

Introduction

Any librarian who spends a sufficient amount of time in the profession will inevitably be promoted into a managerial role. ... With these promotions come a host of varied new tasks for librarians: training, budgeting, writing office procedure manuals, writing and performing job evaluations, and disciplining employees. These bureaucratic tasks are not simple, but they are a part of many librarians' jobs.

Jess Nevins¹

Why another book on library management? You do have many choices among useful and important resources that will help you throughout your managerial career. Few books, however, talk specifically to those who became library managers “by accident,” without a planned step-by-step progression up the career ladder. Many books emphasize theory, history, and background, with less attention to day-to-day, real-world activities. The following pages focus on using your library skills, background, and training to become a more effective library manager, as well as on learning when thinking like a librarian might actually be a hindrance in your management position. You will find ideas on how to become a better and more effective manager, and ideas on what to avoid.

Librarians tend to enter the profession with the idea of specializing in subfields such as reference, youth services, or knowledge management. Only later do many librarians realize that they need to assume management responsibilities in order to move forward in their career. Librarians and other library workers enter accidental management in many ways. They may:

- Have management responsibilities thrust upon them by their administration

- End up running a one-person library or serving as the director of a small rural institution immediately post-graduation
- Enter a library management position from another field, with no previous library or management training
- Start gradually taking on responsibilities in their institution until they are formally moved into a managerial position
- Temporarily fill a management role when a supervisor steps down or retires
- Be asked permanently to replace a departing manager
- Or take numerous other paths. Most librarians and library workers have had little official management training at the time they take on their first supervisory or managerial responsibilities.

Librarian managers who were exposed to at least one “library administration and management” class in the course of their MLS may have found it heavy in theory and short on practical suggestions, or geared too heavily to administrators, with little attention to mid-level management issues. Others may not have given their full attention to such a class at the time, on the assumption that its lessons would never be needed. Students graduating from programs without a formal requirement, or those who did not attend library school, may have had no educational preparation for their new managerial role. In any case, there seems to be a general consensus among many library managers that their formal education and training failed to prepare them adequately for their career in library management.

Students who did enter the library field with every intention of becoming a manager—or who soon realized that management was for them—can treat this as good news. With a moderate

amount of ambition, flexibility, and determination, any information professional should be able to move steadily up the career ladder, and your enthusiasm for management responsibilities will help you stand out. While the strategies and suggestions in the chapters that follow are geared particularly to accidental library managers, those who intentionally entered management will also find much applicable content.

Librarians who entered the profession with no thought to becoming a manager and later find themselves in management positions, however, need to develop both an enthusiasm and an aptitude for management, as do those who entered management before they had planned. Managers also need to make a commitment to lifelong learning that will enable them to develop and maintain their managerial skills, allowing their ongoing education and experience to interact and help make them better managers. The combination of existing skills and knowledge with the willingness to learn and grow in a management position creates the foundation for a successful career.

Whatever your environment, from a one-person corporate research center to a busy urban public library, the information and suggestions in this book will help you settle into (or prepare for) a career in library management—offering hope and encouragement along the way. While some ideas and examples will obviously work more or less well in specific library environments, the overall message of developing a management style that will empower you and your staff to serve the goals of your institution applies in all situations. Turn first to the sections in the book that seem most relevant to your own circumstances. Realize, however, that library managers tend to face similar issues, and that you may find pertinent information and advice where you least expect it!

Throughout the book, you will see quotes from the 244 respondents to a library manager's survey, which was posted and advertised online in Summer 2003. You will also find quotes from the 343

respondents to a second survey for library staff, which was posted and advertised online in spring 2004. The questions for both surveys and some statistics are provided in Appendix A. Longer interviews with selected respondents to the manager survey are included as sidebars in relevant chapters. Chapter 6 (on what library staff members want from their managers) further highlights material from the staff survey, allowing respondents to express in their own words the types of managerial behavior that are best avoided and best emulated in any environment. The words and ideas from these two groups help provide insight, both into the working lives of library managers and into what library staff need to see from their managers.

A number of the manager survey respondents emphasize the accidental nature of their positions. Their stories include comments like:

- “My management responsibilities came on me sort of gradually—I supervised students and sort of unofficially managed circulation operations as a library assistant; then I supervised students for two years in a nonmanagement librarian position; and then I became an ‘official’ department manager.”
- “Tripped into it: ran a one-person special library.”
- “After finishing my MLS the director’s position opened in a library close to my home. There was no chance for advancement at the library where I was employed so on a whim I applied and was offered the position.”
- “I had not planned to become a manager so quickly out of graduate school, but I was committed to staying with the ... district, so I took the opportunity when it came my way.”

- “It really happened by accident, I was a reference librarian in a public library and was asked to consider being the manager of the town’s HS library.”
- “While I was in library school (and for a time after I graduated), I was the youth services librarian [at my library] ... I was not getting the mentoring I was looking for at the position, so I left to take another job. When the former director retired, the board called and asked me to consider coming back as the director.”
- “The current manager left and they asked me to step in.”
- “All the people who were senior to me left.”
- “Basically I was having a wonderful time working reference when my manager surprised nearly all of us by announcing her retirement in June 2002 ... I had not planned to accept a management position this early in my career. I had worked many years in a business environment where management meant a certain set of values and tasks that to me were almost all negative. My career change was in part to find a work environment more in tune with my personal values, and I had found that in public reference librarianship. I was happy in my new career and reluctant to leave the work that was giving me so much joy. ... I felt the timing wasn’t ideal, but it never is.”
- “I had been hired as a reference and instruction librarian and the technology overtook the skills of the director. I was most comfortable with changes, so voila: assistant director.”
- “Because of a staffing reorganization, the job duties of my immediate supervisor changed and I was the only other employee ... who had an MSLS.”
- “By default—seniority and the willingness to get higher education while working.”

- “I said I would never be a director. Never say never. I didn’t think I wanted the stress and strain of directing—I didn’t want the headache. I really enjoy it and am grateful I fell into my first director position.”

The first principle of accidental library management, therefore, is to recognize that you are not alone!

Throughout the following chapters, you will find information to help you successfully settle into—and carry on in—any library management position, and thoughts on using your library skills to become a more effective manager. Chapter 1 discusses making the transition into library management, outlining different scenarios and providing suggestions for various situations, while Chapter 2 addresses different levels of management and their usual responsibilities. Chapters 3 to 5 talk about managing people, from staffing and professional development issues, to managing various groups, to communication and leadership, and Chapter 6 builds on these discussions to talk about potential managerial pitfalls and desired behaviors from the perspective of library staff. Chapter 7 explains various aspects of dealing with library facilities and technology, and Chapter 8 discusses managing change in today’s library environment. Chapter 9, on managing money, covers issues from budgeting to fund-raising, while Chapter 10 talks about managing upward and outward, building relationships with your own administrator, board, larger institution, and/or community. Chapter 11 provides a whirlwind tour of management theories and principles, leading into Chapter 12’s discussion of philosophical, legal, and ethical issues. Finally, Chapter 13 addresses the question of where to go from here in your management career, and the conclusion reemphasizes how accidental managers can successfully settle into their positions. Each chapter lists sources for further reading and self-education on the topics covered.

If you find yourself weary of reading theory-dense library management textbooks, fear not. View the information and discussions

here as one side of a practical and friendly conversation with a colleague or mentor, helping to advise you as you build the foundation of a successful library management career. Not a manager yet? Congratulations on being forward-thinking in preparing yourself for your future career. Learning how management works, what it involves, and how libraries are managed in particular will help you be successful in any stage of your library life, and to realize that most librarians eventually do take on at least some managerial responsibilities. As one manager survey respondent notes: “Professors kept warning us that: ‘You will be a manager.’ A lot of my classmates denied it and said they weren’t management material. Believe me, *you will be a manager*. If you don’t want to be a manager, don’t get an MLS.”

While most of the content will be directly relevant to MLS librarians, any library manager can use the ideas in this book to move forward in their management career. Seeing the “librarian” perspective may also be useful to those who are non-MLS managers. The term “librarian” is used throughout in referring to library managers, not to minimize the value of the MLS, but in recognition of the fact that library managers of all types face similar issues and do similar work, regardless of their degree status. “Staff” throughout refers to those in any nonmanagerial library position, and library customers are variously referred to as customers, patrons, and clients.

If you have comments or thoughts on the pages that follow, I would love to hear your side of the conversation.

Rachel Singer Gordon
rachel@lisjobs.com

A note on bibliographies: Given the wonderful breadth of the library (and general) management literature, both the recommended reading sections following each chapter and the recommendations interspersed within chapters are selective rather than

comprehensive. They represent some of the resources that have been helpful in influencing my thoughts about library management; supplement the recommendations with wherever your own reading takes you.

A note on what you will not find here: Unlike many library management books, this one lacks case studies. If you feel the urge to test yourself in this manner, open any management textbook, read *Library Journal's* "How Do You Manage?" column, or, simply, go to work each day.

Notes

1. Jess Nevins, "What Library Schools Still Aren't Teaching Us," in *Revolting Librarians Redux*, Eds., Katia Roberto and Jessamyn West. (Jefferson: McFarland, 2003) 48.