

## *Managing by the Book . . . \**

### **Moving into Management: Strategies to Take the Pinch Out of Stepping into New Shoes\*\***

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*The transition from key law library employee to manager brings more than new perks and a title on the door. It also presents challenging responsibilities for which training and preparation are necessary. Attention to common sense management development practices will help to make this process a positive one for all involved.*

¶1 Almost every day in law libraries everywhere, familiar scenarios occur. Library administrators and staff make critical decisions about resource allocation. Endless thought and energy focus on budget, collections, services, and technology development. Key personnel receive assignments to implement complex projects. Project monitoring leads to the delineation of responsibilities. Care is taken to ensure the long-term viability of the library's resources.

¶2 With all the attention given to law library financial resources, collections, user services, and technology infrastructure and applications, what steps are library workers, their institutions, and the profession as a whole taking to ensure the long-term viability of the library's most valuable renewable energy source, its human capital? What can be done to create management development practices that will sustain and enrich current managers and nurture the next generation of law library managers?

¶3 While Cinderella and Dorothy effortlessly stepped into shoes that took them in new directions, the transition from key law library employee to manager brings more than a new title on the door. Along with new perks, the ascension to management brings new and challenging responsibilities.<sup>1</sup>

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\* *Editor's Note:* "Managing by the Book" is a regular feature of *Law Library Journal*. In each article, author Jean Holcomb highlights a book outside the field of librarianship that has a message about management topics that will resonate with law librarians.

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1. For descriptions of the challenges faced by new managers, see Henry Mintzberg, *Leadership and Management Development: An Afterward*, 18 ACAD. MGMT. EXECUTIVE 140 (2004); Jared Sandberg, *Cubicle Culture: Friends Who Become Bosses Often Change in Surprising Ways*, WALL ST. J., Apr. 18, 2006, at B1; Matt Villano, *Career Coach: The Control Freak in the Corner Office*, N.Y. TIMES, May 28, 2006, at BU 10.

¶4 While there may be no magic slippers to ease the journey to management, that fact in itself may be viewed as good news. Just as no one style or size of shoe fits all, the paths individuals follow as they explore the possibilities of a move into management vary widely. When opportunities occur, those who have investigated the skills, emotions, and perspectives required for the job will know if they want to and will be able to meet these new expectations.

¶5 When considering or preparing for a career move into management, what should you focus on first?

¶6 Unlike students in MBA programs whose primary focus rests on acquiring the tools of a manager, library school students receive little, if any, formal academic training in management theory and practice. Even if one has received some formal instruction in library management, usually the gap between it and the actual opportunity to put such skills to use ensures that most first-time law library managers must rely on resources outside the classroom.<sup>2</sup> In addition to a lack of formal management training, librarians enter the workforce with visions of specializing in a particular aspect of library work such as reference or cataloging, and only later in their careers do they assume management responsibilities, frequently by default rather than by design.<sup>3</sup>

¶7 Clearly, not everyone possesses the interest or strengths to become a manager. A variety of challenges face those who consider the possibility of developing the skills and experience they will need for success as a manager. To make a thoughtful decision about accepting management responsibilities, a librarian needs to understand the competencies that will be required and what it will take to acquire them.

¶8 Determining what competencies will be required and how to go about acquiring them are two different issues. Law library literature provides numerous descriptions of the tasks academic law library directors perform.<sup>4</sup> Articles can also be found that describe what deans and faculty expect from their library managers.<sup>5</sup> The *Sourcebook for Law Library Governing Boards* outlines the functional operations of state, court, and county law libraries.<sup>6</sup> Law firm and corporate law librarians use the "Law Library" handbooks regularly issued by the Practising Law Institute (PLI) to get clues about management competencies.<sup>7</sup> Speaking for

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2. For a description of the implications this time lag has for librarians, see RACHEL SINGER GORDON, *THE ACCIDENTAL LIBRARY MANAGER*, at xiv (2005).

3. *Id.* at xv.

4. *E.g.*, Carol Bredemeyer, *What Do Directors Do?* 96 *LAW LIBR. J.* 317, 2004 *LAW LIBR. J.* 20.

5. *E.g.*, Special Feature, *The Law School Director of the Twenty-First Century: What Deans Think*, 95 *LAW LIBR. J.* 419 (2003).

6. TRUSTEES DEV. COMM., AM. ASS'N OF LAW LIBRARIES, *SOURCEBOOK FOR LAW LIBRARY GOVERNING BOARDS AND COMMITTEES* (1994).

7. *E.g.*, CATHERINE HARDY ET AL., *THE LAW LIBRARY 2006: SKILLS, STRATEGIES & SOLUTIONS* (2006). In addition to the PLI series, the Private Law Libraries Special Interest Section of the American Association of Law Libraries publishes resources such as *GATHERING STATISTICS FOR YOUR LAW LIBRARY HANDBOOK* (1996).

the profession as a whole, AALL's Competencies of Law Librarianship provide a comprehensive listing of key skills.<sup>8</sup>

¶9 After reviewing the sources of information about core competencies in law librarianship, prospective managers must identify a personal roadmap for how to acquire these skills, and in particular how to acquire the personnel skills that are needed. Here's where the investigation becomes tricky. To acquire the competencies needed to supervise, motivate, discipline, coach, and inspire others, a prospective manager needs opportunities to practice and perfect these skills before being called upon to formally exercise them.

¶10 Because few of the traditional apprenticeship opportunities common in the business world exist for management development candidates in law libraries, anyone considering such a move must take a less straightforward approach. One way to start is to explore resources that describe how such people management skills are developed.

¶11 Authors who write about the challenges facing first-time managers describe the process as a journey. Linda Hill, a leading researcher in the field of management development, describes this journey in *Becoming a Manager: How New Managers Master the Challenges of Leadership*.<sup>9</sup> She details her study of nineteen first-time managers through their initial year after promotion to a management position.<sup>10</sup>

¶12 Hill's book is intended to be used as a resource for new managers. She identifies what it means to be a manager, covering such topics as developing interpersonal judgments, confronting the personal side of management, and managing the transformation from key worker to manager. She also covers strategies for exercising influence without authority, building an effective team, and learning for a lifetime. The book provides a description of her research design methodology, extensive footnotes, a selected bibliography, and an index.

¶13 As she traces and analyzes these new managers' experiences, she reveals the complexities and difficulties faced. She illustrates her main theories with particularly compelling examples of how new managers reframed their understanding of their responsibilities and how they coped with the stresses and emotions of the transformation process as they assumed a new identity as a manager.

¶14 From her research, Hill believes that becoming a new manager demands that individuals engage in three fundamental kinds of learning.<sup>11</sup> Learning something new, such as new technical, human, and conceptual skills, doesn't come as a surprise to new managers or their organizations which plan orientation programs

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8. Am. Ass'n of Law Libraries, *Competencies of Law Librarianship* (2001), reprinted in AM. ASS'N OF LAW LIBRARIES, *AALL DIRECTORY AND HANDBOOK 2006–2007*, at 414 (46th ed. 2006), available at <http://www.aallnet.org/prodev/competencies.asp>.

9. LINDA A. HILL, *BECOMING A MANAGER: HOW NEW MANAGERS MASTER THE CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP* (2d ed. 2003).

10. *Id.* at 3.

11. *Id.* at x.

to address such learning needs. Rather, it's the unexpected necessity of developing new attitudes, mind-sets, and values relevant to the new position that often unnerves first-time managers. This need to change their minds and themselves on the personal part of their learning journey proves to be the most difficult learning task for the individual and the part of the management development process least understood by the organization.

¶15 Hill's epilogue in *Becoming a Manager* outlines strategies that organizations can use to help smooth this learning process for their first-time managers. Because organizations want managers with emotional intelligence, learning agility, and adaptability, she advises them to create organizational cultures with some degree of psychological safety that will support personal risk taking. First-time managers will make mistakes, so Hill believes that they sorely need assurances from their organizations that support will be available to help them fix the imbalance between the pressure for current performance and the need for growth and risk taking.<sup>12</sup>

¶16 In contrast to the scholarly approach taken in *Becoming a Manager*, two books written for a more general audience reiterate themes identified by Hill in easy-to-digest fashion. The title of Ken Lloyd's paperback, *Be the Boss Your Employees Deserve*,<sup>13</sup> sets the theme for the entire work. His message to first-time managers is that the focus belongs on the employees, not on themselves.<sup>14</sup> Rather than being concerned about loyalty, obedience, respect, and productivity from their employees, managers need to focus on establishing a relationship that is based on trust and respect with their employees. For trust and respect to flow upward in an organization, managers must communicate their vision in terms of clear and consistent goals; vary their leadership style to suit changing circumstances; exhibit flexibility; address problems and concerns promptly; and provide open avenues for communication, feedback, fun, and life balance.<sup>15</sup>

¶17 If this sounds like a pretty tall order, Lloyd makes no apologies. Throughout the twenty-two short chapters of *Be the Boss Your Employees Deserve*, he provides guidance for putting his principles to work in every step of the employment cycle, from time of hire to performance reviews and disciplinary action. The book concludes with a chapter on how to get feedback from your employees about your style as a boss with a sample set of questions to help you design such a tool.<sup>16</sup>

¶18 Gary McClain and Deborah S. Romaine, authors of *The Everything Managing People Book: Quick and Easy Ways to Build, Motivate, and Nurture a First-Rate Team*,<sup>17</sup> cover much the same territory as Lloyd with better examples,

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12. *Id.* at 322.

13. KEN LLOYD, *BE THE BOSS YOUR EMPLOYEES DESERVE* (2002).

14. *Id.* at 7.

15. *Id.* at 18.

16. *Id.* at 214.

17. GARY McCLAIN & DEBORAH S. ROMAINE, *THE EVERYTHING MANAGING PEOPLE BOOK: QUICK AND EASY WAYS TO NURTURE A FIRST-RATE TEAM* (2002). A second edition of this book is planned for publication in 2007.

graphics, and easier-to-digest bites of information. The cover promises that it's "perfect for first-time managers" and the focus of the book holds true to that perspective.

¶19 Taking nothing for granted, *The Everything Managing People Book* details life as a manager, describing the varied roles a first-time manager may be expected to fill, ranging from coach, mentor, and teacher to limit setter, mediator, and cheerleader. The authors also describe specific challenges, such as replacing a bad manager, filling the shoes of the hero boss, and the loneliness that can occur when you're in the middle of the organizational chart.<sup>18</sup> The authors' sense of humor and occasional flashes of tongue-in-cheek irreverence about a very serious topic make this an easy read.

¶20 This light-touch approach to a serious topic shows up in a discussion of what employees expect from their managers. Their listing includes the following:

- Know what they want, even if they don't say anything
- Understand that they have lives away from work that sometimes interfere with work . . .
- Be available at any time of the day to answer questions and resolve problems
- Treat them fairly, which they define as considering any and all extenuating circumstances before passing judgment or taking action
- Help them acquire new skills, even if it means they will become qualified for different jobs
- Advocate for them when they have needs that require upper management decisions . . .
- Give them full credit for all the department's successes and take full blame for the department's shortcomings
- Always remember that they are only human, but never reveal this about yourself<sup>19</sup>

Such a list serves as another way to remind first-time managers that it's all about the employees, not about them.

¶21 The list also acts to reinforce the notion that the "do unto others" Golden Rule principle we're all enculturated to follow is not the appropriate guiding rule in the relationship of a manager with his or her supervisees. In this relationship, the manager's guiding principle should be to "do unto" their supervisees as the supervisees want, rather than as the manager personally wants to be treated. By acting in this fashion, the manager ties directly into the first example on the list of employees' expectations: managers will know what employees want, even if they don't say anything.

¶22 Other key points made in *The Everything Managing People Book* include the critical role a manager's immediate supervisor plays in assuring a smooth transition, the importance of providing opportunities for people just to socialize and talk at work, the traps inherent in office politics and workplace friendships, and the need to work with people you don't personally like.

18. *Id.* at 27.

19. *Id.* at 47-48.

¶23 Beyond the information about the skills and strategies required for managing people that is available in books such as these, what can individual librarians interested in a possible management career, the libraries that employ them, and the profession as a whole do to support management development?

¶24 For the individual librarian looking for the opportunity to move into management, a variety of options exist. Because so many librarians move into their first management role without leaving their library, the first step might be to make your interest in gaining new skills known to your supervisor or the library director at the time of your next performance review. Ask if there's a project under consideration that you might be suited to lead. Volunteer to supervise the work of an intern or work-study student. Seek out training opportunities to learn skills you feel are not your strengths, but are ones that a manager needs to have.

¶25 If your work environment supports cross-training, ask for the opportunity to learn new competencies in-house. Explore the option of shadowing a manager in another department or another library in your community. Take management courses offered by area community colleges or a local chamber of commerce's leadership curriculum. Gain insight into personnel management practices by volunteering for committee assignments in local or regional professional, civic, religious, or service organizations. Read management literature. If your organization has a human resources department, ask for suggestions about things to read and local learning opportunities. Ask a manager you admire to be a mentor.

¶26 If, as management literature suggests, the immediate supervisor plays a critical role in the success and job satisfaction of first-time managers, a library interested in encouraging management development can take an important first step to back these new managers by providing the time and support for their existing managers to grow and to polish their coaching and mentoring skills. The library must provide budgetary support and time for training and professional development for new and seasoned managers, particularly in the area of personnel management. Apprenticeships, job exchanges, sabbaticals, and other creative methods have the potential to enrich those who stay put as well as those who leave to learn new skills.

¶27 The profession of law librarianship at local, chapter, section, and national levels has opportunities to play a critical role in the management development arena. Existing program development models already provide avenues for member-driven content on topics related to management development. In addition to programs currently available, specifically targeted training opportunities for first-time managers in conjunction with chapter or national meetings modeled on efforts already underway by the Academic Law Libraries Special Interest Section of the American Association of Law Libraries would provide the networking and training experiences critical to success in all library environments. Blogs, electronic discussion lists, and other methods of exchanging information and experiences could be organized specifically to support management development. While the critical

mass needed for a management development special interest section may not yet exist, SIS and chapter leaders could be encouraged to provide opportunities at their meetings for interested members to meet.

¶28 How individual law library employees, their libraries, and the profession approach the implementation of the management development strategies needed to make the process of transition from key employee to supervisor a positive one for all involved will shape the future of law librarianship. Managers-in-waiting have great opportunities to practice the skills needed to perform library-specific tasks, but key human resources skill-development opportunities seldom arise until the first management assignment begins. It's time to develop "bridge the gap" programs in our libraries and our profession to help new managers acquire these skills. It's time to ensure that when a first-time manager steps into those new shoes, every effort has been taken to eliminate the new-shoe pinch.