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**Running Your Library as a Successful Business©
(Libraries must make this leap to survive and thrive in the 21st Century)**

How are Libraries Like Businesses?

Problems & Challenges Facing Professionals. Over the past few years I have developed a close personal friendship with a professional Librarian and some of her friends. Through this group I have observed the challenges faced by MLS degreed Library staff who start out their promising careers as reference or children's librarians and end up as department heads or branch managers. While these individuals are frequently successful as reference professionals, etc., once they are promoted to management they face issues/nightmares they never realized existed. Once promoted they face what would equate to mergers, acquisitions, downsizings, turnarounds (in corporate terms) and depression all at the same time! The depression is manifested because their past successes have not prepared them for the unknowns and challenges of inheriting a staff wrought with dysfunction from previous management problems; a staff seething with hostility, fear, rejection, and denial. Nothing in their careers has prepared them for these challenges.

My prior roles and experiences in corporate America as a leader in performance development allowed me to see the issues clearly and to determine that I can help Librarians overcome these challenges. After all, I had led the most hostile business teams through the impossible and unthinkable and learned to really like the challenge. My experiences, however, taught me that meeting the challenges they face is a systematic process, one to be carefully thought out. Helping Librarians meet the future would require all my professional training and collective experience in business and education for the last thirty years. Change management, as we all know, is not a job for "sissies."

Titles are different, problems are the same. Historically, libraries have evolved much the same way as academic education. In fact, in many school districts, the library is a part of the central system. I was, in fact, an elected Board of Education member for four years and our library system reported directly to the Board. This experience taught me a lot about how Board's think. I also know first-hand about Return on Investment, Change Management and bottom-line performance management.

Essentially, libraries have their Board of Directors, their customers, their professional (MLS) employees and other staff, clerks or pages. They also have labor unions, very strong labor unions just like business and industry, and libraries compete for a shrinking labor pool of qualified talent to run their organizations.

Management of Mediocrity

Both public sector business and library management faces employee performance issues and mediocrity of performance runs rampant in the absence of good, focused performance management systems. While businesses struggle with this issue, and it is a common management strategy to believe employee problems will go away eventually, many library managers are totally overwhelmed with employee issues and spend most of their time “fire fighting” and “crisis managing” the problem employees. In the absence of clear, strong performance measures, policies, procedures, and employee standards in libraries, managers are paralyzed in a system of mediocrity and intimidation of unions who appear to be better organized than library management.

What's Different?

Profitability. Libraries are funded by taxpayers through appropriated levies. Funding justification is perceived by the public under the umbrella of subjective, “children, Motherhood, and the American education-for-all concepts.” On the other hand, Board's of Directors are business men and women elected or appointed to their positions. They expect a business atmosphere including some version of profitability.... Return on Investment, Return on Assets, Return on Equity and competitive market share yet these are not a part of the accountability structure or consideration for library entities.

Management/Leadership Roles. Board's of Directors of libraries (business men and women) do not always know how to relate to a professional library staff. For example, as a Board member myself, how could I understand their role....how should I evaluate the library performance, for example, how many books they loan, how many Patron complaints I hear? Why does it make sense to build a new building, we just built one 50 years ago...what was the ROI? Our frustration as a Board members was that our Director expected us to provide direction, we expected the Director of the Library to make recommendations. We needed role clarification but there was no management expectation to provide that discussion.

Management Development Skills Training. Professional librarians who leave their formal, professional educational training do so with no formal training to lead and manage people. On the job, training in library management comes from senior or older librarians who are training new librarians. Budgets for outside management and leadership development is negligible at best. Consulting is delivered as a band-

aid approach to crisis problems or issues that come from an anemic or non-existent performance management system.

On the other hand, formal training for business professionals in BBA and MBA curriculums dictates management/leadership training and corporate budgets as reported in the 2005 American Society of Training and Development State of the Industry Annual Survey reports that 3.2% of payroll dollars was dedicated to learning and development which was directly linked to performance goals.

Libraries Must Step Up!

In the future, library education must include management/leadership training. With this training knowledgeable, well trained library leaders will be examining current practices within library infrastructures and will begin demanding such things as mission statements, branding for identity, performance management standards for staff, service policy standards with measurable measures, focus groups of patrons to evaluate service levels, behavioral hiring practices, and performance evaluation documentation complete with learning objectives tied directly to the strategic direction of the library. And, this is only a partial list a of the changes that must be made....why?

The explosive economy and public expectations, the internet, shrinking human resource talent pools.... all will dictate the need for libraries and their Boards to do a serious analysis of current operating practices. Libraries are a real business but many of them just don't realize it.....yet!

About the Author:

Peggy Pattison, former college professor of business, gained her practical expertise in performance development while leading large teams and Coaching Sr. Leaders of employees in Fortune 500 Companies through the dynamics of mergers/acquisitions, downsizings, reorganizations, and restructures. She is the author of KISS Performance Solutions,,,,,Management/Leadership Training Series.

Peggy Pattison, Author, Speaker, is currently one of America's top performance coaches. Get her FREE Report: One POWER Formula to SUCCESS at <http://www.PeggyPattison.com>.

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