



The Benefits of a Workroom Association

In September 2006, I began wondering what other workrooms were located near me in northern Delaware, and if they, like me, wanted to meet. I checked the forum, the WCAA website, and the local yellow pages. After several posts on the CHF forum, I found that there were several in my area and they were interested in meeting. From there, I talked with the Greater Detroit Workroom Association, the East Detroit Workroom Association, and the Houston Workroom Association presidents. They related to me the benefits of their meetings and I was on my way to forming the Delaware Workroom Association.

One of the top benefits of a Workroom Association is education. When a group of workrooms come together and begin discussing fabrication, standards, pricing, and operating a business, the members increase their own power and knowledge and also raise the window treatment industry to higher levels. Gone are the days of sitting by oneself in a workroom trying to figure out how to put together a difficult treatment. With a group of professionals located within miles of each other, the workroom has the ability to call on another local workroom and see if they can figure out the difficult treatment together. Need a particular window treatments book and don't have time to wait for it to come in the mail? Some associations have set up lending libraries where a member can borrow a book and return it at the next meeting. Our first meeting topic for the Delaware Workroom Association was to bring in a favorite book or books. We had a wonderful array of books that pertained to fabrication that night and the workroom owners had time to page through the books and ask questions about them.

Another favorite of our workroom meetings is Tips and Tricks Night. There are wonderfully creative workroom owners that have saved countless hours in their own workrooms by quick cutting bias for welting, or purchasing a particular tool, or streamlining a technique to improve production. Tips and Tricks night focuses on getting the workroom to run more efficiently, which in turn generates more money.

A meeting focusing on a new industry product or production of a treatment improves the workroom's ability to compete in the industry. For example, a member in your group may research many of the different clutch systems

available and then present their findings to the Association concerning the benefits and drawbacks. This presentation could save countless workroom hours of trial and error, while helping the workrooms make better choices when fabricating shades.

Professional Development of the workroom is another benefit from forming a Workroom Association. From the beginning, we had members that were just starting their workrooms and had many questions. The older, more established workrooms were willing to offer advice and their time in helping the newer workroom get started. If the new workroom is making a cheap product or is undercharging for their work, clients in the area may question whether your pricing and work are worth the extra amount. Informing the newer workroom of the standards set by the WCAA and industry leaders helps prevent a regional downturn in quality craftsmanship.

We also had a meeting on Terms and Conditions. Some workrooms did not have terms and conditions and left that meeting knowing that they had some work to do. Terms and Conditions clearly define what the workroom is and is not responsible for. Having a set of Terms and Conditions lets potential clients know that you are you are a true custom window treatment professional and not a fly by night seamstress. There are benefits to the workrooms discussing experiences related to working with interior designers and retail clients. These in depth discussions could help workroom members prevent future problems or similar situations from occurring with their clients.

The big question that always seems to come up when a new workroom is starting up is how to advertise or market their business? More established workrooms have many stories of what worked for them and what failed. Some established workrooms may want to concentrate on a particular market and need ideas from others in the group as to how to reach that market. There seems to be a consensus among workroom members that installers are sometimes the best advertisers for the workroom.

A Workroom Association meeting about pricing seems to be a hot topic. I have found that either the workroom cringes at the mention of pricing or it is confident discussing their pricing. We did an entire meeting on pricing. It was

beneficial because it defined the how-to and whys behind workrooms charging so many dollars a linear foot for a particular treatment. It addressed the fear that the members had of the client saying no. And it gave the members more confidence to explain what work goes into a particular treatment to encourage the client to say yes. Remembering to charge for making welting, or that hand sewing seams is an up charge, or that the workroom is not a storage facility, all relates to being a professional in this industry.

It was interesting to hear some of the reasons given by members for not charging for their time, effort and talent. I think Cheryl Strickland would have been horrified. I remember at the Valley Forge Conference in 2005, she stood up on stage, told us to stand up, and then asked us to repeat after her, "I am a Professional !!" The Workroom Association can be very helpful by giving confidence and support in the area of pricing.

Workroom Associations can help with referrals for fabric companies, hardware suppliers and good installers in the area. Discussions about who has the best foam or pillow stuffing, or a recommendation for a mechanic for an industrial blind hemmer that keeps spitting oil on the designer's silk panels, are important. A vendor referral list is beneficial to a Workroom Association because it saves members time when

searching for items and it helps spread the word when a vendor is carrying a new product. Having a guest speaker who had owned and operated a multi-million dollar business benefits the members because they have the opportunity to learn directly from an experienced workroom owner.

One of the best ideas passed along to me from the Greater Detroit Workroom Association was giving each member a book containing each of the other members business information. Why is this a great idea? Let's say I don't do slipcovers and my client is in desperate need of slipcovers. I can open my book and find someone in my group that specializes in slipcovers to subcontract that job to. I keep the client and help the other workroom with their bottom line.

With so many benefits (in fact, too many to list), I have a final thought on camaraderie. While workroom ownership can be frustrating at times, it is likely that one of the members in your Workroom Association has dealt with the same frustration and can give you good advice about it. Forming a friendship with another member can provide a wonderful

resource for times when fabric is unruly, the pattern company is out of a particular pattern, or your mass mailing of 1,000 postcards netted one phone call from a person looking for a seamstress to fix a hemline in a skirt.

WORKROOM ASSOCIATIONS

Delaware

Delaware Workroom Association. Website: <http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/DelawareWorkroomAssociation>.

Atlanta, Georgia

Designer's Workroom Council, in the Atlanta area. President, Jan Batson. Email: jwbatson@charter.net.

Pennsylvania

Western Pennsylvania Window Treatment Association. Contact, Sydney Schwartz Hardiman. Website: www.wpwta.zoomshare.com.

Houston, Texas

Houston Area Custom Drapery Association (HACDA). President, Susan Kostelecky. Website: www.hacda.com.

Seattle, Washington

Northwest Workroom Association. Mostly Seattle metro area, but have members from all over the region. Lead partner, Mike Beasley of Beasley's workroom (206.362.5485). Email: 1workroom1@comcast.net.

Canada

Textile Artist & Workroom Association (TAWA), a Canadian Workroom Group. President, Lori Crank, CWTC. Forum is restricted to professionals in our field. Share information about Canadian suppliers of findings for our businesses. Website: <http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/canadianworkroom>.

Illustration 1



There is something to be said for picking up the phone on a Tuesday afternoon and calling a fellow member to ask them to explain spacing on pinch pleated panels one more time. Or going to conference as a group and then having a meeting later to discuss the highlights of the conference. I recently went to the Custom Sewing Institute in Texas with two wonderful ladies from our workroom association and had the best experience. We came home and related to others in our group all the awesome information we had learned. Now there will be more from our workroom association going to Texas for the 2008 Custom Sewing Institute.

The Custom Window Treatments Industry expands its products and increases in its creativity year after year. It is constantly changing. I see the future of Workroom

Associations meeting the demand of a constantly evolving industry by educating, setting professional standards and giving support to the great numbers of workrooms that are appearing every year. The Workroom Associations that continue to focus on these areas should continue to see an increase their membership. And the workrooms that join these Associations will keep abreast of the changes in the industry and succeed as it expands and changes. Contact one of the Associations listed in the chart in Illustration 1 or search the internet to find and join a group in your area.

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Kimberly Chaffee is the owner of A Sterling Stitch, a wholesale workroom, relocated to Sarver, PA in April 2007. She is a Certified Workroom Professional with the Window Coverings Association of America. She founded the Delaware Workroom Association in September 2006. For more information, visit www.asterlingstitch.com.