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Management Bliss: The Unexpected Joys of Being a Library Manager

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Management Bliss:

The Unexpected Joys of Being a Library Manager

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Areas with growth potential in librarianship

Youth services and early literacy. Services that help build a community of readers and learners. Services that improve access to resources will also grow. This includes making information easily available via the Web and teaching users how to access and evaluate information. This also includes improving access to groups less well served because of language, age, disability or other barriers.

—PETER LEONARD
Executive Director,
Cedar Mill Community
Library Association

bliss (blis) *n.* Extreme happiness; ecstasy.

OK, so maybe “bliss” is a little extreme but it sounds so good! Regardless, I believe you can find happiness as a manager—you just need to know how to go about it.

Many of us enter the field of librarianship with a specialization in mind—youth services, technical services or reference, for example. But regardless of specialty, those of us who stay in libraries for any length of time find we are in a management role at some point our careers. The dilemma this can pose is that we usually have entered the field with little or no educational preparation for management. Some of us may have gained management experience through a prior profession but for those of us who relied on library school, well, most of us are lacking when it comes to being prepared to manage.

For those of us who daydreamed through Library Management 101, there is hope. By developing a certain level of enthusiasm and an aptitude for management, it can become fulfilling. Rachel Singer Gordon writes in her book “The Accidental Library Manager,” that by combining existing skills and knowledge with the willingness to learn and grow in management the foundation for a successful career can be created.

Since many of us are drawn to librarianship because we value being of service it seems reasonable that we can adjust our vision of service to focus on a larger scale—beyond helping a single patron to helping the entire library. Management allows us to do exactly that. With our existing skills and knowledge we can adapt to the tasks of management that may not come naturally or easily to many of us. These tasks can (and most often will) include the following:

- Supervising staff
- Ensuring adequate maintenance of facilities and technology
- Establishing goals and objectives
- Evaluating people, services and processes
- Representing the library
- Preparing/presenting training
- Making decisions
- Having difficult conversations
- Dealing with conflict
- Managing personnel issues
- Attending/presiding over meetings
- Understanding municipal government and politics
- Making policy
- Public speaking
- Long term planning/visioning
- Budget preparation, presentation and management
- Statistical analysis
- Data gathering
- Measuring performance and outcomes



This is by no means an exhaustive list of management responsibilities but it is our willingness to learn about them and grow comfortable with them that determines our success as a manager.

Librarians don't usually gravitate toward the field because of our love of mathematics, public speaking, conflict management or long-range planning. What we can do is try to direct the passion we have for librarianship to these new areas—finding ways to combine our love of research with math, for example. I know I've said, "I'm a words person not a numbers person" hundreds of times. Yet I have been able to harness my uneasiness with math so that I can successfully prepare and monitor a budget, run statistical reports for analysis, and predict circulation trends. When we look at numbers in the context of what they really mean for the library (enhanced funding, improved agency support, clearer community understanding) they become less daunting.

Librarians are inherently generalists and we usually possess a good deal of common sense—two attributes that can be very helpful as a manager. By trusting our common sense and using the knowledge we have acquired from the many different areas we touch every day, we can tie together our "librarian" and "manager" traits for a challenging yet rewarding experience.

Management allows us to grow in the profession in unexpected ways. In working with (and for) the community we may have the occasion to do public relations and marketing, plan and implement fundraising opportunities, and advocate for the library. As a "face" of the library we will be expected to act as host or hostess and to help build community by being active in local endeavors. Communication is key as we tend to

relationships in the community and greater vicinity. Although public speaking may be one of the most intimidating activities (I understand "stage fright" is the #1 fear in America) after one or two or twenty times, it becomes much less terrifying.

The area where a manager can have an enormous positive impact is with the library staff. The way in which you manage people largely defines their attitudes toward their work, which in turn defines how smoothly the organization runs (Gordon 2005). As managers we can help staff find meaning in their work—and meaningful work translates into motivated employees. Coaching and mentoring can be tremendously satisfying, benefitting both the staff and the profession as a whole. Through appropriate delegation, managers can balance and make the most of the differing abilities staff members. Trust the staff—when people are allowed to do their jobs without overt control they more likely aspire to excellence and to take on new challenges, managers need to remember that. Open communication with staff is vital—be willing and able to provide information to the staff and be open to the information they can provide to you—and be ready to act on what the staff tells you (Gordon 2005). It is important that we respect the library staff and offer our support. By recognizing employees' good work and celebrating successes, the entire library can resonate with those successes.

Through the hiring process managers have the opportunity to bring new life and new perspectives to the library staff. And by actively recruiting, training and welcoming volunteers the library is enhanced.

Managers may have a hand in collection development and programming. Through both collection analysis and by keeping up



Advice for new librarians

Do something to make yourself unique. Develop expertise in a new or emerging area and market your abilities. This will help you stand out from the crowd.

—DONNA REED
Library Director,
Portland Community
College Libraries




with trends in the community the manager can help guide the direction of the collection to best meet the community's expectations. Designing programs and developing projects that reflect the community interests also can be a gratifying aspect of a manager's duties.

Facilities and technology often fall into management's bailiwick. Keeping yourself educated about the technology and facilities you manage helps operations run smoothly. It's possible that you may be part of a building project—expanding, renovating, or constructing a library can be extremely rewarding. Determining future space needs; designing a facility and working with consultants, architects, and construction crews are all areas that library managers may find themselves.

As managers we have to remember to tend to ourselves. Not by taking advantage of our "lofty status" by taking privileges but by always thinking about ways to reenergize ourselves and our energy for our careers. Sometimes the satisfaction of seeing a project succeed, a staff person blossom or a new

program prosper is more than enough to keep us excited about our work.

Beta Phi Mu, the library and information studies honor society selected the motto, *Aliis inserviando consumor*, meaning "Consumed in the service of others" to honor the dedication of librarians to the service of others. Once you attain a management position in libraries you don't have to lose that dedication—you have the opportunity to create and manage a culture of service to others in your library.

Management is not all about paperwork and problems—rather it offers the ability for us to have a positive impact on our library and its collection and services, the staff, the community, and ourselves. By taking on a management role in your library we give back to the profession and influence the future of libraries and librarians. 

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Part Time Librarian

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tion for librarians who want a job (or jobs) that offers variety and flexibility. And if you ever meet me, you'll understand why I may cringe a bit when you ask me where I work, but that won't stop me from encouraging you to try part-time work—I can honestly say it's been a lot of fun and a worthwhile adventure for me. 

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The future of librarianship and how to keep up

We need to stop trying to turn our patrons into mini-librarians and provide tools and services that make sense to them, not ones that only make sense to us.

—AARON SCHMIDT
Director,
North Plains Public Library

