

CHAPTER 9

Mature Manager/Young Manager

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In the past, the path to management was considered to be something open only to those who had paid their dues, putting in the requisite years working their way up the ranks, commonly spending time in the positions they would eventually be managing. The stereotypical manager was a wise, senior member of the team who understood the business of his or her unit, as well as that of much of the entire enterprise, and knew all of the personnel both above and below. This model still exists to some extent, but it is no longer the norm by any means. It is now widely accepted that particular skills are necessary for successful management, and that the difference between a manager who has those skills versus one who does not can make a great deal of difference in the engagement of personnel, and therefore in the effectiveness of the unit (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). This has led to a change in the way we think about the process of filling management positions—it is no longer necessarily enough just to have a long record of service in the unit. Management positions are frequently filled from outside the unit they will be managing, as well as from outside the institution or business as a whole. Candidates are sought who not only have experience in the industry, but who also have proven track records as managers, or the appropriate degree or certification. It is not uncommon for both of these to be listed as required qualifications for job applicants to management positions. This is borne out by the increase in popularity of the MBA degree in the last 25 years. From 1990 to 2015, the number of MBA degrees conferred has almost doubled (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). It has not become common practice in libraries to require that management position candidates have an MBA; however, seeking out candidates with demonstrated management understanding and experience is essential, and applicants with MBA credentials will have an easier time ticking that box.

What does this have to do with the juxtaposition of a young manager with a mature manager? Furthermore, why is this comparison important? In the old model of reaching management by moving up through the ranks, it was unusual to find a manager who was much younger than the people he or she was managing. Not everyone moved into management, so one might end up managing one's peers and potentially some slightly older people, but rarely someone older by a generation. Also, it was generally the case that the manager would have either done the job of those he or she was managing, or would be very familiar with it. Neither of these can be assumed to be the case anymore, and they are among the list of challenges that younger and mature managers may encounter. The question of the importance of this comparison can be answered in part by looking back to Chapter 7, *Managing Conflict*, in which we discussed the conflicts that can arise due to generational differences—the younger manager and the mature manager will encounter different challenges in motivating and supervising his or her team. They will also have to overcome different assumptions that others will make about their experience and skills in various areas.

Discussions of age and experience in the context of the librarian profession are complicated, because people often come to the profession as a second or third career, but there are also many librarians who went straight to graduate school after getting their undergraduate degree. For this reason, no one should be equating any librarian's level of experience with that person's age. In earlier chapters, we discussed the career stages and the various generational groups that can be at these stages. Particularly in the case of younger and mature professionals, assumptions will be made, and those coming into a new managerial position should anticipate these and be ready for them. A detailed discussion of this factor as it relates to younger and more mature managers specifically is included later in the chapter.

9.2 SUCCEEDING AS A MATURE MANAGER

There has been much discussion over the last 10–15 years about the impending mass retirements in the librarian profession. It has been variously predicted, then postponed numerous times. It may come to pass at some point, but in the meantime, librarians, like many other professionals, are staying in the workforce longer, routinely working past the age of 65. Many of these late-career librarians will take on management positions,

or be moved into them due to their level of experience. This is one of the situations that can lead to issues for a mature manager and his or her team. If you are the most experienced member of your unit, and you have been moved reluctantly into a managerial position, what can you do to make the best of the situation? If you think that the position will be yours long-term, make a case to the administration to provide you with at least some basic management training. Taking the initiative to seek out opportunities for local workshops or online courses will help your argument. You can also look for other managers in your organization who have high-functioning, productive teams, and ask if you can shadow them or if they might agree to act as a mentor. This will likely be easiest if this person is a peer; however, don't be deterred if you find a great candidate who is somewhat (or quite a bit) younger than you are. Mentoring of this type can be as beneficial as the more traditional older-to-younger model (this has been touched on several times already throughout the book, and we will discuss it in more depth at the end of the chapter). Most of all, be open about learning as you go, and don't be afraid to admit when you don't know something, or to admit your error in the instances where you may make the wrong decision. Whether or not you have taken the position willingly, if you are a mature manager you may have to combat the assumption that you will only be in the position a short time, because you must be getting ready to retire. This can serve to undermine your authority, and make it difficult to implement changes. While you cannot control people's assumptions, you can be open and upfront about your intentions for the position. If the administration has a clear plan for the position (e.g., interim for two years during restructuring, after which there will be an open position posting), this should be presented at least to your team, if not to the entire organization.

As a mature manager, most of the people you will be managing will be either your peers or somewhat-to-much younger than you. Managing your peers can be straightforward, both because you will have much in common, and because they will likely feel comfortable with you. It can also be challenging for similar reasons. Managing peers who have been long-time colleagues will require a shift in your relationship. This will come easily to some, but not to everyone. There are numerous reasons why a formerly friendly colleague may act differently toward you once you become his or her manager. One is competition that suddenly exists where it didn't before—your colleague may believe he or she should have gotten the management position instead of you. Another is the “us”

versus “them” mentality—your colleague may perceive that you are a different person now that you are allied with management. A third possibility is that the situation is just new and uncomfortable—your colleague may think he or she has to be more formal with you, because you are now the boss. The key to working through any of these issues is communication. In the case where competition is the issue, it is best to have an open and honest conversation as soon as possible to clear up any rumors and misinformation that might be creating bad feelings. Offer to work with your colleague to identify other potential options for transitioning into management. If you suspect there may be some roadblocks that are keeping him or her out of contention for management positions, offer to help in figuring out what these are, and how to get past them. In the case of the “us” versus “them” mentality, again, an early conversation will be important. Try to find out why your colleague has these bad feelings toward management. If you know this already (you may if you have worked long enough with this person) you can get right to the perception changing stage. Counteract all of the negative images with positive and supportive management practices (refer back to Chapter 7: Managing Conflict, for a discussion of strategies for building a healthy team). In the third scenario, where your colleague is unsure of how to act around you in your new role, the solution will be time. Once he or she realizes that you are the same person, only with a different title, your relationship should smooth out. It is important to note also though, that there may be times when you will need to have uncomfortable conversations with your colleagues-turned-team members (such as a mediocre performance review). These instances can temporarily derail a mended relationship, but continuing to communicate and offering help and support to solve the problem can move things back in a positive direction.

The members of your team who are younger than you can fall into several categories: the very much younger, fresh out of school beginner, the somewhat younger, career changer (also a beginner, but possibly bringing relevant experience from another career), and the somewhat younger, experienced librarian. The particulars of being an early-career librarian were covered in-depth in Chapter 3, Early Career Librarians, and those of mid-career librarians in Chapter 5, Mid-Career Librarians. Here, we will consider the relationship of a mature manager to these young professionals in the various stages of their careers. Being a mature manager with team members who are new to the profession puts you in a great position to be a mentor, as well as a supervisor. These new librarians

are generally eager and motivated, but they also may need a lot of hand holding and encouragement. If they are new to librarianship but have experience in another field, work with them to figure out how that experience can be applied to library work. Depending on their prior experience with other managers, they may or may not have preconceived notions about your effectiveness as a manager based on your age. If your new team member had a negative experience with an older manager in the past, or if he or she has picked up on stereotyping from other sources, the best way to combat this will be with time and positive modeling. If a new librarian is also new to the working world in general (or to the world of full-time, professional work), it will give you a chance to be a mentor not only for all things library, but also to guide him or her in developing and understanding the importance of collegiality and workplace etiquette. If this is your first time managing someone significantly younger, it will be a good opportunity to learn about the needs and motivations of librarians in this age group. Engage your young team member in discussions on these types of topics, emphasizing that you are looking to learn from him or her, as well as the other way around. This dialogue will strengthen your relationship, and will model good management practice for your new professional.

9.3 SUCCEEDING AS A YOUNGER MANAGER

In the old model prevalent in many industries (libraries included) where, if you were on that track, you progressed slowly and steadily up the responsibility ladder, it was quite rare to find a young person occupying a managerial position. This is no longer the case in libraries. Young librarians who show an aptitude for handling group projects, and who are well-liked by colleagues and administration, may be asked to step into (or be encouraged to apply for) management positions. It is not easy, but young librarians can be very successful managers. One pitfall that young managers need to avoid is pretending that they know everything. If you are a young manager, you will no doubt have librarians on your team who are older than you are. These team members will, for the most part, fall into three categories: no management experience and no desire for it, no management experience but wants to be in a management position (possibly yours), and former managers. As we discussed previously in regards to mature managers, establishing trust is very important, particularly because some of these more mature team members may not think

you are up to the job because of your age. It is likely that, in order to dispel these feelings, you will have to prove yourself. It is part of the process of gaining trust to show that you can follow through on promises and action items, communicate effectively, and support your team members. If you have mature, experienced librarians on your team, don't be shy about drawing on their expertise. Acknowledging that you respect their experience and want to learn from it will also help in establishing trust and lessening any feelings of resentment that they may be harboring. If one of your team members has been a successful manager in the organization, you will have a potentially rich source of insight into how things get done. If you do end up with someone on your team who has management aspirations, particularly if he or she was interested in the position that you have, developing a healthy relationship can be difficult. If you sense that this team member has issues with your age, be careful of giving advice (as recommended for mature managers in this situation), as it may not be well-received. If you see potential opportunities for this person, you can try enlisting other team members to point these out, or you can make a suggestion directly to administration on behalf of your team member. Annual performance review dialogues present a good opportunity to make suggestions related to professional development.

It is also possible that you will have librarians from your own age group on your team. Managing peers can present some of the same issues that managing older team members does. Stereotyping by age happens within one's own generational group as well as from others. You will likely have less competition for your position from your peers though it is not out of the question, particularly if your organization has made a point of promoting younger librarians into management positions. Negative feelings from peers can often be more difficult to deal with than those coming from older team members. If those peers are former colleagues or friends, it is even harder. In most cases, professional jealousy will fade with time and with the career progression of frustrated colleagues. However, there may be times when the situation will not mend itself, and other solutions such as workplace counseling or transfer to another team will be warranted. In the more common situation where you will have healthy relationships with your younger team members, the challenge will lie in maintaining enough distance that you can be objective when it comes to assigning tasks or writing performance reviews. Beware of falling into the "being everyone's friend" trap—it is not a problem to be friendly with your team members, but be mindful that your team

members may find it difficult to separate your two personas. If you sense that this is becoming a problem, you will need to be the one to rectify it. If this is too difficult for you, then it is possible that management is not for you or perhaps you are not at a point yet where you feel comfortable navigating these tasks and relationships. Acknowledging this early in your career is a good thing, as it is common to get “tracked” into management once you move in that direction. If you do decide to step back from management, and you decide later in your career that you might be interested in trying again, look for an opportunity to serve in an interim or acting position that will allow you to test the waters, and confirm whether you are ready to seek a more permanent management position.

9.4 RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADMINISTRATION

In several sections throughout this chapter we have mentioned the importance of understanding the plan that the library’s administration has for your position. This is particularly important if you are being asked to take on an interim position, or a position in a unit that is in transition. Ideally, this plan would be shared broadly across the organization by someone from library administration. At the very least, it should be laid out clearly for you when you are asked to take on the position (or during the hiring process), and then with your team once you have accepted the position. When there is uncertainty in leadership, work duties, or work environment, there is often also a dip in productivity and creativity ([Zhang & Zhou, 2014](#)). If a plan does not exist, this may (rightly so) cause you to think twice about accepting the position; however, if you are willing to take it on anyway (or are already in the position), work with your administration to develop a plan or, if they are open to it, suggest that you and your team develop the plan. Ultimately, it is up to administration to make these strategic decisions, and they may have an overriding reason for holding off on planning or publicizing the plan. In this case, you will have to do your best to calm any anxieties on your team until the plan is made clear.

Just as it is important for you as a manager to create and maintain trust between yourself and your team members, it is also important for there to be a trusting relationship between you and your direct report in administration. Your administrator should demonstrate (with actions as well as words) that he or she trusts you to direct your team, make

decisions, and manage the work of your unit without micro-level oversight. You should similarly demonstrate that you trust your administrator to make high-level, strategic decisions that are beneficial to the library, and that effectively utilize your team's strengths. Trust also means that you can disagree and make a case to change each other's minds, and that you will both be open to these discussions. These relationships can be rocky for mature and younger managers. If you are a mature manager, you may be seen as a placeholder who won't be in the position for long, and therefore does not need to be brought into important discussions. If you are a younger manager, you may be seen as malleable and someone who will shy away from debate, or be reluctant to share a differing opinion. If this is the case, then you will have to work hard to show that you are engaged and that you have ideas and opinions that you are willing to share. You will need to advocate on your own behalf (or perhaps with the support of your manager colleagues) to get a seat at the table where important issues are being discussed. Even when you are involved in these discussions, there will be times when, despite a reasoned argument, administration goes in another direction. When this happens, as a manager you need to get on board and help to make the plan work. If you cannot do this, management may not be right for you.

9.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORING

In numerous chapters throughout this book, we have mentioned the benefits of mentoring in different contexts and at different career stages. In this section, we will add to those previous applications a discussion of mentoring as it applies to mature and younger managers. The benefits of strong mentoring relationships throughout one's career are well-documented in the literature of many different professions and disciplines. It also gets ample coverage in the popular press, not just as it relates to careers, but also to life in general from adolescence through retirement. So, it is well-established that mentoring is beneficial for everyone—what does this mean for managers? We would argue that mentoring is essential for managers (particularly those new to this area), because they are not only making decisions that influence their own careers, but also those of their team members. It is all too common to hear from new employees that they decided to leave a prior position due to a difficult relationship with their manager, or from someone considering a career change due to

multiple bad management experiences. It is imperative that managers do their best to do their job well, and mentorship can help with this.

9.6 FINDING YOUR MENTOR NETWORK

There are so many pieces of our life and career that can benefit from mentorship, and for this reason (among others) we should be looking for many different mentors, not just one. Kerry Ann Rockquemore (2014), President of the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity, expressed this perfectly when she wrote:

[T]he idea that one person can meet all your mentoring needs and guide you throughout your career is a fantasy. So stop searching for that one special someone. Focus instead on building a broad and deep network of people who can assist you. (para. 6)

Rockquemore (2014), and many others, suggest using a mentoring map to organize your thoughts and help to figure out in what areas you already have support, and in which ones you need to look for a mentor. This technique can work well for addressing all the various aspects of management. Even mature managers who have previous management experience will likely find (if they are honest with themselves) that there are areas of expertise in which they are lacking. Young managers who have not yet developed a network may have many areas in which they would like guidance. Seeking out another manager who has been successful (e.g., has a high-functioning and engaged team, and is well-respected by administration) is a good start, but real mentoring requires a large commitment of time so finding multiple management mentors will help to spread the time commitment around without overburdening any one person. If you are lucky enough to work in an organization that has developed a mentoring program, then there will be a mechanism in place to connect you with willing mentors in many of the areas that you will be looking for. If not, you will need to be proactive in seeking mentors yourself. Do not be afraid to ask—you will find that many colleagues are generous with their time, and flattered that you sought them out, particularly if you are specific as to your need. “I have noticed that you are very good at x, would you be willing to help me improve my skills in that area?” This will make it easier for them to determine the amount of time they will need to allocate to fulfill your request, and it makes the request finite, as opposed to “will you be my mentor” which has no definite endpoint.

9.7 BEING A STRONG MENTOR

What are the important qualities of a good mentor? As we mentioned earlier in this section, being a mentor is a commitment, so one of the most important qualities of a good mentor is just that—committing to see the process through, and help the mentee develop the skill they are seeking. [Smith \(2013\)](#) suggested that in addition to commitment, there are eight other things a great mentor should do ([Table 9.1](#)).

Just as everyone can benefit from having good mentors, everyone can benefit from being a mentor. Above and beyond the good feelings you get from helping someone, being a mentor is beneficial to you professionally. Mentoring will help you strengthen your coaching and leadership skills, and it can also help you to be more engaged and innovative in your professional practice as you strive to set a good example for your mentee.

Table 9.1 Actions of great mentors explained

Action	Explanation
Be committed	Follow through on your promises; be there when your mentee needs you.
Always play both roles	Continue to seek out mentors yourself; be a mentee as well as a mentor
Know that your mentee can be anyone, anywhere	Be open to requests from all age groups and functional areas—anyone who might want to learn the skills you have
Listen	Take time to understand their needs before offering advice; spend more time listening than speaking
Have your own mentors and network	Show your mentee the importance of developing a wide and diverse circle of advisors
Be open-minded and compassionate	Understand your mentee's needs, wants, feelings; be empathetic
Have patience	Remain committed for as long as it takes to fulfill the need; constructive criticism may ruffle feathers, be prepared to wait it out
Be a role model	Set the bar as high (or higher) for yourself as you do for your mentee
Care about the relationship	Take a sincere interest in the betterment of your mentee

Source: Adapted from Smith, J. (2013, May 17). *How to be a great mentor* (Blog post). Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2013/05/17/how-to-become-a-great-mentor/#da78a064f599>.

Everyone wants to work in an environment where they are surrounded by hard-working colleagues who are good at their jobs—mentoring can help with this. An organization with a strong network of willing mentors is more likely to recruit and retain talented employees. Mentoring also has a reciprocity aspect to it. If you are a willing and generous mentor, others who are like-minded will be generous in agreeing to act as a mentor for you, and to advocate on your behalf to their network of mentors. Finally, though the relationship is set up such that the mentee should be learning from the mentor, in many cases it actually goes both ways. In Chapter 7, *Managing Conflict*, we discussed cross-generational mentoring as a method that can be used to get multi-generational teams working more effectively, and one that produces benefits for both the mentor and mentee. These programs would be beneficial to mature and young managers, giving them both a chance to learn from the skill and strengths of the other, and to work towards being a great mentor by playing both roles.

9.8 CONCLUSION

Taking on a management role can be a challenge at any stage of life or career, but doing it when you are a member of either the oldest generation in your workplace or the youngest can bring an additional age bias into the mix. As a mature manager, you may have prior management experience and thus be comfortable in the role, but you are now in a position where you are suddenly faced with this additional, unfamiliar challenge. Conversely, you may be someone who has avoided management roles for your whole career, only to be thrust into one as you are looking towards retirement, leaving you faced with the dual challenge of learning to be a manager and combatting age-related stereotyping. As a young manager who is new to the role, you will be working through similar issues. Even young managers with prior experience will frequently encounter the assumption that they have none. In this chapter, we have provided techniques that managers in these situations can use to work through these challenges. Additionally, we have highlighted mentoring as a key ingredient to being an effective manager at any age.

REFERENCES

- Goleman, D., & Boyatzis, R. (2008). Social intelligence and the biology of leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, 86(9), 74–81.
- Rockquomore, K. A. (2014, February 10). *When it comes to mentoring, the more the merrier* (Blog post). Retrieved from: <<https://chroniclevitae.com/news/326-when-it-comes-to-mentoring-the-more-the-merrier>>.
- Smith, J. (2013, May 17). *How to be a great mentor* (Blog post). Retrieved from: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2013/05/17/how-to-become-a-great-mentor/#da78a064f599>>.
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). Master's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by field of study: Selected years, 1970–71 through 2014–15 (Data table). *Digest of Education Statistics*. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_323.10.asp?current=yes>.
- Zhang, X., & Zhou, J. (2014). Empowering leadership, uncertainty avoidance, trust, and employee creativity: Interaction effects and a mediating mechanism. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 124(2), 150–164. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2014.02.002>.