



Library Advocacy

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What Is “Managing Up”?

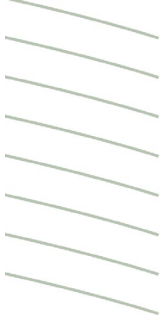
“Managing up” is a very simple concept with a complex definition. Based on the term itself, one might think that managing up means that you should be managing your manager or critiquing their management style. This is far from the case, and in fact may be harmful to your relationship with your boss.

Put very simply, managing up is the act of building and developing relationships with those who hold power within your organisation. This is typically, but not necessarily, your direct boss. The act of managing up should not be seen as way to control power in your workplace. Rather, it is about learning how to better collaborate with those above you in your organisation, in order to be better able to achieve your shared goals.

How Does “Managing Up” Affect Library Advocacy?

Now, more than ever, we need to advocate for our libraries. As budgets grow ever tighter, we face increasing pressure to compete with the internet and artificial intelligence for attention. Furthermore, we face the need to continually justify our presence within our institutions as online resources become a growing priority for decision-makers.

Academic libraries, therefore, cannot simply be providing value to institutions, but must also be *seen* to be providing value. It is not enough to be missed when we are not there, because by this stage it is far too late. We need to be obvious in the ways in which we deliver value to our institutions.



The concept of managing up can help us to visibly demonstrate that we are working not only to improve outcomes for staff and students, but to build happy and productive relationships with those whom we report to.

So, How Do We “Manage Up”?

As stated earlier, managing up is not about wrestling power from those above us in our workplaces. Instead, it is more about being strategic in the way we interact with our leadership in order to better align ourselves with their goals, and in turn guide them to align themselves with our goals.

That is easily said, but how do we actually do it?

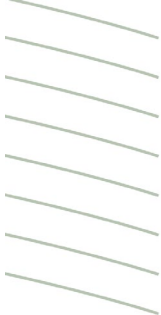
Managing up could appear like manipulation at first impression, but when approached in this way, it can actually move us further from our goals. Insincere actions and manipulative tactics are often more obvious to others than we might think, and for most of us they will feel pretty uncomfortable. Put simply, be *genuine*, but be *intentional* about how you approach genuine communication.

Visibility

In almost all cases, the first real step we can take in managing up is being visible. All too often, the library becomes an invisible cog in the machinery of an organisation. We are all too familiar with the very real benefits that come from our libraries, but as they are rarely tangible, it is easy for others to overlook them.

When we encounter those who hold power in our institutions, it can be useful to have an “elevator pitch” prepared and kept up our sleeves. This pitch could be about an initiative you are working on, an idea you have, or simply about what your library is already contributing. This way, when we have that chance encounter with a College President, Academic Dean, or University Vice-Chancellor, we can communicate what we need to say without unnecessarily delaying them. They are often very busy, so they will likely appreciate the brevity.

Of course, it is a great idea to have this pitch ready, but it is unlikely that you will run into them if you never leave the library. Let’s face it, we all love spending time in our libraries. Some of us love interacting with patrons, and some of us enjoy nothing more than spending our days cataloguing books, but our libraries are often a safe space for us. In order to be visible, we will need to push ourselves out of our comfort zones.



Are there faculty meetings that you aren't being invited to? It might be time to ask someone about how you can get involved. It can be good to be a little pushy, but it is always wise to emphasise how your presence might make their lives easier.

Don't be afraid to strike up conversations with staff outside of your library. It can be a good idea to invite yourself along to morning tea with the faculty, or to find an excuse to drop something off to the staff offices from time to time, even if it is only to be seen.

Of course, not all of us are able to get out of the library. Some of us work alone or are too busy to get out. It might be good to keep an eye out for after-hours events that you *can* attend, or you could even draw others into the library by hosting events.

Finding The Right People

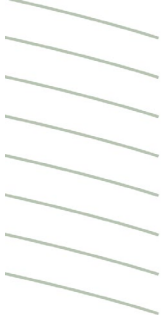
It is always good to develop good relations with those you work with, not just for the benefit of our libraries, but for our own mental health. We all want to work with people we like, and finding those people can certainly make your workday at least a little better. Not all of these people hold the power in your institution, but there is always value in maintaining these relationships.

At this stage, you may have developed some connections with staff at your institution, but the real “power-brokers” are unavailable for some reason. Not all is lost. Those who hold access to power can be your most valuable allies when advocating for your library. Admin personnel and registrars often hold the keys to the kingdom, so to speak. If you are on good terms with them, you are in a good position for your thoughts to find their way to the leadership team.

There are also a multitude of reasons to maintain good communication with faculty, not least of which is having up-to-date knowledge of what is going on with their units. Keep good relations with your building and maintenance staff. Not only are they invaluable when something goes wrong with the facilities, but they go *everywhere*, and they see and hear things others don't.

Advocating For Our Libraries

Once we begin to open up these lines of communication, opportunities will begin to reveal themselves to advocate for our libraries. At this point, we could launch straight into asking for bigger budgets and more



resources, and there is nothing wrong with doing that, but often it can be better to employ a more subtle strategy in how we approach our library advocacy.

In theological institutions, resources can often be limited. It can be easy to be solely focused on our own library's needs, but it is important to be aware that we are competing with other areas of our institutions for those resources. We therefore need to be able to justify to those who hold the purse strings that our library is a necessary and worthy allocation of said resources.

It is worth noting that institutional leadership can often be quite risk-averse, so keep this in mind when developing your communication strategy. They may be more inclined to put resources into an initiative that is low risk and high reward, so framing any requests in terms that emphasize these qualities will be more inclined to pay dividends.

A significant avenue for increasing our perceived worthiness comes back to visibility.

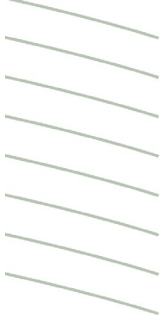
It is important not only to be *doing* good work, but to be *seen* to be doing good work. A helpful strategy for this is finding ways in which we can either save our institutions money or by making the lives of those around us easier. This might involve aiding faculty with copyright compliance or providing library orientation and instruction for new students.

It could be as simple as making the work you already do more obvious. You may have saved your institution money on eJournal subscriptions, but unless they go over the library's budget with a fine-tooth comb, staff may not know about it. Perhaps writing up a brief report could go a long way. Not many people love reading reports, but if it is brief and highlights the money saved, people will start to take an interest.

Having developed relationships within our institutions, you should seek to identify patterns in how people prefer to communicate. Some people prefer in-person meetings, whereas others might prefer to keep communication to a chain of brief emails. You might find that your boss likes spreadsheets with raw data, or they might prefer detailed reports. It may be a good idea to keep track of past communications to see if there are any patterns that emerge. Once you get a feel for these preferences, you can open a line of communication in a way that is more comfortable for the other party.

Sometimes it pays to be transparent in your dealings. If possible, you may wish to meet with your President, Academic Dean, Vice Chancellor, or whoever else holds power, and address the issues directly. These people are often very busy and will probably appreciate you getting straight to the point.

The discussion should be focused not only on what the needs of the library are but should also address the question of what the library can do for the benefit of the institution as a whole. Rather than putting the



burden of figuring that out on the other party, it is a good idea to go into the meeting already having some ideas about how the library can provide additional value to your institution.

The other aspect to this is a trickier one: making yourself an indispensable part of your institution. Once you have developed relationships with your leadership team, it is time to start adding yourself to boards and committees wherever it is appropriate to do so. You may need to be a bit pushy, which might feel a little uncomfortable. It is important to emphasise the value of having a library representative present. You may have nothing to add to any of these meetings for a while. But one day, you will hear someone mention an issue that you are able to help with. Or a committee member might need an important piece of information to which you have access. The important thing is to speak up when the opportunity presents itself. For many, this will be outside of your comfort zone, but it gets easier each time you do it.

Final Thoughts

We all understand the need for library advocacy. It is something that has always been necessary, but it has never been more important than now. By understanding how we fit into our working environment, we can begin to develop better relationships. Once we have developed those relationships, we can open up stronger avenues of communication. And once we have done that, with a little luck, we will start to see opportunities to do real, valuable library advocacy.

All it takes is small steps.

There is a lot that can be done, but you need not do it all at once. A small step at a time is all it takes, as long as each step is in the right direction. You do not need to storm into every faculty meeting nor take over the break room. Just start making connections here and there. Any action is better than none at all.

There is one other kind of relationship that has not been mentioned in this article but is of equal importance at least. That is the relationship with your peers. Please reach out to the other librarians in your network. There is a strong community of brilliant, kind, and incredibly helpful library professionals in ANZTLA. By talking to one another, sharing what has and hasn't worked, and asking questions, we can provide the support needed to help us advocate for our own libraries, and in turn strengthen the theological library community as a whole.



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