

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Compiled from librarians in Missouri, Colorado, and Iowa.

From a Missouri Librarian

How did you prepare?

I didn't prepare. That was mistake number one.

What were your biggest challenges?

Supervising people who were much older and had much more experience than me. I also had no training or preparation in how to effectively do performance appraisals and that first year was a true learning experience for me.

How did you overcome them?

Unfortunately, I learned from my mistakes. I had to learn the hard way. But... now that I am no longer in a middle management position, I often see new managers making the same mistakes and I feel very confident in advising them at this point in my career.

What was the biggest surprise?

That I couldn't be their "friend" and that people were very sensitive about being treated fairly as compared with their peers that I supervised. It was hard because I moved up in the same department and became the supervisor of a woman who had been a close friend.

What was the easiest part of making this move?

I was so happy to be able to make changes and have the budget and chance to make changes in the department. Reference Services increased and improved.

What advice would you have for people just considering this move?

Go to training and/or read books! I didn't receive any formal training until I had been a supervisor/manager for 3-4 years and was working in another organization/library.

From an Iowan Librarian

How did you prepare?

WATCHED/OBSERVED MY FORMER BOSSES

What were your biggest challenges?

ONE LADY, CLOSE TO RETIREMENT, DIDN'T LIKE CHANGE, NEVER GOT HER MLS DEGREE, BITTER THAT SHE WAS NOT A SUPERVISOR AND WANTED POWER

How did you overcome them?

LISTENED, PATIENCE, BASICALLY WAITED HER OUT UNTIL SHE RETIRED; DIDN'T LET HER GET HER WAY ON BIG ISSUES WHERE SHE WAS WRONG.

What was the biggest surprise?

THE ISOLATION AND JEALOUSIES (I WAS SELECTED FROM WITHIN THE RANKS---NOT A GOOD IDEA)

What was the easiest part of making this move?

I LOVED THE NEW CHALLENGES AND HAVING MORE CONTROL AND FLEXIBILITY WITH THE BUDGET, AND I LOVED ADVOCACY AND THE ROLE I COULD PLAY OUTSIDE THE CAMPUS LIBRARY.

What advice would you have for people just considering this move?

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE PERSONALITY FOR LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT.

From an Iowa Librarian

It's been many years now since I moved into management, but I still remember how I struggled with how to develop a good working relationship with those I supervised, how to motivate them and have their respect. Nothing in library school management classes really addressed this.

Two books I found very helpful and wish I had read much earlier were: *In the Company of Women* by Heim and *Play Like a Man, Win Like a Woman* by Gail Evans. I keep these in my office and review them every so often.

Making a move from primarily utilizing technical skills to one where I needed to use other skills more such as planning and dealing with personnel was the easy part. I've always been a big picture person and so even though I had much to learn about personnel management I enjoyed the challenges.

When I became a first time director of a particularly toxic workplace I thought I could change the workplace culture and while I do think I improved it somewhat in the six years I was there most of my struggles came to naught. Only later did I hear a speaker on teamwork say that no one or two new people can change a toxic workplace unless the most toxic employees are fired or quit. I believe this and wish I had heard that speaker sooner. Instead I left for a much better situation and I insist that everyone I now supervise take individual responsibility for our positive workplace culture.

From a Colorado Librarian

As you know, I took a bit of a jump from working for XXX to the Associate Director of Support Services at XXX. At that time, I was the only Assoc. Director. XXX ran the public service side. It was pretty intimidating to not only suddenly have a whole crew of people to manage, but to be making senior level decisions on a daily basis. I felt like an impostor for the first six months or so. Of course, having XXX mentor me along was wonderful. He supported me and helped me with some of the more tricky decisions.

For a while I was writing a journal about how I felt and what was happening. Unfortunately, I deleted them all except a one page entry from Aug. 2001. In that, I describe feeling good and bad about the same decision. I knew it was right to ask the HR Manager to stop attending the circulation supervisors meeting, but also understood that he was feeling left out.

It seemed like I was constantly having people come to me with problems and complaints and never hearing the positive. I wasn't used to that. I think librarians coming from public service desks would really find that part of the job difficult since they get a certain amount of "strokes" in their job from patrons.

Learning how to coach people when they had performance issues was another big hurdle for me. I had to admit that I didn't like conflict, but quickly learned that putting off talking to someone was much worse than just getting it done and being honest.

Whenever a workshop or class was available on managing, hiring and keeping staff, I took them. Talking to other managers in the district helped me a lot too. The easiest part of the job was working with the training and web staff. Also, of course, I enjoyed crunching numbers and doing research as needed. I had a comfort level with all of those areas. Technical services and the computer and network side

of things were trickier for me since I didn't have as much experience in TS or computer areas.

I inherited a couple of difficult / moody staff in those departments too. Slowly over the years, the difficult people left and I was able to hire who I wanted. I love my team now. Let me know if there is more I can tell you.

From a Colorado Librarian

In 2005, I took over the Outreach Services department at XXXXX Library District. I had almost no supervisory experience, but I knew the business of outreach.

I was mentally but not emotionally prepared for the changes in my professional relationships, not just with former close coworkers who I now supervised, but with coworkers throughout the organization who had a strong distrust of management. I went from a position of lateral trust to a position of horizontal distrust for many of these folks and it was unsettling. As for my former close coworkers, they were wonderfully patient as I learned to be a supervisor, but it was awkward and often difficult to assume the leadership role I needed to take with that particular group.

As much as time and experience, hiring new staff who had no history with me as a coworker, who only knew me as their boss, did wonders for my self-confidence and self-concept as a supervisor. Without shared work history, which complicated some of my relationships with subordinates, I was able to figure out my true supervisory style which turned out to be pretty effective most of the time. I also figured out what my real weaknesses were -- those personal and professional qualities that tripped me up regardless of who the employee was.

Apart from the relationships, the hardest thing for me was learning the business of management. I had to go from task-oriented to concept-oriented work; I wasn't ordering books for patrons anymore, I was creating policies for how to deliver services. I wasn't dealing with patrons face-to-face as much as I was advising staff on how to do customer services. Wise hiring, effective training, fair and reasonable discipline, well-planned mentoring and coaching, negotiating between staff and upper management, planning new services, justifying expenditures, running good meetings, effective and appropriate delegation...I didn't learn ANY of this in library school. And the ongoing needs of a department don't go away just because the supervisor is learning. I didn't think I would EVER catch up that first year.

I had the best boss in the world, who was also learning a new job. She not only gave me all the support and encouragement and instruction I felt I needed, but also modeled how to gracefully assume command when your staff know (or think they know) more than you do.

From a Colorado Librarian

Real quick.....1.5 years ago I moved from Ref Librarian to Library Director of a small academic library having four librarians, no staff, and a dozen work study students. (The former director left and the institution wanted to move quickly to secure the position. Before that director came we'd gone w/o a director for a couple of years). Some comments:

- This wasn't something I ever thought I'd do in my life so I wasn't really in that "director" mindset
- I realized it was quite an opportunity, thankfully, however
- My challenge (I expected it) was that I would become the youngest woman supervising two older, more experienced women. However, neither of them sought or could be director or that would've been a completely different situation. I think it was a factor for a time as I needed to earn their trust.
- Though they didn't desire being director they weren't real gung ho for me to be director. It wasn't a personal thing (I don't think) as much as it was my lack of experience, vision, etc. They (like the admin) were realistic in realizing the difficulty XXX Univ. always has in filling any position and esp lib director so they gave me modest support.

- This is a place where people work quite independently and are self directed, which is great. I didn't make any big changes.
- One mistake that I've since corrected was to be too firm about schedules and time worked with faithful, professional librarians who do their jobs but on flexible schedules. I tried to reign that in more but I realized that that was not necessary or productive. I need to let these librarians work the best way they want. We are faculty here at XXX U and even though we have regular 40 hr work weeks we also have some flexibility. Once I adjusted that has helped a lot.
- I brought on a new librarian and for him I did need to give good direction, goals, expectations, and checks.
- Another thing I had to do was to leave my old job! The new librarian was now the work study supervisor, which is what I'd done. For awhile I kept writing down notes to them and doing my old job (because he wasn't doing it but that was partly because I kept doing it). That didn't help anyone here. That's gotten a lot better because I really did step out of that.
- I did and do have great support from our campus community and that was and is wonderful.

From a Colorado Librarian

I moved up into management at a young age during graduate school (20 years ago) but I remember it like it was yesterday. I became a night supervisor at the Circulation desk at the large University where I was a student. Then after a year of that I graduated with my MLS and immediately became the Head of Adult Services in XXX Town, completely managing a department at the tender age or 25.

My biggest pitfalls:

- Thinking that because I had worked in libraries for so long, I already knew everything I needed to know. I did have an advantage having worked in the positions I was now supervising, but I didn't know how to manage them.
- Not admitting when I needed help. I was afraid, especially after I got my MLS, that people would think I wasn't qualified to do the job if I asked too many questions. Even though others did look at me that way (generally long-time "non-MLS" employees), I needed to have the confidence that I was qualified. That truly learning my job correctly and delegating appropriately were what I needed to do and that those who were criticizing me were going to do it no matter how well I did my job.
- Trying to be friends with everyone. Since I had been one of them I wanted to prove that I wouldn't "turn into management". Big mistake. I undermined my own authority. I didn't have to turn into a stuck-up tyrant, but I also couldn't be the same person I was when I was shelving or working the front desk. I had different and more responsibilities.

Ironically, these same pitfalls occur even to experience managers when they move to other positions or libraries. It's not just when you become a manager for the first time.