



The Administrator and the Board

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NO SENSIBLE HUSBAND OR WIFE would discourse upon the husband-wife relationship in public and with the spouse present. The relationship between a library administrator and the board of trustees which employs him and governs the library he operates, is sufficiently like marriage that there must have been few occasions when a dispassionate consideration of the functions, obligations, and responsibilities of the two parties has been enjoyed together.

In trying to indicate how a board of trustees and the administrator can work together harmoniously I have drawn my observations and examples not only from personal experience with boards and individual trustees of libraries where I have worked, but also from colleagues elsewhere, from library literature, and from hypothetical situations.

A library board of trustees may often be made up of persons who themselves serve as employees of corporate boards of directors or who serve as board directors in business enterprises, banks, or other private institutions. Public libraries are community-wide *service* institutions, and so much unlike businesses that are operated necessarily for profit that trustees should be on guard against automatically carrying analogies from their other corporate experiences into the library board's proceedings. They are trustees, not company directors. Sometimes these business experiences can illuminate and guide the library board's acts and provide helpful suggestions, but a commercial corporation director is not at all the same as a library trustee, nor is the administrator of a library at all the same as the managing head of a business enterprise. The natural tendency of trustees to be guided by personal experience in their businesses can be a serious problem if false analogies are applied to decisions regarding staff relations, salaries, fringe benefits, and public relations. The remedy: ask a board to define its special identity as a *library* board.

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The board and the administrator may agree that the board's province is policy and the administrator's is execution and management, yet run into difficulties from failure to perceive where policy stops and management begins. The most effective board-librarian teams are certainly those where the board follows a strict construction of policy in its highest sense, losing no ultimate control, but keeping hands off administrative detail, personnel, book selection, equipment, and processes. And while boards *fix* policies, it is proper and usual for the administrator as a professional librarian to initiate discussion of changes or of new policies and to offer recommendations.

The administrator must take care that he does not make or change policy by administrative decision or practice. For example, a practice of lending books freely to nonresidents, or some policy in relation to the schools, may grow up from little beginnings without a board ruling. A situation could develop that could embarrass the board in changing the practice as a considered policy.

It is easy enough to say, as the manuals do, that a board should carefully select and employ its executive administrator, then let him run the library without interference, removing him if he is proved incompetent or unsatisfactory. A board's care not to interfere does not lessen its responsibility to inform itself, to observe, to help when help is needed and correct when correction is needed, to question, and to suggest.

It is advisable, and not uncommon, for the library administrator himself to serve as a trustee of some institution or organization which employs managerial help and which is sufficiently akin to the librarian-trustee relationship to provide him the trustee's point of view. As he listens to reports as a trustee, say, of a private nursery school at its monthly or annual board meeting, he can see himself in the role of the school principal or superintendent, as well as in his actual role as trustee, and thus gain insight helpful in his relations with his own trustees.

A new board that comes into being, as for a newly created library district, could well consider all aspects of its relations with the library administrator and become a model board. But most library boards already exist and change only slightly in membership from year to year, a state which tends to perpetuate both good and bad procedures and attitudes.

Some of the practices and amenities that may smooth the working relationship can be indicated briefly as recommended procedures:

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All contacts about library business or personnel between staff and board or staff and individual trustees should always channel through the administrator. Neither the board nor any trustee should press the administrator to employ any individual, and if a trustee refers a job-seeker to the administrator, it should always be with a word to both the candidate and the librarian that "selection for hiring is entirely in hands of the administrator." Generally speaking, it will be not an asset but a liability for a candidate to be related in any way to a trustee, or to have approached a trustee before applying to the librarian.

Minutes of the previous board meeting, written carefully and briefly to meet the requirements of a legal record, should be given to the trustees in writing well before each meeting, to obviate tiresome reading aloud. Likewise, the administrator's written report, agendas for the whole body, and detailed matters in the jurisdiction of each board committee should be in the trustees' hands long enough before a board meeting that a committee meeting can be held. Some boards like to have matters presented with the prior consideration and recommendation of the appropriate committee, while other boards like "committee of the whole" first consideration. There are advantages either way, and disadvantages, but once these procedures are adopted, the administrator must cooperate. It is within propriety, however, for him to recommend that the board study its own procedural setup for possible improvement and to suggest changes to ways that he may have observed to be successful in other bodies. A tabulated form for recording motions, seconds, and votes on agenda items can save time.

The board president and the administrator should be pre-informed of, and invited to, all committee meetings. The trustees as individuals should conscientiously avoid caucuses and clique consultations because they will undermine the administrator's morale by any off-the-record consultations that touch upon policy or the administrator's activity. If a correction or rebuke or critical action seems needed, it should be undertaken in the regular way and with the administrator's knowledge.

Trustees do like to get the facts and the problem well in advance. They like to be kept informed, and the president should be included in every communication to a committee. Trustees are expected by their associates and acquaintances in the community to know what is going on in the library, and this news should be provided by the

administrator. He has a special duty to draw the board's attention to trends and long-range effects of policies and services.

Individual trustees should not be given and will generally not ask for special privileges as library users; nevertheless the wise librarian should see that members of his staff recognize trustees and give them no cause for complaint!

The administrator's relations with individual trustees should be guided by the fact that the board is a corporate body. Sometimes it is indeed a legal entity or "person" which can sue and be sued and possess other legal rights that persons possess. No trustee has any legal authority except when a board meeting is in session and then only as part of a majority of the board unless board action delegates some decision or responsibility to a committee of one or more trustees. All of the administrator's authority, however, derives from the board's "pleasure," and while the board is primarily a "legislative" body, it also possesses the final executive and some judicial power, if it chooses to exert it.

The administrator should avoid asking individual trustees for guidance in such a way that the answer becomes a directive. For example, if the administrator is wondering whether or not he ought to join a Chamber of Commerce, he may ask a trustee or the board president's advice in such a way as to indicate that, of course, *if* it is a matter of library policy, it would have to be decided by the board at its meeting.

On the other hand, it is desirable that a free and easy, mutually respectful relationship exist between the administrator and his board members, and he should be able to ask their advice frequently on any point where he feels the need of such advice. The presence on library boards of persons selected for their competence in business, law, engineering, and the arts, rather than for geographical or group representation, will be of great value to the administrator and to the community.

In a situation in which a woman administrator works with a board made up entirely or predominantly of men, the board should *not* operate differently from the way it would for a male librarian. However, in actual practice boards in this situation sometimes do work differently in the exercise of administrative decision and authority, although the situation itself may not arise frequently because board membership usually includes both men and women.

Personal friendships, within limits that both the administrator and

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the trustee will tacitly recognize, are likely to develop between congenial and able trustees and library directors, and can be a help in communicating feelings, troubles, and ideas and in securing support for proposals that might have hard going in a completely cold situation. Such friendships should not reach the point of maneuvering, however.

In small towns and sometimes elsewhere, when the library administrator is long established and influential, there may exist situations where in practice the administrator, an employee, virtually selects the trustees, who are to be his employers. This situation is improper and becomes aggravated with an increase in the size of the library and its budget. The wise librarian, except possibly in very special town situations, should avoid offering suggestions, appraisals or in any way maneuvering to get anyone appointed, reappointed, or not appointed to the board of his library, however tempted he may be.

A trustee may indeed ask the administrator's advice about accepting reappointment after years of board membership, but the librarian had better not respond. An ironic case in one library occurred when an excellent trustee, wise, sympathetic, interested, and conscientious, was asked to give a talk at a regional conference on the duties of a trustee. To help her prepare for the talk, the librarian gave her a *Manual for Library Trustees*, in which it was stated that one reason for terms of a stated number of years was to pass this duty around the community and to allow more people to become closely acquainted with library operations and needs. The manual said that a trustee should, therefore, not accept reappointment, which the appointive body may feel obliged to offer. Thus when this excellent trustee's term was completed, she conscientiously declined reappointment, and cost the library a good, experienced trustee. The principle, however, does seem sound, if appropriate selections are made by the appointive body or mayor.

There is not much an administrator can do if a board is dominated by one person, or if the presidency remains with one individual so long that it becomes almost impossible to change. In instances where this situation does not *yet* exist, but might in the future, it is quite proper, I think, for the administrator to suggest, privately or at a meeting, that the board consider such questions as how a "rotating presidency" can help the library. If conference-corridor talk and other informal exchanges of experience among librarians were recorded, they would be replete with cases of how a library can be adversely

affected by a long-continuing presidency of its board, and yet there are exceptional cases where it appears to have helped the library to grow steadily.

How far an administrator should go and with what approach, in acquainting trustees with the inner workings of the library administration, processes, and personnel, is another delicate matter. How can an administrator expect a trustee not to form opinions and make judgments if he is presented with problems within the librarian's province and discretion? Trustees are human and may be all too quick to form a fixed opinion of whether or not, for example, a branch library needs a children's worker on duty, or which charging system looks best, or whether or not or how long to have coffee breaks or even paid attendance at refresher courses, what displays to put on, how many paperbacks to buy, etc. If the librarian can seek and obtain their views on these matters without jeopardizing his discretionary powers, and without "starting something," fine—although he could seek the opinions of nontrustees who may well be even more competent or informed, and whose opinions are not riskily accompanied by corporate authority!

When the administrator, perhaps so required by law or by the board's own bylaws or customs, brings in salary or promotion recommendations for individual staff members, the ideal situation would be for these persons to be virtually unknown to the trustees, unaffected by any personal feelings. Indeed, one could make a good case for presenting such matters with numbers or pseudonyms instead of real names, underlining the fact that except for his or her own salary, and within the salary framework and budget approved by the board, the administrator should have complete authority for fixing salaries and for recommending promotions and raises. This authority should not be arbitrary, but exercised within a salary and promotion schedule known to staff and trustees.

The administrator should not only be guided by a well planned salary schedule but also have the advice of supervisory heads or staff committees. Sometimes raises have to be granted individually, not because of their merit, but because of a complex situation in the staff, or when all salaries are being adjusted to new levels. The trustees in board meeting have the right and duty to satisfy themselves that there are reasoning and good judgment behind salary proposals and that the proposals fit within the existing budget or within a new budget that the board is prepared to seek and obtain. However, the recom-

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mendations must come from the administrator. Boards of trustees that *never* question or take issue with an administrator's recommendations, if there be any such boards, may be called "rubber stamp" boards and are an extreme to be avoided. A good administrator does not mind being challenged to prove his point.

The administrator's delegated discretionary powers should be very broad and well established. A suitable amount for expenditure which may be made without board action should be agreed upon, perhaps at the figure of one thousand dollars, depending upon the size of the budget or library. This provision fixes responsibility, speeds action, and serves the public interest. Limiting the executive's discretion too narrowly will give the trustees a great many interesting problems, an abundance of committee discussions, long board meetings, and detailed minutes, but it will slow down progress and service. Responsibility—answerability—must be accompanied by authority, the right to make decisions.

A board can enjoy its trusteeship more fully, and have fruitful philosophical discussions of policy, if it will leave managerial decisions to its employed manager, giving him or her help as needed. (Some library heads are, of course, not really cut out to be managers or executives, yet are good librarians in other ways.)

For example, a new library building will usually contain an attractive auditorium, seldom needed by the staff, and offered to civic groups as a free or nearly free meeting place. The administrator consults other libraries and draws up a set of rules about the booking and use of the room—hours, refreshments, etc.—which are later adopted by the board. But it may not occur to anyone that denominational religious groups or partisan political groups may pose a problem, until all of a sudden such a request comes along and is dangerously precedent-setting or embarrassing. Obviously both administrator and trustees have failed in foresight, and the trustees' combined wisdom should have dealt with this problem in advance. It was the librarian's responsibility to pose the question in advance and the board's responsibility to discuss the public policy involved and adopt a rule. On the other hand, it would be wrong, in normal circumstances, for the librarian to put on the board's agenda for each meeting requests by local groups who might wish to use the library auditorium.

A notoriously indecent book may be widely talked about, and the situation arises in which the librarian must decide whether or not to put it in the library. Even though a board has a "Books Committee,"

the question of whether or not a certain book should be in a library ordinarily ought not to come before the trustees. It may, however, be passed to them by a librarian unwilling or unable to decide, or who feels that an explosive situation can be more firmly handled by the trustees. If the librarian has decided to order the book, the board's obligation is to support his decision, if not his appraisal. If the librarian rejects a book and citizens protest, the trustees have, I think, an obligation to become a court, trying the book, not the administrator, and making a *recommendation* as a result, while affirming the librarian's authority to decide.

Let us suppose that the librarian feels that books on hypnotism are dangerous for a library to disseminate. Has he the discretionary authority to remove or reject this subject? I should expect him to ask advice, both of mental health experts and of the board, and if a policy is adopted, it requires board action. In this connection, however, both trustees and librarians may need to reflect that a library cannot begin to take responsibility for the uses to which books and knowledge may be put. Yet, common sense may overrule the we-cannot-be-responsible policy. Should a library blithely fill demands of teenage and younger boys for manuals of combat wrestling, judo, or karate, on the grounds of noninvolvement in consequences? It would be the librarian's responsibility, based upon close acquaintance with the demand, to be alert to such a problem, and it does not seem necessary that it specifically involve a board policy action, as hypnotism or medical books might.

On the other hand, a board, with the help of its Books Committee and with the advice but not the authority of the administrator, may decide what part of a budget to spend on books or on films, how much to emphasize reference books needed by students, what attitude to take toward the demands of a local college faculty and student body, whether to buy technical, legal, or medical books, and such broad policies. Some statement on book selection policies, such as the Library Bill of Rights, should be adopted by the board.

A board, and its individual trustees, as long as an administrator continues in their employment, have an obligation to support him publicly in any controversy related to his administrative decisions, however much the trustees may differ with or rebuke him in private. This is not to say that the executive may not be reprimanded as an official action of the board, if this action, and not dismissal, is thought the proper corrective. And a corollary is that a library administrator must

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give up a little of his civic freedom when he becomes a symbol and spokesman for that citadel of impartiality, the public library. Although free to take part in some aspects of politics and in civic and other "causes," he should not embarrass his board and jeopardize the library or his connection with it by taking too prominent a part in partisan politics, especially local, or in movements that deeply divide the community.

A library administrator has a very difficult and lonely role, a dual role, as middleman or advocate, representing the staff's interests honestly to the trustees and carrying the board's attitudes and policies to the staff. Although he is bound to act as the staff's advocate in bringing matters concerning its welfare to the attention of the trustees, he should not, of course, become a member of a staff association as a "union" nor jeopardize the board's confidence in his managerial firmness and economy by espousing every demand or request the staff makes. If trustees are inured to business and industrial relationships where hard bargaining and some duplicity may be practiced by both labor and management, it will be difficult for them to see library workers as a different kind of labor group, characterized by that over-worked and sometimes misplaced word "dedicated."

Yet as all librarians know, library workers *are*, in many libraries, self-denying, long-suffering, sometimes underpaid, but relatively happy persons gaining much satisfaction from the ideals of service and the congenial surroundings and from the appreciation of their public. To the degree that a library staff is not "organized" and demanding, it is necessary that the administrator cause trustees to realize that the ordinary industrial rules of bargaining do not fit, that there is a public trust obligation on the part of the trustees not only to spend the public funds wisely for full value, but also to represent the perhaps unspoken needs of the staff to the appropriating authorities or to the general public. Library boards are entrusted not merely with books and buildings, but they are also trustees of the welfare of those persons, who as loyal librarians and library clerks, devote themselves to this idealistic service. The administrator may have to stress this point if it seems to be overlooked by his board.

It is a pleasant duty of the administrator to help secure the public's proper recognition and appreciation for the unpaid services of library trustees, since they will usually not want to seek any publicity themselves. Such recognition is good for everybody concerned. There are library-association-sponsored "trustee citations" in various States,

drawing attention to the long and fruitful work of some outstanding trustee. However, some trustees feel that this practice should not be followed, because it singles out one individual on a board, instead of emphasizing the results of teamwork, and may lead to a trustee's becoming a prima donna. It is felt that such citations and publicity might better honor a whole board which has accomplished some notable piece of library progress.

Everyone needs to be appreciated. It is the duty of an administrator to commend and notice good work of the staff under him, especially the quiet, steady, and less-conspicuous examples. And the administrator must look to his own employers, the board, for the vitamins of appreciation and praise. A little can go a long way, and just as a nutritional deficiency results in noticeable symptoms, compliment-hunger can cause one long deprived to behave peculiarly. Anniversaries of employment and report-making occasions provide reminders to board and administrator alike of these obligations.

An administrator will so often be quoted in news stories about library events that he or she is likely to become "Mr. Library" as far as the news media and public are concerned. Much of this is inevitable; some of it may be fitting for a career person who is devoting his lifetime to the library. But the wise administrator will try to be sure that publicity on policy decisions cites the board or its president as the source.

The obtaining of adequate funds is a well recognized prime responsibility of the trustees, whereas showing what funds would be adequate and why is the administrator's function. If there is a campaign for a bond issue, a tax levy, or a new building, the administrator needs to place the burden of organizing and conducting it squarely upon the trustees—who may shift it to an auxiliary Friends of the Library group if one exists or can be created. The librarian and staff will help in any such campaign, but they are, after all, hired employees, and they were hired to give book service, not to raise money or solicit votes. If the administrator is careful not to take on the campaigning burden, a wider group in the community will carry it to a more certain success.

Sometimes a situation regarding public opinion, such as the appropriation or the availability of funds, may look simple to the relatively unsophisticated administrator. But the board may include trustees of great political acumen and shrewdness who can reveal the true situation as a wondrously intricate complex of local political and

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social factors. Such knowledge and "connections" are of great value on a board, and the wise administrator will make good use of them. As all experienced administrators know, much of their time and attention is devoted to business matters—relations with all sorts of suppliers, craftsmen, city and state departments, banks, insurance agencies, and many other business or institutional contacts. There may have been little in the administrator's education or experience to prepare him for these obligations. On the other hand, some of his trustees are likely to be wise in the ways of business, of winning public acceptance and support, and of avoiding offense in competitive business dealings. The trustees may be smarter than the administrator in dealing with business, labor, and political organizations. He should get all the benefit he can for the library from these special wisdoms of the board members.

The progress of public library service in America and the coordination of resources and services with other types of libraries, such as school and college libraries, have too long been sought by librarians, associated together, with only a little help from a small number of library trustees. This activity is not really the province of librarians. I would like to see all present and past trustees of libraries enrolled in a very active and aggressive national association of their own, *quite separate from librarians*, although cooperating in any joint goals. At present, many administrators do encourage trustees, especially new trustees, to join the state and national associations and if possible to attend conferences, meet other trustees, hear talks and reports.

However, even this kind of encouragement can backfire badly. Attendance at some library meetings can be a disillusioning experience as well as a boring or a bewildering one for a trustee, although experiences at his own vocational association meetings may be no better. The conscientious trustee, subscribing to national library publications, and trying, in a busy life, to gain inspiration and illumination from them, takes a risk of becoming discouraged, misinformed or partially informed, or stirred up about details of library operation which are not really a trustee's concern.

Thus, we come to the question of an administrator's proper attitude in introducing his trustees to the professional literature and to the state and national associations and their subdivisions. Some trustees thrive on this material and become evangelists for good library service, better salaries, newer buildings, more books. Others may acquire prejudices based on unfavorable reaction to what they run across in the publica-

tions or at meetings. Yet the consensus is obviously that library administrators have a duty to guide trustees into activities on a state, regional, and national scale, for the good of the "library cause" and also to improve local conditions where a library is substandard by applying the standards observed in state and national movements and in exemplary library systems comparable in size and situation with their own. Such improvements could best be effected by an association run by the trustees themselves, not steered by librarians.

A systematic schedule of library inspection tours by the trustees should be recommended by the administrator. There are trustees who may have used libraries in earlier years, but who now see libraries rarely except on board business. If they are to represent the public's interest, they need to be frequent visitors and users, and in addition to these reasons, the librarian can best describe needs (for which funds are required) by physically pointing them out. These inspections are good discipline for him and for the staff, too.

The library *administrator's* job is more often one of "human relations" than of traditional "librarianship." These relations require tact and other qualities usually gained only by years of experience and tribulation. The young librarian perhaps only recently from library school may look forward to being in charge of a library, but he should realize that the trustees, who will generally have had more years in which to gather worldly wisdom, will sometimes know best what to do in trying situations. It is unlikely that among whatever readership this chapter will have, there will be many library trustees, present or future. In any case, librarians can scarcely tell trustees how to be trustees. It is to be hoped that these comments and suggestions may help those librarians, students, and perhaps some trustees, who want better to understand the authority structure of public libraries.