

What makes an outstanding library director? In my 22 year career as a professional librarian I have worked for nine library directors, some who were reasonably good managers, some not so good, and one who was truly outstanding. In 1990 I joined the Calcasieu Parish Public Library as a member of senior staff and was privileged for the next eight years to work under the direction of Lynda Lee Carlberg. What made her outstanding was her ability to lead by example and manage the library in both a pragmatic and inspiring way.

Lynda was a Professional Librarian with a capital P, kept library staff motivated, striving to meet goals and helped us maintain a sense of humor in the face of inevitable difficulties. Lynda had a rare combination of political savy, compassion, and commonsense. She respected the fact that the library system was part of a mostly conservative community but she firmly belived library service should be liberally provided to as many people as possible. She believed in having a plan, fiscal responsibility, and innovation. She would listen, but she was the final decision maker and always stood behind her decisions, right or wrong.

On a sunny November morning in 1997 she passed away as a result of a one car accident that occurred while driving to work. Within days of this event, I resolved to write down what we had learned from Lynda about managing libraries. She gave us so many insights, inspiration and examples of leadership. Here I just want to put down on paper a few of what our management team jokingly referred to as “Lynda's Laws.”

*Law #1: Do your job including “other duties as required.”*

When I came on board the library had just passed a \$12 million bond issue and a millage increase for the 10 year library property tax. Senior Staff was meeting almost daily to review our multi-volume Capital Improvements Plan and the new 5 year Strategic Plan. At my first senior staff meeting Lynda suggested we make a video about Calcasieu Parish and send it to New York for prospective investors to view. Immediately I had a mental image of wall street investors holding tubs of popcorn sitting in a darkened room watching our homemade video about Calcasieu Parish. Lynda reassured us that it would be a great way to sell our bond. Being an enthusiastic organizer, very decisive, and a firm believer in handing out assignments she informed us that we would each have an assignment either shooting footage around the parish or interviewing community leaders for the video. She turned to me and asked me if I wanted to go up in a helicopter to photograph aerial footage or if I preferred to interview the chief

officers of the Port and the Chamber of Commerce. Stunned, I picked the later and was amazed to hear the Business Manager cheerfully volunteer to shoot the footage from the helicopter and other senior staff offer to shoot a feature of the brand new jail (strangely, the guys were very proud of that jail). I couldn't help but wonder what kind of library was this anyway?

Apparently our video was a hit and we had no problems selling our bond. Post getting the check from the bond, senior staff met and Lynda again made assignments, this time of responsibilities and funds. She turned to me and said, "You have a million dollars for opening day collections, and \$500,000 for a library automation system." (This was 1990 and that sounded like a lot of money and I felt good.) Then she smiled and said "Oh, and don't forget, it's your turn to take out the trash after the Library Board Meeting." Classic Lynda – assign a big job and then remind you not to take yourself too seriously. Do a good job and remember to keep your feet on the ground.

*Law #2: Be responsible with budget; this is the people's money*

In senior management we were each responsible for an annual budget that included personnel, operating and capital expenditures. After a couple of months on the job, I got called into Lynda's office. After I sat down she sternly said, "You have exceeded your budget." Surprised, I answered, "I have a budget?" "I didn't tell you you had a budget?" We both laughed and she explained how she had

come to the conclusion that I had exceeded my budget based on the financial statement for the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter showing I had already spent 50% of the money budgeted for processing supplies. I explained that rather than waiting until we were out of processing supplies and have books stacking up waiting for labels and jackets, we had decided to order 6 months at a time and when we were down to a 2 month supply, re-order. At that point, Lynda said good idea and she asked that I keep her informed of changes in spending and budget issues now that I knew I had a budget so she wouldn't be surprised.

The deal was our taxpayers had voted for our 10 year library tax to pay for library resources and services and were told during the tax election generally what the revenue would be used for and how much money the tax would generate. The challenge for the library was to live within the 10 year budget. At the beginning of the 10 years, there was plenty of revenue to meet expenses, but by the middle of the decade we would be breaking even and to make it through the last couple of years had to pull funds from the reserve we had set aside during the fat years to balance our budget. Every year from July through mid-September each senior staff manager (Director, Central Library, Facilities, Branch Services, and Technical Services) would work on revising their section of the current year's budget (over or under and making it balance) and creating the following year's proposed budget. Lynda would take our revised and proposed budgets and review them, ask questions and make preliminary funding decisions. We could not purchase what was not planned into the budget and any changes were

documented in a budget memo to the Director. Monthly, senior staff received copies of the monthly financial statement to verify expenditures and track budget balances. We had to be very careful with the people's money. For one thing, part of our annual evaluation was based on how well we had planned and handled our section of the budget.

*Law #3: Bring solutions to problems, not just problem reports*

Whenever I had a library problem or decision to make and was not sure what to do, I could go to Lynda and ask her if the same had ever happened to her and what did she do. To be sure when I made that call I had a couple of possible solutions to propose as Lynda had told me early on in our working relationship, she expected me to propose solutions not just point out problems. From what I remember of that event, Lynda took a deep breath and let me know in no uncertain terms that as a professional librarian she expected me to not just tell her there is a problem but be able to explain why the problem existed and propose solutions. What I quickly learned was that saves a lot of time as you start with an analytical rather than an emotional approach to problem solving. Much less stress, less moaning, more action and faster resolution.

*Law #4: Know the law and abide by it.*

Have written personnel and library policies. Lynda maintained and regularly updated our policy manuals. The library's policy manual started with the greatest library documents defining what drives library service: ALA Library Bill of Rights, Freedom to Read Statement and the Code of Ethics. From there it went into all the many specifics for providing service, collection development, challenges, employment at the library, etc.

Lynda made a point of knowing and informing the library board and senior staff of changes in law that would affect the library and was proactive in implementing laws. Our library buildings were handicapped accessible and all new/renovated buildings were re-designed with handicap accessibility in mind before ADA became the law of the land. Lynda genuinely believed in helping the handicapped in practical ways but without limiting services available to other patrons.

We had the first sexual harassment policy in the parish. Long before the stories of high ranking federal government officials being involved in questionable activities, Lynda was sensitive to the fact that most library workers are female and they work mostly in the public eye with all the pluses and minuses of interacting with the public, that young adults and children are vulnerable in public places (and libraries are as public as a park or a beach). Years ago, several years before CIPA (Children's Internet Protection Act), when we implemented graphical internet access we also implemented blocking of pornographic

websites at the request of library staff who stated that they would consider the library not doing so, would make them vulnerable to sexual harassment in the workplace.

We live in a relatively small community with our 1990 population being 167,000 over a 1,000 sq.mile area, now around 186,000. Most of the people who live here are life long residents. Unemployment is relatively low. This makes for a small labor pool with little competition for employment. In so small a community it was often difficult to avoid hiring members of the same family. Lynda decreed that members of the same family could not work for each other. What this came down to was children could not work in the same building as their parent.

Husbands and wives could not work together at the same library branch. No one could be supervised by their relative. That way we kept distinct the line between personal and private life and avoided the appearance of nepotism as much as possible. It was important that the library be absolutely fair in hiring and not let a job at the library become a political favor. We kept our hiring process clean and in that way, were able to reject requests for political hiring when they were made. The library strictly abided by labor law and as Lynda said "If your library can take care of its own business competently then the governing agency will respect you and leave you to it." By knowing the law, enforcing it consistently the library was in a good position and not a "problem agency" for parish government. They did not have to worry about us because we took care of our own business as much

as possible. Do what is listed above and it will be difficult for others to find fault (but not impossible).

*Law #5: Every patron challenge is an opportunity to educate.*

Lynda never said that in so many words, but her actions spoke it clearly. Having been a member of ALA for many years Lynda believed firmly in intellectual freedom. The ALA Freedom to Read and Library Bill of Rights were listed in their entirety at the beginning of our library policy manual and mentioned in all library policy literature. Following ALA guidelines established many years ago, all patron challenges were logged using a standard form available at the circulation desk and routed to the Director for her personal response. I was involved in collection challenges because one of my responsibilities was overseeing the library collection (what is in it, and what isn't). Often I found that complaining patrons were "bad patrons" or not even patrons at all. In one case a mother declared we had a devil worship book in the children's section. This was actually a well respected authoritative folklore collection which included stories featuring witches. Being of a low mind, I noticed the book in question was very overdue. I told Lynda that apparently it only became a devil worship book when it became overdue and the patron was told how much the overdue charge was. As usual I called the branch staff to hear the "backstory" of this patron challenge. What I found out was that the real complaint was about having to monitor what the child read. The parent wanted to say that although she monitored her child's

television and movie viewing, she didn't think she should have to monitor what her child was checking out at the public library. This was an ideal opportunity to explain that the library is not *in loco parentis* and it is the parent's responsibility to decide what their children will checkout. The library does not censor what is checked out. Regardless, we researched the challenged item and explained why we had it and respectfully explained it to the patron and thanked them for their input.

In the vast majority of cases patrons reacted very favorably to this treatment and thanked us for our explanation. We probably had several challenges a year, mostly from irate parents, but occasionally from organized groups in the community. You never read about these in the newspapers or library literature because Lynda knew how to handle them diplomatically and gracefully. What I liked about this approach is that the community was not polarized and people were not forced to take positions on issues which they actually knew little about. I learned from Lynda that a library can be true to intellectual freedom without dividing their service community and harming their relationship with their funding agency if they just take the opportunity to respectfully educate. She had the wisdom to do so.

*Law #6: There's really nothing new under the library sun.*

Lynda and I discussed this several times. One of my first big tasks for the library system was to undertake the first ever planned weeding project since the Carnegie Memorial Library opened in 1904. During the weeding process I noticed how often the same themes were repeated every 20 years or so – educating the backward child, slow learners, ... It was the same idea but with a different name. Educational methods came and went and repeated themselves over time with different names. The same is true with library service. Are we providers of quality materials to raise up the ignorant or do we give the people what they want no matter how crude and poorly written? Do libraries change society or do libraries reflect society? Are we disinterested observers with fair and balanced collections or do we push an unacknowledged change agenda? Do we know what is best for everyone else and give it to them, even though they have proved they don't want it by not using it?

On the Friday before Lynda died so unexpectedly we were sitting together at the Fall Library Administrator's Conference. The session we were attending was about the retirement system and Lynda was talking about retirement being only a few years away for her. She was only in her mid-fifties and I asked her why she thought she should retire. (I frankly doubted she could give up her habit of command.) She told me, that the sessions at the conference about the latest ideas in library service had a ring of familiarity to her. In some cases it would be the third time in her career to hear that particular issue/idea– that the issues,

and ideas and solutions seemed to repeat in cycles and when you noticed that it was time to retire.

There were many more "laws" but these stick particularly in my mind. I'm answering patron complaints right now and biting my tongue, and guess what, I am actually learning something. These people cared enough about the library to speak out. They deserve my respect. Maybe my great idea about switching the collections around at different libraries would have more chance of success if it were discussed first with the staff who will be directly affected. And I think I figured out who the problem employee is, but Lynda never indicated that she valued my contribution any the less. Thanks Lynda, for sharing your experience with us and, by your example, giving us some library laws to live by.