

SOH Disability Access Plan

A train or a tennis ball?

**Carolyn Stewart-Smith –
Manager of Planning and Governance**

A train or a tennis ball - this is the question that I asked the Executive Team of the Sydney Opera House a couple of weeks ago which I will come back to later in the presentation.

Momentum

The mass of an object multiplied by its velocity

In basic terms this means the amount of "stuff" that is moving and how fast the "stuff" is moving

If an object has a high momentum, it is more difficult to change its speed and direction

A train moving at a high speed has a lot of momentum

A tennis ball moving at a high speed has less momentum

Building Momentum

"How has access been addressed in your plans for....."

This was our approach to building Momentum:

Keep it simple - At times disability access planning can be overwhelming, the physical access challenges sometimes just seem too big to resolve - hence we just don't go there, we avoid the issue, it gets put into the too hard basket. Unfortunately this then sets the tone and culture for disability access. If key people in the organisation, like the CEO or senior management only just ask one question every time an initiative is being planned that it can make a huge difference. They don't need to have the answer to every disability access issue in the organisation, they just need to remember one short simple question "How has access been addressed in your plans for... (the website planning for this year, the 2006 performances, tourism experiences etc..).

Keep it realistic, achievable - who wants to get on a plane that is going to run out of petrol in mid flight. No one want to set out on journey that is destined to fail, it is demotivating. Therefore set we set achievable initiatives in our plan. We have taken on learnings from previous Plans and have built in step by step processes. For example one good idea that was proposed was to develop an Access Masterplan which will be an schematic legend identifying all the access issues overlayed over the site maps we already have, so when we are going to work on areas where solutions are needed it is in a form and language that architects, builders and facilities staff work with everyday.

Build in learning - If learning is built into the process then it is OK to not to always have the answers. This Plan builds in that it is OK to seek assistance particularly from disability access organisations or colleagues in other organisations, Learning gives us the opportunity to view something through someone else's experience, it personalises issues. For example a couple of staff met a person who had difficulties accessing our website as he was blind. He showed them what happened when using a screen reader, they were horrified

that he couldn't get past the home page. The staff came back to work motivated to change things and improvements were made to the website.

Have measures - I think that KPIs can be a useful tool and we plan to keep this simple - I think we can have two key indicators. Firstly - what access initiatives do we have planned for the next 3, 6, 9, 12 months, it is pretty simple if nothing is planned then nothing is going to be achieved. So we need to make sure that there are initiatives starting, in progress, or completed on a regular basis. Secondly seek customer feedback (before and after implementation - talk to access organisations who are fantastic resource and have a good link into the public - we will get them to give us a tick at the planning stage and again at implementation).

So getting back to the original question - a train or a tennis ball?

I asked the Sydney Opera House CEO and Executive Team this question the other day as part of presenting our Access Plan for endorsement.

I asked them did they want the organisation to be:

A train where there is a destination (a goal), is on track (a path), there is someone watching and directing the overall network to ensure we are meeting timetable (which is the Executive Team, there is a driver - some one in control of each train (or each initiative) and there are lots of people on board?

Or do you want to be a tennis ball - has to be hit to get moving, is singular, and usually is attributed to grunts and words like "come on" or "you can-not be serious" and just has the life knocked out of it for 9 games and then is replaced?

I am excited to say that they responded overwhelmingly with "that they wanted to be a train"!

Thank you