Two experienced library managers explain how to create a productive workplace as they weave expert advice and commentary into an easy-to-use resource. This revised edition focuses on daily, real-world practices, offering:

- Specific strategies for new supervisory staff
- Hundreds of tips for encouraging a positive work ethic, maintaining productivity, and building teamwork
- Proven advice on practical supervisory issues like hiring, firing, interviewing, and training
- Policies and procedures that maintain fairness while addressing potential legal land mines
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Fundamentals of Library Supervision

SECOND EDITION

Joan Giesecke and Beth McNeil

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MANAGEMENT USED TO be simple. The manager or supervisor told employees what to do and employees did what they were told. That world does not exist today. Today’s managers, supervisors, team leaders, project managers, and unit heads face a more complex environment. Managers need to balance production goals with concern for people issues in a continually changing setting. The workplace and the workforce are different. Managers may now find themselves overseeing four generations of staff, each with its own characteristics and needs. Each group responds best to a different management style. Additionally, more women are in management roles, bringing a different perspective to the administration of organizations.

The legal environment is also more complex, with laws addressing discrimination, sexual harassment, health issues, and other personnel issues. Today’s supervisor needs to keep up with legal changes if he or she is to avoid legal challenges.

As this book goes to press, the bleak economic climate dominates the news. Supervisors may be facing reductions in forces, layoffs, furloughs, or pay cuts. At the same time, use of library services may be increasing as the public turns to libraries for Internet access and job-hunting services, as well as recreational reading, media, and computer games. In these difficult times, good supervisory skills are essential. Supervisors must take a leadership role in providing support for their staff and ensuring the library can meet its goals and objectives. Poor supervisory skills will only compound the morale problems that arise during difficult times. Excellent supervisory skills can lead to departments and units that not only cope with the challenges they face, but are able to move forward and become excellent organizations.

While our world is more complicated, it is also more exciting. Managers have more flexibility in how they structure their units or organizations. They have more options for delegating tasks, establishing goals,
and encouraging staff development. They can build high-powered teams that surpass traditionally structured units.

How can supervisors and managers create an exciting environment? Many of the fundamentals of management that lead to a productive workplace are basic common sense. Others require taking a new view of management and letting go of the idea of central control.¹ In this book, we cover the fundamentals of good management and bring together practical advice from experts with basic commonsense approaches to solving today’s management challenges. Whether you are a new supervisor just getting started or an experienced manager, you will find that the topics covered here provide you with an overview and foundation for the tasks and responsibilities of being a manager.

This book explains getting started as a supervisor or manager, creating a positive working environment, managing teams, working with a diverse workforce, and recognizing fundamental legal issues that arise in today’s workplace. Practical skills that are covered include hiring, interviewing, orienting, and appraising employees; managing rewards; and planning and organizing work. Project management, meetings management, and communication skills are also discussed.

Throughout the book, examples of supervisory challenges will be exemplified through the experience of two new supervisors. Gina is the head of a reference unit who was hired from outside the organization. Tony is the head of a cataloging unit and was promoted from within the organization. Their different perspectives will help illustrate ways that supervisors can address the various tasks and challenges their jobs entail. The examples and stories in this book are composites created from a variety of experiences and organizations. All names, circumstances, and details have been altered. Any resemblance to real people is coincidental.

If you enjoy bringing people together and helping them do their best, you are ready to be a manager. Enjoy the complexities and challenges that make up this very exciting world.

NOTE
Today’s Workplace

Trends

Changing Roles of Managers and Supervisors

Changing Competencies

Leadership Skills

Summary

Today’s Managers face a workplace that is significantly different from the one that existed even a few years ago. Today’s world is more fast-paced, and change is a way of life. The global economic recession of 2008 and 2009 has shown how vulnerable all organizations are to the impact of economic instability. Increasing unemployment, decreasing state and local revenues, and increasing uncertainty about the future are complicating the planning process for any organization. Organizations face new competition, changing technology, mergers and acquisitions, bankruptcies, changing consumer expectations, and economic instability in the normal course of events. They work in a global environment, with potential suppliers and customers located anywhere. Jobs are being outsourced to offshore companies and third world nations. Multinational companies are learning how to blend cultures and develop management structures that can be successful in multiple environments. Technological changes impact all aspects of business, from financial systems to human resources and knowledge-base systems. Trying to keep up with the many changes in how technology can be used is a full-time job. Furthermore, managers are faced with the instability that can result from mergers and acquisitions, as well as from the blending of different types of organizations within the same industry. Managing becomes more challenging when you are not sure if the top management of the company is arranging a restructuring or
planning to sell the company to another owner. Long-range plans quickly become short-range strategies for survival if you don’t think you have a long time frame to protect your own career. To compound this uncertainty, today’s managers also face an uncertain economic environment, with budget reductions, downsizing, and restructuring of financial plans having become facts of life. Externally, organizations face the challenge of new expectations from customers who want to customize anything they can, including restaurant meals, and want everything quickly. Satisfying customer demands when those demands are always changing compounds the challenges of planning and organizing work for effectiveness and efficiency. The changing political landscape is also making planning for librarians more challenging. The election of the first African American president, Barack Obama, in November 2008 signaled a potential change in how the federal government approaches regulations, economic recovery, and military activities. Librarians will need to carefully assess how federal regulations on information infrastructure change, if at all, and how these changes impact what libraries can and cannot do to protect the privacy of their patrons and support core library values.

**Trends**

Libraries are not immune to these different forces, and library managers need to understand how these forces and other trends impact their organizations.¹

*Competition.* Libraries face competition from a variety of sources, including the most obvious source, Google. Today’s students, citizens, or company employees are more likely to try Google first for information than they are to check with a librarian. Library patrons can also be found studying in bookstores with cafés and comfortable seating rather than in public, school, or academic libraries. Libraries are trying to look more like bookstores and cafés even while people abandon bookstores for libraries as the economy worsens. Library managers need to understand this world of competition if they are to position their libraries to remain a vital part of their communities or organizations.

Competition has forced librarians into becoming marketing managers, learning how to advertise and market their services. No longer can libraries afford to sit back and assume that everyone knows what libraries can contribute to the community. Instead, librarians must develop plans to explain why libraries are still needed and why they play a vital role in the information-rich world we live in. The American Library Association’s @ your library campaign is one of many ways libraries can market their services and advertise their worth. As libraries face budget reductions, librarians need to actively solicit community support and demonstrate
how they can contribute to the economic and social well-being of their community or campus, if they are to avoid becoming irrelevant.

Technology. Changing technology is a way of life in today’s libraries. The library manager who waits to find the perfect system before implementing new technologies will not be successful. Librarians have to become risk takers, trying new technologies even though the results are not guaranteed. Moreover, managers must let go of the idea that once a decision on technology has been made and hardware and software have been purchased, they can keep that technology for a long time. Hardware and software change regularly, and libraries must find ways to remain current if the library is to remain vital to its patrons. Finding funds to upgrade workstations on a three-year cycle, for example, will change how budgets are structured and how priorities are set.

Mobile technology is changing how patrons communicate. Information is available anytime, anywhere, on one’s BlackBerry, iPhone, or other mobile device. Libraries appear as physical spaces, websites, RSS feeds, blogs, Facebook pages, or as a part of the search toolbar. Patrons in the library may instant message (IM) a reference desk that is located just a few feet from where they are sitting rather than get up to ask a question. All of these changes alter how librarians think about services and service delivery.

Technology changes also impact internal organizational structures. With networked resources and online systems available in many libraries, managers may find that their staff include employees who want to telecommute rather than work on-site. Supervising these employees takes careful planning and creativity to ensure that productivity measures are met and that these staff feel a part of the overall unit or department. The use of technology also brings ergonomic concerns to the workplace, with supervisors now needing to address issues of safe workplaces and workstation arrangements that will decrease the chances of staff developing health problems such as carpal tunnel syndrome. While previously any table or chair might do, today’s workers who spend all day working at computers need a work space that can be adjusted to meet their individual needs. Furthermore, ubiquitous network options and handheld devices mean that employees can be connected to their workplace and their e-mail no matter where they may be located physically. Work time can expand to include any time of the day or night. Supervisors and managers now need to address the issue of staff who may work too many off-hours, complicating the discussion of what constitutes work and work-related activities.

Technology also impacts how decisions can be made. Supervisors may now have access to a variety of data on workload, productivity, and customer satisfaction that they might not have had twenty years ago. They can use computer systems to monitor productivity measures such as how long staff take to catalog or process items, as well as how long someone
takes to answer a question on a chat reference service. Data can make decision making more transparent, or it can be used by some to obscure how decisions are actually made.

**Mergers and acquisitions.** While most libraries do not think about mergers as a major force in the field, changes in organizational structures are occurring. Public and school libraries are being blended in the same space. Corporations are centralizing information services, eliminating smaller local collections and services. Academic libraries are closing branches and building virtual libraries instead of physical collections in order to serve dispersed populations. Granted, these types of changes have occurred at various times in the history of libraries. But today, with economic uncertainties and the changing information world, managers may face situations that they never thought would impact their institutions.

**Customer expectations.** Libraries know that customer expectations have changed. Customers want access to a wide variety of information resources and services at times that are convenient for them. Libraries that are not customer-focused will not be supported and will find that their funding suffers.

**Economic uncertainty.** Libraries are all too familiar with the problems of budget and staffing reductions. In tough economic times, libraries may be seen as less central to the core mission of an organization, less central to the core activities of a school, and less important to a state, county, or city that has to pay for mandated initiatives and social programs. For example, in a recent survey of citizens in Lincoln, Nebraska, on their perceptions of city services, citizens rated libraries as essential services. Nonetheless, when asked to prioritize the funding of city services, citizens rated fire and police as essential and libraries as nice but not crucial for the city.²

**Changing workforce.** Perhaps the most noticeable trend is the changing demographics in the United States. The population is becoming more diverse. Libraries need to learn to recruit and retain staff from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. Another change in demographics is the changing generations in the workplace, with four generations of workers now a part of many of our institutions. Supervisors can no longer assume that all employees will behave and react to the environment in the same way. Many of today’s newer employees are interested first in what they can get out of a job rather than being focused on how they can contribute to the organization. Supervisors need to think about how to build partnerships with staff to get the work done rather than thinking they can simply give orders and have staff carry out those orders.

**Global economy.** While many libraries may think of themselves as local institutions, libraries are still connected to and influenced by the global economy. With the many mergers in the publishing field, libraries are buying many of their reference and scholarly resources from companies headquartered in Europe and other countries. Acquisition budget
planning has to include the impact of exchange rates as well as the impact of inflation.

Libraries and publishers are also taking advantage of the global economy by outsourcing digitization work to countries such as China and India, where labor costs are less than in the United States. Partnerships are being created, too, as libraries join with libraries in other countries to provide online real-time reference assistance on a twenty-four-hour basis. These partnerships are helping libraries expand services to meet the demand for service in a 24/7 world.

Today’s library managers and supervisors need to be aware of these trends and how they will impact their own institutions and organizations. Every manager has to understand the big picture of the information field if she is to be successful in an environment of change.

**Changing Roles of Managers and Supervisors**

Not only are the organizations we work in changing, but the role of the supervisor is also changing. In the mid-twentieth century, the manager’s role could be described by the acronym POSDCoRB, which stands for

*Planning.* Managers were responsible for determining organization goals and deciding how the organization should meet those goals.

*Organizing.* Managers determined how the work would be divided among organizational units and decided what procedures would be used to accomplish those tasks.

*Staffing.* Managers were responsible for the personnel decisions in their units, including hiring and evaluating staff.

*Directing.* Managers directed the work of others, deciding who would complete which tasks.

*Coordinating.* Managers coordinated activities between units. Staff were responsible only for work within their own units.

*Reporting.* Managers were responsible for reporting on unit accomplishments and keeping upper management informed about unit progress.

*Budgeting.* Managers were responsible for the unit’s budget, determining how resources would be divided and monitoring to make sure that budgets were met.
While these roles still exist in our organizations, it is more likely that in today’s environment these activities are shared between the supervisors and the staff. A supervisor is more coach than director and more facilitator than commander. New roles for supervisors include recognizing and recruiting talent, teaching staff new skills and promoting learning, understanding the organization’s culture, and understanding organizational power.

*Talent.* Successful supervisors are learning new ways to recruit. They are learning that they need to recruit talent and ability rather than looking only at skills. Supervisors know they can teach skills to talented employees easier than they can teach talent to someone. Without the key talents and abilities needed to do a job, a staff member is unlikely to excel. In today’s market, where recruiting is very competitive, it is important to recruit the best staff possible so the unit can succeed and grow.

*Promoting learning.* Most staff today want a job that provides personal satisfaction, where they can control their own destinies, and where they have a voice in what happens. In organizations that promote learning and encourage staff development, staff are more likely to find the satisfaction they seek. Supervisors who promote a partnership approach to the management of the unit are more likely to create an environment where staff have input in the unit and feel appreciated for their efforts.

*Organizational culture.* Successful supervisors understand the organizational culture in which they operate. Supervisors need to know how the organization measures success, how rewards are determined, how mistakes are handled, how decisions are made, and how risk is tolerated. They also understand the time frame in which the organization operates. Some libraries, for example, work on a semester system, some on the school year, and some on the fiscal year. These time frames impact how objectives are measured and how the pace of the work is likely to be set.

Supervisors can learn their organization’s culture by carefully listening to others, observing how things are done, keeping an open mind about workflow and processes, observing who succeeds and why, and remembering to look at the big picture beyond their own units. Setting aside time to reflect on organizational activities and keeping notes on what works and what does not work will help identify the key elements in the culture.

*Power.* Power is a natural part of an organization. Supervisors should review the organizational chart to see how their units fit into the overall structure and fit with each other. It also helps to identify what activities are not reflected on the organizational chart and then learn how these functions are dispersed in the organization. Understanding relationships will also help in identifying organizational politics. It helps, for example, to know if colleagues were sorority sisters or fraternity brothers. Do they belong to the same groups? Do these people form an alliance in the organization? How does the distribution of power in the organization relate
to the political relationships? Thinking explicitly about the organization and reflecting upon what goes on will give supervisors a better chance of developing ways to work that are successful and are rewarded.

**Changing Competencies**

Managers and supervisors need to develop a variety of competencies beyond technical expertise to succeed in their jobs with these new roles and responsibilities. The soft skills of human resources management, team building, and leadership are the foundation of successful management at all levels of the organization. Plan on putting the following competencies to work daily as you develop your skills as a manager.4

*Interpersonal skills.* Supervision is about creating relationships. Good people skills are a must.

*Communication skills.* Written, verbal, and active listening communication skills are crucial.

*Problem solving and decision making.* Learning to analyze data and using that data to resolve problems will help you work effectively. Using good judgment is also a key success factor.

*Initiative.* Taking the initiative, anticipating needs, and taking action are the signs of a good supervisor.

*Delegation.* Learning to appropriately delegate the right tasks to the right people is a skill that is often overlooked. Take time to learn how to delegate effectively.

*Time management.* Managing your own time as well as the time of your staff will make your unit more successful and able to complete assigned projects and tasks.

*Meetings management.* Much of the work in today’s organizations is done through groups and teams. Knowing how to run an efficient and effective meeting will make your groups more successful. Ensuring that meetings are not seen as an alternative to work and as a waste of time and effort is an important skill.

*Customer service.* Know the needs of your patrons, your internal customers, and your external constituencies and be sure everyone in your unit is focused on how they can meet those needs. Service is everyone’s business.
Leadership Skills

Leadership skills are no longer solely the purview of upper management. Today, all supervisors and managers need to understand and demonstrate good leadership skills. These skills or strategies help managers keep up with change as they prepare their employees for new roles and new challenges. In the book *Creating Magic: 10 Common Sense Leadership Strategies from a Life at Disney*, Lee Cockerell describes the ten leadership strategies that the Disney corporation found to be most effective. These strategies are particularly applicable to service industries such as libraries where customer or patron satisfaction is a key success factor.5

**Strategy one: value your employees.** As a supervisor, you want to develop an inclusive style that values every employee in your unit and in your organization. Cockerell uses the acronym RAVE to describe this strategy: respect, appreciate, and value everyone.6 In *The One Minute Manager*, Ken Blanchard and Spenser Johnson refer to this as “catch them doing something right.” Be sure you sincerely thank staff for a job well done. Staff will know if you are only going through the motions of being sincere and will resent your efforts.

**Strategy two: look for creative change strategies.** As a supervisor, you want to keep asking how you can improve on processes and structure. How can you make the unit a better, more effective one? What types of creative changes will bring the best results? By being open to new ideas you will be more likely to see possible changes that will bring positive results.

**Strategy three: hire the best.** Perhaps the most important decisions you make as a manager or a supervisor are hiring decisions, because your staff become the embodiment of your brand. That is, customers will judge your area by the response they get from your staff. You want to hire the best talent you can. As noted in *First, Break All the Rules*, hire talent and train for skills.8 You can teach someone new skills, but you cannot teach them to be talented. When you have good people working for you, your unit will be successful. If you have to spend most of your time correcting hiring errors, your unit will not be able to excel.

**Strategy four: training is key.** Providing training for your unit is essential. If your institution has a staff development program, be sure your staff are taking advantage of training opportunities. If your organization does not provide this type of support, look for training opportunities you can bring to your unit. Is there a webinar available on a particular process or challenge your unit is facing? Is there someone in your community who can help with skill building? Be creative as you look for opportunities to coach your staff to excel.

**Strategy five: eliminate hassles.** Look for ways that you can make processes and procedures more streamlined and effective for your patrons
and your staff. Try being a customer in your own library. Can you easily fill out an online form for a service? Can you find the information you need to answer a reference question? You may also want to borrow ideas from other service organizations. Have you experienced great service? What made the experience so successful? Are there elements of the service that you can bring to your unit?

**Strategy six: learn the truth, then act.** In the 1970s, management literature referred to management by walking around. Get out of your office and out from behind your desk and find out what is going on in your unit. When someone brings you a problem, listen carefully and get the whole story. Verify facts before you act so that you are sure you are working with the best information possible before you determine how to resolve an issue. You will be in a better position to assess information that staff bring to you when you have a thorough and current understanding of the activities in your unit.

**Strategy seven: reward the behaviors you want to see.** Reward the behaviors you want and do not encourage the behaviors that should be eliminated. Too often supervisors either ignore poor performance or spend so much time trying to correct a problem that they forget to reward and encourage those who are performing well. Do not take your best employees for granted. Instead, recognize and encourage excellence. You will find that you get the behaviors you reward.

**Strategy eight: keep learning.** In a world of change, supervisors and managers need to keep an open mind and seek new ideas and innovations if they are to be successful. You need to stay current on trends, learn what others in the field are doing to meet the challenges of the day, and seek to implement best practices. As Cockerell notes, “it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned . . . live in a world that no longer exists.” To avoid trying to manage the past, become an active learner.

**Strategy nine: always be professional.** In this day and age, that one picture of you with a lamp shade on your head is likely to appear on the Internet. The sarcastic remark on your Facebook page will be shared with all your colleagues. As a professional you will want to be sure you project an appropriate image. That image does not include arrogance. Remember that humility is a key ingredient in professionalism. When you treat your staff with respect and value their expertise, you will have a strong, well-functioning unit that will excel.

**Strategy ten: be an ethical manager.** Leading with integrity is important if you want your staff to commit to the unit and to support you. You are also responsible for teaching positive values to your unit and creating a culture of inclusiveness.