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Moving into Management from Within*

Claire M. Germain**

In law libraries as in other organizations, employees are promoted into management positions within the existing staff. Ms. Germain discusses models for internal career advancement and provides practical advice for newly promoted managers.

Moving into management from within your organization, as contrasted to becoming a manager in a new place, requires that two main issues be addressed. First, how do you prepare yourself to advance within your own library? Second, how do you adjust to the move and make the transition from coworker to manager?

Before answering these questions, it may be useful to elaborate on the concepts of "moving into management," "advancement," "moving up the ladder" and "promotion." A promotion can be defined as "the advancement of an employee to a better job—better in terms of greater responsibilities, more prestige or 'status', greater skill, and increased rate of pay or salary."¹ "Internal promotion," or "promotion from within," is a way to recognize and develop "the abilities of employees within the organization, instead of filling skilled and responsible positions from outside."² Moving up from within also may be considered in the broader context of career advancement for the individual.³

The traditional career model is expressed in terms of the *pyramid*; many start at the bottom of an organization and few make it to the top. This model presupposes that everybody is interested in management as a career goal. In the business world, however, this is no longer the case, because of slow economic growth, the increased technical complexity of

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1. P. FIGORS & C. MYERS, *PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION: A POINT OF VIEW AND A METHOD* 303 (9th ed. 1981).

2. *Id.* at 304.

3. See generally P. CONNOLLY, *PROMOTIONAL PRACTICES AND POLICIES: CAREER BUILDING IN THE '80s* (1985) (Work in America Institute Studies in Productivity # 41) (reviewing literature and including abstracts of articles and books on career advancement).

many jobs, and the increasing maturity of the "baby boom" generation. These factors have led to the development of new ways to achieve advancement.

Another career advancement model, the *career-stage* model, shows that a worker's value to the organization can increase over time without traditional advancement into management. In this model, productive employees move through four career stages. The employee starts as an "apprentice," performing detailed work, following directions, and learning from others. As the employee succeeds and gains self-confidence, he or she begins to be recognized as a "colleague," with personal contacts and a reputation for having technical competence in one or several areas. Next, as a "mentor," the employee develops and guides the activities of others. Finally, as a "sponsor," the employee initiates programs and policies and develops key contacts outside of the organization.⁴

In some professions there are two separate ladders of advancement: the traditional one for managers and a separate but parallel ladder for technical employees and researchers. In this *dual-career path* model,⁵ there are four stages similar to those in the career-stage model. The worker starts as a "learner," following directions and receiving training. After this first stage, the employee decides whether to move up the technical/professional ladder, broadening his or her expertise into new fields, or the managerial ladder, concentrating more on personnel and less on "technical prowess."⁶ In this second stage, the employee is considered an "individual contributor." The third stage is that of "advanced status." On the technical ladder this employee acts as a consultant or project manager; on the managerial ladder, as a division-level manager of people. The final stage—that of "mentor," allows the technical/professional employee to make policy on products and services and to advise on product strategy; the mentor manager determines management philosophy and formulates policy and long-term business strategy.⁷

To be successful, the dual-career path model, the career-stage model, or a mix of the two must be accompanied by a corresponding system of recognition and rewards, including a set of salary and performance appraisals parallel to the managerial track.

These examples offer alternatives to career advancement through management positions. However, if moving up into management is your

4. *Id.* at 3 (digesting Dalton, Thompson & Price, *The Four Stages of Professional Careers—A New Look at Performance by Professionals*, ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS, Summer 1977, at 19).

5. Danforth & Alden, *Dual-Career Pathing: No Better Time, No Better Reason*, 10 EMPLOYMENT REL. TODAY 189 (1983).

6. *Id.* at 194 table 1.

7. *Id.*

goal, and you want to stay where you are because you like your job, you have a spouse or friends in the area, or you like the lifestyle or geographic location, here is what to expect.

Based on my personal experience and observations, it is harder and slower to move up through the ranks within an institution than to move out and up. It is more difficult because within one organization you become used to certain behavior patterns and ways of thinking about library operations and services. People around you are also used to seeing you in a certain role. Your progress through the ranks may be in limited increments. Your job may be slowly expanded once the library director or your supervisor sees more use for your skills.⁸

A move up from within may also be slower because of your own perspective. We each grow into new positions at our own pace, and come with our own mental baggage. Some people think of themselves as managers right away; others realize only after a few years that they are interested in and ready for management.

One major adjustment you need to make to advance in library management is to think of the library as a whole. Each department has specific goals and objectives, which may work at cross-purposes; the manager recognizes this but has to consider the best interests of the entire library.

With this in mind, it is now possible to address the first question: What can you do to prepare yourself to advance in your own library?

The first thing to do to prepare for promotion is to excel in your current job.⁹ First impressions count. Work hard and diligently. Be punctual. Show self-motivation. Volunteer whenever the opportunity comes up. You want to establish yourself as someone serious and reliable, someone to be counted upon, someone who shows potential.

Seek ways to improve and enlarge your current job. This is a gradual and continuous process that involves a mix of theory and practice—mainly the latter.

8. I started as a reference librarian, then was gradually promoted through the titles of senior reference librarian, head reference librarian, head of reference, assistant librarian for information services, assistant librarian, and now associate director. This last promotion formalizes my position within the framework of our library's organizational chart: three department heads—head of technical services, circulation librarian, and associate director (who also functions as head of reference)—all report to the director. As associate director, I coordinate library projects, and am also involved in long-term planning and the administration of the library, responsible for collection development, and in charge of promoting communication within the library. I consider library-wide issues and assist the director in all areas.

9. Some of these ideas were borrowed and adapted from Cross, *Speaking from Experience*. . . *Career Development—A Critical Look*, TRAINING & DEV. J., Nov. 1982, at 58.

Learn all you can. Read the professional literature. Talk to other law librarians at meetings. Read and think about general library issues. Think about how your own job relates to the other departments and how things could be improved. Plan your career goals and review them regularly. Plan your current job so that you have better control of your time.

Explore advancement qualifications. One easy way is to look at the ads in the *AALL Newsletter*. See what the requirements are for the positions you aspire to and consider how you can meet those. Often, a higher position will require supervisory experience. But what if in your current position you do not have anybody to supervise? One way to gain some background is to attend supervisory or management courses. I took a supervisor training course within the university, one that was not specifically library oriented; food service, janitorial, office, and lab managers all attended. The course gave me a sound grounding in general management principles and performance evaluation.

Test immediate and long-term goals with your boss to make your desires and interests known. Communication is important to achieve your goals. It is your duty as an employee to plan for your career advancement; nobody else will do it for you.

Seek your supervisor's feedback. Ask how you are doing. Accept constructive criticism and apply it when appropriate. Don't take it personally.

Take on special projects that enhance your knowledge and skills. You will learn more about the library, which will give you more decision-making power, more interest in library operations, and more motivation. Stake out new areas, such as preservation or disaster-preparedness, that cut across departments. Assume a leadership position.

Once you have prepared yourself for a management position, how can you make the transition from coworker to manager? One way to make the transition to management is to change your role from a "performing" to a "supervising" one.¹⁰ This is easier to do in a new position than in the same position with additional responsibilities.¹¹

It might be wise to read up on time management and attend special sessions on how to make the best use of your time. The more responsibilities you add to your job, the more precious your time becomes,

10. For this and other suggestions mentioned below, see generally Flamholtz, *Overcoming the Peter Principle: Successful Transitions to a New Management Role*, 2 J. MGMT. DEV. 51 (1983).

11. Again, an example from my own experience: when named assistant librarian, I thought that I had to continue doing the same amount of reference work and add to it my management responsibilities, for fear of antagonizing my colleagues. It took awhile for me to realize that this was impossible. We have since hired a part-time reference librarian, and this position has now been upgraded to full-time. I still do quite a bit of reference, but I have time for my added responsibilities.

and the more you need to know how to allocate time to different activities and how to prioritize projects.

Relationships with peers can also be a problem. A change from within threatens the status of everybody in the group. The best way to handle difficult situations is to maintain a professional attitude, work twice as hard, and keep a low profile. It helps to stay calm and considerate, to "depersonalize," ask for advice, and not make rash decisions. It also helps to recognize the importance to the library of the senior staff members, and, in general, to treat everyone as you would like to be treated.

Sometimes your boss may not define clearly the reporting relationship in the organization and the delimitation of your new duties. This creates a problem for the middle manager, especially when there is no strict hierarchy in the library. The best way to handle this situation is to ask for guidelines. Remember that management positions are open-ended and flexible.

Finally, adopt a take-charge attitude, and make things happen. This will help build your self-confidence.¹²

I see one major advantage of moving up within the same institution. It has made me more sensitive to how staff members perceive library affairs when they are not made aware of big, or even small, decisions. It is now my turn to disseminate information about what is going on in the library, because it makes all staff members more interested in what they are doing.

Moving up from within can be advantageous to the employee because it rewards the self-motivated person and ensures job satisfaction. It is also advantageous to the organization, provided that internal promotion is granted on the basis of competence rather than seniority, which can sometimes be a problem, particularly in unionized institutions.

In the law library setting, strict up-the-ladder promotion opportunities are limited because of the small number of staff members and even fewer management positions. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to foster the employee's growth and promotion in other ways, stressing job responsibility and challenge rather than salary and organizational level¹³ and emphasizing intrinsic values such as achievement, growth, satisfaction, and quality of work life rather than extrinsic values, such as upward promotion.¹⁴ Both the dual-ladder and the career-stage concepts, with their

12. D. DOUGHERTY, *FROM TECHNICAL PROFESSIONAL TO CORPORATE MANAGER* 22 (1984).

13. See P. FIGORS & C. MYERS, *supra* note 1, at 108-17.

14. See a series of useful articles on career planning and development, mid-career and plateau concerns, and mentoring, in *LIBR. PERSONNEL NEWS*, Winter 1989, at 2 (published by ALA's Office for Library Personnel Resources).

corresponding rewards, are promotion systems that libraries might wish to explore further.