

Do Children's Librarians Possess Management Skills Necessary for Upward Mobility?

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If has been said that because children's librarians only deal with children they have less opportunity to plan, organize, direct and make decisions. Children, being only "little people," are given less consideration than adults; therefore, children's librarians are considered to have less responsibility. The rationale is not quite clear unless it is that children are neither taxpayers nor voters. However, administrators, county commissioners, and other decision-makers may fail to realize that these young patrons are future taxpayers, voters, politicians and businessmen. Their ideas, attitudes, behaviors are being molded; therefore, librarians working with them have responsibilities for being creative, innovative, and energetic.

The energy necessary in planning for and working with children makes librarians more creative. They are constantly using their management skills in planning and coordinating, decision-making, public relations, budget preparation, and supervision. A story hour, film program, egg-decorating contest, or stuffed animal show require no less preparation than planning a panel discussion, job-hunting workshop, or banking seminar. The planning, preparation and execution are all the same.

- Deciding on a theme, expected audience, materials, guest speakers or facilitators;
- routing publicity to the media;
- preparing in-house posters, flyers, letters to important guests;
- projecting costs and raising funds;
- planning a back-up program;
- giving attention to logistical details;
- execution;
- and, evaluation must be involved in planning programs.

Does children's programming require any less time, effort or expertise? Does children's programming require any less attention to detail than establishing five-year plans or preparing a fiscal budget or constructing a new library building? No! The only differences are in the time, costs, and number of people involved in the planning. Planning for children's programs requires organizational skills and analytical abilities.

Decision-making goes hand-in-hand with planning. Constant decisions, such as those mentioned above, are made. Deciding which books to buy, what theme to use for a bulletin board, what information to include in a monthly newsletter are all essential, yet routine activities, for a children's librarian.

Public relations has already been mentioned. Programs must be publicized. Establishing and maintaining contact with public schools, day care

centers, churches, and other community agencies are commonly accepted practices among children's librarians. The charisma, speaking ability, communication skills, counseling techniques that are generally present in librarians working with children are an asset in dealing with adults as well. They present a positive image for the library system as a whole.

In medium and large library systems, children's librarians play a major role in budget preparation. They must define their goals and objectives; determine which activities achieve these goals and objectives; specify materials, equipment, and personnel; and estimate the costs involved in maintenance or expansion of their over-all program.

In addition to the talents, skills and abilities mentioned thus far, a children's librarian, if he/she is also a department head, supervises personnel. A supervisor designates responsibilities and specific duties, counsels, trains, interviews, evaluates, delegates, negotiates. All these are skills which can be carried into administrative positions. With the multitudinous responsibilities of staff supervision one must supervise well and depend on a staff to carry out the details resulting from planning, coordinating, decision-making and budget preparation.

In spite of all the skills one acquires as a children's librarian, that person as well as library administrators, may doubt one's management abilities. The psychology behind these ideas could fill a book, children's librarians may have low self-esteem, lack self-confidence, fail to demand respect, and be lacking in proper appearance and attitude associated with management style. Most children's librarians are women. Women tend to think in terms of "a career as personal growth, as self-fulfillment, as satisfaction, as making a contribution to others, as doing what one wants to do."¹ They fail to see their potential as administrators or executives. They fail to establish informal networks of information sharing, of loyalties.

For managerial mobility, children's librarians need to: 1) develop positive images in both appearance and attitude; 2) demand respect as adults; 3) establish long-range goals and objectives for library services which are measurable, yet realistic; 4) periodically evaluate services, collection, and staff asking critical questions concerning operations, performance, and patron satisfaction and 5) keep abreast of innovations in other libraries and be knowledgeable about research and results.²

Yes, children's librarians do possess management skills necessary for upward mobility. They must first, realize that they have them; secondly, convince others that they have them; and finally, expand and refine them.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Henning, Margaret and Jardim, Anne. *The Managerial Woman* (New York: Pocket Books, 1977), p 29.
2. Richardson, Selma K., ed. *Children's Services of Public Libraries*. (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois, 1977), pp. 170-73.