

Management Matters. Be Kind to Yourself

Article

Librarians, you are AWESOME! Some teachers and others watch in wonder as you work, wearing several hats, and balancing on one foot, while at the same time creating engaging learning opportunities and spaces for our students. You are revered as all-knowing and the ultimate problem-solver; not only in your school, but in your life.

Best Position Ever

We completed library school recognizing the many hats we would wear and accepted the challenge enthusiastically. The hats are what make our job the best one in the entire school. We have the most rewarding view of our students' growth and maturity over time. We delight in the tremendous responsibility of developing a culturally responsive collection that meets our students' need to explore and develop their understanding of the world around them. We inspire inquiry in our students through our instructional approaches and encourage them to think more deeply and ask questions that will help them satisfy their thirst for knowledge. Our opportunity to teach and get to know our students is matchless in the educational playing field.

High Expectations

After having the opportunity to talk to and observe librarians over the years, I notice that one of the things we all have in common is over-achieving. While most people hurl the word overachiever at others sarcastically, I am genuine in this recognition—you go above and beyond to make sure that your school's community of learners are served to the best of your ability. After you exhaust the possibilities and resources provided by your school, you continue to seek out creative ways to expand your students' learning and growth opportunities. So yes, overachiever, thank you for all that you do.

Managing It All

I have heard, and experienced, just how difficult it can be to leave school at the end of the day. There is always more work to do. The thing to keep in perspective is that even if you stayed all night, there would still be something more to do. Because of the contours of our role within the school, we might individually have to grapple with feelings associated with not completing everything we wanted to do within a certain time frame. I can think of specific times when I felt completely down on myself because I had transferred the exact same "to-do" list to three-weeks' worth of calendar dates. I felt hopeless and ineffective, which are the exact opposite emotions required for creativity and maintaining the welcoming environment our students so desperately need from our library spaces. I knew I had to make a change, and I spoke to someone to help me develop a more healthy perspective.

I continue to reflect on ways to manage the expectations I have of myself, because I recognize the over-achiever within. Facing the significance of what could suffer in my life if I stayed on the current course and the difficult realization that time can only be used once forced me to reconsider the way I spent my time and energy. I didn't want to become a librarian *at the expense* of my family, friends, volunteer opportunities, and other meaningful experiences. I choose to become a librarian *because* I was inspired by these same people and experiences, to help students grow in a variety of literacies and in their love of acquiring new information in many formats.

Balancing Your Hats

If I could sit beside you, I would share a few things that I have learned to make it easier to achieve a balance.

- **Decide on your personal criteria for success.** Think about your priorities and values, which can hopefully be aligned with your school's goals. Consider what you can personally impact. Craft a plan to get there and work on one thing at a time.
- **List all of your library hats and other responsibilities within your school.** Having a realistic picture of what is expected of you may help you make the best choices about where to invest your time. You may also realize that there is not enough time to do all of the tasks on the schedule you have created (e.g., bi-weekly overdue notices). Might you give yourself permission to reimagine the time you have versus the tasks you have? Are some tasks traditional, and hold the possibility of a new approach altogether?
- **Build capacity in others.** There is no reward for doing it alone. Is there a place where you can build partnerships to get the basics done? Can students take care of their own checkout? (Yes, they can.) Are there people who can help or actually design your displays? (Students are very keen on what connects with their peers.) As you reflect on the full picture of your contributions to the school, what things might you be able to share with others? What must you do yourself? What can be accomplished more quickly and completely as a collaborative effort? Is your skill set the best match for every outside responsibility you have accepted?

- **Be kind to yourself.** Sometimes the day gets away from us and items on the to-do list remain undone. Think back over your day. Were you there for your students? Did you have an opportunity to be in the moment with them? Did you make someone feel welcome? If the answers to these questions are yes, which, no doubt, they will be, then you did the best thing you could that day. That's what it is all about! Write yourself a note that includes your specific win for the day. It will be easier to keep the to-do list in perspective when you note the wins for your students. (P.S. This might also help with advocacy.)
- **Choose an end-of-day process that positions you for success in the morning.** Some lucky librarians have assistants and volunteers to help them with daily tasks which frees them up to provide their students with more instructional time. However, I know that some people don't have that yet. Consider what your morning looks like and decide what must be prepared for you when you walk in the next day. Have an appointed time to begin this preparation daily and leave when you are done. You can have the satisfaction of a job well-done and even if everything isn't exactly how you want it, you can start the morning off on the right foot.

Librarians have the best job in the world—who else can apply for a job as a superhero? However, we might be our own kryptonite by working beyond the balance our lives need. Many people want to leave work and feel that they are finished for the day, which signals that they have done a good job. As a program manager, that may not be a realistic expectation. I would like to invite you to, instead, decide what a good day looks like and do everything in your power to make the day great for your students, prepare for the next morning so that you won't be stressed out, and leave work to enjoy the richness of the life you expected to live as a librarian.

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