

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

Nurturing New Library Directors

By Rick Krumwiede

A colleague once told me that “a library board’s most important job is to hire a good director and get out of the way.” While there is merit in this saying because library boards don’t want to micromanage, I don’t believe this is the right approach to use when an inexperienced director is hired.

A person who has previously served as a library director may be able to “hit the ground running” when she begins employment in a new library, and, often, long-time assistants are well prepared to assume the position of library director. Regardless of one’s academic background, there is a steep learning curve for new directors who haven’t had much experience working in public libraries. The job is difficult, and new directors need help from their boards.

I believe a library board that hires an inexperienced director has a responsibility to nurture the new director in an effort to help her be successful. After all, the board decided to hire the person because of his or her potential to be a good library director. By hiring an inexperienced director, the library board has made a commitment to create an environment where the necessary experience can be gained for the director to fulfill that potential.

So, what can public library trustees do to honor the board’s commitment and help nurture a new library director?

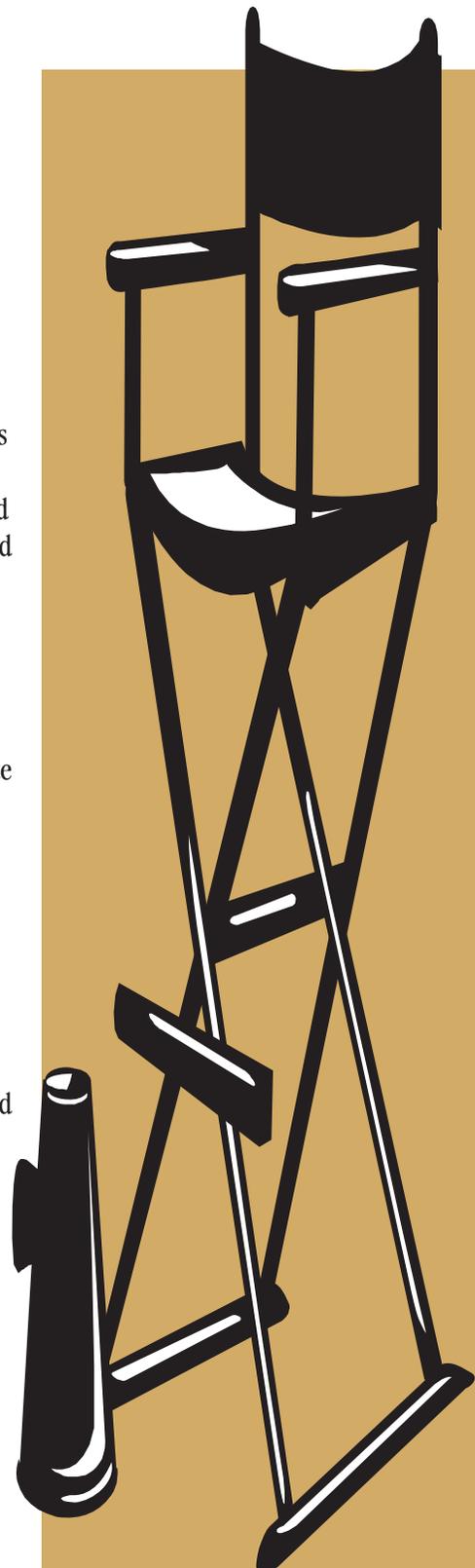
- **Set Clear Expectations**

Make sure that the new director knows exactly what the library board expects. He can’t know what you want him to do or how you want him to interact with the board unless you tell him. Make sure that all board members are in agreement about expectations to avoid sending mixed messages.

- **Give Constructive Feedback**

Don’t just complain about something your new director did or that it wasn’t done the way the previous director did it. Tell her specifically how she can improve when her performance doesn’t meet expectations, and be sure to praise her when she does something well.

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- **Spend More Time**

The library board is likely to have to spend more time on library business after an inexperienced director is hired. Don't complain if meetings take a little longer than in the past; be willing to spend the time. Time invested at the beginning of a new director's tenure is likely to pay off very quickly.

- **Be Patient**

Most new library directors find their positions to be very stressful, often much more stressful than they had anticipated. There is so much to learn and do, but the situation will improve over time. Library boards can help by setting realistic expectations and by helping the director determine priorities.

- **Provide History and Context**

Don't assume that a new director comes to the position with sufficient knowledge of the library or the community. Trustees know the community well and can help a new director understand the library's role in it. Trustees can also provide helpful background and context when discussing library issues.

- **Use the Library**

Trustees that regularly use their libraries show their directors that they are invested in library service and that they understand the service implications of the decisions they make. It's also nice for new directors and trustees to interact outside of board meetings, and, by visiting the library regularly, trustees will have a much better sense of how the new director is doing.

I agree with my colleague that a library board's most important job is to hire a good director, but the job doesn't end there. By adequately nurturing a new or inexperienced library director, a library board can greatly increase the odds that its director will be successful in leading the library for many years to come.

2009 WAPL Conference *"Saving Our Stories"*

The 2009 Wisconsin Association of Public Libraries (WAPL) conference will be held on May 6-8 at the Glacier Canyon Lodge at Wilderness Way in Wisconsin Dells.

There are lots of programs that will be of interest to trustees, including:

- Evaluating your Library Director
- Space needs for Public Libraries in the 21st Century
- The Good, the Bad and the Ugly
(conducting an effective meeting)

You can find more conference information at <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/wapl/conferences/2009/index.htm>

Great Library Video

The libraries in Marquette County have produced a great video showing the variety of services they offer.

To view it online just go to www.winnefox.org and select any of the Marquette Co. libraries from the map.



A Tip for Conducting Efficient Board Meetings

By Rick Krumwiede

Several years ago the OWLS Board challenged me to find ways to make meetings more efficient and, therefore, shorter. One method that has been helpful is to send out “agenda notes” to board members as part of the meeting mailing. Our agenda notes supplement the regular meeting agenda, providing additional information about all non-recurring agenda items. Our agenda notes are always on a separate sheet in the board packet, and we use the format shown in the examples below. The key is to provide enough information for all board members to have a basic understanding the agenda item and what action, if any, is required.

Travel Request

Background:

Policy requires the Board to approve all out-of-state travel, and the director has asked permission to attend the Surfing Librarians Association (SLA) Conference to be held in Hawaii, April 10-27.

Action Needed:

Formal action is required to approve or reject this travel request.

Important Issues:

Estimated cost for registration, travel, lodging, meals is \$20,000.

Alternatives:

The Great Lakes Chapter of SLA will hold its annual meeting in Sheboygan on May 16.

Exhibits:

A DVD describing the conference is enclosed.

2010 Meeting Schedule

Background:

The Board acts at the December meeting to set the meeting schedule for the following year. As in past years, it is proposed that meetings be held on the 1st Thursday of each month.

Action Needed:

Action is required to accept or change the proposed schedule.

Important Issues:

The April meeting falls on April Fools Day, which might present a conflict for some members.

Alternatives:

The meeting could be rescheduled for another day or left on April 1.

Exhibits:

The proposed schedule is enclosed.

I’ve seen enough meeting agendas to know that many don’t provide much detail about any given item. I’ve also attended enough library board meetings to know that it’s not always clear to every board member what needs to be done on a specific topic. Whether your library decides to begin using agenda notes, more detailed agendas, or some other technique, it’s very likely that your meetings will run more efficiently if members of the board share the same expectations about the business to be conducted.



FAQ

Are closed sessions limited to trustees only or can others attend?

Closed sessions are “closed” in the sense that the general public and news media are restricted from attending. Anyone the board deems necessary to the business being discussed may attend. In fact, the business at hand may require that non-trustees attend. Holding performance reviews and consulting with legal council are two examples of this.

Have questions?

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