



The Special Requirements of the Larger Unit In Personnel Administration

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LARGE UNIT LIBRARY SYSTEMS are as structurally various as botanical subspecies. Put three regional librarians on a panel and before they can approach the subject under discussion, each will preface his remarks with "In our system, we . . ."

If any common denominator exists between federated libraries, county libraries, city-county combinations, multi-county or true district unit libraries, it is the difficulty of administering a staff fragmented by distance, wide variations in educational background, split loyalties, and vastly differing responsibilities. A regional librarian counts it routine to drive several hours to an outlying community to settle a staff problem, which has been complicated by the jealously guarded prerogatives of the local library board and the blithe defiance of the local municipal authorities. The administrator of a regional library lives with the realization that the excellence or inadequacies of staff will make or break the service, and the equally blunt truth that personnel problems will be the cause of most broken contracts between units of a system.

The personnel problem and practices at the central agency are, on the surface, very much the same as those of any public library, especially if headquarters serves as a direct circulation point. Gretchen Schenk divided this staff into ". . . those who stay at home, and . . . those who travel," and wisely added that the behind-the-scenes personnel are more important than it would seem.¹ Catalogers, reference librarians, and administrative staff must learn to catalog every book, scan every request, and word every communication with little Mrs. Smith of the Beaver Forks Station in mind. If not, they can unwittingly negate the efforts of the extension workers. Pity the branch visitor

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who must explain to Mrs. Smith (often haltingly) why they did it this way at headquarters.

The best remedy for a parochial point of view is firmly to pry the non-traveling staff away from their desks as often as time will permit and let them see for themselves how the other half lives. If nothing else, it will make them realize that four hours at the wheel of a library vehicle on a blistering August day is far from a picnic. The best time to schedule such field trips is at the beginning of an employee's tour of duty. A grand circle tour to see indicative library outlets in the North Central Regional Library in the state of Washington takes two full days, with an overnight stay 200 miles from headquarters. The mountain passes consume no more time than heavy traffic in a suburban regional system. Schenk aims her dart accurately, when she says: "Field visits are expensive and time consuming, certainly, but much better spend one or two hundred man-hours a year building intelligent service through visits of nontraveling members of the staff than contend with apathy and ignorance."²

Field trips may be more difficult to schedule for the long-time staff member who often brings to an expanded library unit a viewpoint limited by "my town" or "my county." A calculated arrangement of asking such an employee to help out in an emergency, on the bookmobile or by making a field trip, may be resisted less than the more obvious planned assignment. Unplumbed talents come to light, often among the clerical staff. A book mender sometimes can make friends with a shy local librarian who has remained hostile to every approach of the regular field staff. "High grade clerical workers, like good shop foremen, are frequently excellent teachers and should be used for this purpose."³

Regional public libraries rely more heavily on their professional staff members than do other types of libraries. Most systems face the undeniable truth that they have not begun to achieve the ideal two to one ratio of clerical to professional staff. Many small local outlets will always be staffed with untrained local help; the hinterland regional systems cannot compete with the bright lights of large municipal systems; many library schools neither train for nor emphasize extension opportunities; and always there is the lack of funds.

Only the larger municipal libraries in Washington approach the ideal proportion of professional librarians on their staffs. County and regional libraries in Washington reported five non-professionals to every professional in 1963.⁴ Other states report even lower ratios. The

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North Central Regional Library system in Washington serves 123,000 people in a five-county, 15,000 square-mile area with only six fully qualified librarians.

It is precisely for this reason that the relatively few professionals must be exceptional ones. Large unit libraries stretch their trained staff as thin as strudel dough, and there can be no compromise with excellence. The professionals must be able to deal with every situation from the basis of the individuals concerned, to throw away the rule book to achieve the game, and to share and to translate their own professional ideals in working with staff members of little or no background in library work.

In recruiting for new professional staff members, the regional library system looks for the same characteristics needed in every library, but instead of "would like," the insistence is "must have." Every administrator hopes to attract a candidate with ". . . intelligence, dependability, tact, stability, efficiency, patience, pleasant disposition, and imagination."⁶ Few would argue when Schenk pinpoints such staff requirements as, ". . . the most adaptable personnel, not easily flustered, worried, discouraged or frightened, . . . [possessing] strong constitutions . . . undaunted by bad weather . . . [having] a merry heart and a good mind, an even disposition and a buoyancy of spirit . . ."⁶ Finding such candidates is certainly not easy, and more than one regional library is taking the long road of hiring a local college graduate, interesting that person in the profession, creating an internee position and proudly welcoming a full professional after five long years of library school summer sessions.

State after state has set up a formal intern or trainee program and has urged its incorporation into local library programs. The recently approved Librarian Trainee Program adopted by the Recruitment Committee of the Washington Library Association presupposes evidence of library school eligibility in each candidate and expects each trainee to complete a combined work-study schedule not to exceed five years.⁷ Scholarships established with Library Service Act funds required that the recipient return to an extension position. This device has met with varying success; while some states report that regional library staffs have been thus upgraded, others have admitted that the prerequisites have no enforcement teeth.

If regional libraries are to compete for the limited crop of professional librarians, they must upgrade salaries to meet or to surpass those offered in large municipalities. A quick check of positions advertised

in a recent library publication shows that the word "challenging" is used nine times; "expanding," seven; "growing" and "dynamic," five; and the local climate and scenery are endorsed twelve times! When salaries are stated, one wonders if the library trustees actually expect "excellent fringe benefits" to make up for a barely living wage. If regional libraries require top flight professionals, obviously they must pay for them.

We are often advised to find other solutions, and most regional librarians would translate this reluctantly into "hire the untrained and train them." This inevitable alternative encompasses not only the part-time branch and station personnel, but often extends to the full-time members of the bookmobile staffs, the children's department, the circulation desk and the extension department. Carl Hamilton faces the problem squarely, when he speaks of one-fifth of his staff. ". . . I'll never get them into library school at the graduate level. Most of them are only junior college graduates. But they perform well, and with an intensive three months' course they could be capable librarians *in their own library*, . . . which is where they want to stay."⁸ No estimate is possible of the amount of time spent in training these full-time staff members on a local level. Fortunate indeed is the library system located near a library school, or having junior college library technology courses offered within easy driving distance. Patricia Gebhard, in describing a four-semester program offered at Santa Barbara City College, says mildly: "Courses like the ones offered in Santa Barbara might well be advantageous in other communities where there are no library schools. . . ."⁹ The same issue of *Library Journal* describes other means of upgrading staff quality via library aide and library intern programs.¹⁰

These are fine solutions for full-time, college-graduate staff members who could conceivably be future candidates for library school degrees. The problem of training the local housewife who staffs the community outlet for twelve hours a week, with only a high school education, is a far different matter. Most regional libraries are completely dependent on their own training resources and recognize the task as one compounded by distance, time, and raw material.

A few states provide workshops for untrained library assistants. Michigan has yearly week-long sessions designed to qualify local librarians for the legally-stipulated Certificate of Library Experience. In order to qualify for state-aid grants, persons serving libraries of less than 3,000 population must qualify for this certificate by being high

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school graduates and completing two workshops within three years of appointment. Local librarians serving populations between 3,000 and 5,000 must hold the certificate and have completed two years of college. The inclusive manual used at the Michigan workshops includes sections on selecting materials for a library, organization of library materials, the use of the library collection, and library management. Prepared by the Consultant Division, it is designed both as a basic workshop text and a local reference tool.¹¹

The regional library trains when it hires, trains when it orients, trains during every communication, trains during every staff workshop and every branch visit, and counts the job never done. To add to the difficulty, large unit libraries are politically complicated, and local librarians of the smallest unit must have a realization of the fundamentals of taxation, budgeting, library laws, and financial accounting. These part-time staff members are the bone and sinew of the large unit system and upon their performance rests the success of continued cooperation.

Branch or station personnel are usually hired in cooperation with a local group of citizens. Municipal regulations may identify this group as the city council, the library board, the local "friends" or, in some small communities, the local sponsoring agency such as the women's club. The North Central Regional Library insists on the continuation of a local library advisory group, duly appointed by the local authorities, wherever community library branches are maintained. They are designated as local library boards.

One of the most valuable services such a group can provide is to give advice to the regional library administration concerning staffing of the local library outlet. Schenk reports:

When a change in branch personnel is imminent, the citizens' group can be of help to the county librarian in filling the vacancy. After the librarian has conducted an examination to fill the vacancy, the results are made available to the committee, and the appointment is made by the board or committee, or with its advice by the county library governing body. In every case there should be a feeling of joint decisions and an awareness of community participation.¹²

In the case of a large regional library, there is no substitute for the knowledge and understanding of the intricate web of local influence and reaction, and it is the local people who possess this perception.

North Central Regional Library recognizes this by inserting the following statement into the service contract between the regional library

and any local unit of government: "The Board [of the regional library] agrees to consult with the City (Town) or its designated agent before the hiring or dismissal of the local librarian. The person or persons so employed will be responsible to the Board, and all . . . regulations and policies [will be] established by the Board."¹³

The usual practice is to advertise locally, and then have the local library board review the applicants and recommend the best candidates to the regional librarian for further testing or interviewing. It is axiomatic that the best educated, the best qualified person will be hired. Insistence on some college training is not always possible, nor does it necessarily produce the best candidate, although it is one factor to be considered. A written application is a must, and if a written test can be devised which will point up strengths and weaknesses, so much the better. Experience however confirms the blunt statement of Joseph Wheeler and Herbert Goldhor, "To date no satisfactory written or work tests have been developed by those who have attempted them, . . ."¹⁴

In essence, we look for Lawrence Clark Powell's "true librarian." He says:

If the desire to serve and to learn is in a person who works in a library, that person is truly a librarian, no matter what his formal qualifications or what he is classified. The desire to serve others is perhaps the most important of all the elements that make up a good librarian. The desire to learn can be instilled in a person. Knowledge can be acquired. Curiosity and courage can be strengthened by example. The desire to serve is inborn.¹⁵

All during this selection process, one must try to remember that this is the person who will face the reluctant city councilman, who will hand a child his first library card, and who will be performing the task of bringing people and books together.

In the North Central Regional Library system, each new employee is provided with the *Library Policy Statement*, the *Personnel Code*, the *Manual of Library Procedures*, a copy of the *Classification and Pay Scale*, and the *State Library Laws*. Each of the locally produced documents must be a live, pertinent, simply written but complete statement. The time and effort that goes into making them so are repaid many times over in solving policy problems when and where they occur. Copies of each of these publications also should be available to local officials, board members, and officers of friends of the library

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groups. They should, of course, be reviewed periodically by the governing board of the library. Unity is encouraged by these written policies, especially in the field of personnel administration. Every staff member is thus encouraged by knowing that the same rights, privileges, and rules extend to all levels of employment. This is especially true of the part-time branch and station employee.

When distance and funds permit, each outlet employee and each bookmobile assistant should have an orientation period at regional headquarters. Probably the individual will absorb only a fraction of the information heaped upon him during such a tour, but he will gain a sense of the relationship of departments, an overall realization of the library in the community, and an idea of the role of the headquarters unit. Such initial orientation should be followed by as many subsequent visits to the central agency as can be managed. Every employee, even those from the smallest station, should feel welcome at any formal or informal meeting at the central agency. It is stifling to morale if any feeling of difference is allowed to develop between headquarters, branch, and bookmobile personnel.

The initial appointment of any person, whether part- or full-time, should be provisional and should not be made permanent in less than six months. Wheeler and Goldhor point out:

A probationary period plays an integral part in the selection process, if it is properly used. No matter how much attention is given to the prior steps in the selection process, they supply only presumptive evidence as to the candidate's job performance. His actual work performance during the probationary period is the acid test. . . .¹⁶

Serious thought might be given to extending this probationary period to one year in the case of those employees staffing one-person branches and stations. These people have no close supervision and only infrequent associations with headquarters personnel; the first six months of employment may hit a comparatively inactive period of library use.

Even the smallest library system should insist on a careful, written performance evaluation made at least yearly on every staff member by his immediate supervisor. There are many excellent forms available for this purpose which can be adapted easily to a local situation. Some libraries use separate forms for clerical, professional, and sub-professional staff; but more regional libraries find that use of identical rating forms for all staff members is another morale strengthener. Care must be exercised lest these ratings turn into the good old Navy "fitness re-

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ports," where everyone who had two hands, two feet, and only one head was rated excellent. Conversely, a thoughtfully prepared performance analysis can and should be a tool for employee growth. It is imperative that every report be discussed personally with individuals rated and reviewed by the next higher in command, usually the director.

Most large unit libraries feel that a yearly staff workshop is fundamental to smooth operation and use this device to boost morale, provide in-service training, and jar everyone out of the workaday rut. As a unifying factor alone, they are worth all the time and funds expended. The farthest flung station librarian will go back to her library with a new lilt in her voice when she discovers that everyone else has problems with overdue books and raucous students, that her display of local art was singled out for comment, or that the reason why her recent requests for books on a certain subject were slow in being filled was that every student in five counties seemed to have chosen the same topic.

Geographic size may make workshops expensive when the bill is added up and includes transportation, hotel rooms, meals, payment of substitutes, and hourly wages while in conference attendance. The North Central Regional Library pulls together its staff only yearly, and the total cost runs around \$800, notwithstanding shared rides, pot luck meals, and reimbursements for only one member of the local trustees groups. Even so, such system conferences accomplish results which are both gratifying and surprising. They are an opportunity for honoring local and county elected officials and are always good for publicity and promotion. After one of our recent conferences, a newly-appointed regional trustee offered her thanks with her farewell—"For the first time, I feel as if trusteeship is exciting and challenging, not just being concerned with library budgets and library statistics."

Another time-tested tool for staff unity is the system house organ or newsletter. These little dittoed or mimeographed efforts run the gamut from scholarly treatises to gossip sheets. One thing is certain, if they are not interesting, they will float unread into the wastebasket. They should be as newsworthy as the combined talents of the whole staff can make them. The North Central Regional Library system's monthly "Columbia Currents" ranges from a précis of the minutes of the meetings of the Regional Trustees to details of branch library happenings, and inserts operational directives between lively department reports, and library philosophy between decidedly amateur cartoons.

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It is directed mainly to the branch and station personnel, and the local trustees. Newsletters should be a combined effort of many, and not written by just one person. It is frequently advantageous to turn the editorship over to a non-professional who can spot jargon instinctively and translate the message into terms clear and meaningful to other non-professionals.

Few multi-unit libraries start existence as a newly organized service. In nearly every case, operating units agree to cooperate or are absorbed into a new working entity. Probably the greatest apprehension of any independent library unit considering affiliation with the larger unit concerns staff. Virginia Young clearly recognizes this when she advises board members, in *The Trustee of a Small Public Library*: "Personal adjustments must be made, as in every working relationship."¹⁷ Such adjustments, however, are seldom welcomed with enthusiasm. Each change, each new ruling, each shift in routine must be explained and introduced on an individual basis. Library A has an elderly librarian now receiving Social Security payments. Can she continue to work? Library B allows high school students to staff the evening hours of the branch. Is this acceptable? Library C has always paid the librarian's expenses to the state association conference. Will the regional library continue this? Library D allows the librarian to serve as city clerk simultaneously with handling her library duties. Will regional policies permit this?

The wisest and at the same time the most difficult course is to make hard and fast rules and to stick to them. Regional library trustees, eager to promote contracts with these units, may expect the director to make exceptions to keep each locality happy. The victory is usually short-lived. Each early deviation complicates future patterns and, surprisingly enough, resistance to changed personnel policies is seldom the major cause for a community's refusal to affiliate. On the other hand, no regional library system would cut its own throat by a wholesale eviction of inherited staff members. In most cases, these legacies must be lived with, rather than to risk the wrath of aroused local citizenry to whom the lady in question is a friend, neighbor, and weekly pinochle partner. The best protection of the regional library is its published personnel code and policy statement. It means that when the inherited librarian reaches retirement age, she must be replaced. It means that every employee gets the same vacation and the same sick leave allowance, earns at the set rate of pay for the same position, and usually for the first time knows her status.

Typically the least effective local librarian resents the regional library surveillance the most; the best person welcomes the extra help and the moral support that comes from belonging to the system. The normal spurt in library use which accompanies enlarged book collections and services may dismay the sub-standard librarian to the point of offering her resignation. So much the better; a newly-hired staff member will bring fresh talents to the position, and no more will the branch visitor hear "We never have done it this way." All but the most reluctant member libraries appreciate the extended services and professional guidance described by Hannis Smith in his *Cooperative Approach to Library Service*.¹⁸ They are rid of cataloging and processing; the bills are paid elsewhere; and somebody else will handle the tough reference questions. Our best "legacy librarian" put it simply but profoundly: "I no longer feel alone."

Next to superior extension staff, a regional library needs a well-trained personnel officer. Hers (usually) is a much more exacting job than making quarterly Social Security reports and ticking off the time sheets. She, too, must be flexible, sympathetic, and have nerves of steel, for personnel eruptions tend to come in clustered multiples. Her eyes must be eagle sharp; an unfamiliar handwriting on a branch time sheet may mean that the local librarian has gone salmon fishing and left the library in the jurisdiction of her 14-year-old daughter. Her greeting to a new staff member, her notes concerning overtime or a delayed check must be warm and personal. There will be many times when she is "the library" responding to a frantic call for help from the other end of the area, and her answers must be sure. In smaller systems, this person will also assume the responsibilities of secretary or administrative assistant.

The selection, training, management, and preservation of staff take cautious vigilance. The administration of a regional system pilots a multiple unit with two sure facts as a guide; the branch or station or bookmobile that is ignored will be the next one in trouble, and that trouble will be, nine times out of ten, a staff problem no matter what it may appear on the surface. Out of the complexity, and sometimes chaos, an *esprit de corps* can be created when each personnel situation is met with flexibility, patience, and humor.

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