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## Toward a Code of Ethics for Acquisitions Librarians

Barbara C. Dean  
*Fairfax County Public Library*

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# Toward a Code of Ethics for Acquisitions Librarians

by **Barbara C. Dean** (Assistant Coordinator for Collection Analysis Fairfax Co. Public Library)

[As a feature for this issue of *ATG*, **Barbara Dean** has done the difficult job of constructing a code of ethics to share with us. And we are lucky enough to have responses to this code from **Karen Schmidt**, **Joe Barker**, and **Gary Shirk**. Thanks go to all of them! — Ed]

Acquisitions librarians have discussed ethics, and what constitutes a successful code of ethics for some time. Developing one's own code takes years of experience and thought, and some have found themselves in trouble for actions they did not suspect were improper.

Below is an attempt to codify the principles acquisitions librarians, their institutions, and their suppliers can agree belong in a code of ethics. Most are followed by examples of the every-day tasks to which they apply. Concepts appropriate to all librarians, such as protecting authors' rights and fighting censorship, are omitted because they belong in a broader discussion.

## 1) Acquisitions librarians shall be careful stewards of their institution's resources.

Negotiate a high discount and/or a low service fee with the supplier. The librarian's position in a negotiation is based on her knowledge of how much the library plans to spend with a supplier, the mix of titles to be ordered, and the supplier's business.

Use year-end windfalls to buy materials to strengthen the library's collection. Have a group of pre-selected titles ready to order, and/or a good working relationship with selectors who will provide titles quickly, and know which vendors have short turn-around times.

Manage people effectively. Hire the right people for the right jobs, provide them with effective, efficient, and clearly written policies and procedures, and encourage staff to do their best.

## 2) Acquisitions librarians shall be honest in their dealings with suppliers.

Submit claims only for periodical issues not received rather than for those received but later lost. Write requests for bids or proposals with the library's needs in mind rather than a favored supplier's services. Return books sent on approval in the specified time allowed by the supplier. Order books identified by approval plan forms from the supplier who sent the forms.

## 3) Acquisitions librarians shall communicate fully with vendors.

If the materials budget is cut mid-year, tell the vendor how your business will be affected. If there are organizational changes in the library, tell the vendor if the decision-making process has changed, and how.

## 4) Acquisitions librarians shall not make the vendor responsible for any problems within the library.

Do not overspend or over extend the budget and then expect the vendor to wait for payment.

## 5) Acquisitions librarians shall not participate in transactions on behalf of the library when:

— They are employed by the supplier.

— They, their business partner, or a member of their immediate family hold a position with a supplier "such as an officer, director, trustee, partner, or the like, or is employed in a capacity involving personal and substantial participation in the procurement transaction, or owns or controls an interest of more than five percent." (From *Professional and Consultant Services Procurement Policy of Fairfax County*, 11 December 1989, p.25.)

— They, their partner, or a member of

their immediate family have a financial interest in the transaction.

— They, their partner, or a member of their immediate family are "negotiating or have an arrangement concerning prospective employment" with the supplier. (Quote from above, page 25)

## 6) Acquisitions librarians shall not "solicit, demand, accept or agree to accept . . . any payment, loan, subscription, advance, or deposit of money, service or anything of more than nominal or minimal value . . . unless consideration of substantially equal or greater value is exchanged." (Quote from above, page 25)

## 7) Acquisitions librarians shall not accept a job with a supplier doing business with the library or its parent institution for at least one year after leaving the library's employ unless the librarian provides written notification to the library before beginning work for the supplier.

## 8) Acquisitions librarians shall avoid all situations in which the appearance of conflict of interest exists.

Do not attend a costly event as a supplier's guest and then begin doing business or increase business with that supplier.

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## Reactions ==

### Ethics is Like Pornography: A Reaction to "Toward a Code of Ethics for Acquisitions Librarians"

by **Karen A. Schmidt** (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

Ethics is the hot topic of the nineties, and not just in librarianship. Jim Bakker bilked thousands of people out of tens of thousands of dollars. Gary Hart lied to the media about his personal life. Leona Helmsley manipulated her records and lied on her tax forms. George Bush may have known about the Iran-Contra negotiations. His son Neil — well, who knows?

In some of these cases, and in countless others, laws were broken and our legal system frequently meted out its justice on the perpetrators. What really ties these people together, however, is our sense of outrage and indignity that Ethical Standards may have been trod upon. As a society, we expect that people will not lie, cheat or steal, and when