
Career and staff development: A convergence

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Career enhancement from an organizational perspective.

Managing library careers has traditionally been seen as the responsibility of individual librarians. I want to challenge this tradition, or at least to put it in perspective, since I feel not only that it is a responsibility of libraries to be concerned about the careers of their staff members, but also that it makes good common sense organizationally for libraries to foster that development and to provide as many opportunities as possible for staff members to enhance their credentials.

To provide a context for these remarks, I will use *career development* to refer to the acquisition of knowledge and skills that eventually leads to the accrual of additional or different responsibilities and ultimately leads to the achievement of an individual's personal goals as a librarian. I will use *staff development* to refer to organizationally targeted programs intended to ensure that staff will have appropriate knowledge and skills to permit a library to accomplish its goals effectively. Professional development—maintaining and improving skills to keep up with the changing world around us—is not the topic of this paper, but is closely related to both career or staff development.

While career development and staff development have different goals (the preparation of an in-

dividual for the future and the preparation of an organization for the future), they obviously share the means for their individual achievement—the acquisition of knowledge and skills. It is through the mutuality of the means that staff and career development benefit from each other.

Why should a library promote careers?

Organizational effectiveness. There are a number of ways a library can benefit from the career development of its staff. As already noted, the means for achieving career development are similar to those for achieving staff development. If a library is to ensure that its staff will have the knowledge and abilities to perform effectively, both now and in the future, it will need to provide a variety of opportunities for staff members to grow and learn. In so far as these opportunities affect individual staff members, career development is being served. Libraries need to try to match these opportunities with the interests and goals of staff members as much as possible.

Flexibility. When a library takes inventory of its resources, it needs to measure the abilities and skills of its staff as a major asset. An effective staff development program will broaden the talent and

skills base of the staff, providing the library with greater potential for the accomplishment of its goals. This broader base of talent and skills also greatly increases the library's flexibility—as new needs arise, or new opportunities occur, this broader base will enable it to take on new programs and respond more quickly and effectively to its user community.

Staff morale and loyalty. While few librarians expect their libraries to manage their careers, they do appreciate being seen as more than a resource or a commodity. A library can usually raise staff morale levels by providing an environment in which its staff can grow and develop and by being concerned about staff members as individuals. Such a library also engenders a high level of organizational loyalty in its staff members.

Recruitment. Many staff development activities require staff members to attend events outside their libraries—workshops, seminars, conferences and other meetings. By encouraging and supporting staff members in these activities, libraries can mount their own advertising campaigns. Staff talking about interesting and exciting things going on at home are the envy of their colleagues, and that may indirectly aid in recruitment efforts in the future. Their presence at these events says “my library supports developmental opportunities.”

Promotion tracks and turnover. Finally, staff development prepares staff members for greater responsibilities. When positions open up within a library, a good staff development program will make it more likely that internal candidates will be ready to move up. Sometimes, however, there will be nothing available when staff members are ready for promotion, and they will need to look outside for these new challenges. While I would certainly not want to be on record as saying that staff development promotes turnover, realistically I recognize that a certain level of turnover is good for a library, since it provides an opportunity to bring new people in with new ideas and talents.

What should librarians expect from their libraries?

Leadership. Librarians, particularly new professional librarians, should be able to expect certain kinds of support from their libraries. Among the first of these is leadership. Frequently directors and senior staff members in academic libraries are leaders in the library community. Close association with these library leaders is invaluable to new professionals who are trying to integrate their library education experiences with their experiences on the job. As leaders, administrators and senior staff have an obligation to share their knowledge and experiences with newer professionals. Too few librarians take full advantage of these opportuni-

ties, and too few administrators create these opportunities. Staff members should take every opportunity to learn from these people—ask questions, engage them in dialogues. These are the same people that other librarians pay to hear.

Career counselling and guidance. For administrators, another obligation is to provide counselling and guidance to new professionals. They should be asking new professionals what their goals are, giving them feedback on performance, guiding them in establishing themselves in the profession, and steering them toward other areas for further development. Administrators should be helping them plot courses—steering them toward the most relevant literature, suggesting meetings they should attend and helping them write a developmental plan that focuses primarily on their career goals and only secondarily organizational needs.

Travel support. Libraries have a further obligation to provide support—and not just moral support—for their staff's development. Frequently staff members who most need financial support for professional development are those who are starting out—who have the lowest incomes and the highest student loans. The old rule of thumb, still practiced by many libraries, is to support conference attendance, or to support it more fully, for those who are on committees or are giving papers. These are not usually the junior members of the staff. Libraries that encourage staff members to be professionally active need to be prepared to allocate funds to support them.

Opportunities to practice. Finally, libraries have an obligation to provide opportunities for staff members to practice the skills and abilities they acquire through developmental opportunities. It makes little sense for a library to spend money to train staff members in using a computer or a particular software package if they neither own a computer nor intend to own one. Yet many libraries spend resources on workshops and conferences without providing the experiential learning to complement the training. Unused skills and abilities gradually decline and the whole effort becomes a waste of time for the library and a frustration for the staff member. Library administrators need to provide an environment where staff members feel comfortable trying out new ideas and new skills knowing that they can make mistakes and still find the support necessary to try again.

What should your library expect from you?

Career and staff development are two sides of the same coin. As librarians should expect some things from their libraries, the libraries should be able to expect some things in return. Some of these are corollaries to the obligations of libraries.

Commitment to personal growth. Libraries have a right to expect their librarians to be committed to maintaining and expanding their own knowledge and abilities. Libraries can provide opportunities, but librarians need to take advantage of them. This may mean a commitment of time and money. Staff members will need to keep up with information in their own and related fields. The journal literature in library and information sciences is growing, as it is in all other disciplines, and it takes time to keep up with it. Dues for professional associations are not inconsiderable, yet it is hard to stay abreast of what's going on without belonging to one or more of them.

Flexibility. Librarians need to stay as flexible as possible. The environments in which libraries exist are changing rapidly, and libraries must change as well. All indications are that libraries will need staff with different talents in the near future and librarians will need to change their arsenal of tricks to meet future requirements. Flexibility—and the ability to live with ambiguity—will ensure a place in the future.

Openness to feedback. Organizations have an obligation to give their staff feedback on their performance and on areas for further growth. Librarians need to be able to listen to that feedback, to process it, and to be open to constructive feedback and guidance.

How can we enhance our own career development?

As I pointed out at the beginning, career development is still primarily the responsibility of each and every librarian—even if we should be able to expect some support from our libraries. What then can we as librarians do to enhance our own careers?

Take advantage of opportunities. Opportunities for learning new things abound, but they require that we both look for and recognize them, and that we take advantage of them. Volunteering for projects in our libraries or in professional organizations allows us to learn new skills and to work with and learn from people we ordinarily would not meet. Once we acquire these skills, we need to find ways to use them so that they become part of our repertoire and so that others recognize our new abilities.

Keep up. Most librarians keep up with developments in their own areas of expertise and interest. Many, however, fail to stay abreast of broader issues and current developments in other areas. Promotions and other opportunities for advancement frequently entail taking on broader responsibilities or managing functions with which we are less familiar. Staying on top of broader issues can help to prepare for future promotional opportunities.

Budget for development. I have indicated that libraries should take some responsibility for supporting the development of staff members, but at best this will be a shared responsibility. Few organizations can afford to support career development fully. It is important then for librarians to develop budgets for continuing education and development much like their budgets for rent and food. This budget should include professional association dues, an occasional course or workshop, journal subscriptions, and at least partial expenses for conference attendance.

Take some risks. It is easy to become too concerned with security. After a certain length of time in one library, we become dependent on benefits—we build up investments in retirement funds, vacation accruals, etc. Many librarians have family responsibilities that prevent them from moving out of a geographic region. It is important, however, to take risks to manage one's career creatively. We need to recognize when we have begun to plateau and be willing to give up some security to move to new libraries which might present new challenges and stimulate our careers further.

Maintain high visibility. There are tens of thousands of librarians in this country. How can one distinguish him or herself from the rest? It is important to gain and maintain some level of visibility in the profession. At meetings, ask questions. Make the commitment to write an article or give a paper or write a letter to the editor expressing a viewpoint.

Mentoring. Recently there have been quite a number of articles written about mentoring programs. Mentoring can bring together experience and inexperience in a process which provides the "mentees" with an irreplaceable source of information and feedback, and at the same time provides mentors not only with a sense of professional fulfillment, but frequently with the stimulus to re-question and rethink many truisms in their own thinking. Many organizations, both libraries and professional organizations, have begun formal mentoring programs, bringing together new librarians with some senior librarians and administrators. Finding a suitable mentor can play an important role in career development.

Check out the environment. It is important that both librarians and administrators recognize the unique needs and requirements that each organization and staff member has. We do not all react to the same stimuli in the same way. Two of the most critical career choices librarians make are, first, in which kind of library to work and, secondly, in which specific library to work. During interviews, librarians need to try to assess the environment of potential employing libraries and decide whether or not that environment is one where personal accomplishment and excellence is possible. Although it may seem idealistic, it is a mistake to

accept appointment in a library where one aspires only to "acceptability."

Conclusion

Career and staff development are complementary programs, sharing the means to different ends. Managers and administrators need to accept the development of their staffs' knowledge and skills as

a major responsibility so that staff members will be able to perform at a high level of excellence. Through this process, an individual's career development needs will be addressed, even if not directly. Individual staff members have a major responsibility as well—a strong commitment to their own development and a willingness to learn and to change. ■ ■

Promoting professional development: A local approach

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Continuing your education without leaving your campus.

The professional development of librarians is increasing in importance as librarians once hired for their bibliographic competencies are now expected to engage in scholarly pursuits to gain reappointment, tenure, and/or promotion.

Libraries have interpreted professional development activities broadly to include active involvement in professional association work; presentation of papers; publication of books, articles, reviews, abstracts, and bibliographies; grant writing; consulting; research and study leaves; staff exchanges; and other contributions which enable one to perform at a higher level of proficiency.¹

As library budgets face increased competition for funds to support these activities, and evaluation criteria do not diminish their importance, library faculty members may wish to take greater responsibility for mounting local programs which foster a collegial approach to professional development. This is especially critical in the small or medium-sized academic library².

The programs developed by Cal Poly's Kennedy Library over the past three years may serve to inspire other libraries in their attempts to encourage, promote, and support the continuing education needs of their library faculties.

¹*Professional Development in ARL Libraries*, Spec Kit #86 (Washington, D.C.: Office of Management Services, Association of Research Libraries, 1982).

²Susan A. Stussy, "A Need for the Professional Development of Academic Libraries," *Catholic Library World* 59 (September/October 1987): 82-84.