



Supervision and Morale

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“WHAT IS LESS frequently remembered, perhaps, is that the employee’s morale is to a large degree determined by his immediate supervisor.”¹ This statement made by the McDiarmids in 1943 and a similar assertion by a nonlibrary authority that “the relationship between first line supervisors and the individual workman is of more importance in determining the attitude, morale, general happiness, and efficiency of that employee than any other single factor”² are sufficiently emphatic to underline the fact that supervision and morale are inseparable and to point up the need for simultaneous consideration.

In this paper the term “supervisor” is considered primarily as referring to the immediate supervisor, to the “middle management” man, rather than to the top executive, though such a distinction has been impossible in many instances. An attempt will be made to single out developments in professional thinking on the subject of supervisor selection and training and on the improvement of supervisory performance and techniques. The term “morale” perhaps requires no definition, but will be thought of as the total of employee attitudes, individual and collective, toward the library, its administration, its objectives, and its work.

Our best literature on this aspect of personnel management continues to be found in nonlibrary publications. Ralph E. McCoy³ devotes a chapter to human relations. Of seventy-seven entries cited, only thirty-four are descriptive of library work, and of these thirty-four items only thirteen have appeared during the last five years.

Nevertheless, there is an encouraging trend toward greater concern with the basic problems of supervision. A search of early literature reveals occasional recognition of the importance of employee attitudes and the need for staff participation, but it was not until the depression with its accompanying unrest and frustration that these important aspects of library administration forced their way into the limelight.

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Those years saw the natural growth of staff organizations, the belated creation in 1936 of the American Library Association's Board on Personnel Administration, and an increasing understanding (preceded in many instances by irritation) of the needs and desires of the individual employee. There have followed a wholesome ferment, the setting up of modern methods of personnel management in many libraries, and increasing attention to the subject in library literature.

Most striking perhaps is the lack of attention given to the fundamental matter of selection and training of supervisors. Studies in the field of education for librarianship have repeatedly pointed out the lack of training for administration. Joseph L. Wheeler⁴ got down to brass tacks when he pointed out: "Half the graduates who stay in library work five years have been put in positions of administrative responsibility to direct the work of others in a department, a branch, a school library, if not as a head librarian. . . . administration is the weakest and most neglected aspect of college, school, and public librarianship, and is chiefly responsible for other shortcomings. . . ." He pointed out that no school at that time offered any course dealing with the essential elements of administration and supervision. Ernest J. Reece,⁵ reporting on his field investigation of the unmet needs in library school curriculums, referred to graduates' shortcomings "in the training and supervision of subordinates, in the utilizing of individuals' capabilities, and in the evaluation of accomplishment." Clara W. Herbert⁶ pointed out that the highest grades in classification plans are those which carry administrative duties, so that the "librarian whose outstanding work merits recognition is frequently given executive work for which quite possibly he has no fitness."

With this admitted weakness in the basic training of librarians, one might expect considerable emphasis on training for supervision in the in-service training programs of libraries. Yet little appears in print to warrant this assumption. The most impressive evidence is Adra M. Fay's manual on supervision prepared for use in the Minneapolis Public Library and later published by the American Library Association.⁷ This specifies many of the principles of good supervision, adapted to the library scene. The A.L.A. reports that 2,704 copies had been sold through November 1953. Errett W. McDiarmid⁸ pointed out, in 1942, factors in developing library leaders and suggested changes in college and university library organization which would provide administrative experience for a middle-management group. It is interesting to note that as long ago as 1940 one library was reported by Ethel M. De Witt⁹ as using the conference method of training, aimed partially

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at development of the supervisory group. Other libraries are known to have adopted this method at later dates, but their experience does not, so far as the author has discovered, appear in print.

Through the years there has been given a fair amount of attention to the qualities needed in the supervisor as well as to effective methods of supervision. F. P. Hill¹⁰ best summarized the attitudes of an earlier day. He recommended unity of command, strictness without favoritism, praise for merit as well as notice of faults, and singled out standards for assistants as courtesy and politeness, system and order, accuracy, faithfulness and attention, enthusiasm, promptness, and regularity. "Even at the expense of popularity," he said, "the librarian must 'keep at' his assistants if he wishes to secure system and order." Certainly no "staff participation" there!

By 1905 the assistant was apparently being given a look-in. Julia E. Elliott¹¹ included among supervisory techniques encouragement of originality, welcoming suggestions for improvements, communication of plans and goals, making assistants feel they belong. Jennie M. Flexner¹² in 1920 spoke of the "more or less newly recognized right [of the assistant] to have and to express opinions concerning the chief who is to direct her." By 1939 change was in the air. Miss Herbert in her pioneer study pointed out many factors in good supervision, as well as effective supervisory techniques. The McDiarmids made history in 1943 with their general study of administrative practices in public libraries which pointed out many weaknesses in supervisory practices as well as progressive recommendations for improvement. Louis R. Wilson and M. F. Tauber¹³ followed in 1945 with their study of the university library favoring "democracy in staff organization." In 1945 also there was an evident awareness of supervisory problems among catalogers. Tauber's paper¹⁴ on personnel in catalog departments cited good factors in supervisory performance, and H. R. Bixler,¹⁵ Personnel Director of the Mutual Life Insurance Company, in an address before the New York Regional Catalog Group, called attention to the increasing importance of the supervisor in training and efficient performance. He mentioned accepted personnel techniques, such as delegation of responsibility, effective communication, and attention to the growth of the individual employee. He also had a word for the assistant, citing traits which militate against promotion, as brought out in a survey of 4,000 office employees: lack of ambition, lack of initiative, carelessness, lack of cooperation, laziness, attendance to outside things, lack of loyalty, tardiness, and self-satisfaction.

The A.L.A. Board on Personnel Administration in 1940 published *Organization and Personnel Procedure*, followed by revisions in 1952 under a slightly different title.^{16, 17} Although devoted to the entire field of personnel management these contained many recommended supervisory procedures. The chairman of the Board, E. B. Stanford,¹⁸ published an article in 1950 on the duties of, and the traits needed by, a library supervisor, which presumably reflected the opinions of the Board.

As Miss Flexner pointed out, the lowly assistant had also begun to speak his mind. Margery Doud¹⁹ was one of the first and created a sensation at the 1920 A.L.A. Conference when she proved that the assistant was not inarticulate. Throughout the thirties the profession was made increasingly aware by younger assistants of its shortcomings in the area of personnel administration, and during recent years some attention has been focused on the supervisor. Katherine Prescott²⁰ in 1946, speaking before the Staff Organizations Round Table, discussed those elements in a job besides livelihood which are sought by an employee, factors in supervision which are meaningful to the assistant, and the importance of a fair transfer and promotion policy in maintenance of staff security and satisfaction. At the Cleveland conference Helen Reed²¹ enumerated qualities which she, as an assistant branch librarian, expected from her branch librarian, and Alex Ladenson,²² also in 1949, discussed the traits of the good supervisor from the standpoint of the assistant librarian in a large acquisitions and preparations department. In 1951 a member of the Pacific Northwest Library Association²³ stated with considerable frankness the good and bad aspects of supervision, stressing the need for delegation of responsibility to, and encouragement of initiative in, subordinates.

J. P. Danton²⁴ in 1934 was one of the first to present the case for democracy in libraries, finding some justification for the belief that the trend in internal management was a democratic one, but urging more utilization of staff resources in policy formation and personnel decisions. Herbert Goldhor²⁵ in 1940 presented a brief statement of principles and offered the opinion that the staff organization provided the best medium for "the regular, automatic and impersonal communication of the staff's point of view." R. E. Krug,²⁶ speaking before the Staff Organizations Round Table in 1942, held that high morale is fostered by the democratic approach, urged open channels of communication, and expressed the opinion that employee organizations had not nearly approached their full capacity to contribute to library administration. R. A. Ulveling²⁷ stated the principle that the chief

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administrator is and must be responsible for final policy decisions, but believed wholeheartedly in staff contribution toward such decisions. In 1950 R. M. Holmes's article²⁸ in *Personnel Administration*, described the facilities for employee participation in the Library of Congress. Those wishing more complete information about the enlightened procedures in the Library of Congress, with its more than 2,000 employees, have welcomed the appearance in 1953 of its *Manual of Personnel Policies*,²⁹ describing in detail the operation of such devices as the Staff Advisory Committee and the Staff Forum. A recent *Library of Congress Information Bulletin*³⁰ directed at all federal agencies gives suggestions for employee participation. Amy Winslow³¹ mentioned in 1952 various devices for encouraging "bottom-up management," such as regular channels for suggestions, staff committees, opinion polls, adequate two-way communications and staff organizations, and in 1953³² discussed the why, how, how soon, and how far of staff participation.

The original impetus for formation of most employee organizations was to raise salaries and get better working conditions. Nevertheless, along with this has been the desire for wider opportunity for self-expression and for sharing in management. Opinion regarding staff organizations has undergone considerable change and liberalizing. Prevailing early attitudes, particularly toward library unions, were expressed by W. E. Henry³³ when he stated: "Our people can unionize and change our standards from a profession to a trade and force the hands of the employer. This will move us back of 1876." G. F. Bowerman,³⁴ however, was an early supporter of the library union and cited its achievements in his own library.

Bernard Berelson's study³⁵ in 1939 traced the history of library unionization and enumerated the reasons for the growth of unions as the desire for better economic status as well as for democratization of library administration, and for "affiliation with a broad, constructive movement for concrete expression of social attitudes and desires." He urged careful and dispassionate study of the question. J. S. Richards³⁶ in 1940 discussed staff associations versus unions, favoring the former as a means of developing the individual and enabling him to use his abilities for expansion of library frontiers and for promotion of library action. A recent study by J. J. Clopine³⁷ traces the history of individual library unions, their aims, failures, and achievements, and summarizes objectively the pros and cons. A comparable study of staff associations remains to be done and is greatly needed.

The Public Library Inquiry reported opinions of administrators and

assistants concerning various activities of staff associations and unions, as revealed by questionnaire. Staff associations were operating in twenty-five (43 per cent) of the libraries reporting. Half of the administrators had "formed no opinion as to the desirability of the activities carried on by staff associations," but of those who held an opinion "the great majority are in favor of all of the activities listed."³⁸ A considerably larger majority of the employees favored all activities of staff associations. Seven libraries (12 per cent) reported that members of the staff belonged to a library labor union. More than half the administrators were uncertain about the desirability of union activities in libraries and were on the whole less favorably disposed than toward staff associations. Attitudes of employees were likewise less clear-cut, a quarter of those polled being doubtful of the value of library unions and a quarter actively opposed. Approximately one-fifth believed sufficiently in the principle of unionization to be willing to join a library union.

Lack of adequate communication between supervisor and staff and between chief administrator and staff has been repeatedly cited as a weakness in personnel administration generally, and no less in libraries. Staff manuals, staff meetings, formal channels for suggestions, staff newsletters, opinion polls, bulletin boards, and official memorandums are among the means which have been suggested, and undoubtedly many libraries make use of all or most of these. The case for staff manuals has been presented by Wilson and Tauber³⁹ and by Rose E. Boots.⁴⁰ Staff meetings are not new to library literature, witness symposiums in the *Library Journal* in 1907⁴¹ and again in 1942.⁴²⁻⁴⁴ Yet Alice I. Bryan found that, in spite of the advantages of staff meetings as a means of effective communication and staff participation, they were held in only two-thirds of the libraries studied. Her conclusion in regard to intramural communications was that: "The general picture, with but few exceptions, is that of a rather un-systematic use of various devices for giving and receiving information, opinions, and suggestions, with little awareness of the need and value of an integrated, effective two-way system of intramural communication between administration and staff."⁴⁵

That useful device in supervision, the merit or service rating, has received considerable attention in library literature, yet the Public Library Inquiry revealed that only seven of the nine metropolitan libraries and half of the large libraries (population: 100,000-499,999) were using it. The first comprehensive study of service ratings was made by Lucy M. Buker⁴⁶ in an unpublished master's thesis sum-

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marized in *Library Journal* in 1939. She pointed out the advantages as well as the dangers in use of rating forms, mentioning their function in improving quality of work and supervision in the opportunity afforded for employee acquaintance with the supervisor's estimate of him. F. R. St. John⁴⁷ followed in 1940 with a thorough summary of merit rating, describing methods used in business and industry and pointing out the difficulties in finding the "ideal" rating form as well as in application of any system.

W. B. Hoffman⁴⁸ urged that service ratings be used primarily as a tool in supervision, a method for periodic discussion with the staff member, rather than as a system for comparing employees. This use of the rating has been too little emphasized, with the result that the service rating is often regarded as an instrument of torture rather than an opportunity for a frank, friendly, and helpful interview. Elizabeth S. Elliott,⁴⁹ in an excellent recent study, reaches a similar conclusion, namely that ratings should never be considered the sole basis for making promotions, wage increases, and similar decisions, but regarded rather as a useful tool in guidance and training. There is little question about the value of periodic rating of staff members. Too often the employee does not know the qualities which are considered important by the supervisor—the rating form enumerates them, the interview tells him where he stands. Unfortunately, the ideal form has not yet been devised. The form sponsored by the A.L.A. Board on Personnel Administration⁵⁰ was issued in 1948 and needs to be revised. Libraries which use it have learned that a complete change in form at fairly frequent intervals is desirable. Libraries devising their own rating sheets should examine the collection of forms used in American libraries which has been edited by E. B. Colburn for the Division of Cataloging and Classification.^{51, 52}

Rewards and incentives, often found in industry, have been little used in libraries. Several libraries are known to have established awards for outstanding achievement, but in general the Public Library Inquiry concluded that "many libraries are missing an opportunity to apply incentive measures that will help to maintain morale of the staff."⁵³ Less happy aspects of supervision—handling of grievances, discipline, dismissal—receive little attention in print. McDiarmid,⁵⁴ at the 1945 University of Chicago Library Institute discussed the problem of dismissal in university libraries as related to tenure. The Library of Congress⁵⁵ has a well-organized and elaborate procedure for hearing and disposition of grievances and handling of dismissals. In connection with the grievance procedure Archibald MacLeish⁵⁶

issued an excellent statement in 1943 giving credit to widespread staff participation in its formulation. *Personnel Organization and Procedure*, issued by the Board on Personnel Administration, treats grievances, dismissals, and suspension very briefly. The Board on Personnel Administration has also formulated statements of tenure principles which have been adopted by the Council of the American Library Association,⁵⁷ and which are important in this connection.

Good supervision is so inextricably related to good morale that any discussion of morale becomes to a considerable extent a matter for supervisory attention. The chief administrator bears a large share of the responsibility for staff attitude and *esprit de corps*, but as the following citations frequently make clear, the immediate supervisor, in daily contact with the assistant, is the transmitter and the morale builder.

Our conception of morale and the factors important in its maintenance has undoubtedly changed with the years. But Mary Macmillan⁵⁸ stressed in 1903 the importance of making assistants feel that they "belong," as well as the need for recognition of merit. In 1920 Lora Rich⁵⁹ made many points which are still sound, though quaintly submitted under the title "How Can the Beneficence of Libraries Be More Successfully Directed Toward Their Assistants?" The McDiarmids' study of public library administration mentioned among factors in building morale: a real career opportunity, recognition and advancement, a sound personnel program, stimulating leadership, impartiality, good working conditions, and assessment of staff attitudes. B. B. Gardner's excellent discussion⁶⁰ of morale at the University of Chicago Library Institute in 1945 maintained that this essential element depended not on pat formulas, personnel techniques, nor correct records, but on an understanding of people and human relationships, and of the desire for participation, recognition, and status. Lyndal Swofford,⁶¹ discussing mental hygiene in the college library, painted a doleful picture of the frustration, restriction, and insecurity of the "typical" college librarian and outlined an excellent "mental hygiene program" which would be applicable to any library. R. R. Munn⁶² attacked the problem of morale through various methods of staff participation, such as discussion of budgets and cross-sectional committees, and through coordination. He mentioned as factors responsible for low morale, favoritism, rumors, and condescension toward the nonprofessional assistant. Mary D. Herrick,⁶³ after a survey of morale among catalogers in various types of libraries, reported on factors which are considered important in worker satisfaction. Among those

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rated most essential were proper lighting, interdepartmental cooperation, cordial intrastaff relationships, sufficient and proper equipment, adequate working space, and clear demarcation of lines of authority. She further pointed out that no single factor—even salary—can determine the attitude of a worker, but that “a blending of many elements including security, variety and interest in work, a sense of achievement, and opportunity for friendly companionship” is necessary to insure the most favorable attitude toward a job.

The Public Library Inquiry considered such factors as good physical working conditions, recreational and cultural activities and opportunities, loan facilities and other financial aids, incentives, staff organizations, and the extent of their representation in the libraries. The greatest need in public libraries, it found, is for funds to pay better salaries, but funds are also needed to carry out effectively some of its other recommendations, such as adequate pension systems, elimination of long hours of overtime, and adequate facilities for maintaining staff health, comfort, and efficiency. As the report states: “In our sample a little more than half of the librarians (53 per cent) stated that morale was excellent or good in their libraries; a little less than half (48 per cent) that it was only fair, poor, or very poor. This is not a bad showing. But it leaves much room for improvement. In addition to better salaries, pensions, and physical equipment, it suggests a fuller use than is now the case of all the machinery and means of recognition of staff members as partners in the library enterprise.”⁶⁴

In conclusion, it may be stated with confidence that the library profession is increasingly conscious of the importance of skilled supervision and its close connection with employee morale. The growth of staff organizations, the increasing facilities for individual participation in management, the gradual introduction of improved personnel administration techniques, the important contributions of the A.L.A. Board on Personnel Administration, all indicate a vigorous search for solutions. Our best guides and the most advanced thinking are still to be found in nonlibrary literature, as was made abundantly clear by McCoy, but the array of references cited in this paper is an indication that we have made a good start in recent years.

However, indications likewise point to the need for further search and experimentation. The emphasis in this paper has been on middle management, but it is clear that the chief administrator is to a large extent accountable for the atmosphere in his institution. His is the responsibility for over-all personnel practices and policies. He can afford the staff almost endless opportunities for participation in policy

formation, program planning, and carrying out of experiments and projects. He can create a climate of responsiveness, desire and respect for ideas, belief in the processes of democracy, and understanding of individual aspirations.

Given this attitude and will on the part of the chief administrator, how can he insure that the same spirit permeates the institution and is reflected in the methods and policies of the immediate supervisor? Can we give more attention to supervisory qualities in the selection of supervisors and at the same time devise avenues of promotion for the staff member whose work merits recognition but who lacks aptitudes necessary for supervision? We should explore tests of supervisory qualities used in other fields. The newly created A.L.A. Committee on Measurement and Guidance may be able to devise tests for special groups such as this, though such a broadening of its assignment may not be anticipated at the present time.

Once the new supervisor has been placed, how much guidance does he receive? Is the training spotty, or systematic? Is there provision for group meetings of supervisors, affording an opportunity to discuss mutual problems? Do we give specific training in such areas as performance rating, handling of grievances, delegation of responsibility, development of initiative, and effective communication? What steps have we taken to insure that on-the-job training is systematic? It is a fairly common practice to send the new assistant to a few selected supervisors for initial training because they are expert "trainers." Have we developed training manuals and check lists of duties which would assist the others in becoming expert also?

That is an array of questions to which most of us must doubtless answer "no." We need research, experimentation, pooling of ideas, and collaboration of supervisors themselves in order to reach better solutions. The institute on supervisor training, held at the recent Los Angeles conference under auspices of the Board on Personnel Administration, was a good beginning, and special training programs in some libraries are also an indication of alertness. But if the testimony of many of the authors referred to above may be accepted, we still have far to go.

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