

Managing a one-person library

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The most important point to remember in managing a one-person library is that you, as the librarian, are really managing yourself. The aspects of management that you need to be aware of, therefore, are the importance of time management and setting priorities, planning, the service ethic, and networking.

Time management

Because of the limitations inherent in managing a one-person library, being able to manage your time effectively is of primary importance. It is necessary to be realistic in your appraisal of the amount of time taken to do specific tasks, and of the importance of each task to the overall objectives of the library. You will therefore have a clearer idea of which services are necessary, and which are just 'nice', and allocate your time accordingly.

The limitations of a small library are not necessarily a cause for apology. It is possible to do a particular job better than larger libraries, whose resources and services are less focused. The staff and management of the organisation which the library serves should also be aware of the limitations inherent in a small but specialised service. There should be no feeling of disappointment, either in them or in the librarian, if it becomes necessary to refer them on to another type of library or service. Many one-person libraries are also staffed by part-time librarians. This makes time management and prioritisation even more difficult. There is often a feeling of guilt on the part of the librarian that s/he is not able to provide all the services that s/he (or the users) would like. Although this feeling is natural, it is not necessary, as these limitations are imposed by the organisation, not the librarian.

Planning

Time put into planning and setting objectives is not wasted time, as without objectives, it is not possible to adequately prioritise work. Many one-person librarians complain about the lack of time to do everything that needs to be done. This is often true, but it is also true that time will be found when work is considered necessary to the good management of a library: and planning is as necessary as shelving books.

Service ethic

When planning it is most important to remember that the library's *raison d'être* is to provide a service to its particular clientele. It is often necessary for the librarian in a one-person library to have to do as much boring

and mundane work as there is challenging and interesting work. However, if that is what it takes to provide a good service to your users, then it is important work, and worthy of your best efforts: what is the good of a wonderful collection if it is shelved so badly that no-one can find anything?

A librarian in a one-person library must be prepared to do a little, a lot. However, the variety of tasks is often a compensation for the lack of time spent on each. Although it is often not possible to spend the amount of time some people would like to in order to catalogue an item 'to perfection', there is also satisfaction to be found in doing acquisitions, cataloguing, processing and circulation all in the one afternoon!

Networking

Being the only one of your kind in an organisation can often lead to a feeling of isolation and professional or personal stagnation. It is most important to overcome this by professional development (including attending conferences, meetings and seminars) and networking, both within the organisation and with other librarians in a similar situation.

'Management by walking around' is a very useful method of getting yourself (and therefore your library) known around the organisation, and also of discovering how you can best serve your current, or prospective, clients: use their suggestions or critiques to help improve your services.

Professional networking is essential to the manager of a one-person library in order to keep up-to-date on changes in the profession (especially in relation to technology) and also to gain the sort of support only possible from those who are in the same situation. A new special interest group, OPAL (One-Person Australian Librarians) has recently been formed to help in this regard. The purpose of this group will be as a national forum to discuss topical issues, provide support, share problems and solutions and exchange ideas unique to library professionals working in one-person libraries. It is intended that it will be for librarians in a wide range of libraries, from hospital and special libraries, to school libraries, and small public or TAFE libraries, to name a few. It will provide forums for discussion via a newsletter, meetings, library visits and hopefully via the Internet. Those interested in joining the group should contact Georgina Dale, Janssen Cilag, Locked Bag 30, PO, Lane Cove 2066, telephone (02) 779 2364, mobile 041 601 9271, fax (02) 779 2399. ■

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