacific Institute's® education in the workplace, the improvement of performance of the participants by improving their self and collective efficacy.

Tables one and two demonstrate the extraordinary success in accomplishing these goals. We are pleased, but not surprised to learn of additional evidence of the effectiveness of our programs with school personnel.

*Lou & Diane Tice*

managing personnel, widely recognize the importance and potential value of their facilities staffs. However, both the individual and the collective self-image of facilities workers and staffs are generally perceived as low. Often, a collective "victim mentality" is in evidence in maintenance departments.

### Methodology

An on-going *Imagine 21 ~ Fast Track to Change™* implementation program in the Olympia School District Maintenance Department serves as the design foundation for the current project in the Spokane Public Schools Plant Department (SPSPD). Personnel working both as maintenance supervisors in Olympia and as Institute education facilitators allow for valuable experience and insight into

the design and implementation of *Imagine 21* in the SPSPD.

The acceptance and application of The Pacific Institute's education by the department leadership was considered the first vital key to a successful implementation. As such, the executive director of the SPSPD, attended a "Lou Live" presentation of the Institute's education in December 2001. His subsequent support to, and utilization of, the curriculum was made clear to the entire SPSPD department by his endorsement of the active use of curriculum terminology and practices. As president of the professional statewide association for facilities managers, he also showed his support of the Institute's education by authoring a newsletter article entitled "*Behavior Determines Results: Lou Tice.*"

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Following the example set by the department leader, Institute project directors worked with the leadership to introduce the curriculum to the remainder of the organization's 275 people. It was decided that an "in-service" workshop-type presentation would be most suitable. The workshop would be conducted in the summer (July 2002) when school was not in session. The workshop was elective but would also have the advantage of qualifying for a portion of the periodic training requirements for all personnel in the department.

The in-service workshop was also important to the SPSPD leadership as a way to measure acceptance and support for the Institute's education among department managers and staff. After all, it would ultimately be the collective energy and creativity of the department to design and institute operational and other changes that could follow. As such, it was seen as imperative that the choice for implementation should come from within the department. An evaluation form was designed by John Mannix and Institute Project Directors to accomplish this task.

### **Workshop Design**

The format included four (4) identical one-half day (four-hour) workshops that would maximize department participation and allow managers and staffs to attend while maintaining the summer work schedule. Further, it was also thought that groups of 65-70 in each session would be optimal for both instruction efficiency and facility size. The workshop was offered at no cost to the employees by SPSPD.

The four (4) goals of the workshop included:

1. Provide attendees with valuable, lasting 'thinking' tools that could be applied immediately in both their personal and workplace lives;
2. Demonstrate effectively that a change in thinking produces a change in performance;

3. Improve performance by personal and department empowerment; and
4. Reinforce the importance of self- and collective-efficacy.

### **Workshop Content**

#### **First Facilitated Video Presentation**

After introductions and orientation, Tom Kuehn related his personal experience with the Institute's education and as maintenance supervisor for the Olympia School District. Immediately following was an Institute video presentation that introduced the concept that what is "normal for us" can be transformed into a "new (and better) normal." A discussion followed with input from attendees.

An example of an "old normal" in the maintenance department was proposed as a department-wide "victim mentality." A "new normal" was then proposed as a "take charge" attitude and attendees were encouraged to volunteer what that might be like. Visualization was proposed as a key for adding detail to that "new normal" picture.

#### **First Breakout Session**

##### ***(Lego® Toy Construction Workshop)***

The first break out session was intended to demonstrate the problems with an "old" model of management (Newtonian) compared to a new model (Whiteheadian). One of the *Meeting Starter™* video series was shown in which the distinction between Newtonian (traditional "top-down" management style) and Whiteheadian (new "flat" style) was explained.

Both teams were charged with building identical pre-packaged Lego model toy trucks. The winner of a mythical contract would be the team who finished first with a properly assembled toy vehicle. (The truck model packages, with instructions for assembly, are sold in toy stores for less than \$10.) The Whiteheadian group that networked, communicated and worked together consistently outperformed the linear, top down Newtonian management style, winning the contract in every session of the workshop.

This exercise demonstrated the effectiveness of a “new normal” — a different, greater expectation for performance through collaborative action. This exercise was an example of how effectiveness can improve as a consequence of new way of approaching a task or challenge. It was pointed out that this change required no increase in budget or staff, and that performance improvement can result by changing thinking.

### Second Facilitated Video Presentation

The second video presentation addressed the issue of accountability. In order to grow as an organization, it is important for each individual to be comfortable in identifying errors in performance and be committed to better results the next time. The creation of a safe environment for admitting mistakes and taking corrective action, without punishment, is vital for growth and improvement. An increase in desired results can then follow.

### Second Breakout Session

#### *(Problem Solving Workshop — Brainstorming vs. Reticular Activating System)*

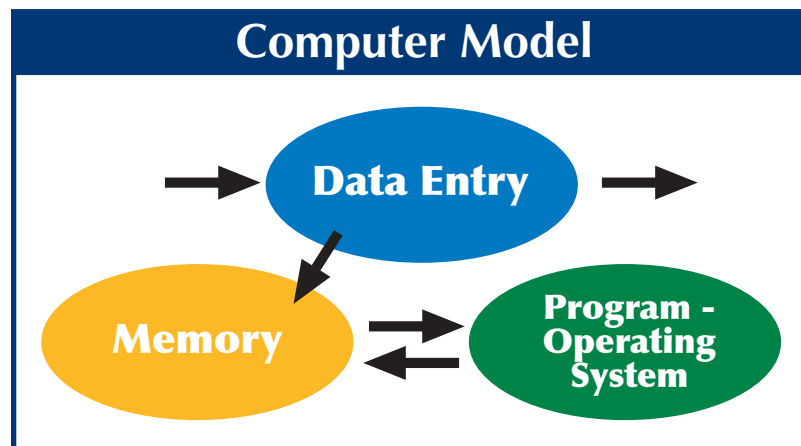
Following a short presentation by the facilitator regarding the need for change, the group gave examples of the types of changes that are taking place in the world around us, including their workplace. This led to a discussion of the concept that, as maintenance professionals, “we are the experts” in our workplace realm. And as a collaborative Whiteheadian team, becoming proactive about problem-solving can have a great impact on the overall effectiveness of the department.

To further demonstrate this point, the “S” exercise was performed with the group. One volunteer from the group is asked to identify as many things as possible in the room that begin with the letter “S” in 30 seconds (screen, sign, sill, etc.). No one else from the

group was allowed to participate or help. Typically, given the constraints of time and perceived pressure, only a small number of items can be named. However, when the task is then opened to the entire group, a much larger number of “S” objects results for the effort.

At this point, the group is broken into natural sub-groups by trade (custodians, bus drivers, grounds, etc.) or positions (foreman, supervisors, etc.). A problem, based on an actual occurrence, was posed to the groups and each group was asked to come up with a solution. One purpose of the exercise is to practice the collaborative technique (ie., team work) and then to pool possible solutions from all of the groups. Another goal of the exercise is to differentiate this conscious-level brainstorming process from a subconscious-level process known as the Reticular Activating System (RAS). The demonstration of the effectiveness of using and directing the RAS is also intended as an indication that more potential exists within us than we currently may be using.

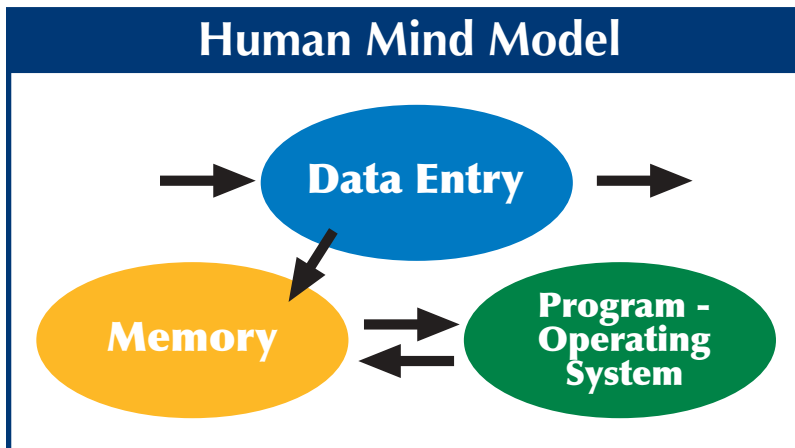
In order to effectively demonstrate the existence and role of the RAS, it was important for the facilitators to present a simple explanation of what it is and how it works. In as much as the computer is familiar to most, and since it is often used as a model in describing cognitive processes, the computer was chosen and represented as shown below.



After a short explanation of this model was given, several minutes of questions and a short open discussion followed. Next, a *Meeting Starter™* video was shown. The video discussed how the brain works in regards to the conscious, subconscious, and creative subconscious process. The video then reinforces the RAS concept in theory and application. A diagram of the computer model remained in the room next to the video screen as an intended live comparison to the human mind model.

the problem on a 24-hour per day basis.

Having the tag in the work place helps to bring the problem back to the conscious mind with, possibly, new ideas for solution. The facilitator instructed the participants to write a solution to the problem on the reverse side of the tag as the solution surfaced in the coming days. One SPSPD employee was charged with accumulating the ideas that were sent in from maintenance offices around the district.



### Third Facilitated Video Presentation

The final video presentation centered on the importance of teamwork. Central to effective teaming is the concept of trust among team members. The facilitator stressed the importance of creating common goals and visions wherever possible, in order to fully benefit from an interac-

tive, more Whiteheadian organization.

### Closing Remarks

The Executive Director of the SPSPD provided the closing statements. He, too, stressed the importance of trust and openness within a safe environment for feedback. And he made very public his assurances of safety and security through the exploratory stage of gathering opinions regarding new ideas to solve the pressing problems within the SPSPD.

As an invitation to participate in filling out the optional questionnaire, the executive director reiterated his position that any implementation of The Pacific Institute's curriculum would be a department-wide decision. Ownership of the education process and, more importantly, the changes that would be adopted in the SPSPD, was placed squarely with the participants in a very open and public manner.

Finally, the group was given a long-term open-ended homework assignment that involved experiencing the RAS in application. As a demonstration of conscious and subconscious problem-solving techniques, each participant was asked to think about a pressing problem or challenge that they faced in their workplace lives. The breakout session facilitators (as coached by Tom Kuehn) offered several generic examples and time was provided so that each participant could identify a specific problem of importance to them.

As participants thought and pictured their most pressing problems, they were each asked to write out the problem on one side of a tag, approximately the size of a business card. The facilitator explained that the tag, attached to a small paper box, was intended as a trigger mechanism. By programming the problem into the subconscious of the mind and then going on to normal activities, the subconscious can be set to work out

## Evaluation - Questionnaire

A voluntary evaluation form was made available to the participants following the closing remarks. As mentioned above, the primary purpose of the questionnaire was to determine the willingness of the SPSPD employees to implement the Institute's education in the workplace. Five (5) questions appeared on the form, plus a space for "comments." Spaces were provided for name and contact information but were indicated as "optional." Institute personnel handled and processed all forms and provided the results to the leadership of the SPSPD, without names to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

### Results

The goals of the workshop, as listed on Page 2, included:

- Providing valuable, lasting 'thinking' tools that could be applied immediately;
- Demonstrating that a change in thinking produces a change in performance;
- Improve performance by personal and department empowerment;
- Reinforcing the importance of self- and collective-efficacy.

The questionnaire posed two (2) questions that required a "Yes/No" choice:

*Would you recommend this workshop to others?*

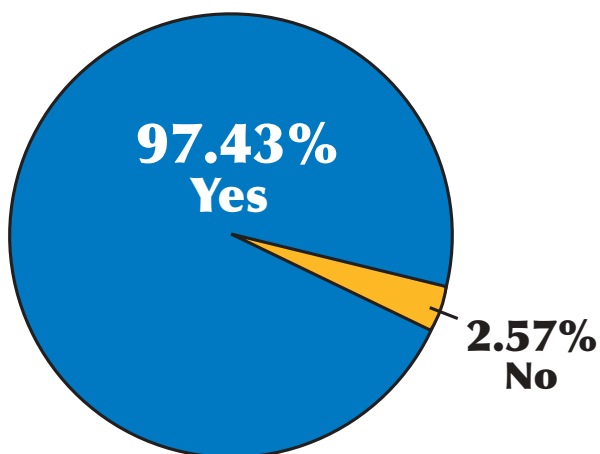
*Would you be interested in follow-up training within your work group, team or department?*

The results are shown on the pie graphs below and indicate overwhelming support for both the workshop and follow-up training. Question #1 resulted in 97.43% of the respondents indicating that they would recommend the workshop to others. Question #2 similarly resulted in 94.28% of the respondents indicating that they would be interested in some form of follow-up training.

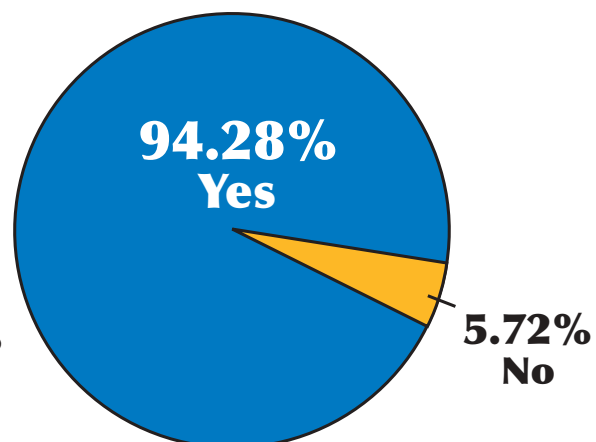
Three (3) additional questions, requiring a short written response, were designed to assess how well the workshop accomplished the expressed goals among the participants. Many participant comments referred directly to the value of the concepts discussed in the workshop and requested that more time be devoted to developing these concepts in the future. Other respondents commented on the importance of developing these concepts on all levels within the department. Still others reflected on how working more effectively as a like-minded department was a key to better department performance.

Selected responses follow each of the three (3) questions included:

**Question #1 Results**  
117 Responses



**Question #2 Results**  
105 Responses



### How has today's workshop presentation benefited you personally?

*"It has changed the way I focus on problems"*

*"It's offered me a new way of looking at problems and dealing with co-workers"*

*"Re-energized my belief that 'It's been done this way' is not always the best way"*

### How has this workshop impacted your plans for the future?

*"It has reinforced some of my own ideas and given me new ideas"*

*"To be more aware of how I do things at work and home"*

*"That I can make changes in my life for the better"*

*"I hope to implement what I have learned here in my work and home life"*

*"Made me aware of thinking things out better prior to acting"*

### How can we improve this workshop?

Seven (7) respondents indicated *"Make it longer"*

*"A take away flyer – leaflet, to help us remember the different concepts"*

*"Maybe a longer presentation so we can go into more detail"*

*"Different areas attending – Principals, teachers, custodians and others"*

*"Longer, more breakout groups, and information on implementing the system"*

These results and the full range of comments received have proven helpful for the SPSPD leadership. Based on the results, the SPSPD has collectively decided to implement *Imagine 21™* training for the entire department.

### Summary

A constructive and consistent educational environment is generally acknowledged to have a positive effect on all learners. As integral members of the educational support system, facilities workers are important to the success of the districts where they work. With increasing importance being placed on homeland security, their role in virtually every physical plant operation has elevated awareness of their value. Yet, budget pressures, aging buildings, school violence, privatization, environmental safety, personal security and health concerns are just some of the



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Dr. Terrell served as Chairman of the Department of Psychology, University of Colorado, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and as Dean of Faculties at the University of Illinois in Chicago before an 18-year tenure as President of Washington State University. He also served as President of the National Association of State Universities and Colleges, Commissioner for the State of Washington on the Western Interstate Commission for

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Dr. Terrell has received numerous honorary degrees and awards, among them a listing in *Who's Who in America: American Men of Science*, and Distinguished Graduate of the Department of Psychology, University of Iowa. His first book, *The Ministry of Leadership: Heart and Theory*, was published in December, 2002.

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forces having an impact on school building, grounds, maintenance and other facilities support groups.

A growing awareness of the ability both to lead change and to provide a model for other segments of the educational environment is currently underway. Led by the department director, the Olympia School District Building and Grounds Department implemented the *Imagine 21™* curriculum starting in 2001. Since then, the department has been able to improve services despite continuing budget constraints. Comments from department personnel reflect the individual and collective transition that has occurred from a “victim mentality” to an empowered, option-thinking collective mindset. Implementation in the SPSPD is scheduled for the 3rd and 4th quarters of 2003.

The growing body of knowledge in behavioral, cognitive and, increasingly, genetic science continues to build support for the similarities rather than differences in human functioning. In this regard, the strength and inherent attractiveness of the goal achievement process in the *Imagine 21™* curriculum is applicable for everyone.

### **Acknowledgments**

The Pacific Institute would like to thank John Mannix, Executive Director of Plant and Facilities for the Spokane Public Schools for his leadership and coopera-

tion, and Brian Benzel, Superintendent of SPS, for his support of SPSPD activities. Tom Kuehn, Supervisor of Building and Grounds for the Olympia School District (OSD) is the workshop designer and originator. His leadership and dedication have been a vital contribution to the continuing outstanding accomplishments of the individuals and organization in Olympia. OSD Superintendent Bill Lahmann and Deputy Superintendent Ken Benny have provided continuing support and vision to the project in Olympia. John Foley of The Pacific Institute participated in the workshop presentation in Spokane and provided valuable instructive content. Christy Watson edited the final draft and provided valuable guidance in production of the final product. Courtney Cook Hopp directed the layout for the final product. All shortcomings, omissions and errors are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Dr. Glenn Terrell provided the inspiration for the article, invaluable guidance and input during its construction, and insightful comments and reflections. The fullness and depth of his passion for education and his dedication to science and research, are both spirit-filled and richly instructive. The authors are, and will always remain, honored by his participation in this effort.