Developing Managerial Skills
in Children's Librarians

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LIBRARIES ARE AT A CRISIS POINT in their history similar to the crisis that must have occurred in monastic scriptoria when Gutenberg invented the printing press. Electronic publishing has to some minds made books obsolete, and the advent of computerized database retrieval systems which claim to solve all information needs instantly seems to make libraries too slow and too old fashioned for some tastes. Even within libraries themselves there has been upheaval never expected. Some information services have become too expensive to provide without charge and the increased number of rapidly changing material formats has been confusing, difficult to maintain, and, in some cases, not worth the shelf space they require. The world in which libraries provide their services is changing so rapidly that some even argue that libraries will be obsolete by the turn of the century.

To some, children's services have seemed to be a refuge of calm in a turbulent world. Books are still popular with children, and the titles and authors do not seem to change fashion as often as they do in adult services. This view, however, does not take into account the enormous changes that have come to children's services within the last several years. Not only have computers invaded children's rooms, but so have realia, videotapes, videogames, toys, animals, and almost every conceivable form and format of media available. Increased emphasis has also been placed on serving clienteles who require special materials and

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attentions, such as the slow learners, the gifted, and the physically handicapped. The hope that libraries and schools can change the discriminatory values of society has caused changes in the types and contents of illustrations, physical descriptions of protagonists, and has added another reviewing criteria—racial and sexual balance—to already stringent requirements.

It would be all too easy, and a mistake, for children's librarians to become so involved in the issues and everyday reality of the children's room that they leave the area of library management to someone else. Children's librarians cannot afford to ignore their management role, nor can they hope that somewhere there is another Anne Carroll Moore waiting to be graduated and provide the leadership necessary to move the field beyond these turbulent times.

This paper argues that leadership and managerial skills can and should be developed in all people to a greater or lesser extent. Since children's services are part of a larger library organization, this article addresses the problems of developing managerial skills to cope with today's issues as a training function of the library organization. Although the suggestions are written for an administrator planning such training, the theories behind each suggestion should allow individual children's librarians to follow and benefit from most of the activities within their current position.

Management is in many ways a state of mind, a way of approaching a problem by looking at it within the framework of relations which exist around libraries and organizations. The decisions that are made, the evaluation that takes place, and the communication that is engendered are all visible results of this thinking process. The suggestions made in this article cost little and should benefit the library as well as the children's librarian and the children's department. It is hoped that by putting these suggestions into practice, children's librarians will be able to develop the managerial skills necessary to cope with today's changing world.

Managerial Needs in the Children's Department

Before beginning to look at the process of developing managerial and leadership skills, it is perhaps wise to review why they are so necessary to children's services. There is a tendency for library directors simply to hire the best children's librarians they can and then forget the whole operation until a problem arises. This may be less a case of feeling that children's librarians are unimportant or that serving children is

inferior to serving adults, than it is an acknowledgment of the children's librarians' special skills and training. Attitudes like these, however flattering, do not help in developing managerial skills, so it is important to look at the children's department and its role in the organization to see what managerial skills are needed.

Robert Stueart and John Eastlick, in their text on library management,[1] discuss several methods of organizing libraries into departments. In the case of children's services, most libraries create one department to handle the supposedly homogeneous needs of children. In management terms this is called departmentalizing by clientele. Some of the advantages of departmentalizing this way are that librarians and staff can become expert in dealing with the literature, reference needs, and programming requirements of a specific group of clients. Client-oriented departments take on most of the functions of the library as a whole and, as such, become mini-libraries unto themselves.

While client-oriented departments may provide excellent service to their own clients, they can have some negative effects on overall library service. Because the departments handle so many tasks that would be handled by other larger departments of the library, client-oriented departments tend to become self-reliant and isolated from other areas leading to communication problems. While these client-oriented departments can provide an excellent training ground for potential managers by allowing them to perform a variety of library tasks, such departments also narrow a librarian's outlook to the needs of a special group rather than the needs of the entire population.

Being head of a children's service department requires the same skills as being head of the entire library except on a smaller scale. For this reason alone, children's librarians who hope to supervise the department need to develop managerial skills. There are, however, some other unique aspects of working with children which require the use of managerial skills.

Recently, increased emphasis has been placed on responsibility and accountability for all public institutions. Schools, libraries, and local municipal offices have been targeted for scrutiny. The lessening of federal tax support and the necessity for local taxing authorities to provide the funding for many existing social programs means that libraries and other service organizations need to communicate a clear idea of their services and how well they are supplying them to the community in order to continue meeting their current and projected funding needs.

Adult patrons can evaluate the services which the library provides on a direct basis just as taxpayers can communicate their opinions to the city or county government office allocating funds. Reports using special evaluation techniques may impress the library board, but librarians themselves receive direct and immediate feedback from their adult patrons, and are, therefore, constantly in touch with the evaluation of their work.

Children's services have a more complex set of evaluation parameters. Children are the primary users of the department's services, and, most of the time, children's librarians focus their attentions on satisfying their needs. Confirmation of the success and worth of their services, however, is not provided by the children but by parents, teachers, and other interested adults who vote to increase or maintain the library's tax base. This group is often thought of as another client group, but for management and evaluation purposes, their needs as clients are less important than their approval of the children's services provided. Ultimately, the children's librarian is accountable to the adults in these groups not just to the children they believe they serve. Understanding and balancing the needs of clients and the needs of those to whom one is accountable requires considerable managerial skills.

The children's department, then, requires the best managerial talents available to it. The desire to allow it to function as a separate area with little guidance or help from other library departments can be harmful not only to developing capable library managers, but it can also weaken the library's position during times of financial exigency. This does not, however, have to be the case. Children's departments can provide an excellent training ground for future managers because of the diverse functions which they routinely handle. By carefully using in-house training techniques, children's librarians have a chance to understand and experience the need to think like managers and to develop their skills into becoming one.

Managerial Skills, Tasks, and Functions

The whole concept of management and becoming a manager is often mythicized by a hazy understanding of what is involved. Some see management as manipulating people to do what is needed by the organization. Others see it as using mathematical formulas and models to foresee the future. Still others see it as requiring promotion to somewhere outside the children's room. Luther Gulick and Lyndall Urwick summed up the functions of a manager in 1937 into these seven

terms: planning, organizing, directing, staffing, coordinating, report-
ing, and budgeting.[2] Knowing the functions, however, does not neces-
sarily help in developing effective training programs. For that, it is
helpful to define what skills are most needed.

Robert L. Katz in his seminal article in 1955 entitled "Skills of an
Effective Administrator"[3] identifies three basic managerial skills: tech-
nical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills. Katz argues that these
skills are not innate, but can be developed, and that they provide a
framework for viewing the various tasks managers must perform.

Technical skills are the most easily explained. They are the skills
which develop from the training that most children's librarians receive
in library school, and, for the most part, they are the professional aspects
of any library job. The list of technical skills a children's librarian needs
reads like a job description: familiarity with the major works in chil-
dren's literature, the abilty to answer a variety of reference questions
correctly, an understanding of the needs and interests of children in
order to provide excellent programming, and a knowledge of cataloging
practices. Technical skills are used to perform the tasks that most
librarians attended library school to learn. They are the most visible, the
most easily measured, and they can become the most time-consuming
even to the exclusion of other skills. Eventually they may become the
raison d'être of many children's librarians' jobs.

The second set of skills which Katz discusses are the human skills
often referred to as leadership skills. In business, these skills are asso-
ciated with providing leadership and motivation to the department or
group being supervised. Children's librarians are faced with developing
good leadership skills not only to motivate employees in their own
department, but also to lead and motivate children, parents, teachers,
and other adults. Through these human skills, children's librarians
must communicate with youngsters of all ages and assist them in
becoming the adult library users of tomorrow. They also must satisfy
the adults who primarily view their work from a distance but whose
evaluation ultimately leads to increases or decreases in the library
budget.

The third skill which Katz discusses is the conceptual skill. "As
used here, the conceptual skill involves the ability to see the enterprise as
a whole; it includes recognizing how the various functions of the
organization depend on one another, and how changes in any one part
affect all the others; and its extends to visualizing the relationship of the
individual business to the industry, the community, and the political,
social, and economic forces of the nation as a whole."[4] This skill is most

important because it is the ability to take a situation and place it into a broader framework that makes an administrator. It is this way of thinking about problems or issues that distinguishes a manager from other employees no matter what the title or level of administrative responsibility.

Given the three skills areas of Katz, a look at the tasks associated with managers and managerial work will help make the abstract concepts more concrete. Henry Mintzberg has developed the following list of managerial tasks which he feels are important: developing peer relationships, negotiating ideas and plans through the administrative hierarchy, motivating subordinates, resolving conflicts, establishing networks that both provide and disseminate information, making decisions when not all the facts are known or when the "correct" response is not apparent, and allocating resources.[5] Being able to perform these tasks allows the manager to accomplish the seven functions Gulick and Urwick suggest. Just as each of these tasks is necessary to perform several functions, each of the skills Katz enumerates is required to succeed in performing these tasks. A closer look at each of the skills as they relate to children's librarians will help find areas for developing managerial and leadership talents.

Developing Managerial Skills

Two apparently contradictory conclusions come to light when looking at technical skills and children's librarianship. First, expertise in these skills is very important to both client and employee satisfaction. Second, a strong emphasis on technical skills, however, may hinder the development of other skills, specifically those in peer communications and in understanding the library as an interrelated organization.

Since a profession, of which most librarians consider themselves part, is a group of people who share a similar body of knowledge and skills it is logical that the development of technical skills would rate highly for job satisfaction. Proficiency in those very skills which make a person part of the profession leads to increased professional status as well as self-satisfaction. It also would be a mistake to discount the value of the technical skills of the children's librarian as less worthy of development than those of a manager, particularly in organizations as small as libraries where all personnel may be expected to take an occasional turn on the reference or circulation desk. Without an understanding of the technical skills and routines necessary to run the department, there is nothing to support a conceptual framework of library

service. In addition to providing employee satisfaction, a proficiency in these skills should provide a high level of satisfaction for the user. Understanding what is necessary to increase user satisfaction is essential for managers to function since user satisfaction is one of the ways managerial effectiveness is evaluated.

The overemphasis on the technical elements of the job is both natural and encouraged under the present system. Students interested in working with children find extensive course offerings that will help them perform well in their later careers. Library school catalogs abound with courses such as Children's Literature, Children's Services in Public Libraries, and Puppetry for Children's Work. As if there are not enough library courses in which to specialize, education departments offer an equally large array to help the budding children's specialists blossom forth with the knowledge and understanding that dealing with children is a different and perhaps a higher calling than dealing with adults. All this emphasis on children, the clients of the children's department, and the special materials for certain ages encourages a belief that children's work differs from other library services and that its uniqueness should keep it apart.

In the initial stages of professional life, emphasis is placed on developing technical proficiency. This emphasis, however, can inhibit the development of other skills necessary for library management. More specifically, concentrating on technical skills at this early stage to the exclusion of other skills can convince the employee that his importance lies almost solely within the technical sphere. This sets up a false sense of security about his role in the total organization. Comfortable in applying those skills which were learned in library school, he may never venture beyond them because he feels his place has already been established.

A second problem may occur with the emphasis on the technical skills. By concentrating solely on the program within the children's department, the new librarian can be inhibited from developing communication lines within other areas of the library. These friendships and liaisons provide the basis for later information transfer so necessary for the manager to function and make decisions. If one is constantly shown or told that his client group is different from other groups, it becomes much harder for the children's specialist to go beyond his own area to use advice or innovations from the other areas of the library.

There are, however, ways around these problems. Any in-house training should encourage children's librarians to see the relationship

between the smaller structure of the children's room and the larger structure of the library. In order to begin and strengthen lines of communication between children's librarians and others, early assignments might include a day or two in each of the other library departments to compare other organizational policies and procedures with those in the children's department. Certainly a comparison of the various routines used in similar departments would encourage both new and old employees to evaluate their own routines. Since one training function necessary early in any professional's career is socialization into that profession, job rotation and a variety of assignments can be easily fit into this early training function.

After the initial stages of job training, every effort should be made to encourage free and open communication between departments. This not only benefits the library by increasing the amount of information and cooperation which flows between departments, but its real value for developing managers is that it encourages the potential managers to develop a network of information sources which later can be used to provide and disseminate information. Committees within the library should include librarians from various departments and service clienteles so that no problem is seen as being unique to a particular department and not amenable to solution by the whole library organization.

Attending meetings and continuing education workshops can develop technical skills beyond the capabilities of in-house training. Among the benefits derived from these sessions is a better understanding of the relationship of theory to practice and, more importantly, another view of routines and methods practiced elsewhere.

Much has been written concerning leadership over the last forty years. Early theories centered around finding the important traits necessary for a manager successfully to inspire his/her employees to work to increase the organization's effectiveness. When no single group of traits could be found that predicted the perfect leader, researchers turned to behavioral theory. Work done at the Ohio State Leadership School from the 1940s to the 1960s found that consideration and structure were the prime dimensions of leader behavior.[6] Later researchers found other combinations that were important for successful leadership, but much of the leadership literature revolved around managing the subordinate through consideration of his/her feelings and the development of the individual's self-worth. It was the heyday of theoreticians such as Abraham Maslow and his Hierarchy of Needs; Douglas MacGregor with his Theory Y; and C. Argyris and his Immaturity/Maturity continuum. Each of these theories centered around the concept that human behavior

and human motivation were the necessary ingredients for establishing successful leadership styles.

As Herbert S. White points out, this is a popular belief held by most librarians. "They would prefer to believe in the innate goodness of all others and to be guided by the premise that individuals with good intentions will reach common objectives and work cooperatively to achieve these."[7] This somewhat simplistic view of leadership does not, as White points out, take into account the entire problem. If it did, organizations that existed before the behavioral school or which used radically different leadership styles would not have succeeded as they often did.

Current leadership research centers around the work of Fred E. Fiedler who holds that there is no one effective leadership style. He looked at leader styles which center around task structure and those that center around leader-group relations and tested them against various situations with different probabilities of success. The results showed that no one style led to success in all situations. He contends that almost any style works some of the time, and it is the situation which determines whether or not a leader will succeed, not the leadership style.[8] Given these findings, he develops several organizational options which he feels will improve the success rate of leaders. The first is experience. "Generally speaking, time and the concomitant experience increase the leader's control and influence."[9] The second is job rotation or the assigning of managers to different settings in order to increase the range of experiences available to them.[10] Training in leadership, however, is seen as a mixed blessing. Training for task-oriented leaders improves their chances for success, while training for relationship-motivated leaders rapidly decreases their effectiveness.[11] In summary, Fiedler would suggest that the choice of leader for each situation would depend on the orientation of the candidates available. In situations where relationship-motivated leaders are most likely to succeed—those which are unstructured with good leader-member relations and those which are structured with poor leader-member relations—that type of leader should be chosen. In cases where there is an organized task structure and good leader-member relations or where there is a disorganized task structure with poor leader-member relations, a task-motivated leader will perform best.[12]

Since training in leadership skills does not always increase effectiveness, it is important to observe potential leaders and try to establish the group into which they fall. Fiedler does it by evaluating responses to a questionnaire on Least Preferred Coworker.[13] Observations of staff,

while not as scientific, may be equally effective for library purposes. Initial asessment and training can be done with case studies and role-playing whereas later assessments can be made by observing real life situations.

Having determined that effective leadership may rely on the situation rather than on the employee, are there other human skills that children's librarians should develop? Developing communication skills discussed earlier falls under the human skills. Mintzberg found in his review of the literature that effective managers developed vast information networks which helped them identify problems and opportunities as well as build mental models of situations that surround them.[14] Placing children's librarians in positions where they can develop and expand their networks is important. Networks within the library are important and were discussed earlier, but alliances with other children's librarians throughout the state, region, and nation are also important. These contacts can be made through workshops and/or conferences; however, for them to be really useful for developing management skills, the attendee should be taught that developing peer networks and professional alliances is just as important as learning technical skills.

Another important human skill, that of being sensitive to the power structure of the organization, is best expressed by H. Edward Wrapp who argues that good managers understand what positions various individuals and units within the organization have taken on any given issue. It is his contention that a good manager knows where the areas of indifference are and moves proposals through these areas rather than through areas of support or opposition.[15] This, he argues, alleviates charges of favoritism or undue antagonism within the organization. Librarians in all areas should be encouraged to examine the various reactions to plans and try to work them through areas of indifference. However, for children's librarians who so often must try to enlist the support of adults for services to children, the necessity of understanding the political climate is essential. Providing programs and attending meetings of groups of interested adults, such as the PTA or teacher's groups, will help the children's specialist to expand his/her understanding of the community's needs while increasing sensitivity to politics of the community. Children's librarians should be encouraged to be involved in these activities as often as possible.

The final skill that Katz enumerates is that of conceptualization. The ability to stand outside any one department or organization and see how it relates to itself, its community, and the social and political world in which it exists is perhaps the most important skill any manager can

develop. This skill colors the thinking on all decisions and turns adequate employees into potential managers and administrators. Therefore, it is essential to develop this talent among children's librarians since the excellence of their work within their department may depend on it.

Conceptualization skills are most valuable during times of decision-making. Their initial importance lies in the ability to analyze the nature of organizational situations and to perceive relationships which already exist but might be otherwise overlooked. Earlier discussions of building information networks and of including children's librarians on committees which consider problems of only tangential interest to them apply to developing conceptual skills as well. The more the similarities of various departments, functions, and routines can be examined, the more likely a person is to see their interrelationships. In this particular case, placing children's librarians on library-wide committees meets a multitude of training needs. It allows for the development of peer networks, it solves the problem of possible insularity caused by a client-based department, and it provides the necessary food for thought to initiate conceptual thinking.

Occasionally there are no clearly defined relationships or solutions to the problems that face managers. Rosabeth Kantor has found that organizations which are successful in entrepreneurial enterprises use what she calls the integrative approach to problem solving, "the willingness to move beyond received wisdom, to combine ideas from unconnected sources....To see problems integratively is to see them as wholes, related to larger wholes, and thus challenging established practices—rather than walling off a piece of experience and preventing it from being touched or affected by any new experiences."[16] Keeping children's librarians from becoming insular in their concern only for their major client group will expose them to alternative ways of thinking, but encouraging them to be innovative and integrative in their decision-making requires two additional situations. The first is a commitment on the part of the library to support integrative approaches by encouraging the staff to consult with each other, and second, the library itself must be willing to consider fresh ideas from different perspectives.

Another use of conceptual skills is to create a mental model of the world around the library and the children's room. Mintzberg points out that managers do not have the luxury of doing their planning once a year in a secluded mountain retreat. Instead, most managers are forced to make decisions quickly in response to some immediate stimuli.[17] To accomplish this effectively, each manager needs to project outcomes of

decisions onto a model of the currently existing relationships. By conceptualizing this model within his/her head, the manager can visualize the ramifications of any decision he/she makes. This is a fundamental example of taking the reality and conceptualizing it in decision-making.

Wrapp suggests that one of the characteristics of an effective manager is the ability to focus time and energy on a few important projects which will significantly effect the long-term future of the organization.[18] To do this the manager must weigh the outcome of various decisions and foresee which will provide the most benefit for the organization. For children's librarians, this may mean viewing certain children's services in light of the response they will receive from interested adults rather than the response they will elicit from the children. While this may sound like a conflict of interest for the children's librarian, the manager understands that an outstanding children's program which draws the fire of concerned adults is likely to result in withdrawn support for future library programs. Managers who are trying to develop managerial skills in children's librarians and others, need to query constantly the outcomes of various decisions and their impact on the whole library setting so as to instill the importance of making decisions from an organization-wide stance rather than a departmental one.

The final use of the conceptual skills is constantly to reevaluate decisions and relationships to see if expected changes occurred and to develop bases for future managerial decisions. Librarians, like other human beings, are constantly faced with changing conditions, values, and interrelationships. Jobs change from day to day and training begins to become obsolete the day after degrees are received. The only constant in this world is the ability to learn from past mistakes and to change methods in the future. Reevaluating decisions and work provides effective feedback needed to survive. While this introspection may be difficult to develop, it should be encouraged and channeled so that it profitably provides managers with the needed material from which to learn.

Conclusions

Good managers are rare in libraries, and good managers in children's services are often encouraged to concentrate only on their own department or to leave children's work. If libraries are to survive, such waste of human resources cannot be allowed. Libraries must take the responsibility of encouraging children's librarians and other librarians to develop their managerial talent to the fullest.

Katz's managerial skills are only a beginning from which to start in evaluating the means of improving skills and competencies, but they do provide a framework to look at some of the past failings and some future methods of improvement. Using Katz's list of skills and an understanding of how manager's think, libraries can begin to develop programs that teach children's librarians managerial skills. Such programs can be as inexpensive as rotating committee assignments and encouraging particular thought patterns to as expensive as sending people to conferences or to paying for additional coursework. Children and their library services are too important to be inadvertently ignored because of unrealistic or unconscious barriers that are placed in the way of children's librarians' development of managerial skills.

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