

## LEVELS OF STAFF COMPETENCE - AN INTRODUCTION

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First of all before I start with the paper, I do not want any museums to take anything I say as a reflection on any individual museum. This is something that applies really to most museums and unfortunately I may have to make reference to a few instances that I know have happened in a few museums without actually mentioning the museums to save those museums embarrassment. Basically the whole level of staff competence applies not only to the tram driver, the the conductor, to the dispatcher (or starter if you want to call him that and you come from Victoria), but to the staff in the bookshop, the staff in the tracks, to every person who is involved in any way with the museum situation. I am also not intending to make this a paper giving information but merely a paper to raise questions which I hope will be followed up at the next COTMA Conference.

Basically, it stems from approaches that were made to me unofficially by a few persons in the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board whilst I was in Melbourne doing my driver training course. Their worry was a very simple worry and it was basically concerning actual tramcar driving. In reference to a serious accident, whatever happens in one museum is going to affect every museum. What also worries these people is that whatever happens in the museums may possibly to a certain degree affect the Tramways Board since they operate similar equipment to most of us, particularly Brisbane. Another worry is the variation of standard from museum to museum. They are quite pleased to train museum members to drive on the Board's system as they did with myself and they made the offer to all BTMS members to go through the normal driver training school. The reasons they put forward for this and why they are prepared to do this is that they at least know that those museums taking that trouble are having crews that are trained to a certain level of competence. Now some museums have no real driver training at all. At Brisbane we are hoping to have driver training of a very competent standard, in fact we are basing our driver training on a manual prepared both by the Melbourne Tramways Board originally about 1963, then revised in 1965 by the BCC Transport Department for incorporation in our tramway system, unfortunately, by that stage it was a well known fact within the department that the system was closing and it was never proceeded with. As part of the archival records, we received all their manuals and information that they had compiled. We have suitably modified that course to suit our museum needs plus we have also had that checked over by the Board and they made suggestions here and there. Which brings us to the other question. They were quite pleased that we were doing this and I think everyone is familiar with problems at least one other museum has had with rear on collisions. This type of thing which really shouldn't have happened under the certain circumstances that they happened under, if the staff had been trained to a high level of competence. I am not advocating that we should all get together and say we are going to standardise our equipment, training procedures, etc., but what I am saying is that we should agree that staff is going to be trained to a certain level of competence that they should be able to react in a given emergency situation in the correct way, the same as an operator would on a normal street tramway. Now some members will say as we are not on a normal street tramway we should not have these problems. As one of our members says we should not even use the word emergency because we are not going to have any. We all hope that we don't have any but the situation is going to arise at some time in a thousand years where we are going to have that emergency and every

staff member should be trained to deal with it in a safe manner.

I will leave the driver training at this stage. The same thing applies to our staff behind the counter. Sales persons should be trained in public relations as it is no good having someone there who is going to discourage people from buying. You want someone there who can sell. You want guides who are able to go around and tell the people a good story. People like a story, they are more interested in the anecdotes that go with the exhibit rather than the exhibit itself. They want the entertainment value which you have heard Brian Harris tell you about. Someone who is good at entertaining makes a good person providing they have the information to show people over exhibits in the museum, if you are going in for that type of thing. You then come down even to your track construction. Now you have heard Allan talk about his experience in the BTMS where in the past we have had people who are not qualified who thought they knew what they were doing on track doing the work, which we have had to redo. We now have people who have taken the time to read the records which exist who have studied the situation, who don't profess to be professionals but who at least investigate and check out what they have to do before they do it. This is the type of person which you have need for in all facets of your museum operation, you don't want the situation happening where you have people lay track which is completely useless which then has to be torn up because the tram just won't go through it. Same with your conductor - you want someone in a conductor's job who is a safety conscious person who realises his responsibilities but who is not just there to collect fares but he is also there to help the passengers travelling on the tram. Also there is the one thing which I think some people may forget, the conductor must also be ready to act as motorman in the emergency situation should something happen to the motorman, and know how to stop the tram. Having the motorman collapsing at the controls and the tram careering down the track and the conductor not knowing what to do in that situation is hair raising to think about. This is the area that really has had these people, I am talking about from the Board, a little perturbed that some of the museums' training programs have extended this far. These museums have adopted the policy "OK a person knows how to drive the trams, he knows how the tram works, let him drive it". It also brings us to another point. It is all very well to have someone stand up beside you in the tram telling you this is how to drive the tram. OK, look I can drive. I mean, most of us are driving on our systems and some of us on the street system, all be it illegally and we thought we were driving trams. It is only when you actually go through a tram school that you realise that you weren't driving trams at all, you were only putting on the power and putting on the brake. There is a lot more to driving a tram than just that. There is the skill which you never really gain in museum operations, unless you can drive the tram continually, of actually having the feel of the car and instantaneous reaction. This is the main thing I learned from being in Melbourne driving the trams in regular traffic even though it be for only 100 hours - the ability to do the right thing instinctively if things do go wrong. This is something that even though I had been driving trams I had never really had. I am not saying that we should all learn to drive trams the same way, I am not saying we should all be trained by the Board because it probably would be in a lot of situations a useless exercise particularly to SPER with their reverse brake handles although the experience of driving in traffic could prove useful to them. (Comment from the audience). That is correct, you have just to get used to the different cars, the equipment is similar, the experience is the same and this is what really counts if we are going to become professional museums and not a bunch of amateurs. We have to put this competence into our staff. We have to make sure that the people we have doing a job are capable of doing that job.

As I said to commence, I don't want to make this a descriptive paper, I am just putting it forward as a view I would really like to see taken up at the next COTMA Conference where we can in some way lay down some guide lines for minimum competency in the various fields for our own staff. If we do, I think in the long run, it will enhance our own standing both with government bodies and insurance companies in particular and also most importantly with the general public who will see us acting in a most professional manner.