Subject: Communications Committee Bulletin, 3/2/13
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Date: 03/02/2013 07:59 PM
To: All paid workers at Free Geek <paidworkers@lists.freegeek.org>, regulars@lists.freegeek.org, "board-discuss@lists.freegeek.org" <board-discuss@lists.freegeek.org>

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE BULLETIN
March 2, 2013

*** Documents related to the re-structuring are available online at http://wiki.freegeek.org/index.php/2013_Restructuring_Documents ***

The major news of this past week--perhaps the biggest news since these bulletins began--is that the Collective ceased to exist on Thursday, February 28. Free Geek's governing Board now delegates management authority to three Directors who form a Senior Management Team. The Senior Management Team works with other managers and front-line staff to ensure that Free Geek runs smoothly and grows appropriately, in both its daily and more long-range operations.

This re-organization of Free Geek's management structure is the result of a multi-year period of reflection and planning where the Board has actively sought the input of managers, front-line staff and volunteers. They most recently have been assisted in these efforts by Paul Lipscomb, a consultant who is affiliated with the Nonprofit Association of Oregon (NAO). Last summer, an NAO consultant, Cliff Jones, conducted an extensive review of personal staff accountability for making, communicating and implementing decisions as Free Geek's first step towards improvements in these areas.

Following a review of background documents, an electronic survey of all Free Geek staff and focus groups, Cliff reported two major findings:

--Transparency was the most consistently mentioned value important to how organizational decisions are made, communicated and implemented.

--More openness, greater clarity and more effective decision making were the most mentioned items related to needs related to how organizational decisions are made, communicated and implemented.

One of Cliff's recommendations in response to these findings was that the Board should establish a management team structure within Free Geek that is charged with leading staff in ways that honor the core values prioritized by staff, volunteers and the Board. Specifically, he recommended the development of a new management structure that is based on key program areas and based on having a nimble team with three to five members. The Senior Management Team, with a Director from each of the Operations, Production and Public Services departments, is the Board's implementation of this recommendation.

Of course, the transition to the Senior Management Team from the Collective is not the end of improving transparency, openness, clarity and effectiveness. The work really begins now to address Cliff's other recommendations:

--Assess operational and workflow systems and build effective systems that are continually adapted to changing relationships and conditions.

--Conduct long range planning and business model analysis and set Free Geeks strategic vision, goals and direction.

--Care for and build relationships within Free Geek across all levels of the organization

including volunteers.

--Preserve Free Geek's strong values of workplace democracy and relative autonomy by providing all employees with the training and support they need to be a leader in helping Free Geek set its priorities, and in implementing those priorities.

--Build Board capacity to provide effective leadership and oversight.

From our formation in 2000 and the inauguration of a 3-member worker's collective in 2001 through today, Free Geek has gone through many changes in organizational structure and programs. We introduced and later eliminated a Community Council. We expanded the Collective and added non-collective paid employees. A union was certified, creating a clear distinction between management and labor with legal implications as well as implications for organizational culture. Throughout all these changes, we have maintained our commitment to our distinctive mission and values. That commitment is the true constant that defines Free Geek as Free Geek: scrappy, focused on empowering individuals through their relationship with the technology they use, aspiring to be a leader in environmental and social justice.

The Board is excited to take the next steps on this journey with the Free Geek community. They are confident that they have chosen three individuals for the Senior Management Team who have proven their ability to move Free Geek forward while and who affirm a clear commitment to transparency, openness, clarity and inclusion.

--Richard Seymour is the new Director of Operations. Richard was excited to be invited to help start Free Geek in 2000. Having spent the previous fifteen years navigating between the then disconnected linux-computer-geek crowds and various nonprofit circles, it was heartening to him to see these disparate groups all together in one package at Free Geek. His strength lies in accomplishing the "behind the scenes" supporting work that makes an organization function well.

--Cynthia Prevatte is the new Director of Production. Her last year at Free Geek has been dedicated to increasing efficiency, load-balancing work, and providing fault-tolerant solutions to our production areas so that we can respond gracefully to an unexpected failure at any step of our workflow. She dedicates a significant amount of time and energy to Free Geek outside of work as well, picking the brains of a broad range of people with skills and experience in technology fields. Cynthia has decades of experience as an IT professional.

--Darren Heiber is the new Director of Public Services. Over the past year and a half, he has focused on expanding Free Geek's reach both in the greater Portland area and online. This effort has paid off in rich online community engagement and increased organizational partnerships. In one example, we now work with Portland Youth Builders to get refurbished computers in Portland Public Schools on a large-scale basis. His professional background before Free Geek was as a librarian and teacher.

One of the first tasks for each Director is to fill the remaining open middle manager positions. The deadline for internal applicants is this Sunday, March 3. Interviews and hiring decisions for internal applicants will be completed no later than Thursday, March 7. If it is necessary to post any middle manager positions as open searches, it will happen after that date.

The Communications Committee will continue to send out weekly bulletins. You may also wish to subscribe to Free Geek's electronic newsletter (http://lists.freegeek.org/listinfo/e-newsletter), the Free Geek regulars email list (http://lists.freegeek.org/listinfo/regulars), and the Free Geek social chatter email list (http://lists.freegeek.org/listinfo/social) to stay informed about the latest Free Geek news and activities.

Also, be on the lookout for upcoming announcements about this year's Town Hall Meeting. This forum is the prime way that Free Geek seeks input and guidance from our volunteers for what our priorities should be.

Sincerely,
Your Communications Committee

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