**Scientists as Communicators: Motivations and Training - John Besley (Michigan State University) and Dennis Schatz (Institute for Learning Innovation)**

*John Besley (Michigan State University)*

Do scientists actually want to participate in communications activities as we've been talking about?

According to Besley, they do want to participate in engagement activities and a good number of them have in the past year. He reported that there are several factors that influence their willingness to engage: Have they participated in the past? Do they anticipate it will be enjoyable? Do they think they can do it effectively? Will it work? Do they have the time?

No matter what, Besley said that engagement should be strategic (knowing what outcomes/objectives you are aiming for) and cumulative (having multiple opportunities). He said that we have to be selective and specific when we approach tactics, objectives, and goals. We need to consider: Where do they fall in people's belief systems? What do you want people to actually do with this information? What do you hope will happen from the time, money, and energy you put into communicating? Once you've set goals and objectives, tactics should support them. For example, if your goal is to appear willing to listen, tactics could include arriving early and staying late at meetings.

Teaching does not substantially change attitudes or beliefs in most cases. Similarly, communication is not just simplification or distillation of information. Besley pointed out that we should be communicating beyond knowledge – to build trust and form beliefs. Beliefs will form, whether you plan for them or not.

*Dennis Schatz (Institute for Learning Innovation)*

Dennis Schatz spoke about Portal to the Public's efforts to train scientists to engage with their local communities at public science events. The program's goal is to connect scientists to the public so they can be role models and put human faces on the discipline. The program teaches participants to use a concept map to frame their message and prioritizes informal interactions. The training program is done in a group, not individually, because people learn better in a group setting. The participants are also given repeated opportunities to practice, because exposure over a period of time is important for learning, whether you are learning communications skills or hydrology.

He also discussed different ways of considering your communications strategy. You might start with an audience first and then expand to the engagement strategies (tactics) needed for that audience. He emphasized that no matter what, the foundation of all interactions and strategies should be based in how people learn. You should take preconceptions into account; people are not blank slates. Making interactions face-to-face gives you a chance to have a dialogue and truly assess what these preconceptions are and how you can address them.

Overall, you shouldn't have to reinvent the wheel to train your own scientists. There are many resources available if you don't have the funding to hire out training. If you do have the funding, ensure your trainers are sophisticated in their approach – they should understand what you are trying to accomplish. Most of all, you need to provide the tools for learning to your scientists, give them opportunities to use the skills, and provide feedback through coaching.