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## Collegiality: An Atmosphere For Expanding Intellectual Stimulation

Tami Echavarria Robinson  
*Whitworth University*

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# COLLEGIALITY: AN ATMOSPHERE FOR EXPANDING INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION

*Libraries are the arena where intellectual interaction takes place through the universal conversation of scholarship. Librarians share a common commitment to learning and service. In addition Christian librarians share a calling to knowledge and service that comes from the Holy Scriptures. Aspects of integrating our Christian faith, through the professional environment we create in our workplace, are considered. Collegiality as the means to achieve a productive library ambience for scholarship is suggested. When a Library has an atmosphere conducive to promoting learning it is a place of intellectual stimulation where the culture is collegial and the values of Christianity are practiced.*

Libraries are the depositories of human knowledge, the collectors of human imagination, activity and creativity. They have become the basis for ongoing discussion where people express opinions, add to and interpret data, and change the direction of the colloquy. Libraries bring people into relationship with each other on the widest variety of topics. Through the literature, scholars interpret the human record and speak to one another through their writings, extending the

universal conversation. *Libraries bring people into relationship with each other on the widest variety of topics.* The endlessly engaging world of scholarly dialog spans space and time, where readers can locate specific conversations or participate in critical inquiry (Bechtel, 1994, pp. 25-26).

Regardless of the type of library, libraries share a common commitment to

learning and are a customer-oriented service. Christianity gave western civilization its virtues, its view of work, and its view of service (Delivuk, 2000, p.16). Libraries are places where lifelong learning can take place. The Scriptures encourage us to learn. As a learning environment we encourage our patrons to learn and we ourselves continue to learn throughout our careers.

The library environment needs to have the type of climate conducive to promoting learning, an ambience comfortable enough for learning to take place. Such a place of intellectual stimulation is found where the culture is one of collegiality and teamwork and the values of Christianity are practiced. Knowledge is acquired through learning and if we add to it brotherly kindness, we add collegiality. We create an atmosphere comfortable enough to promote learning and teamwork through the practice of Christian values.

Libraries are a place where everyone engages in the enterprise of learning. A collegial environment that prizes and encourages learning can be created by a community of learners (Lehman, 1999, p.1). So it is important that a sustained effort be made to create and maintain a collegial environmental

climate in libraries, one in which productive learning is fostered. Collegiality is "characterized by the collective responsibility shared by each of a group of colleagues, [or] cooperative interaction among colleagues" according to the Random House Unabridged

*Tami Echavarria Robinson  
Coordinator of  
Instructional Services,  
Whitworth College  
Spokane, Washington*



Dictionary (Flexner, 1993, p.404). In a library setting, that responsibility is shared by librarians, role modeled by the administration and librarians, and extended to the library staff. Cooperation is stressed and there is a striving toward common goals. If the team is working toward common goals, and working for the common good, the library and its clients are the beneficiaries of the teamwork (Jones, 1997, p.164).

It is important to see ourselves as a team, interactively working together. Collaboratively working with others can provide mutual support and

opportunities for sharing ideas that can enhance learning. We work as partners, as members of a community. A well functioning team

builds on the strengths of its individual members and promotes an atmosphere conducive to consultation and sharing. When each member is cognizant that the team values his/her contributions, provision of consistently excellent service is more easily achievable.

The tone for such an atmosphere depends in large measure on the leadership. Given the power of modeling, we can convey the values and behaviors consistent with what we believe to be truly important about learning and a learning atmosphere. It is incumbent on the Library Director to be the role model of fairness, cooperation, encouragement and a striving for excellence. The leadership that is appropriate is characterized by discussion, consultation and persuasion, and it is as important for the leader as it is for the rest of the staff (Bechtel, 1985, p.553). When managers treat employees the way they would like to be treated, they are rewarded with the kind of dedicated, talented and loyal workforce that will consistently meet the needs of the library's clientele. "And just as you want men to do to you,

you also do to them likewise." Luke 6:31

When required, correction should be done gently and privately. Communication must include everyone. Training, as needed, and clear expectations, communicated and available to everyone, ensures that everyone is working toward the same goals (Jones, 1997, p. 168). As professionals, librarians are ethically responsible for modeling respect, dignity and fairness to one another, support staff and library patrons. Scripture talks of servants in a respectful tone with a servant ethic that is

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"not merely about one's relationship to God, but to all persons" (Deluvik, 1999, p. 6).

As Christians, we have been called to display sincerity of heart and goodwill doing service. And "service must be the primary standpoint from which we offer hospitality" (Peterson, 1999, p.22).

Collegiality is exercised on a daily basis and is based on an attitude toward having one's ideas continually honed and refined by the ideas, opinions and imaginations of one's colleagues (Bechtel, 1985, p.553). Colleagues are seen as resources readily available for the improvement of library service. Collegiality flourishes in an atmosphere where sharing is a safe activity, where interacting effectively with one another is done to provide optimum services to patrons. Libraries are learning environments. We need to be committed to our own learning and sharing our knowledge with our colleagues (Huling, 1999, p.68). The environmental climate is trustworthy enough to consult with colleagues, as needed, with the expectation of receiving assistance and the willingness to provide such help. Each should feel that his/her contribution is

valuable, each receives due credit and is treated fairly. Communication is honest, allowing for brainstorming, discussion and debate, giving due credit for creativity and ideas, and encouraging people to participate, while always showing respect for others.

If there is a willingness to learn from one another and behave ethically toward one another, trust develops. Learning can bring personal satisfaction, growth and confidence to the learner, while influencing the collegiality of the environment (Lehman, 1999, pp.1-2). In a team where this type of behavior is exhibited, working toward a common goal together becomes achievable. In an information age where the amount of information and subject knowledge is overwhelming, colleagues can rely on one another for expertise that will achieve the goal of providing excellent service to library patrons. Librarianship is a profession defined by service (Gorman, 2000, pp. 74-75). The Bible exhorts us to offer hospitality. As Christians called to servanthood, providing hospitality to intellectual resources is our calling. Libraries are a service-oriented enterprise, so providing hospitality to our clientele is incumbent upon us as Christian librarians (Baker, 2001, p.60). In offering hospitality we offer patrons intellectual sustenance, or knowledge. Libraries offer equal access to those hungry for information and knowledge.

Collegial teamwork is indispensable if we are to achieve the aim of excellent service. Getting along well with coworkers is a vital skill in this climate. Treating one another with courtesy and respect, behaving ethically toward one another and toward library patrons, trusting one another, and being willing to learn from one another are the cornerstones of capitalizing on one another's strengths. Team members find a way of bringing their strengths to bear on something that is important to the organization. These types of collegial relationships promote an atmosphere of support and trust (Frank, 1991, p. 47). This atmosphere can be



further heightened by recognition of special occasions. This spirit of caring, if genuine, contributes to the morale of individuals in the group. Individuals who have job satisfaction have lower absenteeism and lower job turnover (Jones, 1997, pp.166-167). Humor, mutual interests and friendships with co-workers are all conducive to a positive atmosphere. Additionally, such an atmosphere is conducive to higher productivity and creativity. Mutual interests may develop into research and writing partnerships among colleagues.

Conversation is the process for realizing collegiality. Information on all issues is shared among librarians and, as much as possible, support staff as well. Librarians lead by persuasion. Decisions are made most commonly by consensus. The conversational paradigm provides the means for problem solving, resolving conflicts, accomplishing change, and future planning. "Conversation... demands collegiality to inform significantly the articulation of mission and goals, the role and character of librarians, and all aspects of library work" (Bechtel 1994, p26). It is dependent on staff commitment and stability over an extended period of time. Selecting able librarians and staff, and nurturing them over a period of years, results in dedicated library staff who together articulate and sustain the organizational philosophy of responsive and responsible library service on which the organization thrives.

An inclusive atmosphere contributes to building a positive daily environment in which morale is high. A generally high level of trust and comfort is pervasive and encouragement for professional development and creativity add to the atmosphere of collegiality. The library plays its part in this learning environment and in the collegiality both within the library and within the college community.

Librarians can perhaps be most likened to scribes of Biblical times in their job responsibilities. As librarians we participate in scholarship, as did the scribes. We write and we help patrons

by facilitating their own learning and scholarship. "Then He said to them, 'Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old'" Matthew 13:52. Libraries are depositories of knowledge and librarians often provide the segue between the search for information and the resources.

Just as different types of libraries can develop collegial climates, collegiality is not confined to professional librarians. Professional and administrative staff need to treat support staff with respect, dignity and courtesy, make expectations clear, share information, training and support, and make their ability to do their job performance as problem free as possible. Library support staff should be recognized as highly trained people whose skill, ability, and knowledge are not easily replaced. The longer a person is successfully employed in the library, the more valuable s/he becomes to the level of excellent library service. Their knowledge, skills, performance, and commitment should be acknowledged and their advice included in planning and decision-making. Their participation and collegiality should be included to inform the conversation. The inclusion of support staff in the library team results in everyone having a clear sense of the significant part s/he plays (Bechtel, 1994, p.32).

There are a number of barriers and pitfalls that can hinder collegiality. Competitiveness, a value extolled by contemporary American society, is a major hindrance to collegiality. Where it reigns, library staff act as individuals, selfishly seeking their own self-aggrandizement, rather than working for the common good. Competitiveness fosters professional jealousy, envy and mistrust. These destructive emotions cannot coexist with collegiality, rather they destroy it. Self-seeking and envy are inconsistent with the Gospel.

Competitiveness can exclude individuals, and feeling excluded can contribute to employee burnout.

Insecurity and defensiveness are feelings stemming from fear, and may come from not feeling included or not being properly taught how to do what must be done to fulfill job responsibilities. Insecurity of some librarians regarding their professional and scholarly qualifications, seeing themselves merely as technicians who have mastered an important and complex skill, is due to a lack of socialization and acculturation into a scholarly outlook. Insecurity and defensiveness lead some professionals to refuse to help less experienced colleagues or to share their knowledge collegially.

Lack of communication is another stumbling block to collegiality. Lack of communication may be manifested when certain individuals receive information while others are expected to discern it indirectly. Withholding, or hoarding, information from colleagues is another type of communication failure that undermines collegiality. Conflict is a breakdown of communication and is detrimental to any teamwork, collegiality, and striving toward common goals for the common good. Non-emotional disagreement is worked out through communication, but emotional conflict is divisive. Competition promotes such emotional conflict and destroys trust through encouraging the elevation of self as better than others. It discourages putting the common good ahead of recognition for self-performance.

Melvil Dewey was the profession's role model and standard of a dictatorial supervisor. His oppressive and prescriptive "busyness" still afflicts libraries. Jim Sheppke, Oregon State Librarian, recently shared the model of the library director as tyrant by sharing an excerpt from the biography of Melvil Dewey, *Irrepressible Reformer*, by Wayne A. Weigand, and cautioned that the tradition has persisted and we must "vanquish our inner Dewey" (Echavarria, 2001, p.11). Scripture exhorts us to serve one another in love (Smith, 2001), avoiding harming any person with whom we have contact.



A dictatorial supervisor breeds staff resentment, which is another hindrance to collegiality and optimal library service. A supervisor who does not support personal goals, discourages projects and professional development dampens staff enthusiasm. Public, rather than private, correction of staff and public humiliation engenders staff resentment and fear while providing disincentive to provide better service. It lessens staff morale and job satisfaction. Supervisors who fail to give credit when and where it is due, or co-workers who fail to give one another due credit for ideas or accomplishments, provide disincentive for motivation. Being responsible for work that is too difficult or more work than can be accomplished leads to burnout. Unclear work guidelines result in role ambiguity, a symptom of burnout. Burnout is manifested as a professional's detachment from work that s/he was formerly committed to. A person experiencing burnout is no longer a fully functioning team member. Many of these barriers and pitfalls are preventable (Jones, 1997, pp.169-172).

Learning is an ongoing, lifelong process. It is the basis of understanding for our intellectual and emotional growth and well-being. Understanding enables us to change and develop and has important social outcomes which are dependent on appropriate and effective lifelong learning opportunities for everyone. Such learning and understanding occur in the interplay and exchange of ideas where human knowledge is found. Libraries are key institutions in this process and achieve the goals of excellent service to their patrons when the environmental climate fosters learning. Collegiality facilitates the interchange of ideas and produces energy and creativity for librarians, library staff and patrons. Such an atmosphere empowers people to work together for the advancement of the library's goals. It provides challenging professional opportunities for those who work in libraries. And it gives us the context in which to live out our Christian values in the

professional arena, as Christian librarians. It is the desire for professional competence coupled with the Christian calling to serve that motivate Christian librarians toward the responsibility of preserving and transmitting the complete record of human knowledge in an environment that fosters learning to those eager to learn.

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