

FEW's National Training Program, the #1 Member Benefit

You're a FEW Member
and have NEVER been
to an NTP????



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FEW National Training
Program (NTP) - What's
that? These words came
out of my mouth when
Civilian Personnel at the
United States Air Force

Academy approached me about attending. I had been involved with the Federal Women's Program (FWP) since 1977 and was selected in 1991 as the Special Emphasis Program Manager for FWP at the Air Force Academy. I did have a slight recollection of my predecessor, Lizz Kalisch (a dedicated member of FEW and a true friend that has now passed away) encouraging all of the FWP members to get involved with FEW and try and attend an NTP. I did think that at one point I would ask about attending even if it were out of my own pocket, but would see if I could get permissive TDY. However, as most of us in busy jobs, I put it off due to other commitments. I was in an upward mobility 5/7/9 job, which involved learning many new things on a daily basis. I also had a collateral duty job as FWP Manager plus various other "extra duties". I had always heard that our organization had little money for training and what we had should be spent for official training relevant only to our jobs. When I was told that Civilian Personnel would pay my way, I was ecstatic. I was going to go TDY somewhere besides Denver, Colorado or Albuquerque, New Mexico. Don't think that I wasn't grateful for any training I received over the years, as they all proved beneficial down the road. I had attended numerous EEO conferences (sometimes at my own expense on permissive TDY). These were only two and a half days in duration and it was hard to get away even for the short TDYs. I believe my first NTP was in Las Vegas (horrible place to go TDY) and believe me I certainly was teased about a week's TDY to Vegas.

I was a little apprehensive about going by myself; however, that sure wasn't going to stop

me. I was so enthusiastic after attending my first NTP, I went back to work at the Academy and started working on how I could reach the top people on the base and persuade them to allow at least one woman from each organization to attend. I talked to my boss first telling him about all of the wonderful workshops and I thought our directorate needed to send at least one woman beside myself (since my trip was paid for out of Civilian Personnel funding). I wrote a report on each class and passed out to all the women in my directorate. He told me the same thing, "We don't have a lot of money for training except for job related things." I told him that a well rounded, dedicated employee needed to know more than just their job skills. They needed training in various categories that the NTP offered. After showing him my program booklet and the categories they offered workshops in (Management & Leadership, Information Technology, Personal Effectiveness, Communication Skills, Career Enhancement and others), he was still somewhat reluctant. I also reminded him that six men from our Television Section had all attended the National Association of Broadcasting and Multimedia Conference in Las Vegas where there was no training - just a week of walking around an exhibits floor getting new ideas. In actuality only two people really needed to go and I knew this had been discussed before. He finally agreed that I had a point and this sounded like excellent training. Keep in mind that I didn't whine and say he was discriminating by sending all the men in one division to a TDY in Las Vegas (although I just might have thought it in my head). I just stated the undeniable facts. Still with some hesitation in his voice, he made a deal with me. He said that we could have any woman interested within our directorate (probably only 20 women were working in our directorate at the time out 90 employees) apply for the next NTP. He told me I would have to come up with specific criteria for choosing the woman. I immediately went to work writing the criteria for my boss to approve. Thus, one person went with me the following year with their entire trip paid for by our own directorate.

My next step was a briefing to the Base Commander. I worked hours on a presentation. Part of my collateral duties as FWP Manager was to brief the base commander once a quarter at a base EEO meeting. All the commanders from the various organizations on the base were required to attend - perfect! I Xeroxed copies of the various workshops from the previous NTP, plus figured out the approximately cost and any other pertinent information they would need. It sure helps to have people at the top on your side.

The Base Commander told all of his subordinates he thoroughly supported the FWP and this sounded like wonderful training. He asked that the organizations all try and put aside money to send somebody to the following NTP. The next year five organizations on the base sent women to the NTP (this was not counting my organization).

I can't say enough about the NTPs. I've had the pleasure of meeting so many women from different organizations all over the US and some overseas. I came in contact with speakers that I remain friends with to this day and some of them came to the Air Force Academy for Women's History Month and Woman's Equality Day to speak (and they were most generous by donating discounted rates or free workshops/keynote addresses). I would have never had the opportunity to meet these wonderful women had it not been for the NTPs. I had never attended an official "Board meeting" before the National Board Meeting which proved to be very interesting. I can't begin to tell you the things I learned that have helped me in my Federal career and as the President of the Columbine Chapter of FEW in Colorado Springs.

I have so many good things I could tell you about FEW and the NTPs. Everything from the keynote speakers, knowledgeable instructors, networking with other women, discussing issues you might have in your workplace and receiving a new idea that may help you overcome various obstacles, and having fun at the same time.

One thing that really stands out in my mind is that I was thinking of retiring when my boss approached me and said he was hoping I would come out on a promotion list as the Chief of Graphics at the Air Force Academy. I told him I didn't think I could take the promotion even if my name was on the list as they had never had a Graphics Chief that wasn't a true "artist" with a college degree in art. He told me that it wasn't the most important aspect of the job. He said it was to "supervise" and that I knew enough about computer generated graphics and was definitely supervisory material. He said he was reading over my qualifications and also noted I was an FWP Manager and also the President of our local chapter of FEW. He also saw in my training that I had attended many workshops at the NTPs including ones in management, supervisory, public speaking, office politics, and on and on. I feel that my involvement with FEW and FWP, coupled with all the training I received, was the deciding factor when my name came out on the official list. I had the qualifications for the job as

the supervisor, but so did nine others in the same office. I truly believe that my attendance at 50 or more workshops that taught me so much was the tiebreaker that pushed me to the top. I was promoted and stayed longer than I was going to, retiring just two short years ago.

I never thought, along the way, that my involvement with FWP, FEW, and my attendance at the NTPs for many years would help me with a promotion. That should never be the number one reason to be involved in a volunteer organization. I was just doing something that was an extra fulfillment for me and having fun while learning so many new skills and meeting so many people. However, in the long run, these extra duties and TDYs to the NTPs actually helped me reach the top. Did I have problems along the way - yes? I had bosses that were great about my absence from work and I had bosses that gave me a rough time. The one thing I always did was make sure I did my job well and even if a week's TDY to an NTP meant I worked harder when I returned in order to catch up - I did it.

My message is simply this - get involved with FEW and do everything you can to attend the NTPs. If you go to one, you will want to go again. I know that even if my chapter or region didn't pay my way, I would find the money to attend. I'm now retired but not retired from FEW. I'm still learning by attending NTPs and I wouldn't give up the friendships I've made and renew each year by attending an NTP. We are busy at the NTPs, but believe me we still find time to have some fun and many times have stayed a few extra days or arrived early to do some fantastic sightseeing. What opportunities FEW/FWP and the NTPs have given me. I've also been to places I doubt I would have ever gone if I hadn't attended NTPs. Put 2003 in Chicago on your agenda. Don't be afraid to talk to your boss for some training money and if that doesn't work - ask for permissive TDY and get another friend to go with you and share the cost of a room. You can always get a reasonable registration rate if you pay out of pocket and airfares on the Internet can be super cheap.

Start talking to your boss now while money is still available. Remember when there is a will there is a way. Hope to see you next year in Chicago! Stop by the Rocky Mountain Region booth and get acquainted.

