

Contributed Paper Session III-1

MANAGING A SMALL SPECIAL LIBRARY IN THE 90'S

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ABSTRACT: *In the '90s we have come to realize that current, accurate information is critical to institutional success, that technology will continue to reshape traditional information sources, and that financial resources will remain extremely tight. We can also be fairly certain that book and journal costs will continue to escalate, and that most institutions will be forced to undergo downsizing or at least impose hiring freezes.*

In order to cope with these factors, librarians will need an entrepreneurial spirit and good management skills. This paper offers seven pragmatic suggestions for the very vulnerable group of librarians that manage small special collections.

1. *Determine the scope of your collection.*
2. *Establish policies and procedures for all areas of library operation*
3. *Staff creatively.*
4. *Create a productive library environment.*
5. *Finance creatively.*
6. *Automate in stages.*
7. *Network internally and externally.*

In the 1990's, we have come to realize that current, accurate information is critical to institutional success, that technology will continue to reshape traditional information sources, and that financial resources will remain limited. We can also be fairly certain that book and journal costs will continue to escalate, and that most institutions will be forced to undergo downsizing or at least impose hiring freezes. In order to cope with these factors, librarians will need an entrepreneurial spirit and good management skills. The term that management gurus use most frequently today is "TQM", Total Quality Management. I believe a healthy dose of "TPM" is equally important. "TPM" is Total Pragmatic Management and the following suggestions are fundamental to a pragmatic managerial style.

Determine the scope of your collection

Before you collect that first pamphlet, file that first newsletter or buy that first book, you must determine the scope of your collection. It is the process of identifying what business you are in. You should secure a copy of your institution's goals, and decide what it is important for you to collect AND what would be more appropriately found in another library. Lack of focus and lack of definition are a library's worst enemies. Without them, you will waste time and money, and will inhibit both organization and access to the collection. Your scope should be formally delineated in your Acquisition Policy. It is important to address the subject areas you will collect in, the priorities within each area, the level of coverage (comprehensive, research, basic or minimal) and any restrictions with regard to subject, language, geography, years or types of material.

Establish Policies and Procedures for all areas of operation

An up-to-date record of current policies and procedures is essential for smooth transitions in staffing. It can help you handle unexpected situations in a professional manner, and will allow your staff to operate more effectively as a team. Moreover, this is an important way to establish quality controls.

A good policy and procedure manual should involve the input of the entire staff. Procedures should be simple enough for everyone to grasp with minimal training, and should make sense to the individual responsible for implementing them. The manual should be a steadily evolving document. Procedures that are antiquated, complicated or redundant should be changed.

Staff creatively

The Special Library Association recommends that there be at least one clerk for each professional staff, and I believe this is the minimum ratio. The use of computers and contract services decreases clerical pressures, but tasks such as book ordering, circulation, and shelving tend to establish their own overriding priorities, and I do not believe that professional librarians should be spending a great deal of their time doing such chores.

—Split positions and use flextime:

Much of the work done in libraries is exacting and repetitive. It is easy to burn out working 8-hour days. National statistics show that clerical positions turn over three times faster than professional positions, and there are plenty of high-caliber people who only want a half time job, for example, students and women raising families. You can offer them 3-day weekends and flextime in return.

—Recruit Volunteers:

Volunteers can be given large jobs or projects which would be impossible for staff to find the time to accomplish. But remember, volunteer program management requires a great deal of effort. Organization is essential. Nothing is more irritating to a motivated individual who is willing to donate 1-8 hours a week than feeling unproductive. Volunteers want meaningful work, want to feel that they are making a contribution to the organization, and want to feel that they are part of your team. If you cannot offer them these things, don't waste their time or yours. It is particularly important to remember that you are in charge. You should quickly direct volunteers who are not productive or who monopolize staff time to other areas in your institution.

—Utilize any institutional programs which can supply you with manpower:

The Zoological Society has a "Limited Duty Program" to put employees who have been injured back to work in a safe environment.

Create a productive library environment

If you do not have a successful internal operation, you will never be able to handle external problems. Most important to a productive environment is the quality of the staff. Personnel problems can monopolize a manager's time and destroy department morale. Recruit judiciously and hire the best people you can. Ask potential employees for references, and never fail to check them out. Check all obvious pieces of information on the resume: educational degrees, memberships, and honors. Take full advantage of a probationary period to test your choice. After you have hired the best people, work

hard to secure top wages and working conditions for them. Let them know that you are working as their advocate within the organization. This is the cornerstone to building an effective library team. Developing a team means emphasizing cross-functional support and eliminating barriers. It means building trust and minimizing bureaucracy (excessive rules, regulations and paperwork.) It means encouraging flexibility, yours and your staff. It means holding regular meetings, sharing information, and making everyone look good. Your entire staff should be involved in developing achievable library objectives and be committed to the library's success.

Never forget what business you are in. The library's job is to acquire, organize, and make available the information staff members need to do their jobs. Everything else should be considered extraneous and dependent upon the size of your staff and budgetary resources. Don't do the impossible. Don't hesitate to prioritize tasks and eliminate low-priority items. Don't devalue yourself or our profession by doing a second-rate job. And finally, be sure that the library is organized so that users can find materials easily and staff can function efficiently. A pleasant, congenial atmosphere is essential to an effective operation.

Finance creatively

In most organizations, you earn very few points for saving money. Recognition usually comes from your ability to be innovative and responsive to organizational needs. The cost of equipment or programs should never be a deterrent to requesting them. It is your responsibility to ask. It is administration's responsibility to determine whether or not to provide funding.

We all know about keeping statistics on library activities in order to justify costs and programs. Try incorporating these statistics into an annual report to give them more weight. Always have a list of capital items with written justifications available. Your Development Department may find an interested donor or you may read about a granting agency that is interested in funding what you want. In fact, you should try to learn as much as you can about outside grants. Concentrate on local and regional agencies as they will be most interested in you.

Learn how your organization operates financially. Make sure you have a friend in accounting and try never to take a vacation during the last few weeks of the fiscal year. If there is year-end money available,

you will be around to take advantage of the situation. Most importantly, don't lose money. If you have budgeted money to print a brochure and are unable to find the time to create a good one, print business cards instead. Book vendors and binderies will always provide you with advance billing. Don't be afraid to juggle line items as long as the bottom line is O.K.

Consider automating library operations

Special Libraries are always work intensive: Indexes, card catalogs, and bibliographies are time-consuming and tedious to maintain. The use of computerized equipment for repetitive library housekeeping operations can alleviate oppressive workloads.

Space limitations are usually additional problems for special libraries. A single microcomputer work station can take the place of a typewriter, shelves of indexes, a card catalog, and a journal file. Because computers are labor-saving devices, management is usually more willing to expend funds on equipment than on salaries and benefits. Organizations will institute hiring freezes even when there is no budget crunch because hiring is considered a long-term commitment - difficult to reverse. Even when automation actually increases costs, it can be an attractive option to administrators.

The key is to automate in stages. After a computer and a word processing package, your next purchase should be a modem to access outside databases. This will facilitate inter-library loan, and by accessing university and state-wide online catalogs, you won't need to purchase *Books in Print*, can secure cataloging records, create subject bibliographies, and verify citations.

For libraries which cannot afford DIALOG, the National Library of Medicine's databases (MEDLINE, DIRLINE, and CATLINE) are attractive alternatives. With a compact disc layer and the U.S. Wildlife Services' CD, patrons can search for literature on their own and then support your requests for new and better systems.

Network internally and externally

Both forms of networking involve a great deal of public relations. External networking is promoting a strong professional image of your library and your organization. It is making contacts that can help you find information and exchange operational ideas. It means joining the Special Library Association and groups that reflect your organization's interests. It means getting to know other librarians in your area

and attending professional conferences and meetings.

Internal networking should be one of your highest priorities. Organizations, particularly large ones, are fundamentally political entities. To understand them, one needs to understand organizational politics. You may not be able to select your hierarchical position within the organization, but you should be working to increase organizational awareness of the library, to attract new users, cultivate important mentors, and make higher-ups aware of relevant library and information issues. Accomplishing anything important usually requires inter-departmental action, and groundwork should be done in advance.

There are numerous ways to proactively interface with your users. Acquisitions lists are a "must", but produce a newsletter only if it is informative and worth reading. Offer a table-of-contents service only if you have the time and staff to do an effective job. It can be an alerting service only. Staff can be educated to come to the library to make their own photocopies. Circulate staff articles and literature on topics of institutional interest. All of these services can help you cultivate mentors.

All special libraries should be thought of as indispensable to their organizations. Our role as information specialists is to act as facilitators in linking staff members with the key information resources they need. As managers, we must set the tone for a quality operation. "TQM" means accuracy, efficiency, and total reliability. Pragmatism or "TPM" makes "TQM" possible. Being flexible, being informed and competent, organizing effectively, hiring the best people, and networking are pragmatic ways to ensure quality.

"TQM" based on "TPM" can help us survive the 90's, but we should never forget that fundamental to a successful library is an enthusiastic and committed library staff. And the only way to ensure this type of staff is to possess enthusiasm and professional commitment ourselves.