THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STAFF FOR REFERENCE WORK

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"No library can render effective service without adequate and competent personnel. The library's unique function of serving as the one unbiased, non-partisan bureau of information for all the people calls for personnel of the highest competence and integrity. The selection of qualified staff members as well as the organization and conditions under which they work, are basic considerations in an institution dedicated to public service."¹ In these words the new Public Library Standards affirm the significance of the human element in library service. While some similar statements of the importance of the staff of a library may be found in the library literature, until recent years little serious attention has been given to the problems of staff training and development. Librarians, in the main, have tended to devote the greater portion of their time and energies to the selection and development of their library collections, with little time for the post professional or in-service training of their library staffs.

In the Public Library Inquiry, Alice I. Bryan and Robert D. Leigh and their corps of investigators found that the personnel in public libraries was inadequately organized and supervised, with evidences of a lack of modern personnel procedures for staff development. The survey revealed the failure of the majority of public librarians to organize their jobs, their salaries, their work schedules and their staff selections on a factual, equitable, and scientific basis. Few libraries had any formal programs for the development of their professional staff; indeed, of the fifty libraries in the survey only ten gave any in-service training for promotion, and only eleven used any techniques to help their librarians develop new talents or skills.² At the conclusion of this study, Miss Bryan and Mr. Leigh wrote: "With the exception of induction training, less than half of the metropolitan libraries, a few of the large libraries, and a very few of the smaller libraries have instituted personnel training programs for their professional staffs. ... Neither formal in-service training nor li-
brary-financed attendance in refresher courses in library schools seem as yet to have become characteristic features of the public library career. But public libraries are not the only type to neglect this phase of librarianship. A survey conducted in 1950, sought information from 507 libraries of all types in Canada and in every state of the United States. The questionnaire revealed that only 29 per cent of these libraries had any form of training program for the development of their professional staff.

While all professional personnel on the library staff need the opportunity for continuing development and stimulus, no one who has listened to the three talks today could deny that the need for continued education on the part of the reference librarian is most essential. Isadore G. Mudge's emphasis on the reference librarian and his knowledge, as expressed in the introduction to Guide to Reference Books is well-remembered: "The possession of the right books and the knowledge of how to use them are the two things essential to the success of a reference department, and the latter is no less important than the former. The ignorant assistant can render comparatively useless the finest collection of reference books while the skilled assistant who knows how to get from each book all the varied kinds of information that it is planned to give can show astonishing results even when limited to only a few basic books."

"Nowhere is personnel more important than in reference work," writes Mary N. Barton in her manual for the General Reference Department of the Enoch Pratt Public Library, "since the core of this service is staff aid to readers. The effectiveness of the service (and of the Library) is largely dependent upon all the staff members who serve at the reference desks."

Knowledge of reference books and the ability to use them efficiently are, of course, basic requirements for all good reference librarians. The development of this book knowledge and this skill in reference searching is indeed a formidable task and one which is never really completed for there are always more books waiting to be discovered and one is constantly finding hidden resources in the familiar works. However difficult it is to know the books with which one is working, it is even more difficult to be aware of the services and resources of other agencies and groups of the college and community, and to learn of the availability of materials in other libraries. This latter information, that is, the availability of materials in other libraries, is an important factor in successful interlibrary cooperation. In truth, any cooperative
acquisition program adopted for any group of libraries must be predicated on the principle that all reference librarians in these libraries are aware of the resources of all the participating agencies. Without this knowledge, valuable materials close at hand may be overlooked, and cooperation may be in reality merely a delimitation of resources.

Technical knowledge, that is, knowledge of library resources and the techniques needed to use such materials effectively, is of the utmost importance to the reference librarian. However, this writer believes there are two other skills which are also essential to successful performance as a member of a reference department. The first might be called human skill, the ability to work effectively with patrons, the faculty of establishing good rapport with all those with whom one comes in contact. It implies not only a proper attitude toward the public, but an ability to work cooperatively with other members of the reference department and with other library staff members. Of what value is a vast knowledge of reference books and techniques if, by a supercilious manner, disinterested attitude, or grouchy disposition, the reference librarian scares away any would-be patrons? Of course, the librarian who is, as one professor commented, "a sweet young girl but she doesn't know anything," is equally as much a deterrent to effective reference service.

The second is conceptual skill which involves the ability to see the library as a whole and the place of the reference department within that whole. It includes recognizing how the various library activities depend upon one another, and how a change in policies or procedures in one department may affect work in all other departments. It extends to visualizing the relationship of the library to the institution of which it is a part, to the community, and to the library world at large. Reference librarians are needed who can envision new and better ways of performing reference services, new methods of bibliographic control, and new services which should be established for the library patronage.

Thus, reference librarians need three skills to be effective in their jobs: technical knowledge, that is, knowledge of library resources and how to use these resources effectively, and knowledge of extra-library resources which are available; human skills which include good public relations and good staff relations; and conceptual skills or the ability to think creatively. The degree to which a reference staff possesses this knowledge and these skills indicates the degree of success enjoyed by the department and the library.

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When selecting a reference librarian for a staff, the educational training he brings to his professional career should be studied. The young reference librarian comes to his first position with a background of a four-year academic education and one year of professional training in an accredited library school. During his college days he may have majored in any one of a number of subject fields, generally in the liberal arts. For work in a small or medium-sized library a strong liberal arts background seems essential, for the reference librarian must be a generalist, answering questions in all areas of knowledge. As the size of the library and the size of the staff increases, the need for specialists grows, and specialized training in business administration, chemistry, medicine, art and music, education, etc., may be required. But even in these instances, it appears preferable that the specialization be in addition to a well-rounded liberal education.

The need for facility in the use of languages other than English depends a great deal upon the location of the library and upon its clientele. In cities having a large foreign population, a reading and perhaps a speaking knowledge of one or more languages may be a prerequisite for employment as a reference librarian. Some language facility is of value in reference work regardless of the size or type of library, and the study of language should be encouraged for all those going into public or college and university library work.

There is not much which can be said that has not already been said or written about the year of library training. It is during this year that the neophyte is expected to become familiar with the basic reference works, to master the techniques of reference searching, to understand the administrative problems of libraries, to adopt the proper ethical standards of the profession, to understand the philosophy of librarianship and of reference service. He should have grasped in this year the fundamentals of cataloging and classification for this knowledge is basic to competent use of the card catalog, an essential reference tool. All librarians would wish that more could be taught in library schools, but everyone realizes the fact which Clara W. Herbert stated in her classic volume on public library personnel administration and which has been reiterated by so many librarians since—that one year at a library school obviously can be only inadequate training and that this must be supplemented by "practical application of theory under actual working conditions." She continues by insisting that "the progressive library must develop a systematic program of in-service training if the staff is to maintain the highest efficiency."
Is it practical to undertake a program for the continued
development of reference librarians beyond their formal edu-
cation? Can libraries afford to do this? If so, how do they
proceed in developing the reference staff?

To answer these questions it is necessary to look at the
group which has done the most outstanding work in recent years
in the training and development of their professional employees
and the group which, at the same time, has been obligated by
the very nature of their enterprises, to show a financial prof-it in their organizations. Since World War II, business and
industry has become increasingly aware that manpower is its
most valuable resource and that it has a responsibility both to
the individual and to the company to provide opportunities for
the development of the talents and abilities of its employees.
Marvin Bower, in his book The Development of Executive
Leadership, says that "the success of any company compared
with others in the industry depends largely upon its ability to
bring in and develop the right kind of men for management
responsibility."9

Through the years there has come the realization that un-
guided experience is costly, that men do not automatically
learn better methods from experience, that many professional
skills are not acquired unconsciously in any job situation.
These are important findings for librarians, because they have
been resting too much on some of the old adages such as,"ex-
perience is the best teacher," "people learn by doing," etc.,
which are in reality only half-truths. To repeat, industry
has found that unguided experience is costly, that men do not
automatically learn better methods from experience, that
many professional skills are not acquired unconsciously in any
job situation.

Therefore, more and more, industry has been systemati-
cally attempting to guide employees in their development of
the knowledge, skills, and attitudes which will make them
more efficient and more effective on the job, and will prepare
them for promotion to better positions. By 1956, 75 per cent
of the companies surveyed by the Personnel Policies Forum
of the Bureau of National Affairs reported that they were car-
rying on training of their professional, their managerial,
group for the purpose of improving their performance on their
present jobs, developing personnel for advancement, develop-
ing selected individuals for key executive positions, and im-
proving the effectiveness of all members of the management
team. Are not these purposes which librarians share for the
training of reference librarians?
One cannot study the research experiments of industry and business in this area without becoming convinced that this group has found the answer to the needs for professional staff with outstanding abilities and talents, in their formal, planned program for staff growth and development. The principles of management development which have been formulated are fundamental to any educational program, and the procedures which industry has developed are logical steps in analyzing training needs of employees in organizations of any type or size. Many of the training techniques which have been devised can be adopted or adapted for use in libraries whether they be college, university, public or school, and whether they be large or small. Therefore, how can these principles, procedures and techniques be applied to a development program for reference librarians?

Before there can be any plan for the training or development of the reference staff, who is to be trained and what kind of training is needed must be determined. Therefore, the first step is the construction of an organization chart, a simple picture of the place of the reference department within the library structure and the relationship of this department to other departments and divisions of the library system. This will not take long, only a few minutes in most instances, but it will give a concreteness to the organization and will enable the librarian to plan more easily for future expansion of his staff and services.

From a study of the total organization the librarian must then turn to an investigation of each position within the reference department. The position analysis is a determination of the duties and responsibilities which comprise each position and of the skills, knowledge, and abilities required of the individual librarian for successful performance. First, a statement of the duties of each position is written down by the person who is in the job being analyzed, and this is reviewed by the person in charge of the department. The qualifications necessary for the person in each position which are then listed should not necessarily coincide with those of the person now holding the position, but should be the skills, knowledge, and abilities which would best fit a person to perform effectively the duties of the position. A detailed explanation of the steps to follow in compiling the list of duties of each library position is given in the Position Classification and Salary Administration in Libraries prepared by the Board on Personnel Administration of the American Library Association.

The position analysis is an excellent means of restudying
the alignment of duties, and a good check on the distribution of professional and clerical duties. In these days when the acute shortage of professional librarians is felt, staff directors are all aware of the very great necessity for delegating to the clerical staff all those duties which they can perform, thus leaving the librarians free for professional work of the highest type. The description of duties, the first part of the position analysis, is a valuable means of ensuring this proper division of labor.

A concomitant of the position analysis is the appraisal or evaluation of each reference librarian to determine his overall job performance, his potential, and the training he needs to improve his effectiveness in his present position and to prepare him for promotion to a higher position. There are many different forms which can be used to evaluate the library staff; some are extremely complicated while others are simple and comparatively easy to follow. If in the position analysis the qualifications have been organized according to the three skills needed by reference librarians and the qualifications essential to each under these three categories have been delineated, this list can be used as a standard against which to evaluate the staff's background and abilities. For example, under "Technical Knowledge," the following might have been listed: "college education with special knowledge of literature," "wide knowledge of reference books and reference techniques," "reading knowledge of Spanish." In appraising each staff member a simple word or two may state how he meets these three needs. He may have a good basic background in literature but be weak in current American Literature. His knowledge of reference books may be fair, his Spanish adequate. Such a brief appraisal appears to be sufficient for most reference department needs, but more detailed evaluation schemes are available and description of these may be found in any personnel text.

Remember that an appraisal is merely the opinion or judgment of one person and is only as unbiased as the person who makes it. To insure an accurate evaluation, one must recognize his personal bias and make allowances for this. Observation of the staff members from time to time will reveal instances of good and poor performance. These should be noted all during the working period so that the appraisal, when made, will not tend to be based on some single failure of accomplishment. Perhaps the greatest problem in rating is that of finding sufficient time to form considered judgments. But time must be set aside for this essential act for it is this evalu-
uation which reveals the area of weakness of each staff member and his specific needs for training or development.

The appraisals may indicate the need of the reference librarians to become more familiar with general reference tools. One librarian may need to strengthen his language skill or his knowledge of a particular subject field. Another is aware of reference titles but is weak on his approach to a reference question and thus needs some further training on techniques. Perhaps it is the ability to delegate responsibility that is weakest, the ability to work with others, or the capacity to arouse in others the desire to give better service to patrons. Whenever the weaknesses, these are the areas for the attention of the one planning the professional training program.

Following the delineation of the training needs, the librarian should discuss the findings with each individual, showing him his good points and the areas in which, in his opinion, the staff member could improve. Emphasis should be placed on the fact that the individual's own desire to improve is fundamental to the success of any professional development program. While discussions with staff members about their weaknesses are difficult, they are extremely important. However, there is one word of caution for this procedure. There may be instances when it would appear that such conferences might prove more harmful than good. This might be caused by a personality conflict or perhaps by the need for more guidance and counseling knowledge and experience on the part of the head of the reference department. If, after a careful study of the situation, the librarian feels certain that an interview with a staff member would disrupt his effectiveness and that of the department, this step should be omitted and the development program for this individual should be prepared without personal counseling. Few instances of this should occur in any reference department.

After staff needs have been identified, the librarian must select the best method of training for the individual need of each reference librarian. This selection is important in bringing about the desired results in a minimum of time and with a minimum of effort, and therefore, librarians must be familiar with the various methods of training and understand their particular usefulness.

Since it is generally recognized that the most effective training is that built into daily, on-the-job experience, if follows that the most effective training methods are the under-study and the guided experience techniques, both individualized, on-the-job approaches to personnel development. The under-
study method is focused upon the person's work habits. By coaching the person as he works, the immediate supervisor "guides practice on the job, utilizing the work itself and the problems it presents to build effective skills and to improve technical understanding."

In addition to acquiring knowledge each librarian must be taught to think, to develop a strong urge to accomplish, to have ambition to seek the satisfaction of personal progress, to be emotionally mature, to be self-confident, to be tolerant, and to develop mental curiosity. Much of this is taught by example and by direct coaching of the supervisor. This means that there can be no day-by-day procedure. Instead there must be a sharing of the reference librarian's knowledge with his assistant. The success of the understudy method, thus, depends to a great degree on the ability of the reference librarian, and on his willingness to explain the principles involved in his daily practices, to seek and encourage the ideas of his assistant, and to give him such special guidance as he needs to develop fully.

Everyone should have an understudy. The head of the department should guide the professional assistant, the professional assistant should help the clerical assistant, the clerical assistant should encourage the student worker. No person should be employed in any position without being given the opportunity to develop his talents and abilities and this opportunity may be given most advantageously through the understudy method.

One plea should be made to library administrators--to create an atmosphere of reasonable security so that reference librarians do not feel the need to hoard their special knowledge lest their usefulness to the library system be ended. Surely the more knowledge is shared the more everyone learns.

Somewhat similar to the understudy method in technique is the guided experience. As its name implies, guided experience consists of planned on-the-job projects designed to help the assistant overcome his deficiencies under the guidance of his supervisor. It may take the form of the assignment of a special problem to be analyzed, the study of available reference material in a certain area, observation of activities in another department or another library, or the responsibility of carrying out special tasks. Each such assignment should be carefully planned to help the librarian develop that knowledge or ability which he needs. One librarian may need a position on a committee in order to help her develop skill in working with others. Another may need to learn to take one task and
carry it through to completion. For her an assignment to study the need for city directories and to make out order cards for those needed, or the compilation of a reading list on a specific subject might be worthwhile. To be of value these projects should be definite and short-ranged, with a reasonable goal in sight.

In some instances a reference librarian may need the knowledge or the understanding which can be gained through a program of job rotation. In most small and medium-sized libraries a complete switching of positions is not feasible, but modified plans have been highly successful. At the University of Florida every professional staff member in the Main Library and in the branches, files in the public catalog one morning in each six week period, and works in the Bibliography Room for six hours during such a six week period. This gives each person an opportunity to learn the intricacies of the card catalog and should enable him to use this tool more effectively and efficiently. By manning the public service desk in the Bibliography Room the person becomes aware of the public's use of the card catalog and of the various bibliographical aids. Some libraries have a plan whereby catalogers and reference librarians work half time in each department. Others assign all staff members to a service desk one night each week.

Sometimes the reference librarian does not need to gain knowledge of other areas of librarianship as much as he needs to know what other libraries are doing. This is especially true of librarians who have come directly from library school to a reference position and who have worked in that position for three or four or more years. It is at this time that the stimulation of a six month or year's exchange is most beneficial. Through this experience, the two exchange librarians may broaden their knowledge and their judgments as they observe new methods of performing their professional duties, and encounter different ideas on familiar service problems. The other members of each library staff will benefit from the experience of having someone in their midst asking questions about practices and procedures, seeking reasons for the presence or absence of reference materials, and inquiring as to policy statements on service problems. With a careful selection of participating librarians and libraries, this experience may be a potent factor in growth and development.

For some staff members increasing their knowledge of a subject area or a language is their foremost training need. Those libraries located near a university or college are at a distinct advantage for, with a little encouragement, many ref-
ference librarians will enroll for a course in the field in which they are ill-prepared for the demands of their positions. When this opportunity is not available, the ambitious librarian should be assisted as much as is possible in his pursuit of formal training.

Some few libraries at present offer inducements or assistance to staff members who need or want to continue their formal education, through leaves of absence, sabbaticals, and scholarship aid. Some college libraries provide time for class attendance or a waiver of tuition fees, but more liberal allowances, both in time and money, should be provided by both public and college libraries.

The training methods described in the foregoing paragraphs have been some of the individual methods for the growth and development of particular skills of an individual reference librarian. There are occasions, however, when the training needs of several staff members may be very similar. When this is true a group method may be used to advantage.

Well-planned, regularly scheduled staff meetings may be very effective in the development of human and conceptual skills, for here librarians exchange points of view, observe, listen, assimilate ideas and interact with others. As information is presented, as new projects are discussed, and as decisions are reached, each participant may grow in knowledge and ability. Staff meetings promote mutual understanding and give members practice in working together harmoniously.

The key to the success of a staff meeting lies in the careful planning which must be done. Spending at least twice as much time in preparation as in the meeting itself, the department head should know what he should tell the staff members, what he should encourage them to tell to others, and what he wants to accomplish in that session in the way of staff development. When the librarian plans with care, pays attention to principles of good leadership, and creates a generally favorable climate, the staff meetings should be an effective method of developing reference librarians professionally.

The conference differs from the staff meeting in that it is called to deal with one particular problem. It may be that the reference librarians in public libraries in one area feel the need for a meeting with the high school librarians to discuss how much help should be given to students on their assignments. Perhaps a series of meetings on book reviewing or on reference service to business groups might prove beneficial.

Participation in conferences improves technical knowledge as the various members present information not familiar
to the others. It reduces any tendency toward intellectual stagnation as each conference member faces the varied topics before the group. By considering these problems which are of a higher order than are those usually encountered in everyday work the participants broaden their interests and attitudes, and develop the ability to analyze and explore problems systematically, to perceive new solutions, and to cooperate in the exchange of ideas and in carrying out the results of the group thinking.

To be successful, the conference, as the staff meeting, needs good leadership, adequate preparation on the part of the leader and the participants, careful selection of members, and a generally favorable climate in which the group thinks, discusses and makes decisions. Without careful attention to these four factors, the conferences may be a detriment to the development program and a great waste of time.

Additional methods which may be used effectively to help reference librarians develop are: attendance at professional meetings, participation in institutes, pre-conference meetings and workshops; professional reading and writing, and membership in professional organizations.

Considerable time has been spent here on the techniques which can be used effectively in helping reference assistants become reference librarians who possess knowledge of bibliographies and bibliographical methods, knowledge of books knowledge of good techniques of reference service, ability to work with patrons and staff, ability to organize and carry out reference projects, and the ability to see the service function of the library as a whole and to conceive new and better ways of effectively serving the library's community. But techniques do not in themselves constitute a professional development program, for basically a librarian's development depends upon the individual and his superior whose actions reflect the attitude of the library administration. Fundamentally, the chief librarian and the department heads create the atmosphere of service, the attitude toward the public and the spirit which fosters the desire for continued development on the part of each member of the staff. Only a program which is inspired by the chief librarian and the head of the department and nourished by their daily example can hope to yield effective results. And the measure of these results will be the degree to which that example penetrates into the thought and practice of every individual in the library organization.

The experience of the writer seems to prove that the success of any development program for reference librarians will
depend upon eight factors. First, there must be professional interest on the part of every staff member, a desire to become a more effective member of the department. Each reference librarian must wish to develop, for where a staff member is not interested there can be little learning.

The purpose of each training plan must be clearly understood by the participants and the goals must be realistic and within the reach of the individual or individuals in the program. Along the way toward the final goal there must be standards against which the learner can gauge his progress. This will give him the satisfaction he needs to continue toward the final goal.

The training program must be personal, designed for each individual and his particular needs. Some librarians need one thing and some another; each must get what he requires by a curriculum as well as a method selected to meet his demands. This necessitates that any program for the development of reference librarians must be preceded by a position analysis and an appraisal of the performance of each librarian as measured against the requirements of his position. By this procedure individual training needs are identified and training goals set up for each person. Training devices which appear to enable the trainee to reach his training goals are then selected and the program is implemented.

Preparation for training is essential to the success of any program. Preparation includes not only careful planning of the curriculum, but also creating an atmosphere in which everyone finds it easy to develop himself and all feel a reasonable degree of security and confidence in relation to others in the group.

Finding time for careful preparation of every phase of the training program is often the "Waterloo" of the development program, for, in an active department, the demands of patrons and pressures of schedules and deadlines must take precedence over staff matters. The answer to this problem is not the employment of a personnel officer to assume training responsibilities, but the provision of enough staff to allow the head of the department to prepare the development program for her staff. Only the department head knows the work of each individual, the training needs of each, and the best methods of achieving the desired development of each staff member within the working schedule of the department.

The participation of each staff member is important to the success of the training program. As each person takes an active part in planning the program, setting the goals, selecting the training methods, he will be in sympathy with the endeavor
and more effective learning will take place.

Not only must there be participation by each reference librarian but the training program must be promoted wholeheartedly by all members of the administrative staff. Without full and continuous support during all phases of the training, the proper climate for the favorable growth and development of each individual will be lacking and the entire program will be ineffective.

To measure the successes and failures of the professional development program and the various techniques used, there must be periodic appraisals of the performance and potential of the reference staff.

Finally, it must be emphasized that "education is not something which is given to us nor is it something we get once and have all our lives. It is a continuous process." 10 The education of a reference librarian can never be considered complete, and it is the joint responsibility of the library and the individual to foster the continual growth of the talent, abilities, and knowledge of the reference librarian.

References


3. Ibid., pp. 256-257.


8. Ibid.
