

TEAM PEGASUS



PENNY'S PROBLEMS SOLVED

A Case Study Analysis Conducted at Sunshine State University

LIS 650.D01

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History & Physical (Background Information)

Penny is currently employed as the systems librarian in the Engineering Library at Sunshine State University (SSU). Her responsibilities, as evidenced by the case study text and validated by question answer set #2 (see Appendix 1.2) include providing technology support and systems support for the Engineering Library and faculty and training faculty and staff on newly implemented technology. Her educational background includes a bachelor's degree with a double major in theatre and information systems and operations management (ISOM)¹ at Indiana University and a master's degree in information science from the same institution. She got the job at SSU immediately upon graduation from IU and has held said position ever since. Hierarchically speaking, she directly supervises two work-study students, has lateral standing with all of the other Engineering Library staffers, and answers directly to Sheldon (see Appendix 1.1).

Symptoms (Identified Issues)

The following is a list of identifiable issues/symptoms that contribute to the overarching issues facing Penny: a cluttered, unorganized office, stressed outbursts towards fellow employees and supervisors, feeling at the beck and call of faculty at all times, skipping meals to ostensibly catch up on work/train co-workers, an obvious disdain for fellow co-workers (e.g. Sheldon), and a distinct lack of self-control in meetings/professional settings (e.g. the outburst in the budget meeting towards Sheldon and muttering during meetings).

Diagnosis (Identification of Overarching Issues)

Currently, Penny feels absolutely overwhelmed and victimized in her current situation, and always appears to be in crisis mode rather than settling into a smooth routine. She feels, based on the case study text, that she has no control and a lack of agency in her current situation. She feels that she does not have enough time to accomplish all her job tasks, even though she consistently comes in early and works through lunch. She has solidly placed the blame on her coworkers, citing what she feels is incompetence, especially upon her direct supervisor Sheldon. This blaming tactic has manifested itself in the manner in which she communicates with the staff around her and resulted in an outburst directed towards Sheldon in a budget meeting. She received, on the whole, mostly satisfactory marks on her performance evaluation, save for the section on working well within a team environment.

The three areas Penny needs to focus on, as identified by our team, are **developing time management skills, fostering teamwork and communication, and focusing on maintaining an organized life and space**. We feel that if she accomplishes these three goals, her professional life will flourish and she will be a much less stressed individual. These suggestions are not mandates; we would like Penny to pick and choose tactics that will work for her and her environment.

¹ There appears to be some measure of discrepancy with this statement. In the case study text, Penny is identified as being an English major, yet in question set #2 (Appendix 1.2), she identifies herself as being a double major in theatre and ISOM.

Prescription (Description of Suggestions)

Prescription One: Develop Time Management Skills

Penny should begin utilizing some basic time management techniques. As evidenced by Cochran's (1992) recommendation that successful librarians formulate a plan for each day rather than simply react to what the day brings, time management is extremely important (p.21-22).

- ✓ Use a program like HabitRPG to set goals and achieve awards as you work.
 - **HabitRPG** is, in the company's own words, an application that "treats life like a game". Like in an RPG (Role Playing Game), you earn experience points (XP) and gold to purchase items/prizes for completing tasks, but you also lose health/hit points (HP) for leaving items incomplete. For example, if there is a new downloadable content package coming out for Grand Theft Auto, set a goal of X number of gold to be able to download it.
- ✓ Use a calendaring tool to block off time for tasks/activities. For example, Google Calendar has a fantastic appointment function where you can, for example, set aside blocks of time as "office hours" for people to request appointments for one-on-one intensive technical assistance.
 - In conjunction with setting "office hours", utilize a ticket system (a'la many ITS departments) for faculty and staff having tech issues to fill out to delegate tasks. Often times, her two work study students are just as competent to deal with issues and that will free Penny up to better manage and flourish. **OSTicket** is great, low-to-no-cost ticket system solution. If you choose to host and administer internally, it is no-cost per month.
- ✓ Take time management a step further, and block off time for things like meals and breaks.
 - Breaks are incredibly important for productivity. In 2011, Atsunori Ariga and Alejandro Llegas of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign published a study entitled "Brief and rare mental 'breaks' keep you focused: Deactivation and reactivation of task goals preempt vigilance decrements" in *Cognition*, the International Journal of Cognitive Science. In the aforementioned study, Ariga and Llegas (2011) assert that inserting breaks into a regimented task will not cause performance to drop off. In fact, breaks from the task either cause no change over time in performance or heighten performance rather than cause the drop-off in productivity that constant adherence to the task statistically produced.
 - Not eating can cause major health issues even outside of effecting mood and work ability. Keep a stash of things like oatmeal, individual mini bags of high protein trail mix, and dried fruit in an office cabinet for emergencies. Not only is missing meals bad for your body, a study conducted by Andrew Smith and Amanda Wilds (2009) from the University of Cardiff asked half of its volunteers to skip breakfast and half to have a cereal bar for breakfast, the results showed that volunteers who consumed a cereal bar felt more alert, happy, sociable and less anxious; and they recalled more words in a free recall task (p. 67).
- ✓ Make sure your calendar/task list is synced to all your devices. Our two previous suggestions of HabitRPG and Google Calendar have full syncing functionality across the network, downloadable widgets for next-generation browsers, and downloadable applications for a myriad of smartphones.
- ✓ Utilize a tool like Doodle to find opportune times to train staffers and offer workshops on new technology. **Doodle** is a free, online polling system for meeting times. This will allow Penny to see opportune times to offer workshops and start to schedule multiple times instead of one concrete time.
 - If lunch is the most opportune time, make it a lunch-and-learn workshop. Not skipping meals is extremely important; see the study produced by Smith and Wilds (2009) referenced above. Making employees skip lunch could also venture into punitive territory, and that would be less than ideal.
- ✓ Be more cognizant of the time it takes to properly train staffers in the technology. Instead of trying to cram two hours of training in one, work with folks to develop an online module system to learn new technologies. Also, think about developing training sessions for faculty and staff as well.

Prescription (Description of Suggestions, Continued)

Prescription Two: Foster Communication and Teamwork

Teamwork is extremely important for a fully functioning work environment. Since Penny is a part of a mostly lateral team, communication needs to flow easily between each contingent of the team, as displayed by the Figure 7.4 in Gordon (2002) that illustrates the optimal flow of information from top tier to bottom tier (p. 194).

- ✓ Take the initiative to organize staffers into a Technology Advisory Team, or the Tech Team.
 - This Tech Team should include Penny, Sheldon (as her direct supervisor), and a number of the technology-oriented librarians and staffers. This group can work together to produce workshops on technology, review purchases, and implement work flow changes.
- ✓ Start having brief Tech Team meetings every week to two weeks; remember, it takes a cohesive unit to win, and you all have the capability to become a real cohesive team. Forming this team takes real leadership skills, which will lead to better teamwork.
- ✓ Find common ground with your coworkers/teammates. For example, develop a fun, group-building game night that meets once every couple of weeks. Play cooperative games such as Pandemic or Castle Panic (board games), Final Fantasy or Halo (video game), World of Warcraft (PC game), and then build into good-natured competitive games.
- ✓ Have the staffers take a personality test, like the Keirsey Temperament Sorter, for both a fun activity and to try to determine which project or team assignments fit each staffer best based in their analysis. These Kiersey Temperament assessments will also allow staffers some measure of understanding of their own habits and methodology.
- ✓ Utilize some gamification techniques in training and make it a fun and dynamic environment. A great book on this is *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* by Jane McGonigal.
- ✓ Encourage the game-oriented staffers to mirror Penny's newfound time management skills. For example, establish a clan on HabitRPG for the entire crew and start working towards group goals.
- ✓ Use the chance to write a grant to, for example, attend a conference on the new technology or maybe fund an additional student assistant to help manage the workflow.

Prescription Three: Focus on Maintaining an Organized Space and Life

Organization is key to a harmonious existence. A chaotic office, chaotic schedule, and chaotic interactions with coworkers will only lend itself to more stress.

- ✓ To tackle the office, set aside some time, either a day or spread out over a few days/weeks, where Penny can shut the door, blare fun music, and fill up the recycle bin with old materials.
 - Penny is not alone in the struggle against clutter. In the article, "Sink or Swim", authors Blosser, Slaughter, and Scherlen (2001) outline the process of redesigning the library work space for better comfort and productivity (p. 375). While Penny is starting by organizing her space, she may also consider furniture placement and decor to improve the ergonomics of the office and brighten her mood.
- ✓ Make a collections management policy for your office space. Something paper goes obsolete? Recycle that bad boy. Is it available in a digital format? Switch to paperless. In addition, inquire as to the library's own collections management policy when it comes to paper goods and technology.
- ✓ Block off fifteen to thirty minutes every Friday to tame the paper beast (while listening to some fun music) and prepare for the next week. Preparation is key to not stressing!
 - Cochran (1992) suggests all librarians schedule time each week for routine paperwork to prevent undue time pressures and the stress of missed deadlines (p. 35).

Follow-Up (Evaluation Process)

A key to the Evaluation Process is that it is, ideally, a continual process. Penny should strive to evaluate her situation on a staggered timeline, but also keep in mind that evaluation needs to be ongoing. Essentially, do not stop once the following goal statements are met; set new goals and continually strive.

Goal Statements

- ✓ **Prescription One (P1): Develop Time Management Skills** – Penny will maintain a structured calendar, complete with time for breaks, levity, and rewards, and thusly no longer feel stressed or overworked. She will also define boundaries and delegate tasks based on these boundaries.
- ✓ **Prescription Two (P2): Foster Communication and Teamwork** – Penny will develop open lines of honest, respectful communication with all members of her unit/team. She will also foster teamwork among her coworkers by letting down her guard and developing enjoyable interactive activities for everyone involved central to shared interests.
- ✓ **Prescription Three (P3): Focus on Maintaining an Organized Space and Life** – Penny will organize her office space and schedule and strive to maintain both in a neat, organized manner. She will also build time into her schedule to reflect and maintain her space and schedule.

Daily-to-Weekly Evaluations

- ✓ Keep a daily activity journal and analyze the journal; the key is to keep an honest, open dialogue on both strengths/weaknesses and successes/failures. **(P1, P2, P3)**
- ✓ Begin and end every week with a goal list. Take time on Friday afternoon to evaluate your progress; if you meet a certain number of your goals, indulge in something fun over the weekend! If not, no worries; get back on the horse Monday morning. **(P1, P2, P3)**
- ✓ Develop a “support group” of friends to meet with for enjoyment at the end of the week. **(P2)**
- ✓ Meet with Sheldon briefly once a week to develop goals for the week and analyze the past week. **(P1, P2, P3)**

Biweekly-to-Monthly/Occasional Evaluations

- ✓ Distribute surveys after trainings with your staff and faculty, asking them to anonymously evaluate your training style and the material covered. **(P1, P2)**
- ✓ If a ticket system is implemented as referenced in Prescription Part One, utilize the feedback section of the ticket system to gain insight on perceptions and growth. **(P1, P2)**
- ✓ Meet with the Tech Team every two weeks to better analyze knowledge retention and staff cohesiveness. **(P1, P3)**

Long-Term Evaluations

- ✓ Aim to raise the “needs improvement” captions on the annual performance review. **(P1, P2, P3)**

Appendix 1.1: Question & Answer Set #1

Q: Who answers directly to you/Do you have an organization chart?

A: Two work-study students report directly to me and I have lateral communication to everyone else in the library and Sheldon is my direct supervisor so I report upwards to him. We are such a small branch we don't have a formal chart that I know of.

Q: What kind of things do you like to do for fun/enjoyment?

A: I am an introvert so I stay home a lot and play video games. I like Grand Theft Auto III, Mortal Kombat and Postal 2. I enjoy comic cons and cosplay. In small doses.

Q: What kind of technology do you personally use? Do you have a smartphone?

A: Duh. I have the smartest phone and upgrade often. I like to consider myself an early adopter for some stuff for games and phones but computers are going the way of the dinosaur.

Q: Would you like to write a grant to perhaps attend some fun, tech-y trainings or maybe get a student assistant?

A: I am not a great writer (hence the tech stuff) so if I had some help that might be okay but I've heard that writing a grant takes a long time and the follow-up reporting can take even more time so that often they are not worth the effort. Maybe.

Appendix 1.2: Question & Answer Set #2 (Edited for Penny's Content)

Q: Your job is to install new technology, provide technical support on this new technology for the engineering librarians and staff but mostly to train the library staff to use this new technology, right? Is this what is in your job description? Do you have a job description and can we see it?

A: Yes, this is mostly my job.

Q: May we see your resume (is it perhaps on LinkedIn or a web page)? If we can't see your resume can you at least tell us what you majored in as an undergraduate and some of your previous work experience?

A: Penny had a dual major at Indiana in theater and ISOM.

Q: We know how wonderful your university's MLIS program is and were wondering what kind of teaching classes you took while there?

A: I have an MIS from Indiana (not an MLS). We didn't have instruction classes but I have picked that up mostly on the job.

Q: Have you ever chatted with Sheldon about his previous work experience, library goals or just about anything? What are the engineering library's goals?

A: Sheldon is a genius but isn't very good with people. Our library goals are pretty simple. We support the mission and goals of the engineering school which is a biggie here on campus.

References

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