

Some Principles
of
Business-Like Conduct
in
Libraries



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OF
BUSINESS-LIKE CONDUCT 82471
IN
LIBRARIES

BY
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St. Louis Public Library

CHICAGO
AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
1928

FOREWORD

This pamphlet is an endeavor to answer the questions, "What is a business-like way of doing things?" "How does it differ from an unbusiness-like way?" "Are there any underlying principles?"

It does not attempt to recommend specific methods, still less to describe them, although they may occasionally serve as illustrations. To specify and describe would be simply to duplicate other accessible material. The author believes that to be business-like is as worthy an aim for the intellectual and high-minded as to be, for instance, artistic or literary; and he has tried here to emphasize and illustrate this point of view.

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BUSINESS-LIKE CONDUCT

What constitutes a "business-like" way of doing things, as opposed to an "unbusiness-like" way? Not system alone; for that may be carried to an extreme that is the reverse of business-like. Not honesty alone; for the scrupulously honest man may hopelessly lack business sense. Not promptness, not quickness of apprehension, but rather such a combination of all these things, and of many others, that the best results will be obtained at the least expenditure of money, time and energy. The business man must not only produce or distribute good articles, but he must do so at a profit; otherwise his procedure is not business-like. A man who advertised that he sold all goods at less than cost was asked how he managed to get along on that basis. "I couldn't," he replied, "if I didn't have such a big business." The size of a business, or the quality of its goods, does not make its methods business-like, if it is not making money.

The public library is, or should be, a business institution. Those who do not like to admit this do not realize that business, conducted in a "business-like" way, is the most honorable of occupations and the most useful to the community. To say that librarianship is a business is to pay it a compliment. To assert that a librarian's administration is not "business-like" is to make one of the most serious charges that could be brought against it. The public library does not operate for a money profit,

but it must show that it has rendered services to the community that are well worth the money that the community has put into it. The very fact that its success cannot be measured financially, like that of a commercial concern, is all the more reason for making sure that its work is carried on in the same manner that would bring success in commerce.

Any public-service institution, whether operated free or for profit, is, or should be, primarily for its clients and not for its employees. When a change is contemplated in any rule, method or device connected with a public library it may be tested by asking the questions, "Will it benefit the staff? Will it improve service to the public?" It may, of course, do both but if it benefits the staff at the expense of the service, it is not business-like.

SOME WAYS OF DOING THINGS

Taking Chances. "Be sure you're right; then go ahead," was Davy Crockett's maxim. But if we interpret it to mean, "Never act except on a hundred-per-cent assurance," we shall remain inactive. One can have such assurance of mathematical propositions, such as $2+3=5$, but of practically nothing else. What we do we must do, not on positive assurance, but on great weight of probability. In other words, we must be always taking chances. We shall be judged business-like or unbusiness-like by the kind of chances we take, by the value of the thing for which we take them, and by our estimate of the necessity for taking them.

It may be good business to take a very big chance even for a slight advantage, where the penalty of failure

is small. Thousands of experiments may be made in a library on this principle. It is always justifiable to try some new device or method, or to make some change in methods, where the experiment is easy and failure involves no expense and does no harm. In fact, in such a case it is not the experiment that fails. That always succeeds, since the result is always one more bit of library knowledge. There is even excuse for taking such a chance when the penalty of failure is not negligible, provided the reward of success is great; but if this is carried to extremes, we have an unjustifiable "gamble." Suppose, for instance, that the alternatives are death and a fortune; just what risk might be taken would depend largely on the taker's temperament, and it would not be a business question at all.

In some instances, however, one is not allowed to decide whether to take a risk or not. He is obliged to do so, and his exercise of judgment is limited to the choice of several courses in each of which the risk is great. He may even lack all means of choosing among them and select one wholly at haphazard. He is like a man, pursued by a bear, who approaches a fork in the road. He must take one way or the other, and must take it quickly, even without knowing anything about either. In library business, as in other kinds, disaster is often avoided by the quick recognition of this kind of situation and by ability to make an immediate decision.

Good Will. This is so important a factor in all business that it has a well defined money value. The "good-will" of a business may be worth thousands of dollars. It represents the combined feelings, toward the concern, of its customers; their likelihood to continue

to deal with it, even if it changes hands. This is one of the "intangibles" that are so important in life, from statesmanship down to family relations. A business concern may have worked for years to build it up, and the successor who has bought it may lose it in a day. Good will is two-sided: the "good-will" of the customer toward the concern is dependent on the concern's good will toward him, and the manner of its expression.

This all applies to the library, for it is a business concern, and its users are paying for what they get just as really as if they handed coin over the counter. If their good will is forfeited, the library loses, and in more cases than one the loss has been monetary. Libraries that receive large, ungrudged grants of public money are generally those that have earned the good will of their respective communities.

Directions for gaining and keeping good will can hardly be given in detail, but in all business it may be said to be dependent on a feeling that the relations between the concern and those who deal with it are something more than mere "business." And this going outside of business is in itself the very best of "good business," in the library as elsewhere, and for every assistant in the library as for the institution as a whole.

In this sense the youngest assistant holds the reputation of the entire library in her hands. Indifference, rudeness, a lack of quick response to the public need, may be responsible—unjustly perhaps, but none the less injuriously—for a general feeling in the community that the library staff is not giving good service.

Two railroads in Mexico, both under American management, were long known in that country as the

"Ferrocarril Simpatica" and the *"Ferrocarril Antagonista."* It is better for a library to acquire the reputation of being "sympathetic" than that of being "antagonistic."

Etiquette. The things that go to create an atmosphere of good will cannot be listed exhaustively. But some of them have been formulated as rules of etiquette. Some of these represent a reaction to conditions now past; some are merely symbolical; yet on the whole, we cannot neglect them, for they are simply a way of taking care of common sense behavior subconsciously.

A large part of business politeness is simply an expression of the fact that it is the duty of the business man to be of service to those with whom he deals, if for no other reason, for policy's sake. If he is not of service, they will go elsewhere. This is true also of the library, where for "go elsewhere" we must read "withdraw public support."

As an example, take the etiquette to be observed when a stranger enters any kind of a service institution—a department store or a library. Some one should at once make him welcome, ascertain the kind of service that he wants and see that it is rendered. If it is simply the privilege of "looking around," it should be made clear to him at once that the privilege is his, and he should then be let alone. Nothing annoys a visitor more than a would-be helper at his elbow when help is not desired. But when it is needed it should be at hand—quick, unobtrusive, efficient.

The etiquette of voice and that of gesture are both important in a library. The most ignorant person knows whether he is being treated with courtesy or rudeness by

instinctive attention to these. The service rendered may, of course, be precisely the same in the two instances. It is as easy to hand a book politely as it is to shove it; it is as simple to answer questions and explain difficulties kindly and pleasantly as it is to do so with indifference or disdain. The distinction is merely one of manners, but it is important and has business value.

In some other countries it is a custom for one who is rendering business service to treat his client as a superior—to adopt toward him an attitude of excessive civility that seems to us like servility. With us it is simply necessary to act as an equal to an equal. This implies no admission of intellectual or social equality on either side. The contact here is one of public service, and it is in this contact that the equality exists. This consideration is as necessary for the public as for the library assistant, but it is “good business” for the assistant to regard it even if the public’s manners prove not to be up to standard.

The etiquette of taking pains is also valuable. It insures that an assistant shall do more than seems superficially required to find what a client wants and to do the thing that is wanted. It is not sufficient, for example, to direct him to the reference book for which he asks, when he really wants a specific item of information in it and the assistant could aid him to find it.

One of the chief avenues of approach to the library is now through the telephone. It does not seem to be generally realized that intercourse over a telephone wire requires exactly the same sort of courtesy as if the persons concerned were talking face to face. All telephone etiquette may be easily deduced from this. For instance,

a personal caller announces himself at once; a telephone caller should do likewise. A person appearing at a house on a business errand and refusing to state his name or his business until he knew the name of the person with whom he was talking, would not go far. Again, one who asks to see another on business at his own instance is asking a favor. We habitually put it that way when we say "beg the favor of an interview." If there is any incidental trouble or bother, it must be assumed by the person who asks the favor—not thrust by him on the other. If he calls at a house and ascertains that Mr. Smith is at home, he certainly would not say, "Ask him to come downstairs and wait for me while I do an errand around the corner." If there is any waiting to do, he must do it himself. Yet similar treatment is constantly accorded to persons who are called up on the telephone.

The telephone is sometimes used to break into another's orderly routine of business, which is somewhat like forcing one's way into a cue before a ticket office or in a bank. It is as rude in one case as in the other.

Records. Records are essential to every business. Where a man is in a business for himself he wants to know its details, and where he is employed by someone else it is his duty to keep track of the work and report its status and progress, whether he personally cares to do so or not. This latter case is that of the librarian. He is employed to conduct an institution, and whether or not he personally considers the keeping of records a waste of time he must account for the property in his charge and be able to tell how and to what purpose he has administered it.

The librarian's records are of two kinds: Those describing the condition of the property in his charge and those describing what he has done with it—the quality and extent of his work. The first are purely business records and are absolutely necessary. They are those kept by any business concern, but are simpler, because the library does not sell goods. Cash and securities on hand are listed, and monetary transactions, either in cash or on credit, are recorded as they occur, in the manner described in any work on bookkeeping. Much of this work is often taken care of by the city authorities, by the Treasurer of the Board, or by a special officer, so that all the librarian has to do is to keep a cash account and sign vouchers. It should be borne in mind that a signature to a voucher means either personal knowledge or confidence in someone who has that knowledge. In a small library it is usually the former; in a large one, the latter. The signature of the person having first-hand knowledge of a bill should always appear somewhere. The points to be certified are the fact that the goods have been ordered under proper authority, that they have been received as ordered and that the price is as agreed, or is reasonable. In a large library these facts may have to be certified by different persons and all become matters of record with the filing of the bills.

No less important than purely financial records are those showing the condition of the material property of which the Library Board, and under it the librarian, is custodian—chiefly buildings and their contents, including books. These must be gone over at intervals and their existence and condition verified. Blank books for property inventory are to be bought, and changes only need be recorded after the first inventory. As for books,

inventory methods are familiar to librarians. These have been taught and practiced in such detail that the taking of book inventories has become a bugbear, and some librarians omit it, although it is part of their plain duty as custodians of public property. The remedy seems to be a simpler form of inventory, such as that described in *The Library Journal*, May, 1917, although the actual identification of each book cannot be altogether omitted but must be carried out at more extended intervals—say every five years.

Records of the second type—those of library work, including circulation, reading-room attendance, registration, etc.—are not so strictly matters of business and might be omitted without actual dereliction of duty. Their necessity is indicated, however, by two considerations: First, the librarian must have the particulars of his past work on record in order to test the success or failure of his methods, and as a guide in planning new work. Secondly, the public, to which he is ultimately responsible, has a right to know how he is fulfilling the trust that it reposes in him.

SOME PERSONAL QUALITIES

Honesty. To be honest it is necessary to do more than simply to abstain from theft. To use for one's own purposes anything that rightfully belongs to another—money, property, time or service, is surely dishonest. Dishonesty is unbusiness-like, because the essence of business is agreement, and in a dishonest transaction one side is ignorant of its exact nature. If a library employs an assistant with the proviso that she shall be allowed to read or study for her own benefit when not otherwise

employed, that is a business transaction, but if work has been provided for such contingencies and she reads instead of doing it, she is dishonest and therefore unbusiness-like.

It may be thought that the flagrant dishonesty of direct theft is unlikely in a library assistant. Possibly that is so. But it is also unbusiness-like to give anyone an opportunity to be dishonest, whether he takes advantage of it or not. It is unbusiness-like to cash a check without requiring identification or to make a loan without security. It is not proper to complain that these precautions imply a suspicion of dishonesty. In like manner it is not proper for a librarian or any of his staff to complain that he is treated as if he were expected to be dishonest—required, for instance, to submit vouchers for petty-cash expenditures, or to record fines and other receipts on some form of cash-register, or to sign a time-sheet.

Some persons with whom financial dishonesty would be quite unthinkable have no scruples about being dishonest with time and will even falsify time-sheets in so doing. Others have no objection to using as private property such library supplies as pens, pencils, paper, or even postage stamps, or to allow the library to pay for their private telephone messages.

It is sometimes difficult, however, to decide whether or not use of such things is official or private—whether, for instance, a question to be answered is addressed to one as an individual or as a library assistant. A good rule is to require the submission of all correspondence written on the library letter-head to the librarian or some other official superior.

Promptness. It has been paradoxically said that much time is lost through promptness. This means, of course, that someone is always late and that those who are compelled to wait would have saved time by being equally late. The only remedy is for all to arrive together, and the only practical way is to agree upon an hour and keep to it. Wasting time is worse than wasting money, because a money loss may be replaced, while lost time is lost permanently.

Time and energy may be wasted by unwillingness to delegate work. He who is business-like in a small way is sometimes unbusiness-like when his business has grown large. He is unable to adapt himself to its growth. Time was when he could attend to all the details himself. He still tries to do so and the mere physical limitations bring failure. The librarian who once attended to his own cataloging, registration, book selection and finances and tries to continue when his institution has grown beyond this possibility, is not business-like any more, although he may have been eminently so at first. A business-like management delegates these things to competent lieutenants, while still retaining ultimate control over them.

The greatest time-waster is talk. It is unbusiness-like, in the course of work, to speak an unnecessary word. Some persons think out loud; they compel others to listen to processes that should have been performed silently. Others do not think at all, and pour out a stream of useless words while they wait for the thoughts to come. Still others speak to the point, but repeat themselves over and over with the erroneous idea that the point is thus being emphasized. In particular it is unnecessary, in preferring a request, to lead up to it by

a recital of reasons or a narrative of events. Make the request directly with a minimum of explanation. Defer argument until it is necessary. Requests are often granted as soon as heard. It is confusing to listen to a long prelude when one is uncertain whither it is tending.

Economy is usually measured in terms of money, but its subject-matter is rather the things that cost money. When one has saved \$500 in his electric bills it means that he has used less electric current; when the saving is \$1,000 in wages, it means that fewer persons have been employed, or that they have been paid at a lower rate. When these things can be done without diminution or injury to service, it is our duty to do them at any time, but occasionally they may be necessary when they do involve such diminution or injury, as when income is lessened and work must be cut. The problem then becomes one to learn where purchases or employment may be lessened with the least injury to service, looking at the matter in its largest aspect. The least injury for the current year might involve the greatest when subsequent years are taken into account, as when a valuable assistant is dropped or a progressive piece of work abandoned. The easiest economy is not always the best. In a library it is plainly the worst, because here the easiest way to save money is to buy fewer books, thus depriving the library of that without which it ceases to be a library. This is much like saving money by going without food. It seems at first as if all other items of library expense—upkeep of building, salaries of staff, etc.—were practically fixed, but it is better to keep on buying books, even if the hours are made shorter or the staff reduced in size. It is better not to catalog the books than not to buy them.

It is possible, however, to reduce expenditures for books without much reduction in real service. Much valuable material may be had for the asking. A reduced book appropriation may also be a good reason for purchasing valuable material at second-hand. This should always be material of permanent value; not partly used current literature. This latter is valuable only in proportion to the life before it; to buy at half-price a volume that is three-quarters worn out is no economy.

Courage. This deserves separate treatment, although it may be considered chiefly as an element or concomitant of qualities treated elsewhere. For instance, it is often involved in honesty, in the taking of chances, in economy and in truthfulness. For our present purposes, it is a disposition to go on with an enterprise without regard to possible disadvantage or injury to oneself or to the enterprise itself. It may become rashness, if not tempered with—

Caution, which should properly be considered with it, in the light of what has been said under the heading, "Taking Chances." Caution is a disposition not to endanger the success of an enterprise by proceeding with it in the face of obstacles likely to bring about its failure. Courage and caution are not diametrical opposites, for one may possess both simultaneously, and it is not too much to say that the successful man must have both. As courage without caution is recklessness, so caution without courage is cowardice. Either lack may be fatal.

As an example of courage tempered by caution, we may cite a very frequent occurrence—the temptation to write a belligerent letter. Such a letter, written upon the impulse of the moment, and dispatched at once, is

often a serious error, and it is irreparable. It might be an error also not to write at all. But if the letter is written and laid aside for a day, and then read critically, it will seldom be sent as it is. It will be toned down, perhaps destroyed. There are persons who can be depended on to write in this calmer fashion without delay. These are still more business-like, and this advice is not for them. For the quick tempered, no one can doubt that the procedure outlined above is the more business-like. The same may be done in the case of the spoken word.

The same or a similar method may be applied to contemplated acts that are likely to arouse opposition. A frequent plan is to act first and let the opposition develop afterwards, when there is no chance of a reversal of policy. A better way is to announce that the act is contemplated and allow the opposition to develop in advance. It may be that it will be strong enough, or plausible enough, to induce a change of purpose. If not, those who oppose will at least feel that they have had a chance to state their case, and their good will is retained. This is not the method of a "fighter," but it is that of a business man.

Accuracy. The library keeps what are practically charge accounts with large numbers of citizens; in a large city probably as many as are kept by a large department store. Most of these accounts are for books lent, but some may be for fines or other charges, although these are usually cash payments. A mistake in these accounts is or ought to be as serious as one involving the same values, made in a commercial house. If an employee in a department store charged a customer wrongly with goods valued at \$5.00, or failed to charge him when he had purchased them, he would risk losing

his position. The only difference between this situation and a mistake in charging a book worth \$5.00 in a public library is that the property in question is public and not private. The reason why mistakes in accuracy occur oftener in a public library than in business houses is doubtless because neither librarians nor assistants realize their seriousness to the same degree that they would be forced to realize it in trade or industry.

Clearness. In every official communication there must be no doubt whatever about the meaning. A common source of confusion is the return of a document without report. This may mean that there is no report to make, or it may signify that through some mistake it has not been seen. No query should be left unanswered in a questionnaire unless the reason for the omission is clear. A blank space, for instance, left on the A. L. A. statistics table opposite "Number of music rolls lent for home use," may mean that the library does not lend music rolls, or that the number has been omitted by mistake. Where checks of any kind are used on lists, their meaning should be clearly stated on the list, even where this is in accordance with established custom. For instance, when a list of titles is checked with the catalog and checks are placed opposite the lacking titles, the words "lacks checked" should appear on the list, so that no one may suppose that the checks indicate included titles, as might be the case.

Again, no communication, book or article, should be sent to anyone without an attached statement of its source and purpose.

Illegible handwriting sins against clearness. An illegible signature is unbusiness-like, although it may be

rendered innocuous by the writer's name printed clearly on the letter-head. Regular writing is not necessarily legible. Old fashioned "copperplate" is hard to read, whereas an irregular hand may be as clear as print. "Library hand," of course, is not necessary in every library communication; but it may be better to require it where the ordinary hand is not easily read.

Carefulness. One is naturally careful with his own property; less so, often, with that of others. As the property with the care of which one is charged increases in value, more and more care is necessary. One does not handle a book worth a hundred dollars as casually as a fifty-cent booklet. The woodwork of a shack may be treated in a thousand ways inapplicable to that of an expensive building. Librarians are not always alive to these distinctions, especially where the growth of their libraries in size and income has involved progress from one standard to another. Because they pinned notices to the woodwork of a cheap old building with thumb-tacks they treat the quartered oak finish of the new one in the same way, with ruinous results.

Carefulness and economy are very closely related; for much undue expenditure is simply to repair damage done by lack of care. Those who use the shears to remove screws, employ letter-heads for scratch paper, let the ink dry up, and stand books on their front edges, must pay the bills; or rather, their libraries must pay the bills. If they had to pay personally, it would not be so bad.

SOME ARRANGEMENTS

Order. Things are in order when they are so placed that one knows where to find them. They are in the

best order when *anyone* would know where to find them. Books would be in order on the shelves if placed according to a plan understood by only one man, but his absence or death would mean confusion, though not a book had been displaced.

The appearance of neatness does not always mean order. A desk with pigeon-holed material and regular piles of documents may be one in which the owner can find absolutely nothing. "Filing" is the art of arranging loose material so that it can be found at a second's notice, and not by the filer alone, but by any intelligent person. In a small institution every one should understand about filing; in a large one there are experts to care for it. Some business men and some librarians prefer to place all loose material in a file, and to use a flat-top desk, empty when all work has been disposed of. Anything on the desk then means an unfinished item. Others do not care to call continually for material likely to be wanted frequently, and prefer a roll-top desk with pigeon-holes in which such material is kept ready for use. Such an arrangement calls for frequent overhauling to prevent the accumulation of rubbish.

What is true of one desk is true of a whole building. Constant vigilance is necessary to prevent the accumulation of waste material. The building should be regarded as a great filing-case—everything in it likely to be needed at some time, all arranged so as to be available at a moment's notice—nothing kept for which use is not clearly anticipated. In particular, nothing should be packed and stored unless plainly labelled and so disposed that any of it can be found and unpacked with the least possible trouble in the smallest possible period of time.

Sequence. This is an important item in orderly arrangements, both in space and time. It is sometimes natural and sometimes arbitrary. If you place books on a shelf in order of size, that is a natural arrangement; if alphabetically by authors, it is arbitrary; for our alphabetic order is itself arbitrary. Here, as frequently, the arbitrary order is the better, because it corresponds to more items of knowledge than the other. It so happens that one who wants a book generally knows the author's name, and if so, he knows the initial of it and its order in the alphabet; whereas the size of the book, though it is a definite mathematical quantity, he usually does not know. There are thus often excellent reasons for doing things in a perfectly arbitrary sequence.

Sequence is not so much for one's own convenience as for that of others. You may know exactly the location of every book in a confused pile, but it would be difficult to describe it to anyone else. Any kind of sequence is usable to the one who has learned it, but the ones that are most generally known are the most useful. *b k t e j a* is a perfectly good alphabetical sequence to him who knows it; but *a b c d e f* is better, because millions know it. *1 2 3 4 5 6* is better still, because it is known to millions more. And *2 3 4*, or *6 9 1* has its definite sequential meaning, whereas *x q c* and *b t a* mean nothing at first sight.

Method. Method means simply a definite way of doing things. It is better to decide on such ways and adhere to them, because then a large part of the work becomes a matter of routine and is done faster and with less effort. If methods are the same everywhere in a library an assistant becomes used to them once for all and no

readjustment is necessary. These reasons do not apply, of course, where it is absolutely necessary to adjust methods to varying conditions, but this case is not encountered frequently.

“Follow-up” Methods. Where the business man cannot see an immediate result from something that he does, he now takes nothing for granted, but investigates. If what he did should have produced a result, he tries to find out why it failed, or he repeats it. In doing this a distinction must be made between cases where he has a right to expect a result and those where he had no such right. For instance, if he tells a subordinate to do a thing, he has a right to expect that it will be done. As a rule, no elaborate “follow-up” system to ensure that orders shall be carried out is necessary. If they are not obeyed, the offender is replaced with some one who will do as he is told. If on the other hand the thing done is the sending of an appeal to buy something, or a request for a favor, the expectation of a response is not a matter of right. If none comes and one is wanted it is the sender’s business to “follow-up” the appeal and see what the matter is. For this purpose business men have devised all sorts of “follow-up” systems. In the library comparatively few matters need to be “followed up.” The sending of overdue postals is a “follow-up” system. In the business transactions of the library, such as the ordering and receipt of books and periodicals, close “follow-up” methods are often necessary. The arrival of the expected item, or a definite report on it, should be insisted on, and in default, an inquiry should be sent. The receipt of periodicals, in particular, should be checked and followed up very promptly, since failure to arrive will be noted by every reader who is accustomed to use them. A good

plan is to post the expected time of arrival of papers and magazines. This often avoids useless queries.

In a library, material of various kinds is often referred by the librarian to some member of the staff, or by one department to another. This belongs to the class of things that one should not be required to follow up; but there is often a time-limit, and it is a good plan for the sender to keep a memorandum and use the telephone when necessary. Material that regularly makes the rounds should be accompanied by a schedule bearing the names of those to whom it goes in rotation, with the expected dates of arrival. A personal dated receipt, opposite the date, makes easy the fixing of responsibility for a delay.

SOME WORDS IN CONCLUSION

Complaints. The business method of handling a complaint, whether from outside or from inside, is to have it put in writing and refer it at once to the person of whom complaint is made; or where there is no personal object, to the one most nearly concerned. The officer in authority has thus both sides before him and can act intelligently. This officer, in a library, may be the librarian or the head of a department. Different librarians will naturally draw in different places the line between matters that must be referred to the chief authority and trivial things that need not be so referred. But any one who makes a complaint to a subordinate has the right, of course, to appeal to the chief, and the librarian will naturally give such an appeal particular attention. Members of the staff, however, who constantly appeal and are constantly overruled should remember

that this must tell against them in the long run. Members whose rank is equal, or nearly so, and who are inclined to mutual complaint, should ponder the dictum: "If two subordinates quarrel persistently, get rid of *both*." A chief cannot waste too much time in trying to find out where the fault lies.

There may be some difference of opinion about complaints that lie on the borderline of accusation, where some one, that is, is suspected of actual wrong-doing—theft, possibly. Immediate reference to the accused here may be an injustice, and one should first be very sure of his ground. Where the need of assurance, however, is made the excuse for spying and all sorts of amateur detective work, the situation may easily become intolerable. Where actual criminality may come into consideration, it is better, in most cases, to consult with the authorities at once.

Large business concerns are now centralizing their handling of complaints in a single department headed by a person selected for skill in making adjustments smoothly.

Although it is hardly likely that libraries will generally be able to adopt this method in its entirety, it is a good plan for a librarian to delegate the handling of specially difficult adjustments to some member of the staff, or some department that has shown ability in preserving or developing good will.

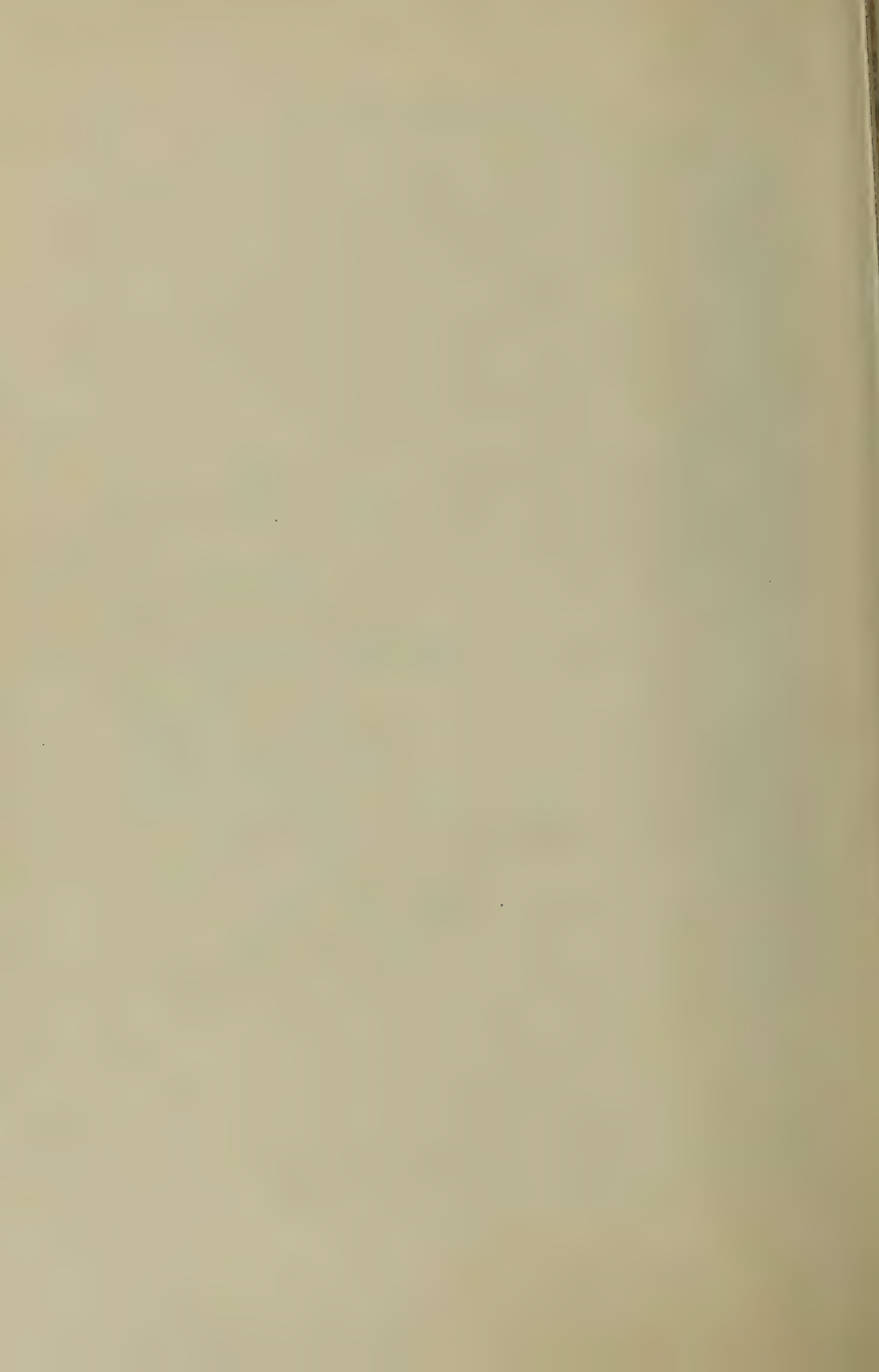
Relations With Other Libraries. Such an institution as a public library has no competitors or rivals, in a business sense. Reasons for suspicion or jealousy among libraries are conspicuously absent. The temptation to be unethical exists chiefly in the exchange of members

of the staff. It is generally considered that when one librarian wishes to offer a position to a member of another's staff, he shall previously, or at any rate simultaneously, notify the other librarian that he is doing so. This is, however, not universally admitted. Some, while agreeing that the other librarian, as a matter of courtesy, should be ultimately informed, believe it to be proper to sound the candidate informally, before doing so. Some candidates make application for a position without notifying their own chiefs. Without going too far into ethics, it may be said that the best policy for all concerned in the long run, is one of complete frankness on all sides. Especially, action on an assistant's part, that raises suspicion of an attempt to secure a salary increase, independently of all considerations of loyalty, service, or real betterment, will ultimately react against that assistant.

Librarians with a position to fill sometimes write to several persons, asking them to be "candidates" for it. This involves injustice, as only one can be selected and the rest are put in the false position of applicants who have been rejected. Anyone receiving a request of this kind may properly answer that it interests him, and that a definite offer will receive earnest consideration.

Personal applications for promotion or appointment are looked upon differently in different places. In Europe they are the rule. An important professorship in a university there may be given only to one who formally applies for it. Such an application in the United States might seriously prejudice the candidate's chances of success. Some librarians like, or at any rate do not mind, receiving requests for promotion or appointment. With others they are not felt to be recommendations.

Relations With the Board. In business, boards of directors were once confined to banks and large industrial institutions. Now it is common for business to be operated by corporations. A board of directors is the representative of the stockholders who own the business and are supreme in authority. But although they, and the board in their behalf, are supreme, they are not experts and they must employ an expert to operate the business. It would be unbusiness-like to do otherwise. In a public library the citizens, collectively, own the institution; they correspond to the stockholders of a corporation. They, or their representatives, choose a board of trustees or directors to act on their behalf; to hold the property and manage the institution. The board employs an expert, a librarian, to operate the library for it. The relationship is therefore that between owners and an expert manager. The board knows in general what it wants and whether it is getting it. If not, it should try another librarian. But ordinarily it is ill-advised if it interferes in any way with the details of administration. On the other hand the librarian must remember that the board has an undoubted right to do anything that it chooses. It is the librarian's duty to call the board's attention to any course that it may be pursuing to the library's detriment, but if this is persisted in, there are only two alternatives—acquiescence or resignation.



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