

Crash Course in Library Supervision: Meeting the Key Players

Dennis C. Tucker
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Crash Course in Library Supervision

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Meeting the Key Players

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Crash Course



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CHAPTER 1

Settling In: Getting to Know You

No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main.

—John Donne, 1572–1631, Meditation XVII

INTRODUCING YOURSELF

Congratulations! You have a new job! You feel positively wonderful about being the successful candidate for this position, and rightfully so. The competition for jobs is fierce.

How did you get to be a library supervisor, manager, or director? Was it an in-house promotion? Did you transfer from another library in the same area? Did you hear about the position in a national job hotline and move from another state to take it?

It doesn't matter how you got this position. The bottom line is, you have it. You're ready to start this next step in your career. So now what do you do?

It's only natural to be overwhelmed and feel as though you need to do everything at once, but these first few days are precious and

something you can never get back. This is the time when you meet the people who can help make your tenure in the library a success. You begin building the foundation of your connections with the staff, the library board, the Friends of the Library, government officials, and the public. These relationships are vital if you want to succeed.

Whether you were an in-house or outside candidate makes a difference in the first meeting with the staff. Both scenarios are outlined below. Some of this advice may sound elemental and obvious, but the number of library supervisors, managers, and directors who get off on the wrong foot with their staff is amazing.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS, LASTING IMPRESSIONS

Michelle Sterling, the founder of Global Image Group and an expert on image, impression, and impact, has written:

Within the first three seconds of a new encounter, you are evaluated...even if it is just a glance. People appraise your visual and behavioral appearance from head to toe. They observe your demeanor, mannerisms, and body language and even assess your grooming and accessories—watch, handbag, briefcase. Within only three seconds, you make an indelible impression... Once the first impression is made, it is virtually irreversible.¹

Your demeanor at your first meetings is very important. Smile. Greet everyone personally. You're going to make mistakes as a new director, but friendly people tend to be forgiven faster than those who are perceived to be aloof or unfriendly.

You're probably going to be anxious about the initial meetings with everyone, but try not to display your nervous habits, such as biting your fingernails or tapping your fingers on the table. Mannerisms are those little things that can drive people crazy. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. For example, if you're a pen clicker, don't carry your pen with you.

Body language is something people read almost subconsciously, so you want yours to be friendly. Smile. Make eye contact. Lean slightly forward when someone's talking to you. This indicates interest. Don't cross your arms over your chest. That's a sign of shutting yourself off from the person who's talking to you. By the way, if you never smile and don't much like to be around people, you have no business supervising anyone!

Overused buzzwords and jargon don't belong in your initial meetings. (In fact, they probably don't belong in any meeting!) "Synergy,"

“empowerment,” “moving the cheese,” “shifting paradigms,” and other such words and phrases coming from a newcomer tend to make people bored, suspicious...or giggly. If you must use such a term, be sure to explain it.

The power of a name is not to be underestimated. Be prepared! Get a list of staff and board members. Try to familiarize yourself with the names before your first day of work. That way, you’ll associate faces with names faster when you meet them. We know firsthand that it works, because we used to have a job that involved meeting a new group of people every week. By getting a list of names and studying it ahead of time, we were once able to greet by first and last name a group of 33 people within two days. Bring name tags with you to your first meetings so you can call people by name. Don’t be shy about asking people to write their name in large letters! A city manager we know made it a practice to introduce himself to staff at all levels, look them in the eye, smile, and repeat their names after they had said them. From then on, he would call that person by name. This made everyone from custodians to upper management feel like a valued part of the team. On the other end of the spectrum, we know a technical services clerk who announced at a meeting that the library director rarely came to their department, and when she did, she didn’t speak to anyone except the supervisor. The clerk said she felt “invisible” and doubted that the director even knew her name.

MEETING THE STAFF

If you’re an outside candidate, or a person who wasn’t part of the organization when you got your position, you can bet that the staff have searched the Internet and called their friends and colleagues to find out everything they can about you. (What you post on the Web, including on social Web sites, *can* come back to haunt you!)

Hopefully by now, someone has taken you around the library and introduced you to everyone. If not, you might ask someone to do so. Even if they have, you still need to have a get-acquainted meeting and one-on-one sessions with the staff. (One-on-one meetings are explained in the next chapter.) If no one has introduced you to the staff, you’re more of an unknown element. Either way, you should have your get-acquainted meeting as soon as possible. It’s important to remember that these meetings do not take the place of your one-on-one meetings. Both types are highly desirable.

THE GET-ACQUAINTED MEETING

You should have get-acquainted meetings with several groups: the staff, the library board, and the Friends of the Library. The basic structure of these meetings is similar, but some of the information you need to share may vary from group to group.

What does the staff want to know about you if you're an outside candidate? Well, what have you wanted to know about your new bosses when you were in a similar situation? Their experience? Their management style? A little bit about who they are? Your new staff is just as curious as you'd be.

What does the staff want to know about you if you're an in-house candidate? Sometimes starting off on the right foot is harder for the successful in-house candidate than for someone from the outside. You need to be especially sensitive to the other staff members who unsuccessfully applied for the job. Be prepared to deal with some bad or envious feelings. Some of them will want to know why you got this job and they didn't (something you can't and *shouldn't* address). Refer them to the human resources or personnel department instead). Some will want to know why you wanted this job in the first place. You might find it helpful to mention that the selection process is behind you now and that it is your desire to move forward as a team in a supportive and cooperative atmosphere. The staff needs enough information to begin to connect with you in your new role. You will find that once you become director, old friendships and relationships change. The staff wants to know how you will fulfill your *new* role.

What does the library board want to know about you? They want reassurance that you have the experience to do the job. They want to know if you're likeable and easy to work with. They want to know if you'll solicit their advice and listen to what they have to say.

What do the Friends of the Library want to know about you? They, too, want to know if you're likeable and easy to work with. They want to know if you have the experience to do the job. They want to know if you'll solicit their advice and listen to their suggestions.

Here is the basic structure for the get-acquainted meeting:

- Smile and greet people individually as they come in to the room. Pay attention to the culture of your organization, even when it comes to something as simple as what you want people to call you. In one organization, where everyone from the meter readers to the mayor was called by his or her first name, a new employee insisted on being referred to

as “Mr. Smith” and spent an inordinate amount of time correcting anyone who didn’t comply. His aloof actions alienated staff, and he became a textbook example that behavior trumps labels when it comes to connecting with people.

- Include everyone in the meeting. Custodians, secretarial staff, volunteers, and pages are often overlooked. Yet, these people are the backbone of your organization. Their support is vital.
- If, because of staff members’ conflicting schedules, you need to hold more than one meeting, do it.
- Have food! Serve donuts or cookies and something to drink. Remember the old adage “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach”? Guess what: The way to most people’s hearts is through their stomachs. One library director who has a very good relationship with her board buys a couple of fresh-baked pies before each meeting. The members of the board look forward to this treat and even offer suggestions for types of pies for the next meeting.
- Be sure to comment on how glad you are to be at this library and part of their team. Don’t forget to tell them that you look forward to working with them. Remind them that you’re relying on them to teach you about the library.
- The staff need some information so they can begin to connect with you:
 - Tell them a little bit about yourself, such as where you went to school, your marital status, whether you have kids, and if you have any hobbies or special interests. What would you want to know about a new boss if you were in their shoes?
 - Discuss why you want to work in this particular library.
 - Talk about your library experience.
 - Explain your management style. Don’t leave ’em guessing!
 - Do you have an open-door philosophy?
 - Are you a hands-on supervisor?
 - Are you (Heaven help everyone) a micromanager? Most people would like to be reassured that you’re not!
- Don’t blow your horn too loudly! That you played first violin in your high school orchestra, graduated summa cum laude, and have or been in every edition of *Who’s Who* since 1985 isn’t relevant, and telling your staff or