

ASK A DIRECTOR

# Successful Leadership

Question: How do you utilize your leadership and management capabilities to create success and visibility in your library?



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**M**y friend Greg Lambert once wrote something that has stuck with me: “Law library leadership has fundamentally changed in the last decade. It is no longer about reporting on the number of books on the shelf, or how to turn empty shelving into collaboration spaces or coffee bars. It is about positioning the library in a manner that aligns all our resources—internal and external, human and information—for the best possible outcome. It’s about risk management, negotiating the best deals with very expensive vendors, community outreach, and collaboration.”

I believe that is true. I also believe that leadership is about turning over every rock to see if it may bring us revenue. It’s about evaluating whatever comes, and making sense of how the law library can best function in that new environment. Above all, leadership is about *planning for the future*.

My feeling is that in good times and bad, a leader has to be able to maintain staff morale. You have to nurture the strength of the team. Good communication is essential, but communicating well and efficiently is essential as well—praising others, thanking others, and celebrating good work and achievements. To do this we have many communication outlets: a short monthly newsletter about important directions and activities,

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and a management group that works together to solve day-to-day problems as an interdependent unit, allowing us to benefit from the input of all staff. We hold quarterly staff meetings for training and mentoring, twice monthly educational sessions, daily staff check-ins, service incentive programs, monthly birthday celebrations, monthly open forums with the director, surprise rewards for great service, and a staff message board relaying important project news. In all these examples, we praise good work and good ideas and measure the efforts we are making. We

know that we are making a difference, and that is always nice to hear.

Of course, financial rewards are just as important as praise. Over the years I have given across-the-board raises, merit-based raises, and bonuses—I keep Visa, Starbucks, and other gift cards of different amounts handy for surprise accolades and on-the-spot appreciation. For every gift or bonus or raise, people are genuinely grateful because they know that if I am giving money to them, it has to come from somewhere else. This means *they* are the priority.

Our reality is that law library revenue has fallen nearly 40 percent since 2008, and we aren't expecting it to come back. With limited staff and a diminishing budget, we have to be very selective about where we put our resources. We want to use staff, databases, and our print materials to maximum advantage. However, when it comes down to it, I am leading a group of *people*—not a group of books or databases. That means I think of them first before committing the library to a project that requires going that extra mile.

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