

MAKING IT ALL WORK: LIBRARY ADMINISTRATION UNLIMITED

Fred Isaac

Description: This final session of the Freshman Seminar will guide attendees toward setting effective library administration goals and present strategies for achieving them. We will share techniques for obtaining, maintaining and building institutional support, assuring an adequate and growing budget, and promoting enthusiastic backing for various fundraising projects. We will discuss such public services as reference work, lively programming, community outreach and bibliographic instruction. If there's time, we'll talk about library space planning and use within the organization. Then, after we solve the problems of supervising or recruiting personnel and/or volunteers and discuss how to get your backlog of books processed without enough staffing, we'll conclude by convincing you that applying for and getting AJL accreditation is your best not-so-secret weapon for accomplishing your goals. Come with questions.

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I came into the room earlier today and listened to Etta Gold talking about policies. I want to start this session by continuing that discussion from my own perspective. In my mind policies are the way we manage the intellectual traffic in our libraries. They tell everyone, from the rabbis and principals—and they do need to be told—to our members and our students. They tell them what the library is and what it does.

There are several key policy documents. We can begin with the vision statement or mission statement, which says in broad outline what you do and for whom you do it. Next, there are goals, which tell how you intend to accomplish the vision. This is frequently done as a list, and it is frequently updated, as conditions in the library and the institution change. The collection development policy tells the community what material you intend to buy, and sometimes what you will not buy. It also reflects how deep your collection is. For instance, if you run a 2000-volume library, you will not want to buy 1500 books on the Shoah. But if you are operating a Holocaust Center library, you may well intend to have 1500 Shoah-related titles. There will be a circulation policy that says what goes out, and to whom it goes out (are you focused only on your own members?) You may wish to have an overdues and retrieval policy that indicates how long material can stay out, and what the charges will be if it doesn't come back. You may also wish to charge a fee for lost material. At the BJE in San Francisco we had a \$10 fee for every lost item. This will pay for the time and material needed to acquire a new copy and to process it so it can return to the shelves.

Next, I want to talk about control over the library as a space issue. The library is your space. This can be as simple as making decisions about where in the room the reference

books are, or which corner will be the children's area. Unless someone else can come up with a very good reason to do things differently, or if they have a great deal of power, those should be your decisions and yours alone.

In synagogues the library is frequently used as the multi-purpose room. You should be able to say to your rabbi or educator, "Gee, we should probably put that meeting somewhere else, because last time three people spilled coffee and we lost five books that I have to replace for \$120. Can you please find another place to hold your meeting?" You will not always get your wish, but what the request does over time is to provide you with control over the space because you have, through your informing the staff. Your policies can assist you in this, because they establish your control over the library as an operating unit.

Next, I want to talk about control over the library's material. To the extent possible, your working conditions, the hours and days you work, are your decision. Also, you are the person charged with the operational aspects of the room. It is your right to do as you wish, and you should defend it. Make sure you are competent to make the choices, and when you make decisions you should be as transparent as possible. If people do not understand why you make a certain decision, the choice you make is more likely to be called into question. If you need to hide something, I would suggest the Poe method (from "The Purloined Letter"): hide it in plain sight. The more complex your system is, the more difficult it will be to operate. If the institution can believe in you and trust you, you have accomplished an important goal.

At the same time the Library is your territory, it is always an institutional resource. Ask your professional staff and clergy, the principal and teachers: What do they want the library to have? What do they want it to look like? You do not need to do what they recommend, but if you listen to them carefully, they will listen to you and they will be on your side when you need them.

When I go out as a synagogue library consultant, I am often asked to weed collections. My routine is to ask the clergy and the educator to review the books I select for removal. I invite them to ask me questions about what I want to remove. I in turn ask them what they want the place to look like when I leave. If I know what they want, and they know what I am trying to do, the process goes more easily and everyone can get the result they seek. Again, this is a matter of transparency. The point is to establish a dialog with the clergy and the senior staff, and to keep that dialog in process.

Many clergy lend their material to congregants. I have asked my clergy to tell me what books they are lending, and then I buy them. The purpose is to insure that their library remains their own possession. If they still decide to lend, that is their option and not a necessity. If you are an institutional resource, the institution ought to take on a certain amount of responsibility for making that happen. I also encourage the clergy to make use of the library for their own purposes as well as to refer congregants to me. I encourage the rabbis and the cantor, the educators and teachers to use the library and its material as teaching material.

Next I want to talk about what it means to become the resource ourselves. Every month, eight or nine times a year, I create an annotated bibliography and publish it in my synagogue's bulletin. They are topical; every month I cover a different subject. This tells my congregation that I am a reader and a learner, just like all of them. Over time, by informing people about the library's holdings, you too will become a part of the resource. The less you are connected to your users and your community, the more they will withdraw from you and the less involved you will be. The more you know and the more willing you are to discuss the books, tapes, websites and other learning tools, the better able you will be to serve.

I want to talk a bit about automation. I believe in computers, but I also am aware that they are a tool, and a very expensive tool at that. I believe that fully integrated automated systems in small libraries with part-time staffs are overkill. If for instance I have a \$5000 annual budget and I need \$3500 to support and maintain my system, the system is not worth the money. If I am only in the room a few hours during the week, an automated system requires that all of my patrons must know how to use it. If they don't or won't or can't learn it, I am likely to lose more material. It's the old lesson, KISS—Keep it Simple, very simple. I use cards and pockets for circulation. I have a database where I keep the book information, and I print it out several times a year.

How many of you use the Web with any frequency?—About half. Get to know the Web. Find your favorite spots—the AJL website, the UAHC, HUC, JTS all have excellent sites with links to other valuable information. Virtual Jerusalem is a wonderful place with an enormous number of links. Find your own favorites, use them and explore them.

Let's now go to public relations. I am an especially big fan of annotated bibliographies. If a course is being taught, or if a lecture is being sponsored by the sisterhood or another group, I will create an annotated bibliography. Simple booklists are a waste as far as I am concerned, because they do not tell the reader the value of a particular title. It is my role to indicate which book is better than another, or why one title should be read first in order to get the most value from another. They are especially valuable when guest speakers come. Rabbi David Ellenson or Dr. Michael Meyer from HUC, or Dr. Neil Gillman from JTS—all of them are excellent opportunities to establish or broaden the reach of the library. Use these resources, create a list, and piggyback on the events you have.

Let me close with a call to all of you. "Being a librarian is more than pointing out sections. The more you know the better a representative you are for your library, your institution, and the age-old cycle of Jewish learning. If you are only a conduit you lose the opportunity to show your clients (actual and potential) what it means to be Jewish." This means reading the books in your library, getting to know them and creating a sense in your synagogue (or institution) that you are the person to see. This includes your rabbi, chazan and educator, your director and fellow staff members. Tell them what you intend to do, and do it. Make them and the entire community welcome to use you and your services, because if some do it others will follow. If you become a personal resource, you

highlight the real resources. If not, you relegate yourself to serving as a clerk in an archive of outdated documents.