Tips and takeaways from the AALL Management Institute.

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Law library leaders stay abreast of trends in the legal market, consult administrators on information delivery, and inform client-facing and revenue-generating products. They cultivate relationships with attorneys and practice groups so library teams can deliver relevant, on-point resource and research responses. They realize that the transformational challenges they face can offer a myriad of opportunities, such as liaising between stakeholders and library staff to align strategic plans, motivating team members, and advocating for resources. For emerging and veteran library leaders, the AALL Management Institute provides an avenue for sharing solutions, discovering innovative opportunities, and engaging in practices for success.

Led by organizational development consultant Maureen Sullivan, the 2017 AALL Management Institute provided law library managers with the tools and inspiration needed to guide teams and organizations through staff challenges, fulfill corporate visions, and enable personal growth. From the vantage point of a new manager, the boots-on-the-ground conversations are exceedingly beneficial. Sullivan provided attendees time for
Leaders value the contributions of every team member, want to see staff flourish personally and professionally, and leverage each individual’s strengths and interests.

Many libraries are at the forefront of innovation and research, yet they still fulfill their background roles of researching and developing client-facing services, faculty publications, or briefs. Even though resources are perennially tight, the environment is fast-paced, team members may have adverse responses to transition, and everyone has individual working styles, the work never ceases. Yet, the animated environment should be viewed as an opportunity rather than a challenge to meeting organizational goals. Managers should help teams envision their imperative role in overcoming any difficulty by sharing institutional initiatives and goals and envisioning libraries and teams as essential to organizational success. Through multiple, transparent communication channels, managers can define the context of the library’s role and facilitate placement of individuals and projects onto a single path that leads to positive contributions. Keep the conversation two-sided and collaborative by allowing time and space for staff to reflect on opportunities and project solutions, and be receptive to the ideas they generate.

**Mastering Essential Skills**

Managers must also possess interpersonal relationship skills and demonstrate emotional intelligence to respond to the varied needs of staff. Perhaps a staff member is content in continuing her technical services development, but has less interest in exploring deep research skills. Another staff member may have learned new skills and is ready for more responsibility, yet the budget does not allow for a new position. Leaders value the contributions of every team member, want to see staff flourish personally and professionally, and leverage each individual’s strengths and interests. However, when the needs of the institution clash, difficult conversations with team members are essential. Conference attendees’ tips for overcoming communication difficulties include building accountability through affirmation of strengths and clear plans for continued growth and improvement. Persistence in respectful and collaborative communication will go a long way toward gaining staff engagement and maintaining positive morale.

To aid in developing these skills, attendees took part in a client-coach-observer exercise. Groups of three took turns playing each essential role: the client, or one who expresses an idea or challenge; the coach, a mentor role guiding the client to a conclusion; and the observer, who later advised the coach on counseling communication skills. This session provided real-world conversation practice and the opportunity to share challenges and successes with peers. Through this and other such collaborative exercises, the Management Institute equips leaders with multiple perspectives on how to tackle communication hurdles.

**Communication Is Key**

The last day of the Management Institute centered on planning for library and personal development. Discussions underscored the importance of cultivating stakeholder relationships. Law library managers must maintain continued dialogue demonstrating the library’s embedded position in the missions, visions, and values of legal institutions. Attending organizational leadership meetings,
volunteering on management teams, and staying abreast of focus group communications are all activities that provide managers with insight into how libraries align with emerging trends and address information needs.

In addition to liaising with administrators, librarians shared successes in aligning with other departments, such as pushing competitive intelligence to marketing teams, and training business development staff to read litigation reports. Information professionals are equipped with essential research skills and are poised to empower other teams to utilize their tools and knowledge stores. In turn, all departments, in partnership with the library, lead by gaining a competitive edge.

No firm leader is immune to the changing legal market, and library managers benefit teams and organizations by engaging in the transition. Law library managers leverage information skills that in turn inform initiatives to keep institutions at the forefront of innovation and success. Attendees learned that strategic planning is a continuous practice and should be met with a strength-based approach, incorporating traditional information expertise and individual skills. Effective strategic plans are brief, focused on resources, and actionable. Deployment focuses on the success of the whole organization, maintains staff motivations through communication of small successes, maximizes individual strengths, and monitors progress. Clarification of the library’s assets in the strategic initiative, and recording the processes that affect positive outcomes will help to demonstrate the library’s value to its stakeholders.

Grouped with librarians from similar legal institutions, attendees identified approaches for making the case for the library’s value. Takeaways included tips on positioning to manage change in information management, and on demonstrating how research centers generate revenue by maintaining content while cutting costs.

- Managers were advised to utilize project and workflow tracking tools, which enable quick delivery of metrics that exhibit not only contributions, but help make the case for continued or additional resources.
- Reports, marketing materials, and communications should include library branding so recipients see the information professional’s stamp on every product.
- Successful library leaders leverage the skills of their staff to maintain and deliver organizational knowledge through management of knowledge stores and internal taxonomies.
- Through all of these practices, a leader’s message must be tailored to consistently communicate the services offered and the importance of the library in organizational initiatives.

Setting Goals
Librarians were encouraged to reflect on professional development goals. In conjunction with attention to the organization, library team, and individual staff members, a library manager must also focus on personal and professional growth. In the current environment of restricted resources, many leaders can be defined as “working managers.” A working manager practices not only managerial and leadership functions, but also participates in the day-to-day, boots-on-the-ground activities of the library team. Exercises at the Management Institute gave managers permission to seek relief from the grind and provide room for development. It is also essential that managers model positive work-life balance. If balance is lacking in the library team, clear expectations for self-management must be defined. Practice stress management, speak positively to colleagues and to yourself, and distinguish between what can and should be controlled and what can be delegated.

Attendees also learned the process of goal development and were given the opportunity to map action plans with partners. Following a worksheet guide, goals were not only stated, but action steps, necessary resources, sources of support, and a clear vision of goal success were blueprinted. After planning a path to achievement, managers discussed goals with their colleagues. Many new and seasoned library leaders left not only with defined goals and clear routes to achievement, but also with a new mentor with whom to share progress and challenges.

Moving Forward
These are but a few of the many highlights attendees experienced at the 2017 AALL Management Institute. Sharing perspectives, identifying innovative practices, and engaging in exciting exchanges about life as a law library leader are invaluable experiences.

Library managers are encouraged to seize the opportunity to participate in these invigorating discussions and return to their home institutions energized and empowered to be positive conduits of staff, team, and institutional success.

LEARN
The next Management Institute will take place in spring 2019. Learn more about AALL’s Management Institute at bit.ly/AALL-mi.

AALL2go EXTRAS
Watch the 2016 AALL Annual Meeting program “How to Create a Positive Culture in Your Law Library (Whether or Not You’re a Manager)” at bit.ly/AM16Manage.

Watch the 2015 AALL Annual Meeting program “Motivating Staff to Achieve Your Organization’s Goals” at bit.ly/AM15Motivate.

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