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# Administrative Antennae in the Fifties

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TAKING THE TITLE ASSIGNED to it as symbolic, this paper deals with the flow of intelligence between a public library's constituents, governors, and staff on the one side, and its executive head on the other. The purpose is to explore the bearing of communication upon effective administration.

As employed here "communication" extends the idea of antennae to involve the innumerable "feeding-in-lines," from both internal and external sources, whereby the administrator gathers material on which to base decisions, and in turn transmits his findings as stimuli to action on the part of someone besides himself. It is thus readily seen that communication in relation to administration is a two-way proposition, composed of both gathering and disseminating information.

This concept is broad in scope because of its close relationship on one hand with over-all public relations programs and thus with the nature of a library's objectives and services, and on the other with scientific management. The topic not only furnishes the base for extensive investigation on public relations and internal communications in general, but offers numerous opportunities for graduate research in such subdivisions of these areas as concern librarianship especially. This article, therefore, is presented on the theory that even designation of problems is of some value to the administrator.

Two preliminary clarifications are essential in embarking on the subject as outlined above. First, the article must proceed on the basis of the experience of the writer and specifically in terms of his immediate experience as director of a large public library system. This is necessary because of the almost complete lack of treatment in an over-all fashion in the literature of librarianship, and the fragmentation of the topic in articles on the activities of individual libraries. However, in approaching the subject from a variety of angles, the

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conclusion has been reached that differences in communications problems in relation to the administration of libraries of various types and sizes are differences of degree rather than of basic nature. On this hypothesis, it appears that a look at the problems of the most complex unit, a large library system, would include, as well as go beyond, those of all other libraries. Secondly, the subject matter to be covered carries the hazard of frequently falling into the realm of the obvious. But the obvious has a significant place in establishing a point of departure into the unknown. The principle of jet propulsion demonstrated by Archimedes was accepted for centuries by scientists as obvious before its practical application in the jet aircraft engine, making possible development of the huge and speedy Boeing 707 jet transport. Also what is evident to one may not be so to another. And as a last shot, it is sometimes more difficult to pin down the obvious than the not so obvious.

In an era when the complexity of living makes tremendous demands on the individual in acquiring information as a basis for deciding personal courses of action, the role of the public library administrator takes on even more complex proportions in assimilating vast sources of material and directing the quality of service through the actions of the library's staff as extensions of himself. Accordingly, a look at areas in which effective communications are essential may be appropriate.

First and foremost is communication with a library's public, both actual and potential users. Intimate knowledge of community character and composition should be the administrator's basis for determining what library services are needed and for systematic evaluation of their effectiveness. Usually decisions on services are based on tradition and theory rather than on expression of needs. No doubt the failure of librarians to seek expressions of need systematically from their clientele is due to the magnitude of the task and the insufficiency of resources. As social scientists recognize, and as B. R. Berelson[1] documents in relation to libraries, there is no such thing as "the public" but a multitude of "publics." To gather from all of these "publics" opinions on what library services each requires would be an impossible task. And yet to provide the proper library service the administrator should have as much of this information as possible. This is not to say that he must obey all directives from the "publics" and fragment the library's services to meet the minute needs of all, which he knows is economically neither feasible nor sound, but rather take account of them in such a way that he may, in the words of the states-

man "follow in order to lead." Such information, when organized and analyzed, can provide a firm foundation on which to base policies and long-range objectives for fulfilling the library's educational role in the community.

Over the years administrators of public libraries have indeed made some efforts to learn more of the thinking of their "publics," to gain a basis for revamping operations and services. Studies of patron satisfaction have appeared in print both as journal articles and as parts of surveys. Many of these have been self-surveys, and no doubt many more have been done than reported.

A study of this type, ascertaining who uses the library, for what purpose, and with what degree of satisfaction, was recently conducted by the New York Public Library, and although unpublished and not available to the profession it is probably the most significant to date. Undertaken in part to provide information on which to build public relations for an annual funds campaign, its findings have had great impact on administrative decisions. For example, the results sharply indicated the need for previously contemplated changes, such as simplification of catalogs, and demonstrated the importance of obvious items that are frequently overlooked or by-passed, such as clearer directories and signs. Its statistical summaries and correlations provide valuable guides for administrative purposes. But even more important in the long run than the statistics will be the case study summaries based on interviews. Because the New York Public Library investigation was made by a professional public relations firm, it offers an interesting departure from the more usual approach in which professional librarians act as surveyors.

On a broader scale in this field of library use are many studies of the past dealing with "who reads what," and with the success of libraries in supplying reading matter. Berelson in his Public Library Inquiry volume, *The Library's Public* [2] does a remarkable job of pulling together the data from these studies and synthesizing their findings with those of The Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan. As R. D. Leigh [3] points out in his foreword, Berelson shows what a short distance has been covered in research on library use and provides a platform for more rapid advancement.

In a different area of service, but still evaluating by means of opinions of users, is the *Catalog Use Study*.[4] Given the consideration they deserve, its findings will force attention to the needs of library users and away from cataloging perfectionism, providing a ready

example of policy decision and administrative action based on patron opinion.

Yet while all these studies have done much to point the way for future investigation they have touched only in a minor fashion on one area. That is the wide field of research on the opinions of people who do not use the library (The New York Public Library recognizes that its survey does not cover this segment of opinion and hopes to do something about it in the future.) In this area summaries of case studies as well as statistics and correlations would prove most valuable, and to the time-honored methods of investigation of librarians and social scientists should be added the techniques of marketing and motivational research. Such research may, incidentally, uncover the clue to effecting changes in the opinion of libraries and librarians held by the public.

Although a part of the general public in many ways, there are other individuals and groups that have a more direct relation to library administration and more immediate influence on decisions. Among these are boards of trustees; citizen groups oriented toward the library, such as friends, councils, and advisory bodies; and the fiscal authority as well as the various departments subordinate to it. The thoughts, attitudes, and opinions regarding the library which are held by these groups and individuals have much to do with its objectives, services, and operation; but while the parties concerned have more intimate knowledge of library problems than the public at large they possess it in varying degrees and have equally varying degrees of interest.

Of all these, the administrator has the greatest access to the group and individual thinking of his board of trustees. The general composition, backgrounds, and attitudes of library board members have been thoroughly investigated and reported in the Oliver Garceau [5] and Leigh [6] volumes of the Public Library Inquiry. While there is no such thing in actuality as the average individual or typical board of trustees, the statements and conclusions of these volumes have been borne out many times in the findings of teams surveying specific libraries. They exist equally in the experience of every library administrator who has passed the neophyte stage. The inevitable conclusion is that, with notable exceptions, trustees of public libraries simply do not think very much about the operation for which they are responsible, beyond the attention monthly meetings force on them. That they do not think about it in the same way as the library administrator is completely understandable, considering the intermittent attention he may give to

important community organizations on whose boards he himself serves.

Because not all board members come equipped with qualifications that the administrator would choose for the "all-time all-American" board, it is his job to impress upon them individually and collectively the importance of the library's contribution to society, the amount of work done by its shorthanded staff, and comparable matters. Although this educational process is best not referred to as "educating the trustee"—the terminology may well bring about such a violent re-action as to defeat its purpose—it is an essential first step in reaching for financial support of the library.

In theory the combined members of the board represent the various parts of the community and thus bring community thinking to bear on the direction of the public library's affairs. Again, as Garceau,[7] reports, it just is not true that boards are usually representative of the community culturally, economically, educationally, or even geographi-cally. Board members themselves then must learn something of the views of various community groups. But seldom do they have the time or inclination or even associations to learn of any thinking and attitudes beyond those of their own circle. Ideally a board should issue public invitations to groups and individuals to attend its meetings and express themselves on the library. However, library boards ordinarily do not follow this practice, in contrast to some school boards where not only is public attendance at sessions sought but where even public budget hearings are held. True, open meetings with public representatives present would consume more time than a board normally spends on library business. Yet undoubtedly they would in the long run be much more worth-while, despite the few crackpots and axe grinders they would attract, than devoting time to the minutiae of administration, which as Garceau [8] suggests, are much better left in the hands of a com-petent administrator.

Activation of board members to more direct interest in the library and their education in its problems can be precursors of vigorous action for recognition and support of their institutions.[9] Research into these phases of trustee relationships, resulting in concrete advice and techniques for accomplishing desired ends, would be of immeasurable value to the administrator caught in today's time dilemma of trying to meet service, staff, book, and other general management problems, and of devising means of getting more recognition of and action on them by a lay board.

Broader than the board of trustees in representation of community

needs and desires are groups oriented towards the library. Among these are the usual organizations affiliated with public libraries, such as community councils, Y.M.C.A.'s and other welfare agencies. These, however, are not particularly significant in discovering community attitudes because their boards too represent upper social and educational strata and they, as well as their agency personnel, are heavy library users. Although strongly favoring the library programs, they are too much concerned with their own money problems and have too little political power to exert much influence on library financing.

While "library friends" or council groups are also composed largely of persons already favorably disposed toward the library, they stand the chance of providing wider representation and often actually do. But at the same time nowhere does the administrator's fear of outside pressures for services and agencies come into such prominence as it does in relation to friends and councils. Encouraging the establishment of a citizen group is like opening a Pandora's Box—what starts to be a flow of milk and honey may turn into sour curds and brimstone. No doubt such a transmutation is due as often to the library administrator's resentment, when the thinking of the group diverges too far from his own, as it is to a runaway tendency. Yet the real value of such a group to an administrator lies in the very fact that it does think outside the channels of a profession and tradition, and brings to him the opinions of his "publics." Alas, when these do not agree with his own it sometimes causes either frustration and violent separation, or the channelling of the group into a pink tea and literary society, thus rendering it ineffectual from any point of view.

A comprehensive job of collecting details about friends groups on a nationwide scale is reported in the *P.L.D. Reporter* [10] of June, 1955. In addition to stating purposes it records accomplishments. However, the former are too broad and the latter too specific to give any true evaluation of friends groups as a help to the administrator. To the report's wealth of fact should be added case studies of "successful" and "unsuccessful" library-oriented citizen bodies. From such sources the administrator could learn through the experience of others how to help these groups be effective and how to avoid pitfalls encountered by the failures.

Always in the mind of the administrator of a public library is the attitude of the authority that appropriates its funds. Of almost equal concern to him in this relationship are the subordinate heads of city departments and their staffs, who make recommendations to the appro-

priating authority and with whom he frequently deals. Too often these officials are all-powerful. And much more political force than a library usually can muster is required to persuade the appropriating body to give weight to the request of the library over the recommendation of the budget director, comptroller, or comparable officer.

How, and by what specific means can the library administrator influence the thinking of the appropriating authority and those who make recommendations to it in order that they will supply the library with funds for operation beyond the mere level of subsistence? How can he exert the needed influence and still keep the library free of the entanglements of politics and patronage? Examples do exist where proof that the library is getting the greatest possible return out of each dollar spent results in allocation of more of the dollars it needs. On the other hand, the result can be a demand for more economy, leading to elimination of essential services and operations. There are also examples where the library administrator's personality and ability have enabled him to achieve, by personal contact, outstanding results in financial support. And some few have been successful through "pressure politics," though this is infrequent. Every method that comes to mind has serious adverse possibilities, yet there are times when the administrator, to save or develop that in which he believes, must undertake any or all of them. Perhaps some astute student of administrative science can point out methods or guideposts in this all-important area.

Thus far there have been considered communications to and from the board of trustees, the public and the fiscal authority as areas of singular importance and meriting further investigation. While the amount of material on communication with these groups is not considerable, almost no attention is paid in library literature to the extremely vital area of internal communications as related to administrative action.

This is in sharp contrast to conditions in business and industry, which treat communication as a management essential. Neglect of this topic by librarians may be due to the fact that by far the greater proportion of libraries are small and personal contact of the administrator with staff is assumed to suffice. That assumption is open to question, and certainly personal contact becomes inadequate where departmentalization and specialization take place. Internal communication is basic to scientific management, and perhaps the slowness with which libraries have adopted the principles and techniques of scientific

management accounts for the paucity of literature on internal communication. It seems only fair to conclude, however, that with or without writing about it the problem of internal communication is recognized and faced daily by library administrators.

In her volume, *The Public Librarian*,[11] Alice Bryan touches briefly on internal communications. In keeping with the purpose of her book, she records only a few of the devices that administrators use in transmitting information to their staffs. For today's administrator this is not enough. Internal communication is a multi-pronged affair, with information flowing in many directions. Freeness in this flow is essential to administration, and the administrator must devise the means for collecting facts on which to base his decisions. The day of the autocrat, the administrator who knows all and sees all, has seen its end, at least in the large library situation, simply because of the tremendous range of decisions required, from plans for a building to commas on catalog cards. Today's administrator must rely on specialists and subordinate administrators, who know their own areas much more intimately than the director ever can. Thus, in a very real way, the administrator is told what to think by his subordinates. Although in the end he must weigh facts and make decisions for which he has final responsibility, he can do so only on the basis of data and opinions supplied by members of his staff. In this sense, as well as in that of transmitting attitudes and directions of thinking to subordinates, communication is the foundation of the organizational pattern and administrative function, rather than a mere adjunct.

At the administrative level itself, the free flow up and down of information and ideas is relatively simple. With few people involved, frequent personal contact with the administrator is possible. More or less regular meetings of department heads as a group with the administrator are standard practice. In these conference situations there usually is good communication, arising from a sense of working toward the same end. But once out of a meeting, a department head's concern with his own problems can lead to a breakdown of communication with his fellow department heads. This often is due to no more than failure to realize how some other area of the operation will be affected by his decisions or actions. Hence the administrator's subordinates not only tell him what to think, but in a very real way share responsibility for the success or failure of his plans through their ability or inability to communicate with each other to achieve effective operation.

While communication between the administrator and his department

heads can be and usually is good, communication becomes less and less effective on progression down the organizational hierarchy. The more remote a worker is from the director's level the smaller are his chances of understanding why a certain decision has been made and the smaller are the administrator's chances of securing implementation of his plans. In this area, management literature has paid much attention to semantics and to simplicity and clarity of writing and speaking, in order to make certain that the thought-images created in the line worker are identical with those meant by the administrator. While such attention is deserved, the key to good communication, lies not only in phraseology but also in the attitude of intermediate and immediate supervisors. Only to the extent that they are convinced of the importance of transmitting their views in a fashion to achieve action and create understanding, will the orders, explanations, and information from the top become effective.

In like manner, the immediate and intermediate supervisors hold the key to transmission of information up the line. Any administrator recognizes the value of knowing what staff members at all levels think and feel. Only with this knowledge can he correct misunderstandings and allay the unfounded rumors that arise in any organization—often doubted but subsconsciously half believed. He knows the natural disinclination of a supervisor to accept and put into effect or forward the suggestions of subordinates because of self-esteem and of thinking that he himself should have had the ideas.

To develop lines of communication with staff at all levels an administrator may try various devices, such as personal visits to line units, setting aside a day for staff visits to his office, and terminal interviews. Although each may be good in itself none are completely satisfactory for developing sound attitudes or correcting poor ones. Having fully recognized the effect of the individual worker's interests and desires on services, costs, and profits, business has developed the "attitude survey," to supply general managers with basic information that the library administrator lacks. For information on attitudes to be frank, realistic, and reasonably objective, it cannot be gathered by the administrator and his staff but must be obtained from the outside combination of a psychologist and a management analyst. While the initial cost may be heavy, investigation of the methods of attitude surveys readily reveals that resulting information provides a sound base for objectives, policies, and management, and likewise records what the staff thinks and thus acts as a morale factor.

All these areas of internal communications in library administration are wide open to investigation. A survey of the literature of business and industry would make a good beginning. Through selection and evaluation of the findings a tool of practical assistance for administrators could be evolved, and further studies of particular aspects applied to the operation of libraries could follow.

If the needs for communication and for antennae to facilitate it are as indicated, are there special reasons for attention to them now? A glance at conditions in the library field may suggest an answer.

The 1950's are demanding years, when the resources of the public library should be making a maximum contribution to society. It is becoming increasingly evident to many in the profession, however, that the public library has missed its mark. Large segments of the population remain unaware of its resources, and individuals fail to make the most of it services by integrating its use in their daily lives. The attitude of the general public continues to be as it has been from time immemorial, that "libraries are good to have in case they are needed" and that their resources should be available, but "for the other fellow." Even more disconcerting is this estimate when it comes, as it frequently does, from individuals and groups at high professional and business levels. Such concepts, still existent among community leaders, as "a library can be located anywhere, preferably in an attractive spot outside the heart of the business community," or "librarians have pleasant, easy jobs involving no pressures," are indirectly responsible for the impasse the public library has reached in fulfilling its potential for service to the community. As long as these represent the general posture, libraries will be kept on a starvation diet. Furthermore they will have little chance to escape from that because, despite all their efforts, they will fail to attract in sufficient numbers the recruits able to assert the position of libraries and to meet the profession's needs.

The time has come for a positive step to combat this general apathy regarding libraries. The development and effectuation of sound service programs are required to eliminate the "doubting-Thomas beliefs" and establish firmly in the minds of all that the library is a vital educational force. The Public Library Inquiry has offered some guidance in this respect, but it is questionable how far its theories have been tested and whether any concrete measures have been taken in pursuance of its conclusions. In any event it should be axiomatic with libraries, as it is in business, that the offering of a good product, avail-

able in sufficient quantity to meet prospective demand, must precede encouragement of that demand. In order to break through the general indifference towards libraries this precept needs to be rigorously followed.

In building a sound program of action it is necessary to review the objectives, so that the services to be supplied will be those required and suitable, and to reject the idea that a library can be everything to everybody and that it should take on this and that task "because no one else has." Only so can a public library have a mark and hope to hit it. The process should include fact-finding, doubtless partly through testing and discarding theory, but certainly by consulting appropriate persons and groups and weighing their interests and views. Here one aspect of communication comes in. The results should embrace clear instead of confused aims; conservation of time and energy, including concentration by trained librarians upon professional tasks; a finished rather than an amateur product; and the realizing of maximum returns from the dollars received and expended.

With such a foundation communication again could come into active play, through a program of public relations which would have something to advertise and could go far toward opening a new era for public libraries. It ought, of course, to be comprehensive and planned. Up to now the one-shot effort, the isolated use of a publicity tool without coordination within an over-all scheme and with only sporadic attention to public relations in general, has been more the rule in libraries than the well thought out long-range program. There are exceptions, of course, such as that in the Enoch Pratt Free Library, where the public relations program is broad and holds a high priority in the administration; and in the Denver Public Library, where a strong influence has been exercised through leadership in community groups. And encouraging developments likewise are seen in the vigor of the Library Public Relations Council of the New York metropolitan area and in the new and rapidly developing Public Relations Section of the Library Administration Division of the American Library Association. From these may come strong leadership, but there should be equally strong public relations programs under the A.L.A. for librarianship as a whole.

It is such possibilities that warrant the emphasis upon communication and antennae urged in this paper. Library administrators may well take a leaf from the record of business and industry in their striving to keep in contact with those their institutions might serve

and with those who support, control, and help to operate those institutions. Something like this seems indispensable if they are to ascertain and influence the attitudes of those around them, to the advantage and usefulness of the enterprises they represent.

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