2012 Professional Practices Program

Training With Personas

Johnson County, Kansas

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Election worker training has become an exercise in preparing for the exceptions.

95 percent of voters have a very similar voting experience. We call them Perfect Voters because everything goes the way it is intended. Voters are in the poll book, they are provided the correct ballot, cast it without incident, and receive an “I Voted” sticker upon leaving the polling place.

The handling of the other five percent impacts the perception of the election with voters, the media, candidates and elected officials, and even election workers. The more confident election workers are with procedures for the exceptions, the more likely they are to excel on election day, return as experienced workers in later elections, and join us in our goal of sustained excellence in election administration.

That preparation starts with understanding that elections involve people. Voters are people. A voter can sometimes be nameless and faceless when discussing training procedures, but the more we view voters as unique individuals, the more likely we are to achieve excellence with the exceptions.

Our latest discussions with our workers stem from a new law change in 2012 involving Photo Identification at the polls. Our workers are generally supportive of the law, but apprehensive about their role. Particularly, they are concerned about complying with the new law, types of ID allowed, and the procedures to follow if the ID is not valid or does not appear to meet the legal requirements.

They also are apprehensive about interacting with vocal supporters or protestors of the new law at the polling place.

Our training approach in 2012 confronts the apprehension directly and through humor. Our immediate impression objective is to demonstrate to our workers that we have thought through exceptions they will face on election day.

We did this by creating personas (people archetypes) representing scenarios that workers may see at the polls. These personas were defined as individual people and then once their scenarios were considered, we created humorous caricatures of the personas.

We enlisted a comedian who utilizes several characters in his work and matched the personas to his characters. We then created a video script around those personas.

We were able to leverage relationships to produce a video at a greatly reduced cost; we used actual election workers in the video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lDaIw1EIMQ). Our comedian played all of the voter personas. He appears as himself at one point just for context.
We greet our workers at training with the video as an icebreaker to kick off the training. Then, we reinforce the video during the training presentation by bringing back slides of the persona characters and a discussion of the scenario and the proper procedure.

Our personas include

- a voter who intentionally doesn't come with ID,
- a voter who comes with the wrong ID,
- a voter who doesn't look like his photo,
- a voter who comes in only with the voter registration card,
- a voter who wants to discuss the new law with an election worker,
- a voter who believes his ID is valid and doesn't want to come back and wait in line,
- a familiar face who is surprised he still is asked for ID, and
- a voter who goes by several names.

The video is hosted by a British hipster and has a news segment opening and closing. We use the closing to reinforce our desired end-state: “These election workers are quite well-trained, remarkably sincere, and they demonstrate the utmost professionalism…they’re absolute rock stars.”

A big challenge in creating the video was timing, particularly because we needed to write, shoot, and edit the video over the period of November 2011 through January 2012 while procedures were being developed and finalized. We didn’t want the video to be outdated with adjusted procedures as we used it, beginning in February 2012 and through November 2012.

We also prepared the video so it could be utilized by any of the other 104 counties in Kansas. Shot in Johnson County, we kept the script at the “Kansas” level to maximize its versatility. We showed the video at the Kansas County Clerks and Election Officials annual conference in May, and many counties have expressed plans to utilize the video in their training as well. The approach can be further emulated by others using just the presentation slides.

Supplemental materials include screen shots of the slides we utilize related to some of the characters, as well as the primary directive we have with all of this—borrowing a line from Star Wars to “Stay on target!” We want our workers focused on the procedures and not veering off-script.

We’ve augmented this approach with an iPad sent to each polling place that contains all of this training information and several sample photos of identifications that can be used at the polls.

Our outcome in our three early elections in 2012 has been what we hoped—election worker confidence in dealing with the scenarios, as well as complete professionalism even when encountering a couple of the real-life versions of these personas.

We will further use this approach in August and November and will post a link to the video on our “For Election Workers” tab of our website beginning in July.
Video Link (also included on CD):
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lDaIw1EIMQ

Slides below and on following page relate to the persona discussion during training

Our 2012 Mission

Stay on Target!

Traps to Avoid

Wrong ID Guy

Instead of the IDs in the manual, he comes with a Costco Card, a photo, a pool pass or worse.

Traps to Avoid

The Talker

Either praises you for asking for Photo ID or criticizes the system. Either way, this person would like to engage you in the discussion.

Traps to Avoid

The “New Me”

Voter doesn’t bear any resemblance to his or her photo.
Video Link (also included on CD):
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lDaIw1EIMQ

Traps to Avoid

**The Familiar Face**
Voter is a friend, acquaintance, or even a pastor from church.
ID must be checked, **by law**.

Traps to Avoid

**Feisty Man**
Doesn’t have the right ID and doesn’t want to complete a provisional ballot or come back with an ID.

Traps to Avoid

**The Name Du Jour**
Voter’s name doesn’t resemble that in the poll book at all.
This will lead to most of your provisional ballots.

Traps to Avoid

**The Protestor**
Refuses to show ID or doesn’t bring ID.