

So you want to be a law library director. Who doesn't? Everyone wants the glory — and the paycheck. But as librarians gaze in awe at those in upper management, they never see the hassles inherent to the job.

To succeed, a director of a law library needs to build a strong team on the staff yet contribute as a team member with the organization's other high-level managers and supervisors.

A law library director has a thankless yet glorious job. The staff assumes that the new director is undeservedly paid the big bucks when it's really the library staff that carries out the work of the library. At the same time, the director's bosses are often unsatisfied with the costs of maintaining the law library. They wonder why librarians are needed at all given the plethora of information available on the Internet. Both sides need continual education and leadership to appreciate the significance of the law library and its staff, including the director.

The Path to Success

Convincing the director's staff and supervisors of his or her worth takes the patience of Job, the wisdom of Solomon and a lot of luck. The director must develop a sense of teamwork amongst the staff. Everyone needs to understand that he or she, and the work they are doing, is important to the operation of the law library. Here is some advice on how to handle the rewards of the director position, cope with the financial and political pressure exerted by upper management, and create the teamwork needed for a law library to flourish within an organization.

Always recognize and respect those with the real power in any organization: the secretaries. Librarians often assume that they control the flow of information, and to a large extent, they do. But they will always be second to the secretarial staff. In most organizations, the relationship with secretaries and other staff members is the key to a manager's success.

Secretaries are the manager's power base. Because they are often privy to the inner workings of upper management, secretaries

can alert managers to the needs and concerns of high-level administrators. When armed with that information, the director can tackle and alleviate problems and pre-empt his or her supervisor from having to address them. Then the director appears prescient among his staff and supervisors — a trait that is invaluable in any organization. Always remember to reward the secretary or any other staff member who provides that type of information either with something as simple as a commendation letter inserted in their personal files or as expensive as a lunch. This relationship must be encouraged above all else.

Never send an angry memo. It will always come back to haunt the sender, especially in the age of e-mail. Everyone is better off verbally expressing any grievances directly with their colleagues. The director makes a stronger impression on the recipient and demonstrates a lack of fear of confrontation. However the manager must never express displeasure with a raised voice. Doing so will only seem petty and out of control to those who might overhear the remarks. The manager must remain calm and cool. Expressing displeasure to the employee in person will validate the director's authority and will help build the morale needed for a strong team.

Do not depend on the staff's computer skills — directors should know how to operate all the software the library uses and preferably more. It is essential that a manager recognizes the technological capabilities of the staff. A manager must understand the staff's skills as well as the software necessary to do their jobs.

Leadership is a two-way street. When a director demonstrates to the staff that he or she can perform their duties and wants to find ways to make their work environment better, the staff regards themselves as truly part of a team. They will respect the director's needs and provide him or her with access to information that might otherwise remain unknown.

Never accept on face value the information technology staff's assessment of the law library's technological limitations, especially if other organizations are using the same technology in question to stay competitive. Because many organizations are understaffed and underfunded, most information technology staffs prefer to keep their libraries' status quo. A director must nudge them forward so that the organization can remain competitive. Working with a



Who Wants to Be the Boss?

Strategies for Success as a Law Library Director

by Brian L. Baker

The Professional Development Committee, which coordinates the "PDC Desktop Learning Opportunity Series," encourages members to explore professional development offerings and opportunities at the local, regional and national levels. We welcome your comments and article suggestions. Please contact Lori Hedstrom at 651/687-5891 or lori.hedstrom@westgroup.com.



reluctant information technology department also perpetuates the image among the library staff that the director is the leader of the library. By researching the technology, clearly stating what the library needs, and ensuring the information technology department that the library will share the credit with it for upgrading the facilities, the director can usually persuade the information technology staff to help keep the library technologically competitive.

Directors can't rely solely on their information technology departments for the latest advancements. They too must keep their law libraries current by anticipating new trends in the profession. Directors must continually research and keep abreast of technological changes. They should explore how other institutions are using technology and present the facts cogently to upper management, explaining how specific types of technology improve productivity, save money or generate revenue.

Never hire on a Friday. Hiring a competent staff makes any manager look better. The process can be long and arduous, but directors should never give in to the urge to compromise. Thus Fridays are notoriously bad days to hire. By Friday, a director is tired and an applicant's references may be difficult to contact. In order to bring the onerous hiring process to an end, a director may compromise by Friday and choose a mediocre candidate. The smart manager should always let any hiring decision wait until Monday when he or she is fresh and has had the weekend to mull over the options. That manager won't be sorry.

A director out of the office should occasionally call his or her office and ask for "the director." Naturally the staff is polite and competent when the director is around. However if the director is out of town, does the staff's demeanor remain the same? The best way to check is for the director to call and ask for "the director" occasionally while traveling. A director can then determine whether the pleasant phone voice heard daily remains so when the boss isn't there. Will they explain the director isn't there? Will they be polite? Will they take a message?

More often than not all will be fine. However a director must be aware when problems arise and deal with them promptly.

Never use a personnel evaluation as an incentive. Many managers fall into the trap of pumping up an evaluation in order to show an employee what is expected. If that employee does not meet expectations, when an honest evaluation is finally undertaken, the employee will use the previous excellent "incentive" evaluation to show the unfairness of the current evaluation. As tedious and uncomfortable as personnel evaluations are, they are a necessary evil. With them, the director has

AALL Professional Development Program Competencies of Law Librarianship

- 1 Core Competencies
- Specialized Competencies
- 2 **Library Management**
- 3 Reference, Research and Client Services
- 4 Information Technology
- 5 Collection Care and Management
- 6 Teaching

This article addresses the AALL Specialized Competency on Library Management. The complete AALL statement of Competencies of Law Librarianship is online at <http://www.aallnet.org/prodev/competencies.asp>.

the power to establish expectations, show how teamwork can help everyone and reward those that excel. Evaluations are a powerful morale builder when used correctly.

No meeting should last more than 45 minutes. Meetings must be organized, regularly scheduled and, above all else, prompt. Over the years, I've attended and presided over some unorganized meetings that tended to drift to the tangential and went on for hours. In the last few years though, I have learned how to moderate better meetings. The various meetings I oversee never last more than 45 minutes because most people tend to tune out after 45 minutes. My dean has taught me how to keep meetings focused. Using her techniques, I have developed a format that works with my staff.

I have tailored a three-week rotation where I meet with some portion of my staff every week. In the first week, I meet with everyone on the staff. I then meet with all the professional librarians in the second week. In the third week, I assemble my department heads. The general agenda

and format of each of these meetings is similar. I report on the positive and negative workings of the library. Then I ask each person about his or her specific project and any barriers hindering the project that I can attempt to break down. This process gives all staff members a chance to vent their opinions and concerns. It also lets them know that I understand and recognize the importance of their duties and projects.

Create or update the procedures manual immediately. If one already exists, the director should review it as soon as possible and work with the staff to update it. If the library doesn't have a procedures manual, the director should immediately instruct the staff to create a manual.

There will be resistance. Everyone deems their job duties as obvious; they won't understand at first why they should take time out of their busy days to document their routines, responsibilities and tasks. The director must emphasize that by having every staff members' procedures in one document, anyone can fill in for their colleagues in an emergency. Initially there will be a tremendous amount of overlap in these procedures.

Make sure the entire staff edits the procedures manual into a cohesive whole. It allows the staff to understand that they are an important part of improving the library's operations. By having the staff create and edit the manual, they get a better idea of each staff member's role and responsibility. This one document will do more to create a team environment than anything else.

Where's the Glamour?

A law library director's job is not as glamorous as it appears. It's a stressful environment filled with long hours, political entanglements and various personalities. But it is fulfilling to know that a law library director does make a difference, whether it's to the firm's bottom line or in helping a law student better understand the nuances of Constitutional law. By aiming to make the law library the best it can be, a director takes on an intense but rewarding position.

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