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Margaret A. Leary

University of Michigan Law School

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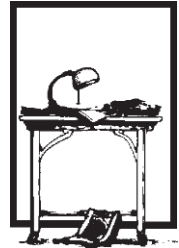
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GUEST EDITORIAL



Service: The Core of Law Librarianship

Margaret A. Leary

ABSTRACT. This guest editorial by Margaret A. Leary describes her vision of one of the core values of our profession: service. It eloquently reminds us of our responsibilities as law librarians. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>>*
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The concept of service to others is at the core of the professions, from that unmentionable “oldest” profession, through the clergy, medicine, the professorate, and the other fields that have been added to the list of professions, including librarianship.

Margaret A. Leary is Director and Librarian, University of Michigan Law Library. This paper is being simultaneously published in *Law Library Service: Spirit of Law Librarianship*, 2d edition (Roy Mersky and Richard Leiter, eds. Alert Publications, Inc: Chicago 2003). *Legal Reference Services Quarterly*, Vol. 22(4) 2003
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The association of “service” with “profession” is odd considering the derivation of “service.” Its root is the Latin *servitum*, meaning slavery. The first definition in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1978) is “the condition, status, or occupation of a servant.” Only in the fourth definition do we find “the action of serving, helping, or benefiting; conduct tending to the welfare or advantage of another.” I write about the latter, and certainly not about slavery.

Many believe that service to others is one of the core reasons for being alive, when people contemplate their life’s purpose. An excellent example of this is Robert Cole’s *The Call of Service*.¹ Of course, the idea of “great service” as the key to business success has been a hot topic for more than a decade. A search of OCLC’s FirstSearch in August 2002 found 42,526 non-juvenile level books published in English since 1990 that had the word “service” in the title. A search for the key-word “stewardship,” which connotes service as a duty done for intrinsic² reward rather than as a way to earn external rewards, got 1,934 hits. Works on the general subject of customer services are numerous.³

I write here about both service and stewardship, and about them as part of one’s professional and personal life. My comments include service within the parent institution, in my case a law school in a large public university, and to the profession.

The first of AALL’s Competencies of law librarianship (approved by the Executive Board March 2001, at www.aallnet.org/prodev/competencies.asp) is “demonstrates a strong commitment to excellent client service.” I believe that service extends far beyond that to the client.

SERVICE TO THE PARENT INSTITUTION

Within the Library

The first level of service to the parent institution is within the library itself. Service to clients is primary and obvious, as in the *Core competencies*. How do libraries achieve excellence in service? There is a huge body of literature about this, both in specialized library publications and in general management

literature. There are essentially three elements: defining “excellent service” in terms of specific knowledge and behaviors; providing training to ensure that staff have the substantive knowledge and skills; and measuring or observing actual performance against the defined standard. A classic work⁴ on this subject discusses accessibility and convenience, evaluating the collection, evaluating in-house use and materials availability, catalog use, reference question answering and database searching, standards and library service evaluation, the range and scope of library services, and user studies in libraries. This is where the focus has been: on the library providing services to its patrons.

At the University of Michigan, libraries have required training in “giving great service” for several years. We use trainers and service principles from a renowned local delicatessen, Zingerman’s.⁵ The training includes a delicious lunch and covers the elements of great service (determine what the customer wants and then provide it, plus something the customer may not have expected), and how to handle complaints (apologize, empathize, ask how to make things right, and then do that). We modify the training. Zingerman’s rule is that “no one but the owner can fire a customer,” and they go so far as to pay parking tickets for people who had to wait in line an excessive time. Instead, we train staff (especially all student hourly workers) in how to bend a rule or make an exception, and emphasize the need to say “I am making an exception for you this time, but do not expect this to happen in the future.” We also require written “incident reports” whenever an exception is made, or a patron complains. The extensive literature on defining, providing, and measuring service to customers obviates the need to detail the methods here.

However, there is a second level that deserves equal attention: the service that library staff provide to each other. It is obvious that the service that one staff member provides to the public is usually directly dependent on the work of another staff member. For example, a reference librarian depends on a cataloger to provide an accurate, complete and timely bibliographic record; and on a student in the Circulation depart-

ment to shelve the book where it belongs. However, there is a deeper level of service to each other, and at that level good interpersonal skills are critical. At Michigan, librarians and support staff are expected to have such competencies.⁶

Competencies which support “service to other staff” include:

- Inspires confidence, respect, enthusiasm and teamwork in others;
- Shares knowledge of library functions and information to enhance staff development;
- Demonstrates a positive approach on the job;
- Requests and presents information in a cooperative and tactful way;
- Is respectful of people and their ideas;
- Listens attentively to others;
- Interacts effectively with others;
- Operates effectively within the organizational structure;
- Accurately and constructively participates in discussions;
- Interacts with and responds to others in a reasonable and professional manner.

There are other ways in which library staff serve each other. The Director has a responsibility to construct an organization which challenges, and supports, employees doing their best. At Michigan, the library’s work plan includes a section titled “Continue to enhance service to students and faculty, and to each other.” It includes another called “continue to improve discussions and decision-making,” which consists of improving our ability to frame comments and issues neutrally; to listen to, and understand each other; to ask for each other’s help in solving our problems; and to conduct effective, efficient meetings.

The library owes its employees straightforward and clear statements about job responsibilities and expectations; about the library’s mission, long range plans, and its work plan for the year. Employees deserve fair and comprehensive performance reviews, designed around agreed-upon goals for the individual, the department, and the whole library.

And even more specifically, the Library should offer its employees training, educational opportunities, and other ways to enhance their skills. It should monitor internal and external markets and consider ways to pay competitively without creating internal inequities. It should pay attention to the work environment, and ensure the comfort and safety of all. This means clean air, ergonomically correct furniture, appropriate lighting, equipment of all kinds, and constant vigilance to changing needs.

Finally, a library should serve its staff by including them as appropriate in decision-making, developing long-range plans, and designing work priorities and work flow. This can be done by using a team approach, by creating temporary inter-departmental task forces, standing committees, and by other management methods. However, the library must be careful to avoid delegating responsibility without providing authority, and be sure to recognize increased responsibility with higher rank and pay. The danger lies in using teams to eliminate middle management, when the result is that lower-paid staff members take on increased responsibility without proportionate pay raises.

Within the Parent Institution

The third AALL *Core Competency* is to “understand and support the culture and context of the library and its parent institution.” At Michigan, that means the Law School, and beyond that the entire University.

The Law Library’s mission statement states:

The Law Library’s purpose is to build collections and provide services to support the teaching and research needs of Law School faculty and students. Therefore, the Law Library’s collections, services, and policies are primarily designed to benefit the Law School’s faculty and students, and others officially connected with the Law School....

How does this translate into action? First, our work plan each year explicitly states, “we will strive to be ...an integral part of the larger institution.” Second, we structure our priorities to put

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Law School patrons above others, and Law School Faculty at the top of the list.

- Books headed for faculty offices get highest priority in selection, ordering, cataloging, and delivery operations.
- Research for faculty members get highest priority. One reference librarian has primary responsibility, but others pitch in as needed.
- Access to the Law Library is automatic for Law School students; others must obtain passes by providing evidence of a need to use the collection.
- Our hours of opening are geared to the Law School's schedule.

We also strive to provide special services to Law School staff. For example, we provide semiannual tours of the library to academic support staff, so that they know our processes and meet the people who provide services to faculty. I provide annual tours tailored to the needs of major units in the Law School. For example, I show Admissions staff what our library provides that should help them attract the best new students such as our excellent physical facilities with carrels and quiet study space, and work with them to design a brochure highlighting the library. The reference librarians and I have lunch with the Career Services staff to describe the profession of law librarianship as an option for our graduates. I often join the Development and Alumni Relations staff to meet with donors, or discuss approaches to prospective donors. I copy them with all correspondence with donors, including my annual letters which thank donors and list books we purchased with their gifts.

I pay special attention to prospective faculty members, and spend at least half an hour with each person, to be sure I understand what her research agenda is, and that she understands the level and depth of service we provide to faculty. I attend job talks, and make notes about ways the library will be affected should the person come here as a faculty member. I see this as an opportunity not only to influence someone who may become my colleague here, but also as a way to educate one more person about what law librarianship is, and what law librarians do.

Guest Editorial

Michigan has earned a special reputation for its services to faculty. In fact, visiting faculty tell me that one reason they decided to come here is to take advantage of these services, not just our collections. There are two key components, one quite old and the other relatively new.

The first is our document delivery service. Faculty members can call an answering machine or person, send a note or an email, or use our website, to request delivery of an item to their office. They don't need to know where the item is, or whether we own it. They just need to identify it enough for us to find it, and if they don't, we call for more information. In 2001-2002 we delivered 7,938 items to faculty offices, an average of 662 a month. About two-thirds of these came from our collection; a fifth came from other campus libraries, nearly a tenth came from electronic resources, and the rest came via interlibrary loan or other means. We call this the "phone page." It requires supervision of a librarian with a J.D., and about 40 hours a week of student help, usually Law students but sometimes from the School of Information.

Our Faculty research assistance program is increasingly popular. We completed 503 research requests in 2001-02, and spent 3,075 hours doing them. About half the work was done by reference librarians, the other half by student workers. This service uses about 40 hours of student work a week.

When we started the research assistance program, we thought all reference librarians would share the responsibility. We found that didn't work as well as we wanted, and a couple of years ago we decided to put one librarian in charge, and to have that person also oversee the document delivery service. This enabled the two faculty-focused services to be integrated and given highest priority, because the supervisor had few other responsibilities. We have had success hiring people with a J.D., without a library or information degree. Unlike the other reference librarians, the faculty services supervisor has no collection development responsibilities, although she does work at the reference desk and attend collection development meetings.

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Providing service to our patrons, to each other on the library staff, and to the law school, is essential, a mandatory part of each person's job. Service beyond that, to the University as a whole, is optional for individuals. Historically, the library director has done the most service within the university. I have served on the Faculty Senate and some of its committees; participated in searches for University officers; and been an adjudicator for application of the student code of conduct. Service at this level provides a broad perspective on the operation and values of the University, creates relationships which may have direct future benefit to the library, and enhances the reputation of the Law School and the Law Library when the work is done well.

Although such service is optional for individuals, serving the University community in terms of providing legal research resources is a significant part of our mission. We allow anyone, whether or not affiliated with the University, to use our collection and services to conduct legal research. We have carefully built a collection that dovetails with that of other campus libraries. When we license electronic resources, we put a high priority on obtaining campus-wide access. Our reference librarians have a goal of building bridges with other librarians on campus, and we conduct tours to educate other librarians about our resources and policies. We provide carrel space to people who need to use our books over a period of time, because we don't allow any books out of the building. We have an audio tour designed to educate beginners and non-lawyers about the basic tools and methods of legal research, as well as guide them around our building and point out our two service desks.

SERVICE TO THE PROFESSION

There are many ways to provide service to the profession. The most obvious is simply by being an excellent law librarian, modeling the best behavior and practices.

A second way to contribute to the profession is by publishing, either research-based or descriptive. The trick here is to be sure you are contributing new material, and, that if what you write is descriptive, that you provide a theoretical background or insightful analysis of what you describe. *Law Library Journal*,

AALL Spectrum, and *Legal Reference Services Quarterly* are the most popular places for law librarians to publish, but consider also *Journal of Legal Education*, journals of general librarianship, and those in general management. Journals in other academic disciplines might welcome articles about using legal research resources in their work, whether print or web-based. Again, remember that your research and your thinking can benefit more than the relatively narrow circle of law librarianship; and that when law librarians are active outside of our profession, we provide public relations benefits for our profession.

A third, related way to provide service to the profession is by providing content to the educational programs of AALL and other organizations, including the Association of American Law Schools, the International Association of Law Libraries, and others. For a list of law-related organizations, see the *AALL Directory and Handbook* in its current edition or at www.aallnet.org. You can easily pair this up with something you are doing in your job. For example, if you are working on a research guide on publications of the Organization of American States, you might offer to be on a panel about documents of intergovernmental organizations and share what you know. Then, you could write an article.

Finally, one can serve by being an active member of a professional organization. My own experience serving on the AALL Executive Board in the 1980s, and as President in 1988-89, was valuable in giving me the chance to apply managerial skills in a volunteer setting, develop close relationships with people in other kinds of law libraries and other locations, and interact with people in similar positions in other professional organizations. Along the way I picked up a significant amount of substantive information that helped me in my own library. I traveled extensively in the U.S. and into Canada. I chose to focus on building my personal connections to the private law library sector, since I've never worked there and AALL has so many members who do. From that, I learned about marketing, providing customer-oriented service, and the difference between working in the private sector and the public sector.

For those seeking to serve in a professional organization, I offer some guidelines. First, focus on what truly interests you, rather than simply trying to achieve what appears to be a powerful national position, or to impress others. Second, be willing to work and to spend personal time. However, focus on finding work that supports your professional development, and avoid purely clerical tasks. Third, be sure your manager knows about, and supports, what you are doing. Ideally, your service to the professional organization will develop skills and abilities that will increase your value at work. For example, your job may not present an opportunity to manage a project or supervise other people, but you could volunteer to chair an AALL SIS committee that will write standards for a particular type of law library. You will learn how to define a project, identify and prioritize the component parts, assign and monitor the work, and meet a deadline with an excellent product. Or, if you want to practice skills, perhaps speaking to groups, away from your workplace, use a professional organization as your practice arena. When you are confident, you can show off your new poise at the podium back home.

To sum up: as you think about the service you want to provide to your library, your parent institution, and the profession, be holistic. These are not arenas separated by thick walls; they are just different places in which you give your expertise, your energy, and your grace. In these different venues you learn, practice what you learn, and see examples of different methods and different behaviors, from which you can pick and choose those that will improve you and give you satisfaction.

Or, as I recently was advised by a fortune cookie: “You are capable, competent, creative, and careful. Prove it.”

NOTES

1. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1993.
2. “. . . Sharing time [and] talent...for the benefit of all mankind,” *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary Unabridged*, Springfield, Mass., G.C. Merriam, 1968, p. 224.
3. Michael Treacy and Frederik D. Wiersema, *The discipline of market leaders: choose your customers, narrow your focus, dominate your market* / Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1995.

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5. Zingerman's Training, aka Zingtrain, 422 Detroit Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104; 734-930-1919; www.zingtrain.com.

6. We have two extensive lists of standard competencies, one for support staff, the other for professionals.