June 1997

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Recommended Citation

Montgomery, Jack G. and Alvin, Glenda (1997) "Inside Pandora's Box: Issues in Management," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 9: Iss. 3, Article 30.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2155>

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Inside Pandora's Box: Issues in Management

Column Editor: **Jack G. Montgomery** (Technical Services and Collection Management Librarian, Law Library, U. of Missouri- Columbia) <MONTGOMERY@law.missouri.edu>

As today's library environment has become more technically complex, so too has its organizational structure become a veritable cauldron of complex issues and concerns. Today's library director, middle manager or first level supervisor must be able to deal effectively with an ever-increasing diversity of people and work-related issues. In the past, learning to manage people and processes was only given the vaguest lip-service in the professional educational literature and the librarian was supposed to acquire his or her management skills while on the job or under the apprenticeship of an older colleagues. Trial and error were the order of the day with sometimes disastrous results. It is the hope of the editorial staff

of ATG to provide a practical forum for the exchange of ideas and issues concerning this most important professional skill. We will welcome your ideas and responses and hopefully, we can begin to offer our collective wealth of scholarship and personal experience to both the novice and seasoned librarian. Issues of management and supervision are classically imprecise and often do not offer quick or easy solutions. I hope you will consider sharing your valuable experiences with your colleagues. If you would like to write an article on this topic, please contact me at (573)882-7739 or at <montgomery@law.mis-souri.edu>. I look forward to hearing from you. — JM

Fighting Wars on the Acquisitions Front: The Librarian as Battle General by Glenda Alvin (Acquisitions/Collection Management Librarian, The College of New Jersey) <alvin@tcnj.edu>

The combatants:

Over the years, as I have been assailed by the incoming flak from the contentious factions that confront Acquisitions and Collection Development responsibilities, I have at times felt myself to be under siege. Demands for "rush" orders for titles that will not be needed for two to three months, requests for out of print searches for arbitrarily dubbed "classics," purchase orders that disappear courtesy of the U.S. Mail, and gift textbooks from alumni who graduated twenty years ago, are only part of the light artillery. At times, Business Services departments, Public Services Librarians, vendors, faculty, staff, antiquated acquisition systems, and the library administration can be cast in the roles of opposing armies who are attempting to overrun the Acquisitions Department. Librarians would do well to survey the battlefield, cautiously engage their adversaries, and plot a strategy that will allow them to maintain a lasting peace.

The ground forces:

Business Services Departments are supposed to efficiently process purchase orders by encumbering the correct amounts and liquidating invoice charges when final payments are received. One would assume that they promptly send out checks to publishers, jobbers, and other vendors and in cases of prepayment, always include a copy of the purchase order so that the vendor will know why they are receiving money and what goods and/or services are expected in return. Because they are accounting and bookkeeping specialists, one could assume that these experts conscientiously enter payment data, that their balances are always correct, and that their procedures are logical and consistently followed.

Any Acquisitions librarian who is persuaded by these assumptions is in perilous danger of being ambushed. Although they may not provide any updated written procedures as to how purchase orders, invoices, and check requests are supposed to be processed and will change procedures without any written or verbal notice, Business Services Departments have no qualms about complaining that the Acquisitions Department did not follow a specific procedure. If the balances are wrong, the burden of proof usually falls on the library, thus necessitating that the Acquisitions department waste time auditing its accounts and making photocopies of past paperwork such as purchase orders, invoices, partial payments, and check requests.

Trench digging in the form of repeated telephone calls and memos requesting corrections or clarifications may yield very little success. Additional shelling comes in the form of vendors who either repeatedly call the library or send annoying letters from collection agencies, usually on the letterhead of an attorney's office, demanding payments for materials the Business Services department has not yet gotten around to processing due to staff shortages, backlogs, end of the fiscal year close-out, etc.,.

The only way to keep hostilities from escalating is to maintain a cordial rapport with the Purchasing Manager and the Accounts Payable Supervisor. They make mistakes, but guess what? So does the library. If telephone calls do not bring desired results, then schedule meetings to clarify ongoing problems, take along paperwork, and supporting data to demon-

strate why corrective measures are needed. Business Services Departments, especially at state funded institutions, always have the long shadow of the State Auditor's Office hanging over them and often welcome the opportunity to identify areas for improvement before they become documented by an outside agency. The library's Acquisitions Department should demonstrate that it is doing all that it can to be helpful.

For example, our Acquisitions Department discovered that the Business Services Department was posting encumbrances to our account for the same order twice. Upon investigation, it was discovered that there was a problem with mega publishers like Prentice-Hall/Simon & Schuster, SRA/ McGraw-Hill and R.R. Bowker/Reed Reference who have several imprints and accept orders to one company or division and send invoices from another. We addressed the purchase order to SRA and Purchasing Department filed it under SRA. The invoice came from McGraw-Hill Educational and Professional Publications (SRA Division was in small print), and even though the purchase order number was cited on the invoice, the Business Services bookkeepers looked for a purchase order under McGraw-Hill, instead of SRA. Not finding anything under McGraw-Hill, they posted a duplicate encumbrance and payment on the college's financial system under McGraw-Hill. We bartered a truce on this issue by having the library bookkeeper write on the invoice "bill to ..." to the company that received the purchase order. To assist with liquidating the bal-

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ances in our purchase orders, we ordered large print 36 pt stamps with red ink which state "Final" and "Partial" to alert Accounts Payable personnel to either close out the balance remaining on the purchase or leave it open for further shipments.

Friendly fire

Public Service Librarians have been known to launch offensives and contribute their fair share of grenade tossing in and around the Acquisitions/Collection Development Department. Some librarians regard Reference and Public Service as their calling in life; one could say that they were commissioned. They have never served duty that required purchasing a book in a library setting. Sometimes it appears that they do not realize that the books they order are not sent to the vendor the very day that the order is dropped off in the Acquisitions Department and that just because a book shows up in *Books in Print*, *Choice*, or *Library Journal*, it does not mean it is available and ready to be shipped from the vendor or publisher. The book may not yet be published, out of stock, or had its publication canceled. In some cases Reference Librarians may not realize that although the fiscal year may officially end on June 30, the Business Services Department may start closing out the fiscal year in May and refuse to accept any purchase orders or check requests after a specified date. This means that all of their orders need to be submitted during the winter so that the library's budget will be encumbered as much as possible. Occasionally confusion may arise because the selectors thought their allocations was fully encumbered and then discover late in the fiscal year that money is remaining in their account because of cancellations, requests for titles that have not been published, and discounts.

In order to maintain peace, it is best to keep the communication lines open. If the Public Services Librarians meet, ask to be on the agenda to discuss how orders are be processed. If necessary, talk them step-by-step through the workflow issues such as pre-order searching, ordering, and receiving, that are required to process the number and variety of orders the department typically handles. In my case, I waited until after the ordering deadline, loaded all of the order requests cards onto a book cart and wheeled them into the meeting and began my discussion with "This is what happens to the order request once it is delivered to Acquisitions." Be prepared to justify the deployment of your staff and how they handle their tasks. Ask for questions and try to accommodate reasonable suggestions. However, be careful not to compromise or retreat to the point where the Acquisitions staff has to take on unnecessary, labor intensive, or time con-

suming tasks that will diminish their productivity and effectiveness.

Weapons of Choice

The library administration can bring trouble by air, land or by sea. They can drop bombs from out of nowhere in the form of adding on additional departmental processing tasks, without adequate support staff or not filling critical positions that facilitate the workflow. They can also add so many responsibilities into the Acquisitions Librarian's job that he or she finds it difficult to plan, manage, and organize. Nowadays this comes in the Trojan Horse guise of "Team Management" which usually means that they want one Acquisitions Librarian to do the work formerly handled by two or three librarians ("Acquisitions and Cataloging Librarian," "Acquisitions and Serials Librarian," "Acquisitions and Bibliographic Instruction Librarian," "Acquisitions and Preservation Librarian," "Acquisitions and Collection Development Librarian" or "Acquisitions and Circulation Librarian") with a reduced staff. My personal "team" favorite is "Technical Services Librarian" which calls for a "generalist" or jack of all trades type who can perform acquisitions, cataloging, collection development, bibliographic instruction, staff supervision, and reference desk hours on nights and weekends. The library administration can bring out the managerial tanks and rollover the Acquisitions Department by insisting on purchasing an online system that is not Acquisitions friendly or insisting on amortizing and trying to wring the last penny out of a system that has grown too antiquated for the current library workload or electronic environment. The library administration can deploy warships with big guns and form a blockade surrounding issues such as adequate computer maintenance, software support and willingness to pay for value-added services such as plasticizing and tattle taping which will mitigate lack of staff and student assistant hours.

The best tactical strategy is to maintain data, statistical and otherwise, concerning not only the types of work performed by the department, but how much time it takes to accomplish the work. Monthly and annual reports should reflect the amount of work accomplished in the department from the librarian down to the student assistants. It's also a good idea to know the hourly wage of the support staff in the department, so that the cost effectiveness of having staff perform simple, clerical tasks, such as applying plastic covers to paperback books or inserting tattle tapes, can be compared to the cost of outsourcing these processes to a library jobber.

The Acquisitions staff can be a mine field for personnel problems. The staff can exhibit hostile aggression in the form of resisting technological advances encouraged by integrated automation systems and computerization of tasks, which alter or

eliminate the way they perform their tasks, thus permanently altering their work environment in ways they find discomfiting. When the troops start grumbling and complaining about changes in their duty as-

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signments or show irritation with new methods of accomplishing tasks, it is time to implement team building initiatives in order to avoid mutiny. The first order of business is to listen to their concerns and make sure that their expectations are reasonable. Analyze the effect of the changes in their jobs and decide what is a manageable workload for each staff member based on their ability, outlook, and education. Secondly, try to convince them that the changes will bring more effective and efficient methods for enhancing the department's workflow. The third step is to make certain that each affected person has enough training in the new procedures or proper equipment to feel confident that they can do the job. Since everybody in the department is required to adapt to the changes, everybody has a stake in its success. Be sure that the support staff is allowed to participate in the restructuring of the department, so that they become an active partner in the transition. Try not to just ask for their suggestions, but implement those with merit and make sure that the staff member gets the credit for the success of the procedures or processes. Encourage innovation and allow the staff to assume a measure of control over how they go about accomplishing their new assignments.

The air forces

Carpet bombing from publishers comes via telephone and the U.S. Mail in the form of multiple copies of catalogs and flyers addressed to everybody in the building, except possibly the custodial staff. Membership in library organizations means landing on mail lists that allow

publishers to target air strikes at home addresses. To shore up their position, publishers deploy the telemarketing platoons to bombard the besieged acquisitions, collection development librarians, and bibliographers with rapid fire monologues about the virtues of their latest weapon for the library's arsenal to fight ignorance at home and abroad. Strafing comes in the form of multiple copies of invoices which arrive after checks have been processed and mailed, as well as notices from collection agencies threatening dire consequences if payment is not received for shipments they sent the previous month. Having been mired in the bureaucracy of state supported schools for the better part of my career, I have begun to become irritated with those outside of its confines that expect anything to be processed rapidly, or for that matter promptly.

Faculty Stealth bombers are a source of danger and one must tread cautiously in their wake. Retiring faculty will decide to donate the contents of their offices, which usually arrive in numerous boxes or crates, in various condition levels. Professors who go off on foreign vacations or visit antiquarian bookstores and purchase items that they think should be in the library and expect cash reimbursement can be a no man's land. Explosions can erupt from book requests submitted on illegibly written napkins or scraps of paper, requests that the library purchase course required textbooks to put on "Reserve," and requests for personal income tax letters for gifts which are comprised of review copies.

Changing fronts

Ten years ago, many Acquisitions Librarians processed orders manually, used PC based systems such as Bibbase or MATTS, or implemented first generation

mainframe dependent systems like CLSI, NOTIS, DRA, or GEAC. Their budget arsenal included funds for monographs, periodicals, pamphlets, maps, government documents, microform, and media such as kits, videos, and music compact discs. Today, many Acquisitions and/or Collection Development Librarians are making the transition to second generation client/server based system like SIRSI, Innovative Interfaces, Horizon, and Endeavor. Their budgets now have allocations for CD-ROMs, electronic journals, online searching, document delivery, online periodical tapes, network licenses, etc.

As the automation battlegrounds shift from mainframe to client server, the arms and armament are transformed from paper formats to electronic, and Acquisitions Librarians are experiencing casualties in the form of shrinking staffs and diminishing budgets. They have had to implement counter measures for organizing viable workflows which include re-designed staff assignments and doing more with less. With automation, the support staff has been forced to learn new skills and assume different responsibilities.

For the past several years the orders of march have been resource-sharing, which is being driven by skyrocketing costs in periodicals and monographs. Acquisitions Librarians are paying for ownership of materials, as well as access to resources, something few of us did ten years ago. Libraries are endeavoring to join consortia and other groups in order to help defray the costs of expensive research materials such as CD-ROMs and multi-volume reference sets. Document delivery is a relatively new phenomenon in resource-sharing, but other methods such as interlibrary loan and reciprocal borrowing agreements among libraries in local areas have been around for many years.

Peace negotiations

As the Battle General, the Acquisitions Librarian or Collection Development Librarian stands in the midst of the fray, surveying the assailing forces, urging her troops on, and mapping out strategies for peace settlement. Sometimes a lasting peace is too elusive and he or she has to settle for an assortment of truces. Staying abreast of the latest technologies is always a requirement, but people skills are often what is called upon the most. Good humor, flexibility, and a thick skin are some of the most potent weapons an Acquisitions Librarian can wield.

Interpersonal communication among the Acquisitions Department's staff as well as clear communication lines with the library administration, library liaisons, and selectors, and the Business Service department reduces hostile skirmishes and the need for hand to hand combat.

Good luck!

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