

Administrator Shadow and Interview

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## ADMINISTRATOR SHADOW AND INTERVIEW

Managing a public library has become one of my major goals after completing the MLIS program at Dominican University. This goal became more prolific after completing the interview and administrator shadow. Maggie Clemons is the Chicago Public Library Branch Manager in the Back of the Yards neighborhood. She is the youngest branch manager in the CPL system and is a Dominican University alumni. After moving through different roles in the CPL system, she found her home at the Back of the Yards branch. Shadowing Maggie for half a day allowed me to witness the level of involvement and dedication she has to her staff and neighborhood patrons. There have been several obstacles to overcome while managing the branch, but Maggie continues to exhibit admirable leadership. After shadowing Maggie Clemons at work, I was able to interview her about topics relating to library management and her personal philosophies on community empowerment through library services.

Back of the Yards Library operates in a leased space located on the south side of Chicago. It is a branch that is attached to the neighborhood's high school that opened in 2013. Before managing the branch, Maggie was the adult librarian and acting manager for the Richard M. Daley branch in Humboldt Park. On Tuesday October 11, 2016 I meet with Maggie Clemons to shadow her in her opening routine of the branch. The hours of the branch are Mondays & Wednesday, 10am to 6pm, Tuesdays & Thursday, 12pm to 8pm, and Friday & Saturday 9am to 5pm. The branch is required to open with 3 staff members, not including their full time security guard, and if anyone calls off work Maggie must find a replacement or come in to open the branch herself. Maggie let me know that they are currently short staffed, and it is very common for the branch to only have 3 employees all day (Personal Communication, October 11, 2016). Maggie encourages professional development with her staff and is very supportive when

staff apply for promotions or transfers, which usually means leaving the branch. Maggie reports to the district chief who then reports to the assistant Commissioner of Neighborhood Services. Her overall responsibility as a branch manager is to oversee the branch staff, maintenance, operations of the branch building and library services.

Everyday Maggie communicates what is expected of her staff by providing a task list with duties as well as special programs happening that day. In that matter everyone is aware of their responsibilities and programs to promote for the day. Maggie states that she is usually never in her office unless she is working on the monthly report or staff schedule. Because the branch is small Maggie is usually working in reference, covering someone for lunch performing circulation duties and even putting books away. She stresses that they have not had a Library Page for over a year and that being a branch manager does not mean skipping the tedious job of putting books away. I found that very admirable and a great quality of being a leader that displayed commitment to the staff and branch.

In our class readings and lectures we have explored leadership as a trait, ability, skill and behavior. In this sense her behavior is a way of defining leadership. As Northouse (2016) would proclaim, other staff can observe the behavior that Maggie portrays while taking on any task and influences her staff to follow. Shadowing Maggie thought the day also allowed me to compare her management style with other managers I have worked with at CPL. During my time with Maggie, I was able to identify traits associated with transformational leadership. as she makes sure to spend time communicating with staff about system wide procedures regulations. Further, she demonstrates commitment and passion by being relational and open to any staffing concerns. Staff regularly approach her to pitch program ideas and ways to improve services at the branch.

As a manager Maggie attends various system wide meetings and lets her staff know of changes that are going to take place. I was present to witness Maggie talk to staff about a new system the circulation department will be using. She was able to coordinate when staff would go through trainings and relieve some stressed caused by the change. This is a great example of communication and preparing for overall changes library systems may be implementing. In Libraries' choice: Change or fade into oblivion, staff faced challenges with leadership that affected adapting to changes at the branch (Toppo, 2014). In contrast, Maggie works with staff to ensure readiness and adaptation to new procedures. This is largely done through including staff in opportunities to refresh and develop new skills in refresher or introductory trainings.

In our personal interview we explored what skills and qualities she looked for as well as how the staff were evaluated. Maggie looks for people that are flexible, creative, have good customer service skills as well as a drive for public service. She states staff evaluations should occur twice a year but only done once, because the system is so stretched for time and people (Personal Communication, October 11, 2016).

When we talked about goals for the office Maggie expressed wanting to support CPL's strategic plan and its priorities within that plan. The Chicago Public Library Strategic Plan 2015-2019 focuses on providing the best quality in areas pertaining to the library material in their facilities, technology, staff programs and overall services. Maggie's Philosophy of empowering communities though the library aligns with the areas CPL focuses on, which are access for all, nurturing learning, supporting economic advancement, strengthening communities, and serving patrons effectively (Building the Library of the Future, 2016). Maggie also addressed that in a local scale the priorities are to keep the branched staffed so it can open every day and to make sure the community knows about the library and the services available to them. It was interesting

to notice that Back of the Yards Library had its own mission within the organization's vision. As stated in the article "Organizational Cultures of Libraries as a Strategic Resource," Back of the Yards Library supports the needs of their community even though they follow a system wide vision (Kaarst-Brown, 2004). Maggie states as a branch manager she does not contribute personally to the strategic plan, but her job is to support the plan and to make branch goals every year that address and follow it.

It is important to note that as a manager one must be prepared to handle difficult situations and problems with staff. Sometimes there is no training or education to confront these obstacles that come across but managers must use their best judgment in finding a solution. After shadowing Maggie, I was able to witness some exemplary qualities of leadership. It was powerful to see how staff believed in her leadership and respected her judgment. It was also purposeful to talk to a manager that cared greatly about community empowerment through library information services. Her personal philosophy of community empowerment aligned with my views and enthusiastic goals. Maggie has been able to successfully manage the branch even when short staffed and with opposition from the principle of the school they are attached to. Maggie states that she knows they meet their goals through feedback given by district chief, main departments, and patrons as well as how the numbers match up with other branches of larger size.

## Work Cited

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