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LIS 650.04D – Library Administration and Management

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### **Assignment 1 – Library Administrator Interview**

#### **I. Introduction**

For my interview, I have chosen to interview a library administrator who oversees an academic library, which caters to both the academic and general public. Throughout this paper, I will refer to this director as “Serah” and the library where she works at as “Cocoon” for the purpose of protecting her identity. At 2:30 P.M. on February 6, 2018, I met with Serah in person at Cocoon and I interviewed her for a little over an hour and thirty minutes. By the time the interview was concluded, it was around 4:00 P.M. Not only did we both enjoy the interview, but we also enjoyed a delightful general conversation as well regarding different aspects of a library. She explained to me in detail what her role in the library is as well as her perspective on what qualities a library director should have.

I had a bit of an adventure when trying to determine what library I wanted to explore in-depth. What I did when I was researching for a library was I focused on libraries that were specifically located within and around the area where I reside. I not only wanted to work in a specific type of library, but I also wanted to work somewhere that is close to home as well. Towards that goal, I sent out multiple interview invitations to multiple libraries, which most of them are within the public library category. When I got a reply back from the academic library director, I immediately replied back, because I potentially

see myself working in the confines of an academic library one day. Knowing that I will be interviewing a director who oversees the library department of a school, I created questions that revolved around the theme of academic libraries.

As I previously mentioned before, “Serah” is the current library director of “Cocoon,” which is an academic library that is located within a community college. She received her Master of Library and Information Science degree at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro via their library program. She is currently working on her dissertation, which is about the library program curriculum that some colleges offer. At least four full-time librarians and one librarian who work there part-time staff the library. The staff is mainly comprised of reference librarians and staff who work at the circulation desk. The library is open from 8:00 A.M. to 9:30 P.M from Mondays to Thursdays, while its only open until 5:00 P.M. on Fridays. While Cocoon’s patrons are mainly comprised of students and faculty, it also caters to the general community as well since it is located on a public campus.

From a hierarchal standpoint, the library staff is organized with the director at the top, who is the leader of the entire library department. From there, the library technicians who work there are the next ones down the hierarchal ladder. They answer to the director and carry out whatever tasks that the director has sent out. The library also has one librarian who comes in during the evening as well. That person is on the same hierarchal ladder as the other technicians.

According to Serah, the library has a few goals that it is working towards accomplishing. First and foremost, the library’s ultimate goal is to serve the students, which in turn serves both the campus and the community. The students are the library’s

top priority and have a duty to try to provide them with the best quality service as they possibly can. Towards that ultimate goal, the library has created a sub-goal, which is to increase the library's visibility. Serah said that one of the things the library is doing to increase their visibility is that they are collaborating with the campus' game club. This is one of the strategies that they are using in order to encourage their stakeholders, which are the students, staff, and the community, to make use of the resources that the library offers.

## **II. Administrator Tasks**

When I asked Serah to describe to me what her primary tasks are as the library director of the library department, she broke it down into three types of management.

Those three managements are the following:

- Library fiscal management
- Personnel management
- Facility management

According to her, she is in charge of managing the library's budget, the people who run the library, and the resources that the staff needs to keep the library running smoothly. When I explained to her what the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> rule is, she said that this rule is extremely accurate with the tasks that she does on a daily basis. She said that the rule is really accurate, because she is not on the floor. I think what she means by that is that the people who work the floor have to spend the majority of their focus on the external customers. If the director is on the floor with the rest of the their employees, then the director won't be able to place their attention in other areas that really need it. She lets

the employees handle the role of catering to the patrons while she herself handles the role of catering to both the employees and the library as a whole.

I asked Serah to break her task down into percentages in regards to what areas she spends most of her time on. She responded to my question with the following:

- 50% - Business operation and management
- 30% - Internal Customers (Employees)
- 20% - External Customers (Patrons - students, faculty, community)

As it is shown here, it can be seen that the majority of Serah's responsibilities are focused on business operations, which makes sense. According to Serah, one of her major priorities is making sure that her employees have everything that they need so that they can do their job effectively. It is one of the reasons why she puts much more emphasis on fiscal management. If she can allocate a portion of the library's budget towards areas that need it the most, then this will allow her employees to perform to the best of her abilities. That in turn satisfies the needs and expectations of the external customers that the library is always working hard to serve on a daily basis. Overall, it is her duty as the director of the library department to prioritize business operations of the library, which in turn benefits both internal and external customers greatly. That is how Serah views her role as the library director of Cocoon.

After we discussed percentages of her responsibilities, I then asked her how she defines both leadership and management. She explained that leadership is where does the organization want to grow in the future, while management is the hands on, day-to-day activities. To put it another way, leadership involves setting up long-term goals, while management involves setting up short-term goals. Based on her definition, leadership is

all about deciding what direction you want the organization to sail towards and then you take the helm of the ship and guide it towards your chosen destination. The day-to-day activities that revolve around management help keep that ship on the path that leadership has set.

### **III. Answers to Your Top Five Questions**

I told Serah about the top five goals that I am looking to accomplish, and she gave me her opinion on them. There were a couple of main points that stood out to me as we were discussing my top five goals. The first thing that she told me was that a leader should see what leadership models exist and pick the one that works for you. We were discussing that each leader is unique, which means that one model is not going to work for everyone. They have to experiment a bit and see whether or not the model in question is compatible with their personality.

Serah also pointed out something that really stood out to me. Even if a leader finds a model that works for them, it probably won't work with one of their employees. To reiterate, each individual is unique. This also applies to the leader's followers as well. One model may work for the leader, but it may not work for a certain employee. Depending on the person, the leader may have to resort to a different model in order to resolve the situation. It really depends on the employee in question. It shows that the role of a library administrator can be situational. Every challenge that they deal with is unique from one another, so they have to constantly resort to a new solution each and every time.

Finally, and this is one of the major things that I took away from this interview, Serah responded to my goals by emphasizing the importance of sharing information with both

the employees and the community. It is a leader's duty to make sure that all of its followers are armed with the information that they need so that they maintain their ability to perform their job effectively. If the information is going to directly impact the administrator's employees, then it is very important that they get that information right away. The same goes for the patrons as well if the information in question is going to impact them as well. Depending on the current situation at the time, the information that a library administrator possesses can potentially impact one or both sides.

#### **IV. Opportunities for Improvement**

When I asked Serah what does it take to run a library, she gave me list of the things that she believes libraries have to have in order to succeed. Those components that create a library's success are the following:

- Staffing
- People
- Money
- Education
- Resources

Out of all these five things, the one that she puts more importance on is education.

While it is important for a library to have people to run the library floor, it is even more important to make sure that those people have the skills necessary to effectively perform the job. Education is vital in creating high-quality library service. Employees have to have the required skills in order to maintain high customer satisfaction. While education is important in any field or business, it seems to be even more important in the library and

information field. The staff needs to be armed with as much library education as possible so that they can better serve both the student body and the community.

Even so though, it would not make much of a difference if the library were constantly forced to keep staffing the library to replace staff members who have left. This is one of most frequently occurring problems that Serah has to face as the library director of Cocoon. According to her, the size of the staff at Cocoon is relatively small. If someone calls in sick, it throws the entire schedule for that day off kilter. It creates issues because the director doesn't have anyone else who can take over for that person. Unexpected situations like this is one of the reasons why she has to have a couple backup plans that she can implement if one of these very situations comes up.

The other frequent problems that Serah comes across in her job are money and resources. While she has big dreams for the library that she would like to see come true, she has to keep that vision in check because of money boundaries. During my interview with her, she explained that while there are certain resources that she would like to buy for the library, immediate issues force her to focus that money into areas that need her attention. For example, if the library's computers are not working, then the director immediately has to focus the library's money into getting those computers fixed and updated. It goes back to trying to be prepared for unexpected situations like these. Strategic planning is very important when it comes to being a library administrator.

Even so though, Serah said that she is usually pretty satisfied that the organizational goals of the library are being met. She believes that it is important that you keep your goals realistic. If the goals in question are impossible to accomplish, then the organization is not going to be able to make much progress. She also believes that it is

important that you set up short-term goals that will lead to the overall accomplishment of the library's long-term goal. For example, Serah is currently working to upgrade the library piece by piece. She is bringing in furniture to set up study areas for the students to study or do homework at. She is slowly but surely making progress towards accomplishing the ultimate goal that she has set for the library.

The next topic on the agenda that we discussed in the interview was what she thought were the "ideal" qualities that an administrator should have. Serah emphasized only one quality, which happens to be a quality that I too think that all library administrators should have. That quality is the ability to be flexible in any situation that comes their way. Throughout part of the interview, Serah kept pointing out that an ideal administrator should have multiple plans waiting in the wings to deal with any challenge that they will encounter. As previously mentioned before, each and every obstacle that an administrator faces will be different. Therefore, it is very important that an administrator keeps an open-mind and adapts to whatever situation comes their way. As Serah explained, an administrator has to have a plan at all times.

At the end of the interview, I asked Serah if there was any advice or lesson that she would like to pass on to me as I begin my own path in the library field. She told me to always observe and model. According to Serah, a future librarian can't go into things thinking that they know everything. There will always be something that they don't know. In order to succeed in not just in the library field, but in life as well, a librarian has to have the willingness to learn and experience new things. Experience can be an excellent teacher if you are willing to let it. All the accumulated experience that you



have observed and modeled yourself after will give you the skills that you need to become a phenomenal librarian.

**V. Compare and Contrast our readings to your administrator**

After speaking with Serah, I can definitely say with confidence that the three secrets of Raving Fans do apply to both her and her library. She seemed to have a vision in mind for the library that she is slowly working towards achieving. Even while she is keeping her focus on achieving her vision, she also takes the needs of the patrons into consideration as well. With both of these in mind, she is constantly striving to give the ultimate vision of Cocoon to the community.

This also speaks to how the twelve questions in *First, Break all the Rules* is related to Serah and her library. If one would to rate Cocoon based on the twelve questions, then I believe that it would rate pretty high on that scale. At certain points during the interview, Serah emphasized the importance of not only having the right people working the library floor, but also to make sure that those same people have the best quality resources at their disposal as well. It shows that she cares about the people who work for her and wants to make sure that they succeed. The purpose of the twelve questions is to gauge whether or not an employee has a positive relationship with the organization that they are working for. Based on that, I would say with confidence that Serah is fulfilling that purpose with all effort she is making towards making the library a success.

**VI. Conclusions and Recommendations**

I have to say, I enjoyed taking the time to interview someone who is a resident of the library information field. Interviewing Serah has completely opened my eyes to the world of not just library administration, but libraries in general as well. I knew

beforehand that leading an entire library organization would be difficult. I didn't know exactly how difficult it would until I conducted this interview. It's because of how difficult this position is, that it is important that an administrator has the ability to be flexible in whatever situation comes their way. That is one of the major things I learned from Serah. You have to be willing to change so that you can help the library adapt to the situation that comes up at that time.

Whether or not I find myself in a position of leadership, I will still take this lesson to heart as I venture forth into my future library career. As far as what areas of opportunity that Serah should make use of for her library goes, I can't really think of anything to be honest. Personally, I think she is making use of every opportunity that is afforded to her. If I have to give an opinion, I would say that she should keep doing what she's doing right now. Based on what I have gained from this interview, Serah is doing a good job as Cocoon's library administrator. I wish her and her library the best of luck in their future endeavors. Finally, I thank them for giving me the opportunity to learn valuable knowledge from the experience of a seasoned library professional.