

It's no accident that **Eliza Mathis** and **Kelly McLaughlin** share this story – it is a natural extension of the relationships and collaborative efforts that the Higher Education Forum has fostered. It's a story of shared experiences and shared outcomes. It's a story of collaboration and teamwork. It's a story that transcends boundaries between small liberal arts colleges and large state institutions. And it's a story of personal and professional relationships that carry forward into lifelong friendships.

Eliza is the director of IT service management at the University of South Carolina, South Carolina's flagship university. Eliza's department was in a state of reorganization. They were re-evaluating their service delivery strategy around the help desk, desktop support, laptop support for students, and the wide range of other service demands they were facing. Kelly is director of operations and technical support at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, a small liberal arts school in Geneva, NY. Kelly was just starting out in a new position at the colleges. "We were transitioning to a real support center," says Kelly, "where the notion of single point of contact at the help desk didn't really exist."

### Forum Connections Prove Personally and Professionally Rewarding

Both directors joined the Higher Education Forum, eager to network with professionals from other higher education institutions that were experiencing similar challenges and learn from each other. It became evident rather quickly how similar the problems, issues, desires, goals, and visions were amongst the other institutions, regardless of size. The members got to know each other quite well through the forum meetings and active participation in the HDI Group's listserv, which led to a very high level of trust.

Four years later, it has proven to be a career-changing experience. "It is the most personally and professionally rewarding membership that I have ever been a part of," says Eliza. "We have been able to share ideas – whether its customer satisfaction surveys or operational procedures or just frustration on how to get the staff to do something they do not want to do – and it has helped us move our help desk to another level."

Kelly agrees: "I leave every Forum meeting with some very tangible things that I want to investigate further, or even do right away. The meetings also plant so many seeds that as things arise later, I can pull those ideas out when I need them."



*Eliza Mathis is director of IT service management at the University of South Carolina. She has been a member of the HDI Higher Education Forum for five years and brings more than sixteen years of experience in IT service management.*



*Kelly McLaughlin is director of operations and technical support at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. She has been a member of the HDI Higher Education Forum for four years and brings more than ten years of experience in IT service management.*

Eliza and Kelly took that collaborative spirit a step further. At Hobart and William Smith, Kelly had recently hired new employees and was looking for ways to advance their team culture, bring people together, and establish a new foundation for their service desk. Kelly remembered the conversation she had with Eliza during one of the Forum meetings, some months before, about the work her team had done on vision and mission statements. The seed was planted.

A phone call, travel arrangements, hours of planning, and a few weeks later, Eliza was on a plane from Columbia, SC, to Geneva, NY, happy to facilitate these sessions with Kelly's team. And, the planted seeds continued to sprout. At the eleventh hour, they decided to use a team-building exercise they had experienced in a Forum meeting, but neither one could remember precisely how it worked. They called Craig Bennion, another Forum member from the University of Utah, on a Sunday night at eight o'clock to get the details. "The fact that you can just call someone on a cell phone on a Sunday night – that's a special relationship," says Eliza. "These are professional relationships that will last a lifetime."

## Collaboration Leads to Professional Development and Thousands of Training Dollars Saved

The workshop was a full-day experience filled with exercises on vision and mission statements writing, small group discussions, brainstorming, and plenty of energetic team-building activities, including the rope trick. At first, Eliza sensed that the group was not completely on-board with the plans for the day, but that feeling quickly dissipated. "It actually surpassed my expectations just with how much Kelly's team embraced what we were doing and what they did with that knowledge even after I left," says Eliza. "It was a personally rewarding experience for me."

"My team still talks about it today," says Kelly. "Not only did it generate tangible results in the form of visions and mission statements, but it brought my team closer together in a way that I don't think I would have been able to do on my own." Sending twenty people to a training class or bringing in an outside consultant to facilitate the customized workshop would have been cost prohibitive, so the collaborative effort saved Kelly's institution thousands of training dollars as well.

Eliza and Kelly are quick to show their gratitude for Leslie Cook, HDI's Forum manager, and the HDI team that provides the resources and connections with other experts in the field to help the group focus on what's important and specific to higher education. "That unique focus is the real value we get out of the forum experience. It's truly collaborative," says Kelly. "My participation in the Higher Education Forum has exceeded my expectations on every level."

### The Rope Trick

For this puzzle you need two people, some rope, and some empty space to do the puzzle in. Each person will need a piece of rope with a loop tied in both ends, so it can be worn as handcuffs. The rope should be reasonably long, so that the person wearing it can easily step over it if they want.

Each person puts on a complete set of handcuffs. Before putting them on, they loop their handcuffs around each other so they are tied together. Each person should wear a complete set of handcuffs. They then have to get themselves apart while following these rules:

- The handcuffs cannot be removed.
- Do not break, cut, saw, bite through, or in any other way damage the rope. Damaging each other is probably a bad idea, too.
- If you are doing this puzzle with a class, make sure you tell them they need to be able to show you their solution. Otherwise it wouldn't be so much fun!

Visit <http://bit.ly/cWwpBI> for more information.

## About the HDI Higher Education Forum



The HDI Forums are the highest level of HDI membership. The HDI Higher Education Forum is an all-inclusive annual membership package that includes admission to the HDI Annual Conference & Expo, two three-day HDI Higher Education Forum meetings, one HDI Gold Membership, and online tools that keep you connected to the Forum group year-round. Forum meetings are co-developed by HDI staff and Forum members,

hosted by a participating institution of higher education and specifically targeted to higher education. These three-day events focus on the operational, strategic, tactical, and professional development needs that are necessary to optimally run a complex support organization. HDI Higher Education Forum meetings provide members with a valuable opportunity to learn from each other, network, share ideas and experiences, discuss benchmark ideas, and develop support center best practices specifically for the higher education sector.

## About HDI

HDI is the world's largest IT service and technical support membership association and the industry's premier certification and training body. Guided by an international panel of industry experts and practitioners, HDI is the leading resource for help desk/support center emerging trends and best practices. HDI provides members with a vast repository of resources, networking opportunities, and the largest industry event, the HDI Annual Conference & Expo. Headquartered in Colorado Springs, CO, HDI offers training in multiple languages and countries. For more information, call +1 719.268.0174 or visit [www.ThinkHDI.com](http://www.ThinkHDI.com).