

## Putting up Roadblocks on Your Path Toward Management

Patricia Katopol

When I was an information school student, I took advantage of a trip from College Town to the Big City to visit libraries in various units of Huge Automotive (obviously, I'm using fictional names in this trip down memory lane), a major player in the automotive industry. I would learn later that these were 'special libraries' and very different from the public and academic libraries with which I was familiar. I got my first look at technology used to manage images. And it was a bit shocking to walk into a beautiful corporate law library and see rows of empty tables and carrels – empty now because the lawyers could access Westlaw and Lexis from their desktop. Law was my first career and I remember, after a visit from a Lexis representative, a professor telling us that no lawyer would ever use a computer because you had to *fee/* the law as you held the treatises and reporters in your hands. And then there was a hospital library (there was no end to the interests of Huge Automotive), where the librarian was excited about Huge Automotive's offering of in-house classes, including those she had taken in accounting and human resources.

On the drive back, we discussed what we had seen. To me, it was heady stuff. I had no idea all this was part of library and information science. However, to a woman, my classmates expressed shock and dismay at the librarians' work. It wasn't what they had signed up for when they began their academic program. "I don't want to deal with people." "Seems like a lot of paperwork." "I don't want to be in authority; I just want a job." "A lot of the work wasn't even like being in a library; they don't work with books very much."

This was the first time I noticed what my classmates thought about careers in the field and their own career paths. As a woman pursuing a second career, and as a person who had been out in the world and knew how it could knock you upside the head sometimes, it seemed that my friends were unwilling to see the future of library work that Huge Automotive had just laid out for them.

With that in mind, I want to put management theory aside in this issue and discuss management as a career goal for information professionals and why people, especially women, either opt out of management entirely or never quite reach the career goals they desire.

I taught management in a SLIS program for a number of years. I admit to being a little jealous when I read articles from management educators in business schools. Their happy students eagerly signed up for class, took pride in seeing themselves as future managers, participated in role-playing games where they showcased their understanding of management principles, and didn't think that 'manager' was synonymous with 'Devil's disciple.'

On the other hand, my students (and those of some of my faculty friends in other schools) were often fearful or dismissive of the managerial role. To provide an overview of management challenges in a variety of environments, I required that they read articles in *Harvard Business Review* as well as practitioner literature on library administration. I had more than one course review along the lines of, "I was afraid to take this class." "I never saw myself as a manager" or "Why are we reading business journals? It's a little 'corporate,' isn't it?"

Information professionals are highly educated. According to the US Census, only 12 percent of the US population holds an advanced degree<sup>1</sup> – and many information professionals hold multiple masters or even doctoral degrees. They are well-educated professionals who may well find themselves working with their organization's executives and in intra-organization projects with officials from nonprofits and government agencies. Even if not officially a manager, they may make managerial decisions about the 'Friends of the Library,' student workers, programming, or purchasing. Unfortunately, it was our school's experience that MLIS students, through their course comments, would suggest that the only appropriate classes were those that taught them how to perform the tasks – cataloging, reference, and bibliographic instruction, etc., that enabled them to obtain their first job. Few considered how their education should help prepare them for a management position or managerial decision-making.

Following are some of my thoughts as to why the path to management is so problematic in our field:

1. We confuse joining a service-oriented profession with joining a religious order. Being a librarian does not require taking a vow of poverty. You have knowledge, experience, and skills and deserve to be paid for them. If your current position doesn't recognize your accomplishments and contributions monetarily, move on and move up. Contrary to what some may think, your boss doesn't appreciate you because you work cheap.

Not asking for increases may actually indicate that you lack skills, that you are easy to replace, and that there is no reason to consider you for advancement. Not standing up for yourself now can have serious repercussions later. For women, a lifetime of lower wages results in lower retirement income, with elderly women likely to find themselves in poverty<sup>2</sup> and women of color even more so.<sup>3</sup>

2. We confuse the present state of the discipline for its future. We get so wrapped up in daily tasks that we don't take continuing education courses, get another degree, or keep up the literature. We wait for someone to tell us what to do next instead of looking around to find out what projects or processes will move our organization forward. Organizations need people who can scan the environment and determine where it needs to be a year, five years, or ten years into the future and who have the ability to analyze their findings and act on them.
3. We confuse being concerned about income and budgets and using our authority to get things done with being 'the man.' As a lapsed hippie, I can understand the sentiment, but once I realized that being 'the man' usually came with interesting work, an office, and a regular paycheck, I put that sentiment aside. To be blunt – if you can't do a simple SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) of your environment, if you don't know how to budget, if you can't make the case for why your department, your team, or your library should lay claim to the limited resources available to it, you will not get them. Someone else will and they will be perceived as promotable and management material.
4. We confuse our present situation for our future. We may be married, but then we get divorced or our spouse dies. We may have children, but they grow up and move out (or at least move to the basement). Our family may be healthy now, but we may have to take care of sick parents, a sick spouse, or deal with our own chronic illness in the future. Managers know that whether it is in their personal or work lives, the only constant is change and they prepare themselves by taking courses, participating in projects, and seeking difficult assignments. They look for places where change may occur and don't expect their job or organization, however pleasant it may be at the moment, to stay the same forever.

5. We confuse perfection with what it takes to get the job done. Some of my management students were shocked when I mentioned that I wouldn't knowingly hire a perfectionist. What? Isn't that what all employers want? I explained that perfectionists were often so wrapped up in minutia that they were blind to the big picture of getting the work done. Most of them did not have a real understanding that work needs to get out and can't wait for hours or days of revision. They were used to asking for an extension to turn in papers (though procrastination rather than perfectionism was probably the basis for most of those requests) and unaccustomed to deadlines in which money, jobs, or the organization's sustainability was on the line. Perfectionism causes doubt rather than confidence – Is it right? Is it good enough? Should I do more? For females, there is a tendency to behave at work the same way they did at school, trying to show the boss that they are 'good' workers by being quiet, turning in perfect work, and hoping that this behavior will help them to advance. Unfortunately, this is not the way the real world works – as many a good girl has found out.
  
6. Finally, and perhaps most damaging to our careers, we confuse a lack of confidence with a lack of ability and we allow that lack of confidence to control our lives. For example, research has shown that a man will apply for a job if they have only some of the qualifications, whereas a woman will not apply unless she thinks she has all of them. This is indicative of a lack of confidence - problem that can stop a woman from moving into management roles.<sup>4</sup> A lack of confidence can manifest itself as underestimating abilities, blaming oneself for problems not of one's making, and feeling like an imposter in roles of responsibility and authority. The lack of confidence may be one reason why men negotiate for salaries four times more often than women and that women, even when they negotiate, will ask for 30 percent less than men.<sup>5</sup>

Confidence turns thoughts into action. Confidence “is the factor that turns thoughts into judgments about what we are capable of, and that then transforms those judgments into action” and “Confidence is a belief in one's ability to succeed,”<sup>6</sup> even if it takes hard work, even if the way is difficult, and even if our early attempts are failures. Confidence may be the

primary quality that makes the difference between having the career you want and settling for the career others create for you.

There are many reasons why an individual might decide not to pursue a career path leading to a management position. Health restrictions, family obligations, or pursuing personal interests outside of work are among the valid reasons for not putting in the hours and extra effort required to move into management. If management is not for you, that's fine. But opting out of a career path leading toward management should be a considered choice and not the result of misunderstandings about how the world works, where the profession is headed, or a lack of confidence in your abilities.

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**Published:** August 2016

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