

>>> Mary Ludwick <ludwickm@LISD.NET> 05/22/03 07:34AM >>>
This was posted on another listserve:

From: Alice Yucht [<mailto:aliceinfo@EXCITE.COM>]
Sent: Sunday, May 18, 2003 11:08 PM
To: LM_NET@LISTSERV.SYR.EDU
Subject: HIT:

Advice for new librarians, aka survival strategies:

On May 1, I posted a notice that asked: If you could give ONE strategic survival tip (50 words or less) to a new school librarian, what would it be?

Obviously I must have touched a nerve, because I've gotten over 90 responses so far. After sorting, crunching the many duplicates, and editing where necessary, here are the tips the LM_Net community offers to our newbies:

MAKE FRIENDS WITH THE CUSTODIAN AND SECRETARIES!! These people can do so much for you, and they usually know how/where to find stuff you need... whether supplies or inside info.

Join LM_Net, but set to set to DIGEST for the first few months, so you're not totally overwhelmed.

Check the LM_Net archives to research topics you've got questions about, *before* you post a request.

Join your state/regional professional association(s). Make friends with other local school and public librarians; they will be your best resource and support group!

Network: No matter how nice and how welcoming your new colleagues are they do not understand your job. As a newbie you will have plenty of specific questions that only another librarian will be able to help you with.

Don't hesitate to go to professional meetings, either in your district or at the state level. It's the administration responsibility to keep the library open on these occasions, not yours no matter how painful it feels.

Actively seek out mentors -- experienced librarians who are willing to provide 'been there, done that' advice. Mentors don't have to be local -- just willing to listen objectively (even online) and offer seasoned suggestions.

Request site visits to/from other librarians.

Make sure you have at least 2 pairs of comfortable shoes to wear.

Get to know your colleagues before school starts. Find the school yearbook or ask the secretary for the last year's faculty photos.

Learn how to use any library automation systems before school starts. Know how to check stuff in/out, look up titles, add and edit patrons. Once the kids are there you won't have time to figure things out.

Find out what the login passwords are, where the instruction manuals are, how to order supplies (new toner cartridges, etc.), and where the supplies are kept.

Get to know the principal and the technology manager/coordinator. Find out what *their* priorities are.

Get a copy of your school's curriculum and read it. Look for ways to offer library 'connections' to the classroom teachers.

Decorate: do something to make the library look noticeably different/better than it did before.

Have a 'get to know you' breakfast for the faculty during the first week of school. Provide donuts/muffins and/or make a breakfast casserole. A tray of fruit is great too. This definitely gets you started on the right foot.

Be sure to have lots of new books sitting out that will look interesting to teachers, but don't talk business... just socialize.

Don't change things right away. Talk to teachers and administrators and even students to find out how and why certain procedures have been established. Then gradually introduce changes that will make your and their lives better and easier. Be aware that some changes may not be possible until you've built your program and trust. If the change involves operational logistics, be prepared for solid reasons for making the change.

Mail: You will get tons of it -- mostly trying to sell you stuff. Stand next to the trashcan or recycling bin as you go through the mail, and discard as much as possible.

Catalogs from publishers and vendors:

1. Set up a filing system (usually alph by company name is best). Date each catalog and file it. Keep only ONE copy of each catalog, throwing out the old ones as soon as new ones arrive. (This is a good job for a volunteer. . . or 5th graders).

2. Sort catalogs into reference (keep all year, for basics) and browsing (new titles, etc.) piles.
3. Browse through catalogs during faculty meetings, while watching the news, etc.
4. Tear out the catalog pages of titles you want to consider. Highlight the choice(s) and put the pages into a file. Throw the rest of the catalog away. Most of the major jobbers will have the items you've selected, and you can search using the information you've saved.

Paperwork: Keep expandable files or plastic bins on your desk for four categories of paperwork:

- Schedules (meetings, calendars, due dates, etc.)
- Orders (budget info, possible purchases, etc.)
- Lesson Planning
- Research Projects/Requests

You can further organize into subtopics, using file folders. But -- on those days when you are even busier than usual, you can just toss the paperwork into the right holder, and then get back to it later.

Create a "remember to report" form to keep with your daybook. Suggested headings: special activities, units taught, meetings attended, problems, need to buy. You can then use these forms to quickly note items to include in your monthly and end-of-year reports.

Written Goals & Vision: Take the time each month to review your goals and write out your accomplishments. I was always able to work more productively after I had reviewed my goals and vision for the library, and bad days seemed better after reviewing my accomplishments.

Discipline: never threaten students with an action you cannot carry out. If you say you are going to do something, don't back down.

Learn to let the little things go. Some tasks in the library may have to wait a day or two. Remember that some of the things we do are important only to us as librarians, while other people will never notice whether they have been done or not. Concentrate on what is essential for the moment, for the day. Remember, **interaction with your students should take precedence over anything else you do.** [Highlighting Jana's]

Listen to your students. Often we overlook their opinions about books, and they are the people we're buying for. Do a survey early in the school year, and find out what they like and dislike in literature. Then, if you can, buy some of those titles. The kids will be thrilled.

Shelving: even 3rd graders can help get books back onto the shelves. It won't be perfect, but it will be better than carts of unsorted books.

With all of the fun and exciting things you can do in the library -- don't think you have to do it all this year. Plan one or two great events and be really successful with those! You can add something else the next year. Leave room for your program to grow.

Accept the fact that you'll never get it all done. You may find that others see your job as 'easy' compared to theirs, because they have no idea of all the responsibilities you have. Don't whine. No one's listening.

LUNCH: do not eat at your desk / on the run because you 'have so much to do.' Be collegial and congenial: join the crowd in the faculty room. You don't get brownie points -- or extra pay -- from TPTB for self-sacrifice! "

Create a backflip.com account to keep all the websites you find - and want to remember -- in some sort of order.

Circulate (yourself): Get out of the library between classes and observe the culture of the building. Are teachers in their doorway? Talk to them. Nod to them. Smile at them. Put items in their mailbox that might be useful to them. Email them when you find something in their field.

Students? Walk around so they know you. Go to the cafeteria so they see you. Be in the hall when they enter and leave the building. Become a people person so they see the library as a people place.

Pop into classrooms for a minute to leave a new book, a list of curriculum-related web sites, suggested titles, etc. Just saying Hi is an important marketing tool.

Carry a PDA or small notebook to write down the numerous requests that come your way when you are in the hall, the lunchroom, the bathroom (yes, even there people ask for information), the parking lot. . .

Service: a media specialist is to serve, but not be a servant. Work with, but not for, the other teachers in your building. You are a professional colleague, not support staff.

COLLABORATION: After getting to know your library-using teachers, approach one or two about collaborating on a classroom/library project. Don't try to work with everyone at once, and definitely don't try to convert the library non-users your first year. Once you have had success (defined as making the teachers happy), the word will get around. "Word of mouth" is your best friend. Don't

be discouraged if there are holdouts, you can't please all the people all of the time. Besides, they will retire eventually.

Get a copy of Gary Hartzell's book: Building Influence for the School

Librarian and study, study, study! Learn how to promote your services, and develop advocates who will spread the word for you. Without influence, we are sitting ducks for budget cuts and the dreaded "reduction in force."

For even more advice, search the LM_Net archives for 'new librarian,' take

a look at the set of practical guidelines/timelines on my website, at

http://www.aliceinfo.org/YSGD_newlibjob.html

Remember: Stay as healthy and fit as you can and be focused with a positive attitude while you are on the job!

It *will* get easier. The first year, when you are learning and/or inventing ALL the routines, can be mind-numbingly exhausting. It won't be this hard the second year. And each year after that gets easier!

and finally: Super(wo)man is a cartoon character, not a real person. You are a real person. Remember to have a real life. .with time for yourself.

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