

Quick-Start Guide for New Managers in Academic Libraries

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ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG



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Contents

Front Matter	vii
About the Authors	viii
Acknowledgements	x
Introduction	1
SECTION I. <u>YOUR ROLE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION</u>	
1. The Role of Middle Management Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig	7
2. The Scope of Your Role Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig	9
3. Information Sharing Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig	11
4. Goal Setting Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig	13
5. Managing Change Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig	15
6. Managing Up Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig	19
SECTION II. <u>MANAGING TEAMS AND INDIVIDUALS</u>	
7. Managing Teams Andrew Colgoni; Monica Rettig; and Randy Oldham	23
8. Meetings: Chairing and Facilitation Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig	27
9. Project Management Andrew Colgoni and Randy Oldham	30
10. Managing Individuals Andrew Colgoni; Monica Rettig; and Randy Oldham	34
11. Delegation of Responsibilities Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig	38
12. The Power of Recognition and Acknowledgement Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig	41

SECTION III. HUMAN RESOURCES

- | | | |
|-----|---|----|
| 13. | Hiring and Onboarding
Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig | 45 |
| 14. | Managing in a Unionized Environment
Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig | 48 |

SECTION IV. MANAGEMENT STYLES AND APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP

- | | | |
|-----|---|----|
| 15. | Self-Awareness and Reflective Practice
Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig | 53 |
| 16. | What Matters Most? Leadership Values and Styles
Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig | 55 |
| 17. | Intent and Impact
Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig | 58 |
| 18. | Difficult Conversations
Andrew Colgoni; Monica Rettig; and Randy Oldham | 61 |
| 19. | Process and Decision Making
Andrew Colgoni; Monica Rettig; and Randy Oldham | 64 |
| 20. | Manager Growth and Resilience
Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig | 67 |
| | Conclusion | 73 |
| | Longer & Broader Reads | 74 |
| | Suggestions and Feedback | 75 |

Front Matter

By Andrew Colgoni and Monica Rettig.

Contributions from Randy Oldham (chapters 7, 9, 10, 18, and 19).

No large language models or generative artificial intelligence were used in the creation of this text.

The content of this guide shall not be used for ingestion into or training of any large language models or other artificial intelligence/machine learning models without the explicit consent of the authors.

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About the Authors

ANDREW COLGONI, CO-AUTHOR

I am currently the Associate University Librarian, Student Success at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada (2019 to present). In this administrative role, I support multiple departments within the library and our library facilities. Prior to this, I was in a middle-management role as the head of services (and a teaching librarian!) at a campus branch library at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

I have been fortunate to be able to participate in a number of in-person leadership training courses over my career, but I've seen that these aren't available to everyone, and many managers must learn on the job. Creating this guide is a small way to support that learning, and to give back to others some of what I've gleaned from formal training, on-the-job experiences, hard lessons, and observation. Working on this project aligns with my interests in management, leadership, and mentorship within the library profession.

I was able to take advantage of an administrative leave to write this guide.

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MONICA RETTIG, CO-AUTHOR

I am currently the Evidence Synthesis Librarian at Brock University in Ontario, Canada. My management experience includes eight years as a middle manager (Head of Access Services) and eighteen months in an interim administrator role (Acting Associate University Librarian, Research).

I experienced a steep and significant learning curve at the start of my first management position. While I had confidently led projects as a librarian, there was a whole world of supervisor demands and responsibilities that had been previously invisible to me. I realized these gaps through challenging experiences and tough lessons along the way. I attended the local HR-led training, but often felt there was a cultural mismatch with the library environment. Formal librarian management training was strong, but also costly and offered infrequently. I was fortunate to find a supportive mentor early on and also benefitted greatly from a small group of peer mentors from other libraries. I believe that we, as a sector, can do better in supporting managers in academic libraries. And, above all, I am convinced that a capable and competent manager can make a positive difference in the workplace experience for a library worker. This is what motivated me to develop this guide with my fellow contributors and authors.

My other interests include mentorship, philosophies of power and feminist leadership, the 'librarian-staff divide', and Wikipedia editing.

This book was a 2025-2026 sabbatical project.

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Randy Oldham is the Head of Digital Strategy & Technology at the University of Guelph Library (2022 to present).

I began my management journey in 2009 as manager of web at the University of Guelph Library. When I started this role, I had no formal leadership experience, however, I had engaged in a number of training and development courses offered through the University of Guelph HR department. I had enjoyed these training opportunities immensely, dipping my toes into diverse leadership topics including learning how to navigate difficult conversations, personal leadership at work, and motivating others. I felt like I had a responsibility to the organization, my team, and myself, to continue to add to my leadership toolbelt. I enrolled in the Master's in Leadership program offered at the University of Guelph. I completed this program while working full time which provided me with ample opportunities to inform my scholarship with practical real-life experiences, and vice versa.

I was excited to participate in this project as a way to give back to the community and provide leadership resources to new and emerging leaders. Often times, managers and leaders can find themselves in their first leadership position because they've been at the organization for a while, not necessarily because they have leadership skills. A free resource like this project can provide practical guidance to support these new leaders, while providing more seasoned leaders an opportunity to add to their skills.

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Introduction

Becoming a manager in an academic library requires gaining mastery across a number of different areas, including interpersonal interaction, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Developing the ability to successfully navigate complex workplace dynamics will involve practices and techniques varying from relationship management to project planning to improved self-awareness. Some of these competencies are commonly called 'soft skills.' You will likely need to use these skills as much, if not more, than your well-developed technical skills or subject expertise. This guide will largely cover these kinds of behaviours and skills, which are so key to your success as a manager.

WHY A QUICK-START GUIDE?

In academic libraries, managers are often entering the role with little to no experience managing people. Before becoming managers, they are typically domain experts, with years of experience working in their specific area. Traditional entry-level academic library roles are often very entrepreneurial, like the liaison librarian, working largely on their own. Given this context, being thrust into a leadership role with the responsibility of managing a department full of people is a radical shift. In our experience, academic libraries do not offer adequate support at this important time of need, and new managers are often learning on the job, with the possibility of formal training sometime in the future.¹ For some, the context of insufficient training plus the demands of a challenging new role leads to feelings of inadequacy or 'imposter syndrome.' This guide, we hope, will show you that you have what it takes to manage in an academic library.

We have supplemented the chapters with relevant external readings and other media. Much of the popular management guidance is created with for-profit, corporate workplaces in mind and, while some of the advice is applicable across sectors, we have found that some aspects are a cultural mismatch in the academic library environment. In this guide, we seek to create a resource that acknowledges how and where our workplaces are different, while pulling from the best available material.

We also want it to be free and open, available to anyone when they need it.

1. A recent project growing out of the annual 'Conference on Academic Library Management' explored the gaps in developing managerial skills in academic libraries. Cook *et al.*'s findings assert that, "Academic library managers seek development in soft skills related to affective management, e.g., prosocial skills, psychosocial skills, interpersonal skills, people skills, emotional intelligence, social skills, person-centered skills" (p28). Cook, D. B., Kirker, M. J., Bell, K. K., Douglas, V. A., James, H., Smothers, D., & Smith-Cruz, S. (2025). *Expanding the Impact of the Conference on Academic Library Management: Identifying Gaps and Opportunities in Professional Development Support for Managers* [White paper]. Institute of Museum and Library Services Grant. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6t589571>

WHO IS THIS FOR?

This guide is meant for those of you about to enter management or have recently become a manager in an academic library. Of course, anyone can use this guide, and it may be useful for those considering career progression.

It is meant to be shorter than a full book (of which there are many that cover this topic), but more in-depth than a single academic paper or video. Think of it as a launchpad to get you up to speed quickly.

We have selected principles that we personally felt were most valuable to address, based on our lived experience as managers. We recognize this approach can be an asset but also a limitation in the text. This book does not presuppose nor attempt to describe a universal manager experience. A librarian manager will be navigating a unique environment and bringing to bear their own lived experience, positionality, and identity. The authors are writing from a perspective rooted in the Canadian academic library context, but we hope the lessons are largely transferable to other countries' contexts.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Many of the topics are much larger and deeper than our overview, and so we have included further readings for those that wish to learn more. We have selected open-access or web content in most cases. At the end of this guide are longer reads, which are often books or closed access resources for those interested in much more coverage on a given topic.

While we have ordered sections and chapters to be read sequentially, the book can just as easily be read in whatever order you like. We have indicated with in-text links where we are connecting ideas to other chapters.

A core theme of this guide is self-reflection, which is one of the primary ways we come to understand ourselves as managers, and in turn, get better at it. We invite you, as you read through the guide, to reflect on the advice we offer and consider if it is right for you, or if it makes sense in your library's context, or as it relates to your personal identity and lived experience.

BEYOND THIS GUIDE

If you are a new manager, we recommend you seek out a mentor with whom you can speak openly about your role. This might be someone within your own organization who has experience in management and whom you respect. Another great option is finding a peer at another institution in the same or similar role, as they will often have the same kinds of experiences and challenges as you. Look to your local associations to see if there is a mentoring program available that can do the work of matching you with an experienced mentor.

If it is feasible, speak to your own manager about participating in training opportunities. These are often offered to academic library workers through consortia at the province/state or national level. Your own institution's human resources department may offer training, and several private library-focused companies also offer these. If you have the available funds, a private coach is another possibility.

YOUR FEEDBACK AND SUGGESTIONS

At the [very end of this book](#) we have included a Google form to solicit your feedback and thoughts about this guide. We welcome your ideas about how we can improve it, topics we should cover, or resources to add, for example. We look forward to hearing from you.

SECTION I

YOUR ROLE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

CHAPTER 1

The Role of Middle Management

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

Typically, when you enter management in an academic library, you begin in a role that is sometimes called a 'mid-level' or 'middle' manager. This kind of management role is named after the unique squeeze this role experiences: it is somewhere between the library's administration and the library workers you are supervising. These roles in academic libraries are sometimes called team lead, unit head, department head, library manager, and so on.

Author's Note

Throughout this document, we'll be referring to the organizational unit you manage as a '**department**' and the collection of people that report to you as your '**team**'. Depending on the size of your academic library, you may have several layers of management above you, or maybe just one. The senior-most leaders in your library, who usually consist of your University Librarian/Dean and Associate University Librarians/Deans (and often a few other administrative roles) we'll call '**library administration**'. Glossary terms throughout are linked with a dotted underline.

As a mid-level manager, you are balancing two interests: the needs and goals of your department and also those of the library organization. As the manager responsible for a department, you are that department's 'champion' in discussions with library administration and your peers. You will know more than anyone else what your team is good at and where it has challenges. As one of the library's managers, you are also responsible for ensuring that your department meets organizational goals, is aligned with strategic plans, responds to changes and plans from library administration, and collaborates effectively with other departments. In most instances these dual responsibilities are neatly aligned: your department has a specific role to play within the library, the goals are clearly laid out in a strategic plan, and the individuals that report to you understand and are working towards those goals.

A challenge comes when these two interests (the library and your department) are not in alignment. This can happen in either direction. For example, there may be a decision from your library's leadership about a change or new goal, and members of your team do not agree with this direction. Conversely, members of your team have a particular desire for their department (i.e. to change something, stop doing something, etc.), and your library leadership does not agree. As the manager in the middle, these 'organizational' conflicts become your responsibility and can be quite sensitive to manage.

A common mistake for new managers is to assume that the default position should be to defend their department in every situation (and sometimes at all costs), putting them and their department in conflict with

the organization or other departments. While this position can certainly gain the favour of the people that report to you, you will quickly lose the trust of the library's administration and/or your middle manager peers.

A better way to treat these kinds of organizational conflicts is to take a holistic, nuanced view, and to consider each one individually. If you or your team has an objection to a direction from library leadership, it is certainly your role to articulate that opinion in the appropriate forum. The opinion should, whenever possible, be evidence-based, and identify the particular ways the direction will impact your team. In some cases, you won't necessarily agree with the objection your reports have raised. Be willing to explain to your team that you don't agree with them, and why, but that you hear their concerns, take them seriously, and will ensure they are also heard by the appropriate people in your library's administration.

Your peer middle managers are your allies. They are usually in very similar situations to your own and are dealing with (or have dealt with previously) departmental challenges like yours. This may not always be smooth sailing, particularly when departments have different priorities or are facing uneven budgetary pressures. Avoid departmental silos, find common ground, foster relationships with these peers, and find ways to share and collaborate. Organizational management teams or committees, when available, are one venue where this can happen.

As a middle manager, you have a responsibility to both the library organization *and* your department, and these should be in balance rather than in conflict. More often than not, your job is to find solutions and compromises rather than 'wins.'

Further Reading

Gordon I. (2021). **Toughest job in the library.** *Library Management*, 42(1-2), 46–55. <https://brocku.scholaris.ca/items/03c72aa0-316c-42e9-87a9-a02ed3412337>

Gordon writes a reflective article that elevates and celebrates the role of the middle manager in the academic library. The author describes the 'caught in the middle' feeling that we described in this chapter and articulates some of the skills and competencies required of the library middle manager.

Google. (n.d.). **Following the data: The research behind great managers at Google.** <https://rework.withgoogle.com/intl/en/guides/managers-research-behind-great-managers>

Google conducted a multi-year internal research project to try and understand what makes for a great manager within their company, and the resulting list of 10 key behaviours relies almost entirely on non-technical skills. Of interest is to see the extent that non-technical managerial skills are critical in both corporate and non-corporate settings.

CHAPTER 2

The Scope of Your Role

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

Your role as a manager is bounded; the things you can do and not do in your managerial role are defined by your job description and possibly a collective agreement. It is also less visibly bounded by the job descriptions of other people in your library (and sometimes campus), both those who report to you and those who don't. It is a good idea to give a close read of your job description and any other union or university rules that govern your role, so you have these internalized. Follow this up by learning about the roles of the people that report to you, and other people in the organization that might have roles that bump up or overlap with your own or the work of your **department**.

Having this understanding will help you with activities like delegating work to the appropriate person(s), knowing when and who you should consult with on a decision, appreciating when something is no longer your responsibility and belongs to someone else, and importantly, when you can (and should) say 'no' to a task.

There will be instances when it is unclear whether something is your role (or your department's role) or someone else's role (or their department's). The fuzzier the boundary, the softer you should tread when it comes to making decisions or taking action. Be prepared to allot time for consultation and discussion with the other people who have a stake. A common fuzzy boundary is between you and your manager, since you both may have higher-level responsibilities in the organization. Depending on your relationship with the other person, this may be as simple as asking something like, "Is this something that you think you should do? If not, I would be happy to do this work," or "given that this feels like something either of us could do, what approach makes the most sense for getting this done?"

If you need to assign or request work and it's with someone who reports to another department's manager, be aware of the expectations around that. It's easy to step on toes with your eyes closed. If there is no set process in place, you should communicate with their manager first to sort out expectations. They may want you, for example, to copy them when you email their employee. Or you may need to run the request through them every time because they are managing their employee's workload.

YOUR SPHERES OF CONTROL & INFLUENCE

Think about the set of things that you have direct control over as a manager, then imagine the next layer of things you cannot control but can influence. Borrowing from the field of international relations, you can think of this as your managerial 'sphere of influence.' Beyond your 'sphere' are all the things that other people control and where they have decision-making power, but where you have little to no influence.

“Sphere of control is a concept that helps people focus their precious time and energy on the things they can control so they can make a greater impact where it matters most. While sphere of control is commonly regarded as a productivity tool, we see it as a tool for building resilience at work. It’s not just about getting things done; it’s about recognizing your power.” (The Management Center, 2021)

Thinking about these layers of control and influence is useful concepts for when you are asked by someone on your **team** to change something within the library, but outside of your department. If it’s outside of your control and outside of your ability to influence, chances are it’s not something you can directly affect. You can be frank with your team member about these constraints and shift to a more productive conversation about proposals within your sphere of control, related or not. Additionally, reflecting on your spheres of control and influence can help you manage your own frustrations about organizational problems that you are unable to easily resolve. They may be simply beyond your ability to do anything meaningful about.

In our environments, it is common to notice a level of discomfort in explicit discussion of power. Workplace power dynamics are complex and inevitably also intersect with [privilege and positionality](#). For the purposes of this guide, we encourage you to reflect on the ‘positional power’ you hold as a manager. This includes the authority associated with your position, the decision-making scope entrusted to you by the more senior **administration**, and your opportunities to contribute and influence strategy-level deliberations. By understanding and taking ownership of your power in different spaces, you can be more effective in advocating for your **team** and making change.

Further Reading

The Management Center. (2021, October 28). *Using Sphere of Control to Build Resilience*. <https://www.managementcenter.org/resources/using-sphere-control-build-resilience/>

A brief four-step framework to become ‘unstuck’ when faced with situations beyond your control at work. Developed by an organization ‘that helps leaders working for social change build equitable, sustainable, and results-driven organizations.’

Hurley, C. (2025). 6.2: **Privilege and Power in the Workplace**. In *Culture Smart: Communication in the Global Workplace*. <https://pressbooks.nvcc.edu/culturesmart/chapter/privilege/>

This unit from an open textbook provides a substantive explanation of the interplay of power and privilege at work, including a discussion of the ‘five types of power’ (‘legitimate power’ maps to the ‘positional power’ discussed above) and common workplace privileges.

CHAPTER 3

Information Sharing

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

Information sharing is one of the most important responsibilities you have as a manager. You are the primary conduit through which information flows to reach your **department**, since you likely will be at more ‘tables’ than those who report to you. In general, in academic libraries, it is better to err on the side of more transparency whenever possible. However, it is not as straightforward as simply sharing everything you know: it may seem transparent to share information that is irrelevant or not yet well understood by you, but may lack clarity and is more likely to create confusion. A lot of organizational information is generated in an academic library, and so as your department’s ‘filter’, you will want to triage the importance of the information, and then determine how you will share that information with your department. News that is complex or likely to engender much discussion may be best suited to a team meeting. Timely information might be shared in an email. Less critical information could go in a weekly round-up or shared in an online communications tool like Microsoft Teams or Slack.

When you start your role, you will want to find out what the expectations are for privacy for the various managerial-level groups and committees you will join. Different libraries will have different expectations: some may share openly the minutes and agendas, while others do not. If the minutes are not shared, you will want to find out what aspects, if any, can be shared with your **team**. This is true for anything that is in development, such as project plans. You may or may not be able to tell your team about something in development, and you may need to ask if it isn’t clear. Usually, issues that relate to individuals’ jobs, roles, and labour issues are considered confidential unless otherwise indicated.

SHARE THE “WHY”

As a manager, you are closer to the strategy than the rest of your department. Given your opportunities to sit at tables with other leaders, you are more likely to see the direct link between the mission of the library or institution and the resulting projects, tasks, and services. By the time the task is assigned to the employee, there is a real risk that that person does not understand why this task matters. Sometimes, when an employee has an information gap about the ‘why,’ they will make up their own reasons, which is often disconnected from the truth. You are there to make those connections for your department: explain how their tasks connect to the broader mission. This both demonstrates the real value of that person’s efforts and allows them to feel more connected with the big picture.

You may have heard the line, “There’s no such thing as overcommunication.” That’s a bit of an exaggeration, but it highlights that the criticism is almost always that we could communicate more, share more, share earlier,

and/or share with those who we didn't think would want to know. A privilege of the manager role is access to information.

Andrew's Take

A guideline I use in organizational communication is 'no surprises.' This means that the person or group that is most affected by a decision or change should never be surprised when it is announced or revealed publicly. Another way to think about it is that the most affected individuals of any change should find out first. For example, a member of your team will need to be involved in a library-wide project because of their particular skill set. That person should not find this out when the project plan document is sent out on a library-wide email or during an announcement at an all-staff meeting.

Instead, you should meet with (or email) that person first, explain the project and why they have been selected for the work, and any other pertinent details. If multiple individuals across departments need to be informed, you may need to coordinate with other managers around timing of information sharing. If feasible, consult with those affected people as part of the decision-making process to support early buy-in.

Further Reading

Yousefi, B. (2017). **On the Disparity Between What We Say and What We Do in Libraries.** In S. Lew & B. Yousefi (Eds.), *Feminists Among Us: Resistance and Advocacy in Library Leadership* (pp. 91–125). Library Juice Press. <https://summit.sfu.ca/item/17387>

Yousefi's chapter discusses the 'disconnect between our professional values of democracy and social responsibility and our decisions and actions'. She discusses tactics of resistance and, in the paragraph starting on the bottom of page 101, includes her own approach to information sharing as a middle manager: 'exaggerated compliance' with respect to openness and transparency.

Rodeck, D. (n.d.). **How Leadership Transparency Builds a Culture of Trust.** ADP. <https://www.adp.com/spark/articles/2026/03/how-leadership-transparency-builds-a-culture-of-trust.aspx>

This blog post provides rationale for transparent leadership, common missteps, and strategies for implementation. ADP is an HR software company.

CHAPTER 4

Goal Setting

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

Departmental goal-setting serves multiple purposes, including:

- Focused **team** discussion of the upcoming year and any specific challenges or opportunities ahead;
- Prioritizing projects that surfaced in the prior year but could not be tackled (due to human resources, financial constraints, etc.);
- Anticipating and planning for any related budget requests;
- Planning projects that will advance the library's (and/or university's) strategic direction; and/or
- Distributing your team's workload appropriately.

You may be required to develop goals annually, but if this is not your local practice, consider collaboratively setting goals for the academic year. Depending on your team culture, you could add this to an existing meeting agenda with some of your early ideas, and request their suggestions or hold a separate meeting for idea-generation and discussion.

SOME GOAL SETTING 'DO'S'

Use the classic 'SMART' model for developing goals. Make each one Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-specific.

Have goals that align with the strategy of the library and university. In addition to goals that further your department's work, leverage strategic plans to create goals that support the higher-level institution. If you are finding it challenging to immediately identify alignment, your goal might be to undertake an exploratory project to work on this further.

Include upcoming projects that are externally imposed. If your team will be dedicating considerable time and

energy to complete a task, it is worthwhile making that visible for your team's planning purposes and for the broader library's understanding of your team's availability. An example would be "Spring launch of new consortial search interface." While your department is not initiating the launch, if you are responsible for the related technical configurations or campus communication, this is on your list.

Time your goals throughout the year given your knowledge of departmental and campus rhythms. For example, a stacks-shifting project may be planned for summer when fewer students are on campus.

Having a set of departmental goals is a valuable guide throughout the year. This list of agreed-upon initiatives can be something you consult when you have a lull in service demand or want to provide someone with a meaningful project. Inevitably, new ideas arise or new constraints emerge. When this occurs, remember that your goals were a plan made in advance with incomplete information: Plans will always need to adjust. Some projects may need to be deferred or cancelled. Alternatively, you might need to say, "that new idea is a good one, but given our goals for this year, I think it will need to wait for next year." When your annual cycle ends, ensure that you take the time to assess completion or non-completion. Unfinished goals may need to carry over to the next year. When reviewing what was achieved and why, you may also gain perspective about approaches to making future goal-setting more effective.

It can be beneficial to share your goals with peer managers and/or the rest of the library. Oftentimes, departments end up siloed, which can contribute to lesser understanding and appreciation of each other's hard work. Shared goals can work against this pattern.

Further Viewing

Helen Bryant. (2026, January 9). **Why Most Managers Set Goals Wrong (What to do instead)** [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QB9vFA-j7ng>

Thirteen-minute video describing the "GPS method": a template approach to make visible a goal's dependencies, scope, stakeholders, and more. Similar to a simplified [project charter](#).

Further Reading

University of Calgary. (n.d.). **Manager Toolkit: Setting Team Goals**. <https://www.ucalgary.ca/hr/training-development/connect-perform/goal-setting/goal-setting-toolkit>

A guide with a team goal-setting process with six distinct steps and two worksheets to support the discussions. Particularly helpful if your organization does not have a structured goals process in place.

CHAPTER 5

Managing Change

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

We don't need to tell you that academic libraries are constantly undergoing change. As a manager, you will inevitably be involved in making or managing these changes. These can range from small tweaks to workflows all the way up to supporting complex library reorganization.

The fundamentals of supporting change apply at any scale and to all but the tightest timeframes.

1. Understanding / conceptualizing
2. Communicating
3. Building buy-in
4. Implementing
5. Assessing and refining

Let's go through each in turn.

UNDERSTANDING / CONCEPTUALIZING

Change might come from the organizational level (i.e., through your **library administration**), or it may be change that you wish to initiate yourself. For top-down change, your primary role is to learn as much context as possible, including whatever is known about what, why, how, and when. Ask questions. Your team will want to know how this change is likely to affect them. If you are the one making the change, it will be your job to be prepared with the contextual details.

COMMUNICATING

This is where you share the change with your **team**, and everything you've either learned or prepared. Your goal is to share as much information as possible while also ensuring there remains room for input (in the next stage). You will probably not have all the answers, so be honest about what information is available and where there are unknowns. If the change is positive, this is a great time to help your team see themselves at the other side of the change. Negative change comes with more emotion and may require additional time for people to express their feelings. Resistance to change is often a result of inadequate early communication. Change that feels 'sprung upon' people is more likely to meet resistance.

BUILDING BUY-IN & PLANNING

There is a strong culture in academic libraries of collaborative and collegial planning. One of the best ways to get buy-in for a change is to include the people affected by the change in the planning of it. It is through this process that they can come to understand it themselves, and in turn share that understanding with others.

In some cases, building buy-in might look like sharing draft planning materials and reserving time for group discussion. It is important to listen to, capture, and consider your team's feedback. Adjusting plans when merited can demonstrate your genuine appreciation of their contributions. Alternatively, you might strike an appropriately sized planning team (e.g., small changes = small team, bigger changes = bigger team) to generate recommendations on how to implement the change.

If you are not in a position to strike a team, be sure to gather feedback, write down questions, and bring this back to those who are doing the planning. Ensure the people that report to you have a voice in the process.

You may have heard of the idea that 'change happens at the speed of trust.'¹ Your team should feel that they can trust the process that is developed in this stage. Consider here what you know about developing fair, transparent processes (see chapter on [Process and Decision Making](#)).

IMPLEMENTATION

If you have a planning team, they will have generated some recommendations, and now you get to decide what to do with them and put into motion a plan for implementation. A strong plan includes clear timelines, contingencies, and, where necessary, training or up-skilling. Keep communicating as you move forward, and ensure all stakeholders know what implementation looks like throughout. Doubts and frustration are likely to occur during implementation. Introducing change will involve discomfort and adjustment, and you may run into unanticipated effects. You can maintain your team's momentum by expressing empathy while facing challenges with a curious, problem-solving orientation.

ASSESS & REFINE

You've made the changes. It's a great time to celebrate everyone's hard work but remember there's more to be done. The larger the change, the more work should be done to understand if the change worked as planned. Ideally,

1. Popularized by Stephen Covey in the book 'The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything' (2018).

the people who initiated the change will have generated success metrics, and the work is to gather that data via surveys, analytics, focus groups, etc. The information gathered at this stage may reveal that further changes are required.

Change is difficult for many people. In your previous role, you may have needed to manage your emotions during a stressful change. As a manager, you will be managing both your own emotions and those of your team. Even positive changes can be stressful for those that find change difficult, and changes perceived as negative (for example, budget cuts, stopping long-running services, and for some, reorganization) may take a long time for some people to adjust to. We cover emotional labour and the risks associated with burnout in [Manager Growth and Resilience](#).

Andrew's Take

One of the benefits of being new to a manager role is that it is easier to interrogate existing processes, workflows and procedures, since you're usually learning about them for the first time. Find out what aspects are working well, and which are not. You will undoubtedly hear about various new and long-standing problems as you engage in your listening tour (see [Managing Individuals](#) for more on this).

It is very tempting to want to rapidly institute changes that attempt to remedy these problems. Instead, take the time to create a holistic view of all these issues, so that you can consider the best approach to resolving them. Ask a lot of questions. Learn about the history and why things are done the way they are done. Based on what you have learned, you can choose to prioritize the issue that will have the biggest impact on the work of your team, the 'low-hanging fruit,' or the one that everyone is in agreement needs a solution. You will also need to carefully weigh the degree to which you have built up enough trust and/or social capital from your team to make changes. To test these assumptions and ensure you are heading down the right path, follow a change management process like the one described in this section to ensure these changes will work for your team, rather than be imposed upon them.

Monica's Take

During my tenure as Head of Access Services, the library brought in a new catalogue / Library Services Platform. You can't work too long in libraries without experiencing one of these implementations and all the work and worry involved. No matter how much you prepare, it is a major disruption and, in a department like Access Services, affects pretty much every workflow. While there was a library-wide change management effort, I made certain choices about how I supported the transition in my unit. When we were a few months away from the switch-over, I drew a large timeline on our departmental whiteboard with the major milestone dates. Everyone walked past this whiteboard daily and I updated it as dates were adjusted. I made every effort to be as informed as I could be on the new software, hoping to instill confidence that the team was well-supported.

When we got into those intense few weeks of the actual system transition, I held daily fifteen-minute 'stand-up meetings' to check in and hear any new concerns. I took notes and committed to following up on those issues. I also printed simple and slightly silly signs facing the public at the desk: It was the classic "Hang In There" kitten image with additional text noting that we are learning a new system and thanking patrons for their understanding and patience. This external indicator that we are going through a big change was also intended to communicate that I didn't expect things to be 'business as usual' and that lots of grace was being extended to everyone. Overall, my approach to those 'crunch weeks' was to maintain both a problem-solving orientation and a general optimism that we would get through this together.

Further Reading

Marshall, B. H., Cook, D. B., & Ippoliti, C. M. (2020). **Fostering change: A team-based guide**. Association of College & Research Libraries.

<https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/acrl/content/publications/booksanddigitalresources/digital/FosteringChange.pdf>

Specifically, pp.44-49, “**Change is Hard**” and “**Psychological Safety**”.

This free e-book is a worthwhile read for those interested in change management in libraries. We have selected two sections to round out our chapter. ‘Change is Hard’ breaks down some of the reasons why change is difficult, and how you can support people going through change.

‘Psychological Safety’ is a topic that will come up again in our Managing Teams chapter.

Readers that value models and frameworks may be interested in the section ‘Models of Change and Transition’ (pp.55-62).

Further Viewing

Ross School of Business. (2025, February 14). **Why Managing Change is Important in an Organization** [Video recording]. YouTube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_6F9nbPRis (3min35s)

In this pithy video, business professor Stewart Thornhill covers the topics “why we resist change” and “how can leaders deal with resistance to change”. Thornhill recommends overcoming novelty through over-communicating and finding ways to give control to those affected by the change.

CHAPTER 6

Managing Up

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

Being a manager involves a great deal of people management, supervision of the individuals that report to you (which we'll go into further in [Managing Individuals](#) and [Managing Teams](#)), but you don't just manage downward, you also manage up. Managing up, or managing your boss, is an important but often overlooked aspect, and is applicable to both managers and non-managers.

One reason to manage up is to ensure your boss is aligned with how you are prioritizing your own work and the work of your department. The context you provide about your team, what they are working on, what is working well and what is challenging, will help you negotiate with your boss when new asks are made of you and your team. A good initial conversation to have with your boss is about your respective management and work styles, so that you can understand their preferences and you can share yours. These might include what kinds of information you/they would like, about what, how frequently, approaches to management, values, and so on. In hierarchical organizations, your direct supervisor may not always have the authority to approve decisions directly. Managing up, in this case, may also mean thinking about managing further up to the decision maker: learn when this is required, and find out what your supervisor needs to know in order to effectively pitch an idea or sell the decision.

As you grow as a manager, you will probably discover that *your* manager too has their own strengths and weaknesses, or they may tend to focus on one aspect of their job more than others. You can then consider how you can leverage their strengths, prepare yourself for areas where they are weaker, and help them (re)focus their attention.

Ideally, the items you want to talk about are a significant part of the meeting agenda with your boss. Use that time! Corporate wisdom suggests that you should come prepared with a solution for every problem, but the reality in academic libraries and people management is that the solutions are not always clear or simple. If you have a solution in mind, share it. It's OK if you don't, though. Talking about it with your manager may lead to an alternative solution that you had not considered or may not have been available to you alone. Your manager's role is to help you solve your problems and make your job easier, just the same as it is yours for your team.

Further Reading

Wiesner, L. (n.d.). *Managing Up series* | *Human Resources*. UC Merced.

- Managing Up: **What is It and Why Do It?** <https://hr.ucmerced.edu/content/managing-what-it-and-why-do-it>
- Managing Up: **Understanding the Relationship** <https://hr.ucmerced.edu/content/managing-understanding-relationship>
- Managing Up: **Being Active** <https://hr.ucmerced.edu/content/managing-being-active>
- Managing Up: **Sustaining Success** <https://hr.ucmerced.edu/content/managing-sustaining-success>

A four-part series of brief blog posts from a conflict resolution coach based in a university setting. Includes reflective questions, strategies, and considerations to improve the relationship with your boss (ex. task-oriented or relationship-oriented?).

SECTION II

MANAGING TEAMS AND INDIVIDUALS

CHAPTER 7

Managing Teams

ANDREW COLGONI; MONICA RETTIG; AND RANDY OLDHAM

As a manager, you will oversee a group of people with varying roles. When you first start, you are not likely to have been involved in hiring this collection of individuals, nor shaping the work they do. Nonetheless, what you have is a **team**, and it is your responsibility to support their collective purpose and shape the dynamics and culture of their work together.

Often, unless you have a brand-new **department**, there will be an existing team culture that you are inheriting, as well as an opportunity to understand and push that culture in a new direction if needed. Take the time at first to observe the team's dynamics. While it is tricky to put your finger on exactly, team culture can be found in how people communicate with each other and library users, interpersonal interactions, how they talk about the library and its mission, how they see their work as it relates to the library and campus community, what kinds of support structures there are, and whether people praise and lift each other up, among other things.

It may be useful to consider what makes for an effective team ahead of introducing any significant changes.

Further Reading

Google. (n.d.). **Understand team effectiveness.** <https://rework.withgoogle.com/intl/en/guides/understanding-team-effectiveness>

As part of the re:Work project, Google conducted internal research on the factors that most and least influence team effectiveness. We would draw your attention to the section titled 'Identify dynamics of effective teams'. It describes the five factors that most impact team effectiveness. These factors, while generated in a corporate setting, are likely to have generalizability to any team.

TEAM VALUES AND NORMS

If you are new to the organization or department, ask if there are any existing team values and norms that have been developed previously.

Values: a set of shared principles that lay the foundation for individual and team behaviour. These may relate to the work of the department as well as interpersonal interactions. Examples might be: innovation, respect, collaboration, welcoming, etc.

A team will have values, even if they have not been discussed and recorded. As you spend more time in your role, you will observe values emerging. There may be behaviour patterns that, in your judgement, are dysfunctional or run counter to the interests of the department. For example, authority (seeking direction on small deviations from normal practice), autonomy (self-directed practices are prevalent and protected), or seniority (deference to long-standing employees). These are not the kind of values you would see listed in a library's strategic plan! Nevertheless, noticing these patterns helps you build understanding and can shape your thinking if you hope to guide the group towards a new direction: For example, moving away from reliance on the supervisor for decision-making and towards a sense of empowered confidence.

If your team does not have articulated values, consider developing them collaboratively. Set aside time to have a conversation about what your team cares about at work and spend more time listening rather than talking at first. You may wish to break up your values discussion to focus on different aspects over time, such as your department's function, the department's role within the library and university, interpersonal values, and so on. If you manage a department that is services focused, for example, you are likely going to want values that speak to your customer service approach. A department that is teaching focused, on the other hand, may want values that speak to critical thinking, universal design, or inclusivity.

Norms: guide team behaviour through shared expectations.

Norms can vary widely. A team norm could be that there is no expectation that emails are checked or responded to after hours. An interpersonal norm might be that we don't interrupt another person when they are talking. Developing norms as a collective is one way to bring team dynamics to the forefront for open discussion, while having clearly articulated norms helps everyone remain accountable to those shared expectations.

There are different ways to develop norms. You can set aside meeting time to brainstorm them from scratch. Alternatively, you may wish to develop them over time, as needed. For example, if you have a team member that shoots down every idea that other people suggest, you may want to discuss creating a norm that supports a process for more open idea sharing. Another option is to discuss norms every one or two months, while looking back to see if any teamwork would be improved by having one.

Ensure what you develop is not filed away and forgotten. You could, for example, include the norms in your department meeting agenda package. Your team will need a plan for accountability – norms only work when people follow them and hold other people to following them.

Further Reading

University of Alberta. (n.d.). **Team Ground Rules + Norms.** <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/human-resources-health-safety-environment/media-library/managing-and-administration/hybrid-workplace/ground-rules-and-team-norms-tip-sheet.pdf>

University of Victoria. (n.d.). **Team Agreements About Norms.** https://www.uvic.ca/faculty-staff/conflict-toolkit/_assets/docs/teamagreementsandnorms_uvic.pdf

Two guides on creating team norms and usefully provide guiding questions and sample agreements.

If you've done the work of developing values and norms, a logical place to document them is within a broader team charter. This is a formal document that includes things like context (what the team does, who it is accountable to), vision, goals, members of the team and their roles, norms and rules, and anything else that is useful for your team to have a shared understanding about.

Outside of any developed and crafted norms, you should also reflect on how your *own* behaviour, consciously or not, shapes the norms and behaviours of your team. How do you react publicly when things are challenging or chaotic? What do you do when someone makes a mistake? Model the kinds of behaviours you want your team to perform. For example, if you want your team to value innovation and experimentation, you'll want to treat failed experiments and unsuccessful projects as learning opportunities, not something to punish or chastise.

Randy's Take

When an accident or mistake occurs, avoid conversations of assigning blame and instead lead the team through a conversation around what can be learned from the incident. What safeguards can be put in place? What changes could improve things and make things more reliable and robust? Accidents and mistakes help us uncover vulnerabilities and weak spots and engaging the team in these conversations helps to encourage a sense of ownership of the changes and bolstering that results. This is an excellent opportunity for team building.

BEING AVAILABLE TO YOUR TEAM

A common workplace communication strategy for teams is 'an open-door policy:' being available to assist as needs arise. In the modern workplace, a metaphorical 'open door' could look like physical drop-ins, phone calls, emails and messages on Teams or Slack. Without a doubt, you want your team to feel comfortable coming to you if something needs immediate attention or if they need a brief response to keep work progressing. In some departments, much of the work of a manager is this sort of regular support for the ongoing flow of work. If interruptions become a challenge, one strategy is to establish 'office hours' or you can suggest that less urgent issues be added to the agenda for your next one-on-one.

For some managers who naturally tend to lend an empathetic ear, there is a risk of being overburdened with the emotional load, especially alongside the ongoing desire to be available to support individuals. It is never too late to set boundaries in order to protect your well-being.

Should a manager be available while they are on vacation? We really feel it is important to protect your restorative

time away from work. Remember that, despite what you might say, when you are responding to low priority emails on vacation, those around you will infer that you expect that level of responsiveness from your team members on their days off as well. In addition, it can suggest low trust if you don't demonstrate that you believe your team and your delegate can handle things without your involvement.

CHAPTER 8

Meetings: Chairing and Facilitation

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

Meetings are an often-derided aspect of life in the workplace, but they are an essential tool for a people manager. When meetings are criticized, it is often because the purpose of the meeting is not clear enough, or the use of the meeting time is not effective enough. You will likely be attending more meetings than ever as a manager and, in a complex organization, meetings *are* the work of a manager – they are one of the key ways to move work forward. You will want to hone your skills for running productive and effective meetings.

Meetings are more than information sharing, which we have covered above. They are a way to shape your team's culture and ensure your team has a way to contribute to the department's activities.

Team meetings can take many different forms, and much will depend on your department's culture and how you choose to express your management style.

Questions to consider as you plan your meetings:

- How often will you meet?
- How long is the meeting?
- Are your meetings in-person, virtual, or hybrid?
- Is there a call for agenda items?
- Is an agenda shared in advance?
- Is someone taking minutes for those not in attendance? Who will take minutes / Is it a rotating task?
- How will you handle action items that emerge from the discussion?
- What is the objective of the meeting? Do you have the right people in the room to meet that objective?

It is worthwhile to be thoughtful about these choices since each of these modes has varying affordances.

Monica's Take

When I started as department head, the department did not have a practice of 'all hands' meetings. There were a number of logistical barriers (who would cover the desk during the meeting? What about the part-time evening staff? Would they be compensated for this additional time?), but the main adjustment was cultural. I was trying to build stronger team cohesion and boost the voices of those not typically invited to the table. It took multiple iterations over time to arrive at a place where we prioritized meetings enough to hire student staff to cover the desk and paid part-timers to attend. Of course, then there was the work to encourage participation at the meetings. Eventually, I introduced an 'around the table' at the start of each meeting, where every attendee was invited to briefly share what they were working on—with the option to 'pass'. This strategy had mixed reception, especially at first, but the broader information sharing sparked enough conversation that we stuck with it over time.

Leading a department meeting is a dual role: as chair and facilitator. As the chair, you are responsible for logistics management, such as agenda planning, starting and ending on time, and room setup. As the facilitator, you support the navigation of complex group dynamics during discussions. Inevitably, disruptive behaviour will occur – such as interruptions or side conversations – and the group will look to the chair to diplomatically address it.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect is guiding a group discussion when there is conflict. As the manager, it is important to be clear on the agenda item's goal: Are you seeking **consensus**? Or are you requesting feedback to inform your decision? Each of us will have a differing level of comfort with conflict, but it is wise to allow space to hear divergent viewpoints. You can demonstrate respect for differing opinions by active listening, noting their concerns, and taking time after the meeting to consider.

SOME USEFUL TIPS:

- Openly discuss norms and expectations for your meetings. This can be done through group discussion, gathering opinions on what kind of behaviour your team members want from each other, and sharing yours. Use this to set a transparent, shared framework for your meetings.
- Avoid spending too much time on information distribution. If there is new information that needs to be considered, send the details in advance and ask team members to come prepared to discuss. Give adequate time for review amongst other work responsibilities.
- If possible, avoid being the only one speaking. You likely have important agenda items, but it is good to share the spotlight. In advance, you could request that a team member share an update on an ongoing project or highlight a development in their field of expertise. If you have a topic that requires broad input, allow for people to share that with you in different ways (e.g. via email), in case some people are not comfortable speaking in front of the whole department.
- Take the logistics role seriously. Time is precious, and people are busy. Start your meetings on time and conclude them when the time is up. Keep your eye on the clock and make decisions about how much time can be allocated to each item. When time is running out for an agenda item or the meeting, but discussion is ongoing or needs further decision-making, determine how it will be moved forward (i.e. tabled for the next meeting, followed separately with specific individuals, etc.). If a meeting isn't needed (i.e., lack of agenda items), cancel it and give people their time back.

Further Reading

Bates, K. F. (2018, July 11). **Power Dynamics: The Hidden Element to Effective Meetings**. Interaction Institute for Social Change. <https://interactioninstitute.org/power-dynamics-the-hidden-element-to-effective-meetings/>

This article surfaces the dynamics of power at play in the workplace, particularly in meetings. It posits that people with formal power can use that to build 'power with' (rather than 'power over') others, and encourages collaboration, and using your role as meeting chair intentionally.

Seeds for Change. (n.d.). **Facilitating Meetings: a short guide**. <http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/shortfacilitation>

*In addition to listing all the key tasks of a facilitator, introduces the idea of co-facilitation, which may be a good way to bring individuals from your team into a meeting leadership role. Also speaks to the role of facilitating **consensus**, which is often a goal of committees in academic libraries.*

CHAPTER 9

Project Management

ANDREW COLGONI AND RANDY OLDHAM

Projects, small and large, are commonplace in academic libraries. A project might be within your department, across library departments, or between the library and other campus units. As a manager, you are likely to have some authority over a project, perhaps chairing a project team. At whatever scale, managing a project successfully from start to completion requires a plan and a process.

Arguably the most critical phase of project management is the first one, planning. Having a clear, approved, actionable plan pays dividends down the road, so invest the time upfront.

BUILDING BUY-IN

One way you can improve organizational buy-in is to involve stakeholders at the earliest phase of project planning, particularly during the development of the “why are we doing this project” phase. If the stakeholders can develop and articulate the need themselves, they are more likely to have a sense of ownership in the outcomes. It is, of course, much faster to have a mandate up front (i.e., “we have to do this project because someone decided it”), but you may have stakeholders that are less invested in both the process and the outcomes.

You should also ensure you have buy-in from **library administration** or any other senior group that may find themselves accountable for this project. Once you have a project plan in place, bring that plan to them and get explicit agreement that they support this project and its outcomes.

Randy's Take:

Having explicit support from **library administration** ensures that if (or when) any complaints about the project reach them, they are prepared to speak to it, support it, and direct specific questions to the project team. I will say something like, “I am looking for everyone's support here and if for any reason you feel you can't support this project, now is the time to share those questions/concerns. If an employee reaches out with concerns as the project proceeds, please redirect them to the project team so that we are fully aware of the concerns and can deal directly with them. Do you all agree to support this project moving forward?”

CREATING A PLAN

Effective project management is probably 50% documentation (with the other half being communications,

discussed next). Most projects start with a document that defines and describes the project, sometimes called a project charter.

One tip to building out your project plan is to start at the end:

1. Start with identifying the ultimate outcome or final deliverable (launching a new product or service, creating a report, generating a proposal, etc.)
2. Consider who will be impacted by this outcome, use the deliverable, or be required to implement it – these people are your stakeholders
3. Determine what steps are necessary to reach the outcome; these will become your tasks (a unit of work) and milestones (a major deliverable)
4. Finally, consider how much time each step will require, which will define your timeline

You now have the outline of a project plan, which includes goals and outcomes, stakeholders, milestones, and a timeline. A fulsome project charter (your library may already be using a template you can follow) often includes additional components:

- Alignment with the library's strategic plan
- A project sponsor (the individual(s) to whom the project is accountable)
- Resources (people, materials, or money) available to the project team
- Success metrics (how do we know that the project did what it was supposed to?)
- Identifying what is in-scope and out-of-scope

Your project's outcomes should be specific and well-defined (see SMART goals in [Goal Setting](#)). In your charter, it is extremely useful to be explicit about what is in and out of scope, as this will help you respond to 'scope creep.' Scope creep is very common in larger projects, as work on the project generates new ideas, suggestions for additional features, or ways to gather new information. It can also emerge as, "if you're doing this, we might as well do that...." Any additions to scope after the project's launch should be very carefully considered and only added after a thorough evaluation of the timeline and available resources, since additions to the project will usually require more time, more resources, or both. Good ideas that remain out of scope can go into a list that becomes part of 'phase 2', 'future enhancements', or 'project recommendations' that can be evaluated further in the future.

As you develop your timelines, you will want to consider which are fixed and which should be more flexible. This is particularly true if your project includes external stakeholders who are responsible for deliverables. For example, you may need to engage with your university's marketing department, and they need a certain amount of lead-time to produce materials – this is a fixed deadline. Similarly, if you are relying on an external partner to provide deliverables, you should anticipate delays and account for these accordingly. Consider, also, which tasks will impede progress if not completed, and which tasks can happen in parallel.

Large-scale university projects, like those involving facilities/space or central information technology, might come attached with an external project manager. This reduces the load on you to manage the entire project but can add complexity with the addition of a critical external stakeholder.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PROJECT TEAMS

Your plan should include some consideration of communication: who needs to receive information, how often, and what about. Look to your stakeholder list and separate out the components: **library administration**, project sponsor, project team members, internal stakeholders not on the project team, end users, and so on. For each of these, decide on the most appropriate communication method, frequency, and content. Leverage existing communication channels (all-staff meetings, email lists, internal newsletters or updates) wherever possible.

Randy's Take:

I highly recommend keeping a rolling timeline of all of your communications so that employees can quickly review what has happened (this is also really great since it provides you with receipts and a great summary of your project). If you ever publish or present at a conference, this sort of timeline becomes very helpful. You can use any tool you're most comfortable with—a list in SharePoint, Microsoft Planner, Excel, a bulleted list in a Word document—the most important part is that you keep it up to date.

As your project team begins work, discuss and set expectations early.

- How frequently will you meet?
- What is the expectation for team communication between meetings?
- What is the expectation for accomplishing work between the meetings?
- What will you use the meeting time for?
- How will you track progress?
- What (if any) tools/technologies will you use to keep on track and maintain documentation?
- How does this project intersect with others in the library, on campus, or beyond (consortia), etc.

Be honest with yourself, your team, and your sponsor about project progress. It is natural for projects to get stuck for any variety of reasons, many of which are not the fault of your team. Talk about these issues openly and ask the same from your project team. This will make it easier for all involved to come up with solutions and adjust expectations.

If your project team involves stakeholders who have discrete areas of expertise, consider how you can use meeting time to focus on where those areas of expertise intersect, and how the group can help each other continue to move the project forward. It is not likely to be productive to spend a lot of time in the 'weeds' of one specific area, unless there is reason to think that it will help with understanding and/or problem resolution.

If your project is larger in scope than just your department, challenge your project team members to think outside of their immediate areas of expertise and consider the final needs of the whole project. For example, if you're implementing a new course reserves system and you work in information technology, you're going to have a vested interest in the data migration and patron loads and may lose sight of the end goal, which is a user-friendly course reserves system. As a project manager, your role is to re-center conversations on the final goals to ensure everyone is considering these aspects in addition to those areas they are most experienced in.

CONCLUDING A PROJECT

Once a project has finished, it is important to take the time to debrief as a team. Debriefing gives the opportunity

to learn from the project and these lessons can have a positive impact on subsequent projects. Talk with your team and ask open-ended questions like:

- If we could start again, what would we change?
- What would have helped the project flow more smoothly?
- Where could we have used more time?
- What is something that really worked well and we should do on our next project?
- What should we avoid in our next project?

During these conversations, it's important to keep the conversations focused on the project, not the people – redirect the conversation if it begins to drift towards discussions about individuals. This reinforces reflection and analysis. Keep a list of the lessons learned and adjust any project templates you use to reflect these.

Celebrate the success of the project at the end, of course, but also along the way as the team reaches milestones and completed tasks.

Further Reading

Rebel's Guide to Project Management. (2026). **How to Manage a Project.** *Rebel's Guide to Project Management.* <https://rebelsguidetopm.com/how-to-manage-a-project/>

There are endless sources on the internet that go deep into project management, which is a whole discipline into itself, with courses, certifications, and careers dedicated to it. It is also a very business-oriented discipline. This page gives project management a light touch, while defining the terms you'll see if you choose to dig deeper into this topic.

Camp, T., Laufersweiler, B., & Robbins, S. (2018). **Using Pre-project Planning to Manage Workload.** In *Project Management in the Library Workplace* (Vol. 38). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0732-067120180000038010> (closed access)

There is not much in the way of open-access content about project planning in libraries, and most relevant resources are books. This article, which is behind a paywall, does a good job of describing the importance of planning (and specifically the very earliest of planning, which is often called 'initiating' in the project management space).

CHAPTER 10

Managing Individuals

ANDREW COLGONI; MONICA RETTIG; AND RANDY OLDHAM

When you first start in your role, schedule individual informal ‘get to know you’ meetings with everyone who reports to you – also known as a ‘listening tour.’ This is a great way to ask that person what they really enjoy about their work and what they see as their strengths. Ask about their career goals and what they want to work toward. Before the meeting, prime their thinking by sharing some of the questions you want to ask.

One-on-one meetings are an important part of your relationship with the individuals that report to you. Short (e.g., 30-minute), regular check-in meetings with your employees are ideal. Weekly meetings are recommended, but for those with large teams, this kind of schedule may not be feasible. But don’t skip the “regular” part: biweekly, monthly or even quarterly, making time to talk to the people who report to you is a worthwhile investment of your time. Meeting one-on-one does several useful things: it builds relationships and trust, it gives you insight into your employee’s work and motivations, and it provides structured time for feedback and coaching. It is also a way to show that you care about them and their work. If you have a regular meeting, and something comes up that forces you to cancel, do your best to reschedule. Otherwise, you risk sending the message that their meeting time was the least important thing in your week.

Allow your team member to contribute to a shared agenda and give over the first portion of the meeting time to the items they want to talk about. When you start the meeting, you can’t go wrong with the question, “How are you doing?” Some employees may benefit from more structure to keep the discussion on track (e.g., ongoing work, new projects, issues/concerns, etc.), but you can also be flexible here. For your section of the meeting, be sure to connect their work to both the department and the larger organization – help them see their work as part of the whole. This could also be a great time to introduce an upcoming project or opportunity, as reviewed in [Delegation of Responsibilities](#).

Randy’s Take

I use regular meetings with my team members to help them reflect on their job. I lead them through a conversation by asking probing questions, such as “Talk to me about one project or activity you worked on that you’re really proud of, loved, or looked forward to?” This helps me discover what motivates my employees and gives insight into tasks they enjoy. I also ask what tasks they find always dropping to the bottom of their to-do list. These are likely to be things they don’t enjoy doing, things they struggle to complete, or areas they could perhaps use more training in to build their confidence and skill. Working with the employee to uncover the areas of their job that they enjoy and those areas they tend to put off helps to build their confidence and identify areas for growth. These conversations can be as formal or informal as makes sense for the team, but the most important part is that they happen regularly.

Normalize giving regular feedback to your employees, so it doesn't just happen when there's a mandatory annual review. We often think of feedback as critical or corrective in nature, but positive feedback should be a significant part of this process. Your goal is to reinforce the positive work behaviours you see and help correct the places where there is room for improvement. Your team expects you to hold individuals accountable for their responsibilities: Failing to do so can lead to frustration from others on the team who are completing their work reliably. You can use the same approach we discuss in [Difficult Conversations](#), the SBI model, for regular feedback. If you are involved in writing annual reports / performance evaluations for your employees, then your one-on-one meetings should lay the groundwork for those. An employee should never be surprised by something that you write in those reports.

COACHING

Your team members may be coming to you with all their work issues and be looking to you to solve them. Rather than automatically providing a solution, consider if this is an opportunity to empower your employee to think through their challenge and arrive at their own. Using a coaching approach, you can build this capacity by listening carefully, asking questions, sharing your insights, and helping them be accountable to their goals. You might consider coaching for scenarios that come up repeatedly, or when your employee has expressed a particular goal, such as career advancement.

As a manager, you set the destination and timeline, then provide the autonomy for your employees to choose their own route. If they press you to provide a route, work with them to devise a path, don't do it for them. Ask open-ended questions and encourage employees to consider what potential challenges might present themselves when taking a specific path. Encourage employees to consider their next steps along the path: your goal is to guide them through planning their own path while avoiding prescribing all the stops along the way. Allowing employees to chart their own paths builds an environment of trust. Providing the route might seem like helping; however, it saps autonomy, will reinforce the need for constant check-ins, and can result in employees feeling micro-managed. Modeling the planning process and providing clear final destinations and timeframes provides the guidance and guardrails to build confidence in employees.

A popular coaching framework for asking open-ended questions is GROW: Goals, Reality, Options, Will Do (or Way Forward). Here are examples of questions or statements you might ask for each step of the framework:

Goals

What result are you trying to achieve?

What does success look like?

Reality

Where are you now in relation to your goal?

What can you learn from what has/hasn't worked so far?

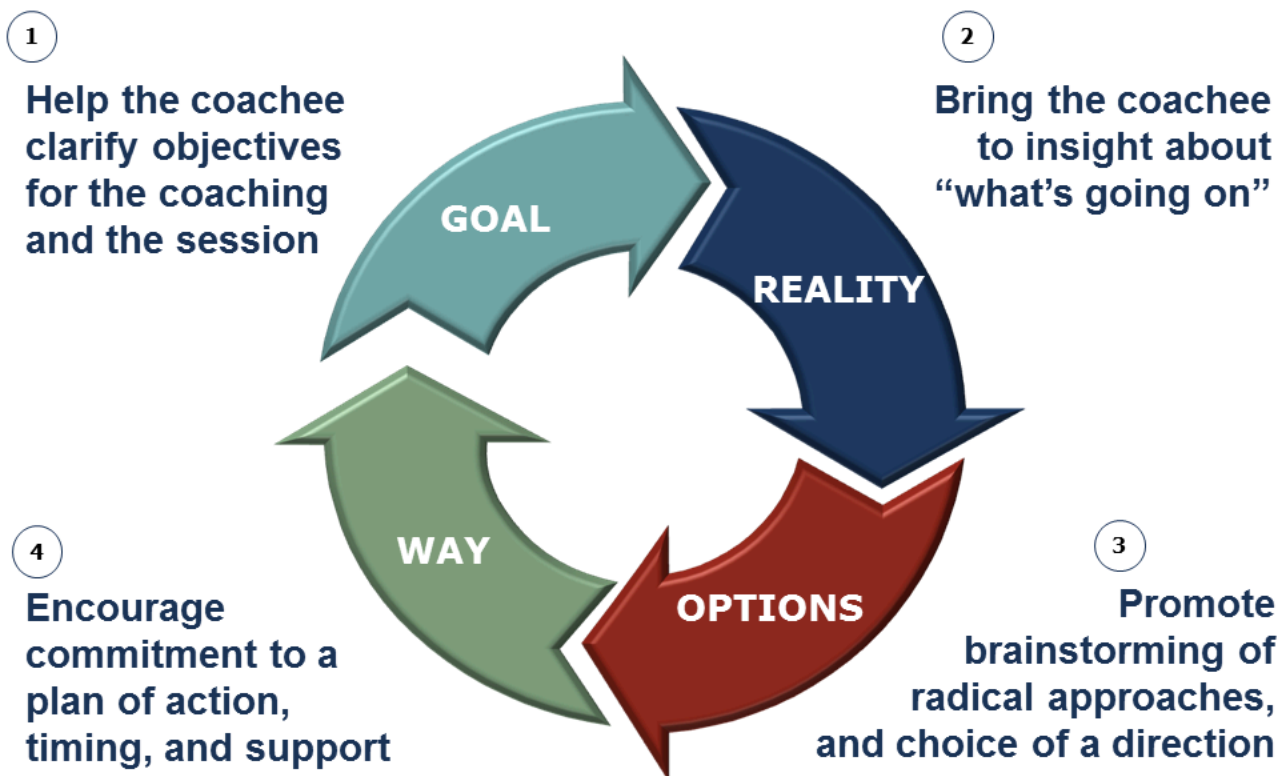
Options

How can you break this into smaller steps?
What are some of the ways you could approach this?

Will Do/Way Forward

What do you need from me to achieve this?
Tell me how you're going to do that.

GROW – how to structure coaching sessions



Adapted with permission from *The Tao of Coaching*, Max Landsberg, 1996

GROW Coaching Framework, by user:Wikedl, [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Example

Two employees are not getting along, and one employee comes to you to solve the turmoil. They might say things like: “I can’t work with them!” or “Never put me on a project with them again.” The employee may be searching for you to do something about the other party. There is an expectation that colleagues be able to work together even if they would rather not be friends with one another.

Part of this expectation is that employees act professionally and treat each other with respect and courtesy. Swooping in, even if asked, to work out interpersonal conflict between other people is not your place as a manager. Instead, ask open-ended questions to learn more, ask the employee what might help the situation, and ask them about their next steps. Set clear expectations: they'll need to maintain collegial relationships with fellow employees regardless of whether they'd be friends outside of work or not; they're in charge of the path getting there. If you step in to mediate immediately, you risk making yourself a necessary step in future disagreements as well. Having said that, there may be times where unresolved interpersonal conflict *will* require your (or a neutral third-party's) involvement.

Coaching can also be strategy to help your team members work through projects or workloads that feel large or overwhelming. Encourage employees to break seemingly huge problems or projects into easily manageable steps. Have them identify the steps, thinking out the problem logically and deciding what order the steps should go in. Ask "where do you think you should start? What step seems like it should go next? When should we consult others? Who should we communicate with about the problem/project?" This is a simple way to help reduce work anxiety, and this is also the core of basic project management.

Further Reading

Polemis, J. (n.d.). **The GROW Framework**. Coaching for Leadership. <https://wp.nyu.edu/coaching/tools/grow-model/>

A short blog post that walks through the GROW framework step-by-step and provides more example questions to support the coaching approach.

Manager Tools. (2022). **How to Run Effective One-On-Ones**. <https://www.manager-tools.com/one-on-one-meetings-guide>

Offers a deep dive into one-on-one meetings, why they are effective, how to run them, troubleshooting tips, and much more.

People and Culture, University of Calgary. (n.d.). **Questions to Ask Employees: One-on-one Meetings**. <https://www.ucalgary.ca/hr/training-development/connect-perform/one-one-meetings/questions-one-ones>

Dozens of sample questions that you can use in your individual meetings. Topics include 'to check in on how the person's coping with a recent change at work' and 'to ask for feedback on the one-on-one meetings and on your manager performance.'

Further Viewing

Big Think. (2023, October 25). **Adam Grant's #1 phrase to unlock potential** [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJWFxu6k1g4&t=20s> (8min)

An eight-minute video from Adam Grant, organizational psychologist, on coaching and providing feedback. Grant debunks the 'compliment sandwich' and provides alternative feedback strategies and phrases aimed at better supporting others to reach their full potential.

CHAPTER 11

Delegation of Responsibilities

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

Delegation can be especially challenging for new managers in academic libraries because they tend to be capable practitioners promoted due to their ability to successfully complete a variety of tasks. Becoming a great manager means a certain amount of ‘letting go’ of that aspect of your identity. Instead, you will develop the skill of matching the task with the appropriate person in your department and supporting them to successful completion – and finding the ‘win’ in celebrating their accomplishments.

“There are several reasons why managers may shy away from delegating work. They might:

- Think it would take longer to explain the task than actually completing it themselves
- Want to feel indispensable to their team by being the keeper of specific knowledge
- Enjoy completing certain projects so prefer not to reassign them
- Feel guilty about adding more work onto another employee’s to-do list
- Lack confidence or trust in who they need to transfer the project to
- Believe that they’re the only ones who can do the job right.” (Landry, 2020)

In some organizational structures, a **department head** may not have formal authority to assign work (such as when all librarians report to the **University Librarian**), and the role is more about coordinating the work of the **department**. Whatever the reporting structure, delegation is a request where you can explain the need and rationale and provide an opportunity for them to ask questions or raise concerns.

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Who should this task go to? You will need to assess what skillset is needed, but also the current workload and capacity of your team members. Recall if anyone has expressed an interest in growth opportunities or learning these skills. Does this task align with anyone’s job description? Notice if you

are repeatedly bringing work to the same few people. You may have employees who have efficiently completed work in the past or are more open to new tasks. Over-relying on these same people can risk their burnout and resentment over time. Instead, try to ensure opportunities are offered widely and skills developed across your team.

- Be clear about any associated timelines or deliverables. Provide any helpful constraints, such as “the presentation time is maximum ten minutes,” “the report should be approximately 2-4 pages,” or “this task should be done first thing each day.” Be explicit if the work has inflexible requirements or if there is room for creativity.
- Discuss a plan for communication to ensure things are on track. Resist the urge for frequent and impromptu ‘checking in’ since they can indicate that you don’t trust the work is proceeding. Encourage the employee to bring you any roadblocks or questions.
- Align your support for their work with their experience and skill level with the specific task assigned. Even when the individual is a great worker, if they have never done this kind of task before, more guidance and monitoring may be necessary. As they gain task experience, you should give them more autonomy.
- Prepare yourself that the output will not match how you would have done it – and that’s actually a good thing! Successful delegation involves accepting that your way is not necessarily the right, or only, way. Providing space for team members to grow, experiment, and learn will increase their confidence and capability over time. Delegation does not end with distributing work, it extends to empowering and entrusting others.
- If you lack the formal authority to assign work, your delegation role is likely more nuanced. You will primarily be guiding the direction of work, leveraging the larger goals and strategic priorities of the library. Your department will ideally have a clear mandate from **library administration**, which will help you point the way toward an outcome. You may be spending more of your time getting ‘buy in’ around an idea instead of directing a specific task with a defined outcome. This can be a fine line to walk, particularly if you manage somebody who puts clear boundaries around their role.

MICROMANAGEMENT

No one sets out to micromanage. If you are accused of micromanaging, how can you respond? Start by asking more about which of your actions have made your team member feel this way. Reflect on what is motivating your behaviour: Are you under pressure? Is there a looming deadline? Are you concerned the employee cannot complete the work? Consider whether your concerns are legitimate. For example, you thought the other person needed more support or resources to complete the task. Explain your rationale, pointing to specific evidence (e.g., “I could see that you were going to miss your deadline”), and use the conversation as a springboard to a deeper discussion about what support is actually needed. Alternatively, this may be a situation where you can learn from this feedback and adjust your interactions to give them more space to work. Either way, you can apologize and re-commit to a mutually agreed communication plan; e.g., “Let’s schedule 30-minute weekly to touch base until this gets submitted.”

Landry, L. (2020, January 14). ***How to Delegate Effectively: 9 Tips for Managers***. Harvard Business School – Business Insights Blog. <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/how-to-delegate-effectively>

This short blog post provides a few more tips beyond what we've covered. Of note are "allow for failure," "be patient," and "give credit where it's due."

CHAPTER 12

The Power of Recognition and Acknowledgement

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

We all want to work somewhere that celebrates success. In this section, we will encourage you to take recognition seriously and think more broadly about “what” to recognize.

Employee recognition should involve:

1. “The person – acknowledging the employee as a person, not just a worker. This involves being respectful, listening to their opinions and involving them in decisions.
2. Work Practices – appreciating the manner in which employees perform their roles. This involves recognizing not just their results, but the manner in which they get there (e.g., their creativity, their efficiency, their strengths, their way with customers, etc.).
3. Dedication – appreciating employees’ effort, commitment, persistence, and dedication, especially in challenging times. This communicates that their effort is seen even when results fall short.
4. Results – rewarding achievements, positive outcomes, and successes.”¹

It is worth noting that individuals are unique in how they are motivated and how they prefer to be recognized. Some people are mission-driven, and compliments don’t provide them with much of an additional boost. Others find public recognition very meaningful. This is a topic that you could raise in a one-on-one as you get to know each employee better.

Setting aside personal preferences, you can establish a culture of recognition in your **department** and develop a habit of highlighting contributions. Acknowledging the efforts of team members contributes to a positive, uplifting workplace. Moreover, recognizing an individual’s efforts builds your relationship with them and confirms that the manager is paying attention.

1. Giving Thanks at Work: The Science and Power of Recognition | Psychology Today Canada. (n.d.). Retrieved February 26, 2026, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/the-thriving-workplace/202511/giving-thanks-at-work-the-science-and-power-of-recognition>

What might this look like?

- In a one-on-one, acknowledging the effort in completing a project and articulating the impact of the work.
- In a department meeting, asking the person to share the results of their work and publicly praising the effort.
- In an email, especially when you can share the praise more broadly (department-wide) and/or copy a level or two up the hierarchy. It can feel quite meaningful to have one's work flagged for **library administration**, particularly if those more senior people wouldn't typically see the individual's output.
- In a celebratory post on the library's or department's Microsoft Teams or Slack channels.

For some new managers, acknowledgement feels inauthentic or artificial. It's worth developing this skill, so start small and in a way that is manageable for you (i.e., in writing or privately).

In the private sector, managers may have a multitude of rewards available, such as added vacation days, a raise, a bonus, or a promotion. In the education sector and in unionized environments, it is possible that none of these material reward options are available to you. More reason for us to take seriously the role of acknowledgement, motivation, and recognition in our academic library workplaces.

Does your library or campus have annual awards that recognize great work? This is worth investigating and considering submissions for members of your team. Recognition at the campus level can be a very significant moment for a mission-driven person or a strong addition to a CV for someone looking for growth.

SECTION III

HUMAN RESOURCES

CHAPTER 13

Hiring and Onboarding

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

Turnover happens in any library, and hiring is a regular part of the manager's work. Much of the 'how' of hiring is dictated by local rules, policies, and collective agreements. Having said that, it's worth reflecting on some of the areas that are under your control.

VACANCIES

Being able to refill a vacant role in a timely manner is not to be taken for granted, particularly in tight budget times. Having said that, the tendency is often to fill the same role 'as-is,' as quickly as possible. It's worth considering in advance of any vacancies: the complement you have, the work your department is doing, and any changes you anticipate for the future. A vacant role might be an opportunity to re-imagine how work gets done and where a different role might meet an unmet need. For some institutions, there is a lot of pressure to refill vacant roles quickly (to prevent them being taken away entirely), which means any planning you can do in advance is helpful.

When revising a staff role, you will need to have a good understanding of how your organization evaluates jobs, corresponding compensation, and any other associated benefits. A common standardized approach to job evaluation is [the Hay Method: a highly structured set of factors and associated "points" to ultimately determine equitable pay](#). You can expect to work closely with human resources (HR) colleagues with respect to determining the job grade. If a role is increasing in complexity, it could be that you require approval for a greater salary budget from library administration before introducing any revisions.

GOOD HIRING PRACTICES

Academic libraries in general have been putting more emphasis on creating and implementing fair and equitable hiring practices.

Take a look at your library's hiring processes with an eye to:

- Accurate assessment of the role (i.e., does the process assess the requirements of the job? Are the interview questions and/or presentation directly aligned with the job ad?)
- Robust and fair candidate evaluation (i.e., does it use a rubric?)
- Equity and diversity (i.e., are you recruiting a diverse candidate pool? Could it bias for/against particular kinds of candidates?)

The full scope of equitable and inclusive hiring practice is beyond this guide, but there are excellent resources available if you want to learn more.

ONBOARDING AND OFFBOARDING

These two processes are the often-forgotten partners to hiring and turnover. Onboarding is the process of orienting and training a new employee. It should not be a 'one and done' thing, nor should you think of it as only the first week of employment. If your department doesn't have an onboarding process documented, you should create one. The first impressions of a new employee are important, and demonstrating an organized, prepared department will set a professional tone.

Ideally, there would be a general onboarding process for the library, and then another specifically for your department. In it, list all the things a new employee would need to do and know to be comfortable to work in your department. Subsections could list more specific roles individuals might have (e.g. interlibrary loans, monograph purchasing).

Set the new employee up with individual meetings with the other members of the department to learn about the different roles. Pair the new employee up with a peer mentor, someone who has the experience and willingness to offer support to someone new. During their first week, walk around and introduce the new employee to library colleagues – even those they are not likely to work closely with. Help them understand that they are a part of the bigger picture and an interconnected organization.

Offboarding, or the process before someone leaves, is also worthy of attention. At minimum, we recommend a meeting with the departing employee, which is called an exit interview. The questions you ask can be prepared (and/or shared) in advance, and these are particularly useful for getting frank, candid answers that an employee might not feel comfortable sharing during regular employment.

Questions you might want to ask:

- What prompted you to leave?
- Did anything about the job make it difficult to decide to leave?
- What was the department/team/library culture like for you?
- If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?
- What are you most excited about in your new job?
- What did you think of our (equity and inclusion / diversity / policies / anything else you want to know about)?
- Was there an area you felt you needed more support or training in?

If you are interested in getting honest feedback about yourself as a manager, you will probably want to ask a neutral third party to conduct the exit interview and have them let the employee know that the feedback will be shared with you only after their time with the library is over.

In addition to the exit interview, you should think about any need for knowledge transfer. Does the person leaving have any undocumented knowledge that should be captured before they leave?

Further Reading

Bélanger, A., Beaubien, S., Bell, K., Benson, K., Cawthorne, L., Mazari, S. G., Garrett, T., Gorecki, P., Frigo, E., Meyer, K., Vainner, J., & Espinoza, J. (2023). **Building Inclusive Libraries: Kindness, Equity, and Candidate Experiences in Hiring & Onboarding Toolkit.** Library Reports and Communication. https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/library_reports/26

This extensive toolkit provides guidance for making the entire hiring process more equitable in libraries. It covers from the writing of the job description all the way to onboarding. Each section contains to-do style checkboxes so it can be used by hiring committees for each step.

Fenway Library Organization. (n.d.). **FLO Libguides: FLO IDEA Hiring Toolkit.** <https://libraries.flo.org/hiring-toolkit/welcome>

Another recruitment toolkit, drawing on a variety of sources for its recommendations. Lots of links to templates and readings.

CHAPTER 14

Managing in a Unionized Environment

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

In Canada, academic libraries tend to be unionized environments, sometimes with multiple unions representing different groups. In some situations, the manager is also unionized, albeit belonging to a different union. While there is a risk of tension between these dual identities, you can ease that friction with a sense of solidarity and shared worker identity.

If you are managing unionized staff, you should familiarize yourself with the appropriate collective agreement (CA). Ask your manager or your HR representative which articles are especially pertinent or have been points of tension in the past. You don't need to become a collective agreement expert and, if there are issues of interpretation of the language in a CA, you should refer that up or through HR. In general, though, a collective agreement is a useful tool for the manager, since it lays out mutually agreed-upon rules for work.

Some sections that are usually worth knowing:

DISCIPLINE AND DISMISSAL

Should you ever be in a position where you have performance concerns, you'll need to know what steps to follow. Consult with HR before you embark on any formal discipline process, as you'll likely have union involvement.

JOB POSTINGS AND APPOINTMENTS

Outlines what is required for any new job postings, including required language and process. For example, you will want to understand the role of seniority for internal job applicants.

WORK JURISDICTION

Some agreements describe certain tasks that can only be completed by members of a particular union. Alternatively, there may be tasks that cannot be assigned to said union members.

LEAVES & ABSENCES

People miss work for all sorts of reasons, and you'll need to know what everyone is entitled to and any associated paperwork or processes.

JOB PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS

You'll want to know as soon as possible if you will be required to perform any kind of job performance evaluations, so you can prepare accordingly.

HOURS OF WORK / FLEXIBLE WORK

This is particularly important if you are managing staff who are shift-scheduled, but it is also important to consider with regards to working from home and other flexible work arrangements. You will also want to familiarize yourself with any provincial or state labour law that governs hours of work.

GRIEVANCES

If you have unionized employees, it's possible that at some point you may be accused of breaking the rules set out in the collective agreement, which is known as a grievance. Should this happen, don't panic. Grievances are simply one of the processes available to union members to check that the agreed-upon rules are being followed.

Further Reading

Holley, R. (2022). **Don't Fear the Union: Successful Management in a Unionized Library.** *Journal of Library Administration*, 62, 122–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2021.2006990>
(available openly on ResearchGate)

In this opinion column, Holley makes the case that managing in an academic library union environment confers several benefits: fewer decisions (from shared rules), less likelihood of making bad decisions, better feedback, and improved morale. The author concludes with tips for managing in a union environment.

SECTION IV

MANAGEMENT STYLES AND APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP

CHAPTER 15

Self-Awareness and Reflective Practice

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

Self-awareness is a key ability for those in leadership and an important aspect of emotional intelligence. We all have tendencies, preferences, habits of mind, and 'comfort zones.' We have things that make us fulfilled, hurt, frustrated, and energized. These unique qualities produce our strengths, but also our weaknesses and blind spots.

Just like you, other people are unique, emotional, and complex. If you can improve your awareness of how you tend to respond to others, you will better your ability to navigate complex interpersonal situations. With self-awareness, you can reap greater benefit from your existing strengths and help identify where you might need to curb certain impulses or 'lean in' on skills that you previously avoided. Learning about yourself as a manager is a journey that will take time.

Let's say you are a numbers person. You love a well-designed spreadsheet. When making decisions, you are likely to find quantitative data highly compelling. As a self-aware manager, you might let your team know that about yourself: "If you have numbers to support this pitch, please do include them!" But, at the same time, not all information can be conveyed quantitatively. You will want to account for your personal preference by making a greater effort to grasp the qualitative data.

Deeper self-awareness can help you avoid jumping to conclusions. Consider the 'Ladder of Inference,' a mental model for how we make decisions. The ladder sits in the pool of available data. On rung one, we select a part of the data from everything that is available – because we can't process it all. This step is often fast and autonomous, based on patterns learned from our past experiences. On the second rung, we interpret the data we selected and give it meaning. Again, how we give it meaning is coloured by our own biases and assumptions. Finally, we reach rung three and draw conclusions. We've climbed the ladder fast, but were our conclusions based on the right data? Did our biases and assumptions lead us to the wrong conclusion? It can be helpful to climb back down the ladder to check yourself, and at each step consider if there was another way to draw conclusions, make a different interpretation, or select alternate data. The Ladder of Inference model is expanded on in the further reading section, below.

Illustrates the Ladder of Inference concept. The ladder sits in a blue pool of water which represents the pool of observable data, and each rung is named as it goes upward: observations, selected data, meanings, assumptions, conclusions, beliefs, and actions.

Ladder of Inference, image by User:Biogeographer, [CC BY-SA](#), via Wikimedia Commons

One way to learn more about yourself as a leader or manager is through personality tests, used often by training workshops. Some popular choices are [Myers-Briggs](#), [Enneagram](#), [CliftonStrengths](#), and [DiSC](#). While these tools

are usually commercial and are criticized for lacking scientific validity, the exercises *can* boost self-awareness. The resulting personality categories can act as a shortcut to understanding ourselves so that we can better recognize how we handle conflict, exhibit communication preferences, struggle in specific situations, and succeed in others. Consider seeking out similar personality tests: There are free online versions and/or your HR department might have access to paid platforms. Participating in these tests in a group setting (e.g., among peer managers) can be a useful entry point for comparing and discussing different management styles.

A do-it-yourself strategy for becoming more self-aware is dedicating time to reflective practice. It sounds surprisingly simple: Take time at the end of the day, week, or especially after a difficult interaction to write down your reflections on what happened. You might describe the sequence of events, your emotional response, the emotional responses you observed in others and how you understand them, and if there is anything you would do differently next time. There are a variety of models supporting reflective practice (e.g., [Visualization of Gibbs's Reflective Practice](#)). This process supports greater emotional intelligence, “the ability to recognize, understand, and deal skillfully with one’s own emotions and the emotions of others.”¹

Being aware of your own strengths and weaknesses will also help you find support and collaborate more effectively. On committees and teams, you can seek out individuals with strengths different from your own. If you are looking to bolster areas that you find challenging, seek out a mentor who has these strengths and learn from them.

Further Reading

Short, L. (2025, August 28). **Why Emotional Intelligence is Critical for Successfully Managing Up.** *Professional & Executive Development* | Harvard DCE. <https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/why-emotional-intelligence-is-critical-for-successfully-managing-up/>

In this article from Harvard Continuing Education, four factors that underpin emotional intelligence are explained (adding onto self-awareness with self-regulation, social awareness, and social skills). The article goes on to describe how to learn to be more emotionally intelligent.

Dickerson, C. (2025, May 8). **The Ladder of Inference: Building Self-Awareness to Be A Better Human-Centered Leader.** *Harvard Business Impact*. <https://www.harvardbusiness.org/insight/the-ladder-of-inference-building-self-awareness-to-be-a-better-human-centered-leader/>

This article expands on the Ladder of Inference mental model described above and how you can use it to increase your self-awareness. Using the ladder is meant to slow your thinking process down, uncover unconscious biases, and as a tool to help others work backwards from wrong conclusions.

1. Definition of emotional intelligence. (2026, March 21). [Dictionary]. Merriam-Webster. [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emotional intelligence](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emotional%20intelligence)

CHAPTER 16

What Matters Most? Leadership Values and Styles

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

Understanding one's values as a leader is something that develops with time and experience in the role. The same goes for determining if you have a preferred leadership style. Nevertheless, we opted to include this topic because it helps to have an awareness of these concepts in order to recognize the elements as you are ready.

Leadership values are a set of principles that guide your decision-making, consciously or unconsciously. Examples include Transparency, Accountability, Equity, Integrity, Empathy, Efficiency.¹ While these are all admirable, each of us will have a handful of things that matter most and have the strongest influence on how we operate.

Monica's Take

My core values include Inclusion, Respect, and Equity. I can think of a few practices and habits where I put these into action in the Head of Access Services role. It was important to me that I shared the bigger picture and assumed that my department members were interested in the 'why' behind their day-to-day tasks. I referred to the folks in the department as 'colleagues' (not 'my staff'), especially to external parties such as faculty and students. I recognized their expertise in their area of work: If there was a change coming or a decision to be made, I would consult with them in advance to include their insights.

As a manager, you will be asked to make countless decisions, large and small. As you gain clarity on your values, you will be more confident selecting a path forward that is in alignment. Over time, your team will recognize the consistency in your actions and build greater trust. Thinking about your leadership values can also help you understand other leaders in your organization, what they value, and how that is demonstrated in their actions. You may find that those situations that make you think "I wouldn't have done it that way" come down to a different set of core values. Finally, as your values cohere, consider where they might be getting in the way of your path forward. If, for example, you value 'risk-taking', you may find it is not the right one to draw on when your employees really crave stability.

Leadership styles are a set of categories that describe common approaches to leading, [spanning from Autocratic to Democratic](#) and all sorts in between. Reflecting on and adopting a style can be a shortcut to figuring out what kind of leader you want to be. Context matters and ideally you will want to adopt a leadership style that is suited to the work that you do.

1. Dare to Lead List of Values. (n.d.). Brené Brown. Retrieved March 26, 2026, from <https://brenebrown.com/resources/dare-to-lead-list-of-values/>

Leadership styles that may be well-suited to the context of academic libraries will include features such as service, growth and development of the self and others, collaboration, shared decision-making, and open communication.

A few styles you might consider:

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

In academic libraries, 'servant leadership' is one of the styles commonly discussed. Even if this style is not your own, it can help to understand this contradictory-sounding idea of the leader acting in service of those around them.

"A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. While traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the "top of the pyramid," servant leadership is different. The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible." (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, n.d.)

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

This leadership style leans heavily on self-awareness, a stable set of core values and ethics, and a desire to be your true, genuine self at work. As you develop your ability to self-reflect, listen deeply to others, and communicate honestly and openly, this style can open up to you.

EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP

This style emphasizes clear delegation, trust, participatory decision-making, encouraging initiative and clarifying accountability. This may be a good fit if you value collegial decision-making and coaching.

As you grow in your role, take the time to understand various leadership styles and observe diverse leaders at your library and institution. What styles do you notice are effective? What sorts of situations demand different strategies? Are there styles that you find aspirational?

Andrew's Take

The empowering style is one I have come to embrace. I tend to steer away from getting too "into the weeds" of the work of my team and rely on and trust them to bring me issues as they come up, so we can problem-solve them together. This style also meshes well with the culture of shared decision-making of the academic libraries I've worked at. I've read research that suggests this style may best support introverted types (which I identify as). I communicate my management style to the people that report to me. I want to be explicit that I will be relying on them to elevate their concerns when they have them. This doesn't mean, however, that I'm not still involved and curious as a manager: weekly meetings ensure that we're checking in regularly and staying in communication.

Further Reading

Academic Leadership Group (2023, August 2). **Effective Leadership Styles for University Leaders at All Levels.** <https://www.academicleadershipgroup.com/blog/effective-leadership-styles-for-university-leaders-at-all-levels>

This article first describes the tasks required of a leader in the university setting, including balancing academic freedom and shared governance, while also promoting student experience, equity and inclusion, and a collaborative welcoming culture. It goes on to describe leadership styles better suited to academia, and a few that are not as well suited. Some styles that we didn't cover in this chapter include 'transformational', 'spiritual', 'affiliative', 'coaching' and 'democratic'.

Celestine, N. (2021, December 22). **What Is the Authentic Leadership Style? 3 Real-Life Examples.** *PositivePsychology.Com.* <https://positivepsychology.com/authentic-leadership/>

Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. (n.d.). **What is Servant Leadership?** <https://greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/>

Managing Life at Work. (2023, August 4). **Empowering leadership: Definition, examples, outcomes, and more.** <https://managinglifeatwork.com/empowering-leadership-definition-examples-outcomes-and-more/>

These three resources offer more information on each of the leadership styles we highlighted, above.

CHAPTER 17

Intent and Impact

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

Miscommunication and misunderstandings happen in the workplace all the time, and sometimes it's because there is a mismatch between the *intent* of our words or actions and their *impact* on others.

We tend to judge others based on their impact on us. We judge ourselves based on our intent. When we act, we have an intent, but it is hidden from others. Even when our intentions are good, our actions may be *experienced* by others as negative – likely in a way we did not anticipate. As a manager, your impact has grown, and this outcome is likely to happen more often than before. And, since our good intentions are not visible, colleagues may question our motivations. Usually, over time, a manager builds trust with their team by repeatedly demonstrating integrity and dependability. The goal is that you build a positive reputation that makes colleagues less inclined to doubt your intentions.

There are strategies to handle these situations, some of which are discussed in the following two videos.

Further Viewing

Resolutions Northwest. (2019, September 17). **Impact vs Intent by Nyanga Uuka** [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBMWkHHAkN8>

Antoinette Griffin. (2026, January 21). **Intent vs Impact: The Communication Mistake You May Be Making** [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmhFWC1uV2Y>

Two brief videos (2 min and 5 min, respectively) that provide examples of Intent v Impact, sample language, and strategies for responding. 'Resolutions Northwest' is a non-profit focused on restorative justice and equity services. Antoinette Griffin is an executive leadership coach with a focus on communication.

A general strategy for when, despite your best intentions, your actions did harm:

1. Listen.
2. Acknowledge the impact you had: e.g., "I hear you: I have upset you."
3. Be accountable. Own what you did and reflect on it: e.g., "I can see how my mass email surprised you and made you feel embarrassed."
4. Clarify your good intent but resist becoming defensive. The focus is on their experience, not your intentions: e.g., "Please know that was really not my intent."
5. Ask how you can adjust in the future. Resist rejecting proposals on the spot and take it under consideration: e.g., "What would you prefer I do next time?"

It is inevitable that someone else's decision or action will have a negative impact on you or your team. When faced with such an incident, keep in mind that we are all prone to a cognitive bias called the [fundamental attribution error](#), which overemphasizes our consideration of personality behind the intent, and underweights situational reasons that might explain the action. We tend to jump to conclusions of bad intention and blame a person's personality for their mistakes.

, via Wikimedia Commons" href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fundamental_attribution_error.png">

The Fundamental Attribution Error:

	Reason for my action	Reason for other person's action
Positive outcome	Personal character	The situation
Negative outcome	The situation	Personal character

Example:

	Reason for the time I arrived	Reason for the time the other person arrived
On time for work	I take my job seriously	It's their job
Late for work	Heavy traffic	They are disrespectful

Fundamental Attribution Error example, by user:Onceinawhile, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

To counteract this cognitive bias, we recommend going into these situations assuming positive intent on the part of the other person. By assuming good intent, we are more likely to enter these conversations from a place of curiosity rather than distrust.

Further Listening

Beard, A., & Ignatius, A. (Hosts). (2026, February 24). **Assuming the Best About Others is Hard—But Necessary** [Audio podcast episode]. In *HBR IdeaCast*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/podcast/2026/02/assuming-the-best-about-others-is-hard-but-necessary>

Thirty-minute interview with professor and author Amer Kaissi. Explains how operating with 'accountable positivity' does not replace conflict resolutions or difficult conversations. Discusses key skills for putting this approach into practice and includes workplace examples.

CHAPTER 18

Difficult Conversations

ANDREW COLGONI; MONICA RETTIG; AND RANDY OLDHAM

As a manager, you will eventually need to have a ‘difficult’ conversation. These are the conversations related to interpersonal conflict, providing (or receiving) feedback, setting boundaries, or a mistake (theirs or yours). Whatever the reason, these are considered difficult because most of us have little practice with these types of conversations, and many find them stressful.

In general, try to have the conversation in person and as soon as feasible – often within a few working days of the precipitating event. As time passes, memories can become fuzzy, resentment may fester, and your team may be waiting for you to respond. It’s fine to do what you need to prepare, but delaying will likely only cause any discomfort to build.

Find a good way to confidentially invite the team member into a private space, and when you do so, tell them what the topic will be about. If possible, minimize the amount of time between the invitation and the meeting.

When having the conversation, stick to the facts that you know. A simple approach you can follow is Situation, Behaviour, Impact, or SBI. In this approach, you clearly explain the situation, describe the behaviour at issue, and then assess the impact. The impact may be on yourself, another individual, the entire team, or a user. From here, as we talk about in our [Intent and Impact](#) section, you will want to enter the rest of the conversation from a place of curiosity rather than blame or judgment. You won’t know their intent, and don’t assume it going into this conversation. You might then ask, “Can you share your perspective on what happened?”

After you have a strong understanding of what happened, you will need to consider next steps to avoid recurrence. Perhaps a departmental process contributed to the error and could be amended. Alternatively, there may be a workplace expectation that needs to be made more explicit and a strategy to support this person to be more successful going forward. For example, “We aim to reply to emails within three working days. Let’s review some inbox management strategies to help you prioritize.”

In interpersonal conflicts, the next step is often a request for a different response. For example, “In the future, if you are frustrated with me, please come speak to me directly.” In other situations, the outcomes might not be obvious during the meeting, and may require further action (e.g., evidence gathering or discussions with your manager, peers, or HR) or deliberation on your part.

It is important to document the conversation, and in most cases, you let the other person know you will be doing so and will share it with them. This could take the form of an email that contains a high-level summary of the

conversation, and any outcomes or actions that came out of it. This ensures that there is a record/paper trail in case it is required in the future.

There are many other models and approaches you can follow for these kinds of conversations, and training on difficult conversations is often available at the university level.

In unionized environments, it is possible that the employee will respond to the invitation to inform you that they will be accompanied by a union representative. If so, it is wise for the manager to also be accompanied by a representative from human resources or labour relations. You will want to review your 'difficult conversation' plan with HR before the meeting. If the issue is serious, it is possible that the approach will instead need to be guided by collective agreement language and/or more formal processes.

DEAL WITH INDIVIDUAL ISSUES AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Imagine a scenario where an employee is routinely late for work and is regularly late returning from lunch break. It is now at a point where other employees and managers comment on this employee's tardiness. You might be tempted to send an email to all employees reminding them of the attendance policy and the importance of being on time to support your teammates since this doesn't single out anybody and avoids the difficult conversation.

The issue with this approach is that all the other employees will likely know who the email was meant for, and you won't know if the employee you wanted to reach understood the message was intended for them. If the behaviour doesn't change, the employee who is routinely late either knows they're in violation of the attendance policy and doesn't care, or they're unaware that they're in violation and reiterating the policy to the entire team will not reach them. Another important factor is that by not dealing with the specific behaviour directly, you're essentially showing all other employees that this behaviour is acceptable: whatever you don't change, you choose.

A better approach to this situation would be to have direct private communication with the employee who is routinely late. Be clear with expectations and be clear about how their poor attendance has been falling short of the policy and the impact it has had on colleagues and the team.

Further Reading

Williamson, D. (n.d.). 2. Use the SBI (Situation-Behavior-Impact) and DESC (Describe-Express-Specify-Consequences) Models. In *Business Communications in the Modern Age of Artificial Intelligence*. <https://txwes.pressbooks.pub/bcomm/chapter/2-use-the-sbi-situation-behavior-impact-and-desc-describe-express-specify-consequences-models/>

This e-book chapter summarizes two models for having difficult conversations, the SBI model covered in this chapter, along with another structured approach called DESC. Each model includes a video and examples.

Further Viewing

TED. (2020, February 10). **The secret to giving great feedback | The Way We Work, a TED series** [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtl5UrrgU8c>

This 5-minute TED-produced video offers some research-derived tips from a cognitive psychologist on how to give someone feedback through what they call a “four-part formula”.

CHAPTER 19

Process and Decision Making

ANDREW COLGONI; MONICA RETTIG; AND RANDY OLDHAM

Not long into your new role, someone will ask you to make a decision. As a manager, you are both trusted and expected to be a decision-maker for your team. In your previous position, you undoubtedly had to make decisions, but your impact was likely smaller. Given the increased impact of your decision-making now, you will need to give serious consideration to the “how” – how you make decisions; how you implement a plan; how you lead a project. You should expect that your decisions will be subject to scrutiny.

To support your decision-making, look to process, which is the defined series of actions that lead to an outcome. First, gather information about existing and/or past processes. For example, is it the norm that a plan is first shared in draft form with a period of time for feedback? Does your department have expectations about how this situation will be treated based on past precedent?

If you need to develop a new process, consider a principle from social psychology called the ‘Fair Process Effect’: If the process is seen to be fair, people are more likely to accept the outcome – even if it is unfavourable. This is sometimes called procedural fairness or procedural justice.

But what is ‘fair’? Isn’t that entirely subjective?

“In the workplace, procedural justice is about things like:

- Transparency: Are employees aware of how decisions are made?
- Consistency: Are the same standards applied to everyone?
- Voice: Do employees have an opportunity to share their perspectives?
- Accuracy: Are decisions based on complete and reliable information?
- Correctability: Is there a process for appealing or questioning decisions?
- Ethicality: Are the decision-makers acting in a way that aligns with moral and organizational values?

When these elements are present, employees are far more likely to accept outcomes, even if those outcomes

aren't in their favor."
(Ethena Team, 2025)

Monica's Take

In a previous role, I had responsibility for scheduling staff to cover all hours of operation at the main library service point. As you can imagine, there were some hours and days that were very unpopular. And the impact was real: Someone might end up with a Sunday-to-Thursday shift for the entire term. Without a doubt, some of the department members were going to get the undesirable shifts and be unhappy. And, despite the fact the library needed to be staffed and that was undeniably the job of our department, I could expect those unhappy folks to direct their displeasure at me.

I leaned hard on process in order to get through this. Several months in advance, I sketched out a plan for the shift assignment process, reviewed it with both my manager and HR, and then shared it with the staff union and the staff group themselves for feedback. Based on their suggestions, I made adjustments. The plan included how the process would play out (seniority + ranked choice) and when everyone would find out the results. In the end, there were indeed some unhappy people, but the shift assignment was understood, with no surprises, and we were able to accept and move on to preparing for September.

DECISION-MAKING AND COMMUNICATION

If you're not clear with employees about how and why you're engaging with them, this can foster resentment, disconnectedness, and mistrust. When communicating with employees, it's important to be clear what type of communication you're having.

Consider the situation where a decision has been made by **library administration** and has been shared with **department heads** to pass on to employees. It's important to be clear with employees that the decision has already been made and that you're sharing the decision for information: the team can have a conversation about the implications of the decision and their feelings about it. It is important to be clear that in this case, the conversation about the decision does not have the opportunity to impact it. Without providing this clarity, employees may feel as though their input and comments are being taken and communicated back to **library administration** and that there is potential for their comments to shape or influence the decision. When they find out later that their comments were not passed on and there was no potential to influence the decision, it's likely that employees will feel disconnected and will feel a lack of trust.

When *you* have a decision to make, you may want to consult with employees to gather their input and feedback to help inform your decision. Again, be clear that the decision is yours to make, that you're soliciting comments and feedback to help you decide, and not every comment may be reflected in the final decision. Being clear about your intention behind soliciting feedback, who is responsible for making the final decision, and how employee feedback will be used helps provide transparency around how they can participate in the decision and what their scope of influence in the outcome is.

Sometimes, you'll be looking to your team to make the decision as a collective. In academic libraries, this is often about coming to a **consensus**. In these cases, they may have full autonomy for the decision and you just need to provide a few words of guidance. For these decisions, communicate clearly that the decision is in their hands and

ask them to share back their final choice so that you can be in the know and can fully support their choice. It's important to fully support the decision they've reached and to not try to alter or change the decision after they've made it: this would erode trust.

FALSE URGENCY

As a manager, you will be regularly confronted with problems and issues from your team. These issues, in the moment, can be presented to you as 'extremely urgent' and a 'top priority', sometimes explicitly and other times because of strong emotions that are attached to them. It can be all too easy to be swept up in that emotion and as your department's champion you might even be inclined to amplify them. Resist this temptation. Instead, aim to be the voice of reason and then both cool down the emotions and slow down the thinking. Your goal is to be able to assess the problem from a place of logic, so that you can accurately determine what needs to be done and, importantly, what priority it should have. Some matters *are* truly urgent and require an immediate response. In many cases, though, while the issue has importance and requires attention, it is not *the* most important item on your or the department's to-do list. If this is the case, take the time you need to work through the issue rationally, and assign a timeline and priority that makes sense. Be sure to communicate your decision and logic to anyone who might be waiting for an outcome.

Further Reading

Ethena Team. (2025, March 31). **Procedural justice: Why employees care more about fairness than outcomes.** Ethena. <https://www.goethena.com/post/procedural-justice-why-employees-care-more-about-fairness-than-outcomes/>

In addition to providing the description for procedural justice used above, this article also summarizes some relevant research, explains why procedural justice matters at work, and provides six ways to make decision-making fairer.

CHAPTER 20

Manager Growth and Resilience

ANDREW COLGONI AND MONICA RETTIG

ASKING FOR FEEDBACK

Honest and constructive feedback is invaluable in understanding how you are performing as a manager. In some workplaces, there are formal feedback mechanisms such as performance reviews or term renewal processes. All too often, the existing practices do not provide managers with timely, actionable feedback from those with direct exposure to their work. It can be ineffective and even frustrating to only hear feedback once annually or at the end of a 3- or 5-year term. Instead, you can choose to open up these conversations yourself using some of the following suggestions.

Informally, you can invite feedback in your one-on-one conversations. For example, after a difficult situation, you could ask, “is there anything I could have done differently in that scenario?”

Another option for collecting feedback from your department is to create an anonymous survey. Before you do so, you will want to give serious thought to how you plan to be accountable to those who take the time to fill it in. Will you publicly share a summary of what you receive? How will you respond to and/or act on their input? Be clear about your plan upfront. A simple manager feedback survey can follow [the 3-question Start, Stop, Continue model](#).

Finally, you can ask your manager or mentor for constructive feedback. Since they are unlikely to be able to directly observe your performance, you could share how you addressed a scenario and request any suggestions for next time or insights on what they might've done differently.

It can be challenging to hear criticism, but it is important to recognize that it also takes courage for an employee to provide candid feedback to their boss. Try to avoid becoming defensive by focusing on listening, taking notes, and committing to considering what you've heard. Similarly, resist refuting feedback in the moment since it will appear that you are not, in fact, genuinely prepared to hear their comments. Not all feedback requires you to make a change but do try to understand what is shared. If appropriate, you can revisit the topic at a future meeting and discuss your reflections on their comments and what you might implement in the future.

Further Reading

Breton, K. (2024, January 18). **The Manager's Guide to Asking for Feedback.** Omni. <https://www.omnihr.co/blog/asking-for-feedback>

General advice on the value of asking for feedback as a manager and practical advice for introducing this process. A blog entry from Omni, an HR technology company.

Scott, K. (2024, June 4). **11 Tips for Getting Feedback From Your Employees.** Radical Candor. <https://www.radicalcandor.com/blog/get-feedback>

A lengthier post with embedded videos, this article is from Kim Scott, author of a popular management book: Radical Candor: Be A Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity. The author advocates for a very direct approach which might not work for everyone nor every workplace, but there are interesting strategies worth considering such as "Criticize yourself in public" and "Relish being wrong."

BURNOUT AND WORKLOAD AS A MANAGER

Burnout is a complicated topic to cover succinctly due to it having multiple dimensions, with many possible contributing factors.

"Burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterised by three dimensions:

1. feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
2. increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
3. a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment. Burn-out [sic] refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life."¹

Why might someone experience burnout? Possible reasons include: a toxic work environment, lack of control over one's work, difficulty disconnecting from work, the burden of emotional labour, over-work, taking on significantly more responsibility, and so on. The differential experiences at work of being gendered, racialized, neurodiverse, disabled, or of a different gender identity may further contribute. Of relevance to libraries is the notion of 'vocational awe,' in which the library and the work within it is considered "inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique"². This can lead to feelings that library work should continue apace despite any negative effects experienced by the person.

While workload is only one of the factors that can contribute to burnout, it is the one that is under the most

1. World Health Organization. (2022). *International Classification of Diseases, Eleventh Revision (ICD-11)*. <https://icd.who.int/browse/2025-01/mms/en#129180281>

2. Ettarh, F. (2018, January 10). Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves – In the Library with the Lead Pipe. <https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/>

direct control of the library manager. If you suspect (or hear directly) that one of your employees is experiencing burnout, talk to them. If you can understand the issue, you can offer support in a variety of ways.

These might include:

- Adjusting the employee's workload through a collaborative discussion: options can include deferring low-priority projects and reconsidering committee involvement. Including the employee is important because a low-priority project might be a welcome creative outlet.
- Revising deadlines and timelines. In your role, you can 'give permission' for a slower pace.
- Providing more direct support for the work, either from yourself or other members of the team.
- Providing information about employer-provided support resources (e.g., employee family assistance programs, or EFAP), such as counselling or therapy.

Despite growing societal acceptance, mental health continues to carry stigma, and this discussion could be uncomfortable for both you and the employee. Treat the topic with sensitivity but convey that burnout does happen sometimes and you are prepared to support them. Communicate that your concerns are about them as a person, not about work product or performance. It is possible that your offer to adjust their workload is turned down. That's okay. The individual may need time to consider privately and/or may be more open to suggestions if you return to the topic in the future.

This might also be a good time to revisit your team's norms (see: [Managing Teams](#)). Are there more [guardrails](#) needed to help your team step away from work when it isn't expected? For example, no emails after 5pm and delay send the next morning, expectations about response times, etc.

Something we don't talk about in libraries enough is the expectation of 'doing more with less.' We should interrogate that concept and spend more time thinking about right-sizing the work to the available resources (i.e., 'doing less with less'). This may mean, in some cases, stopping doing things that were once important but are no longer feasible.

The library manager is as prone to burnout as any role in the library and may carry additional risks from increased emotional labour. Your team members may see you as a safe place to share their worries, concerns, or fears. This is in addition to the burden of more frequent difficult conversations, needing to manage relationships up and across the organization, managing change, handling disputes, interpersonal conflict, and so on. This kind of emotional work is real work, is exhausting, and can take a toll. It can also be insidious, rising to unmanageable levels without you even knowing it. Compounding this, management can be a lonely role, particularly if your position distances you from your peers.

You, as a manager, deserve the same care as your employees. Leverage your skills of self-reflection and check in with yourself: are you going down the path of burnout? Can you pinpoint why? If yes, you can seek your own support. In the case of emotional labour, you may need to closely examine your boundaries and determine where they need to be set for your own well-being.

Further Reading

Johnson, M. W. (2024, June 10). **Keeping Up With... Burnout**. Association of College & Research Libraries. https://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/keeping_up_with/burnout

A short primer on burnout in academic libraries, from definitions to responses. It also points to several important books and articles about the subject.

Johnson, M. W. & Page, S. (2022). **What's in a Workload? Affect, Burnout, and Complicating Capacity in Academic Librarians.** In *Academic Librarian Burnout: Causes and Responses*. Location: ACRL Press. UCLA. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6w86w41v>

One chapter from an edited book on the subject, this digs into the topic of emotional labour as an under-discussed cause of burnout in libraries.

BEING LIKED VERSUS BEING RESPECTED

The tough reality of being in a management role is that you are going to make decisions that leave some people unhappy and there are going to be some people who don't love your management style. This is a normal part of leadership, but that doesn't make it any easier to handle.

We all have varying temptations to be a 'people pleaser.' In North American culture, feminine gender roles are "usually associated with passivity, nurturing, and subordination."³ As a result, women in leadership are often also resisting general social conditioning when pushing back on personal people-pleasing tendencies.⁴

Resist being swayed in order to make someone happy in the moment. Likability is a short-term fix.

Instead, if your aim is the longer-term project of gaining and keeping the respect of those around you, you can make choices that are in line with established process, your personal values, and departmental culture and norms. While it is possible some will be unhappy with an outcome, you can maintain your integrity, make efforts to ensure your approach is understood, and hope others will respect how you enact your responsibilities.

When taking on a leadership role, you are unavoidably opening yourself up to criticism. At the same time, you have the chance to serve those around you and bring about positive change in your workplace. While the work is often invisible, you can make a major contribution to creating a supportive place of employment for library workers — and also a better library for the faculty and students. Theodore Roosevelt's 'arena quote,' albeit somewhat grand, might help buoy your spirits during those tough times.

"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

3. Gender and Socialization | Introduction to Sociology. (n.d.). Retrieved February 25, 2026, from <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wm-introductiontosociology/chapter/gender-and-socialization/>

4. People-pleasing linked to gender differences in problem-solving: Study. (2025, March 13). Department of Psychology. <https://www.psych.utoronto.ca/news/people-pleasing-linked-gender-differences-problem-solving-study>

—Theodore Roosevelt, Speech at the Sorbonne, Paris, April 23, 1910

Conclusion

The art of management, and becoming a better manager, is a learning journey. It requires being vulnerable, introspective, and self-reflective, challenging yourself to do hard things, and being open to making mistakes and learning from them. Like any skill, it takes practice.

Even great, experienced managers make mistakes or errors in judgment and don't know what to do in every situation. But any manager, at any skill level, can start saying, "I don't know, yet," or "I apologize," and "let's figure this out, together." The real trick is being honest with yourself and then being honest with the people around you. Core to this guide is the idea of being aware of yourself and reflecting upon your actions. Give yourself the time to reflect on your decision-making and give yourself the grace to learn and grow from your experiences. Know that it is entirely okay to look back on an interaction and, if you regret how it went, reach out and say just that: "I was reflecting on our meeting yesterday and I feel that I responded defensively. I'm sorry. Can we give that discussion another try?"

Management is hard. It is hard to feel isolated, to carry emotional labour, to make tough decisions, to have difficult conversations. It is hard sometimes not to know what to do or to not have the answer. On the other hand, being a manager is deeply rewarding. Lifting up others, mentoring, coaching, finding solutions, working towards and completing important projects, making the workplace better for your staff: these are where the joys are found.

As we talked about in the introduction, there are networks of people just like you throughout the academic library community. Find your peers. Find a mentor. Keep learning and stay curious.

Longer & Broader Reads

These are resources we have found valuable, but whose scope was beyond our 'quick' framework.

CRD Connect & Communicate. (2025, September 24). *CRD C&C Series: Change Management Strategies for Library Workers* [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yViK5DyFg-0>

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