

**Library Administrator Interview:**

**Edna Krabappel of the Springfield Towne Library and Research Center**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Springfield Towne is a restoration project and museum in the eastern United States. One of its components is the Springfield Towne Library and Research Center, with a collection of over 20,000 volumes, and a mission to support both the internal research goals of the affiliated museum and archives, and to provide research materials for external history and genealogical research.

### About Springfield Towne and Edna Krabappel:

C. Montgomery Burns, one of the restoration project's founders, established the Springfield Research Center as an adjunct to the project and museum. Grants were obtained, and the center was established with a focus on the study of historic arts and crafts within a seven-state area. The center initially collected artifacts and archival material, but as Mr. Burns purchased more and more books for it, its collection was eventually consolidated with small collections belonging to various other departments within the restoration project, and the Springfield Towne Library and Research Center (STLRC) was born in 1998. The library currently has a collection of over 20,000 volumes, mostly focused on regional history, in addition to its collection of archival and arts and crafts materials.

Edna Krabappel has been with Springfield Towne for just over five years, and started as a cataloging volunteer while she was working on her MLS degree at a nearby university. She also teaches at a nearby community college. Her

background is in business, and this is a second career for her. She considers herself an archivist first and foremost, but her official title is Librarian and Archivist.

#### Organizational Structure and Stakeholders:

Mrs. Krabappel reports to the Director of Research, who oversees all library, museum, and research collections. She described the organizational chart as “flat, but in flux”; the new president of Springfield Towne is doing some reorganizing. Currently, Ms. Krabappel is the only official employee of the library, although she does have one intern who works approximately eight hours a week. The library and research center are also in the process of hiring one full-time technician who would be shared between the departments.

The primary mission of the STLRC is to support the restoration project and its associated museums and research. As such, internal customers are approximately 80% of the target audience. In addition, the center supports visiting scholars and researchers, and also an increasing number of genealogists. As a non-profit and non-government operation, the center relies heavily on grants and working partnerships with other institutions.

#### Methodology:

A 45-minute face to face interview was conducted with Edna Krabappel, the librarian and archivist for Springfield Towne on Monday 11 February 2008, using questions that had been submitted for her reference several days before.

The interview was conducted in Ms. Krabappel's office within the library complex, and the interviewer was also given a tour of the facilities. In addition, follow-up questions were submitted by email the following week.

## II. ADMINISTRATOR TASKS

### Primary Tasks

When asked about her primary tasks, Ms. Krabappel replied, "I do everything." This is not surprising, given her role. In fact, she spends more time on cataloging than on any other single activity. However, she is also responsible for acquisitions, collection management, and budgeting for the library. As there is no official archivist position within the Research Center, she also handles this aspect when she has time; the shelves in her office were lined with boxes of materials waiting to be processed.

### Percentages and the "1/3 Rule"

The "1/3 Rule" suggests a division of time and attention based on business operations, internal customers, and external customers, with roughly one third of a manager's time spent on each. The proportions may vary, but the idea is that each aspect is equally important.

Ms. Krabappel states that the proportion of her time spent on administration is "nowhere near" one third. Most of her time, she says, is filled with routine library tasks. She attends very few meetings. However, she will be involved in significant outreach activities starting in March that will take up perhaps a quarter of her time.

As to specific percentages, Ms. Krabappel says that her tasks are just "too variable" from week to week. She has tried in the past to determine proportions in the past for budgeting purposes, but it is "just really hard to pin

down.” On an average week, she might spend a third of her time on cataloging, and a third on miscellaneous activities such as archiving, working toward her genealogy certification, and research questions. She also coordinates binding orders and is responsible for the center’s Summer Institute, a graduate program centered around the research center. There is also seasonal variation, with budgeting becoming a higher priority near the end of the year. In her own words, she simply does “what needs to be done.”

### Defining “Leadership” and “Management”

When asked to define the concepts of “leadership” vs. “management”, Ms. Krabappel stated that leadership was “more ephemeral in nature”, more theoretical, and specifically related to a vision. It involves motivating people to “follow along with what you’re doing”. Management, on the other hand, is more practical, concerned with the “everyday nuts and bolts, delegation, who does what, what to buy, etc.”

This view is generally consistent with Buckingham and Coffman’s assessment of the difference between managers and leaders (1999, p.63): Great leaders look inward, with a macro or “big picture” focus on the competition, the future, and broad trends, while great manager look inward, focusing on internal subtleties and specifics. Ms. Krabappel agreed that management is not necessarily a precursor or prerequisite to leadership, and that great managers are often not great leaders, and vice versa .

### III. OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

#### Meeting Goals?

Ms. Krabappel states that up until recently, she's "not sure there *were* goals in the library." Right now, the staff of the STLRC is more in the process of creating and implementing the goals rather than measuring their success. "The cool thing," she says, "is that I get to have a hand in that and be a big part of it." Her current "top two" goals and areas for improvement are:

1. Streamline cataloging: "Get the books on the shelf as quickly as possible." This is somewhat difficult as the library handles numerous unusual materials for which bibliographic records are not readily available from external sources, but it is extremely important, particularly to her internal customers.
2. Outreach: "Let people know we're here and create a friendly and non-threatening environment." She also mentions the need for more pathfinders and finding aids as a means of making the facility easier to use and thus attracting more external clients.

In addition, she offers the following challenges and areas for improvement, the first three directly related to customer service issues and the last three centered more on internal organization and preparation for growth:

1. OPAC upgrade.
2. Better system for acquisitions (which is a potential area for a needs assessment).
3. Expansion of the archives.
4. Development of a records management policy.
5. Development of an acquisitions and cataloging policy.
6. Establishment of a “friends of the library” organization.

#### Ideal Qualities of an Administrator:

Ms. Krabappel stated that a clear vision is the single most important quality an administrator should have. Also of prime importance is optimism; there should be “no ‘we can’t do that.’ Be willing to at least try.” She also stressed the ability to delegate and to multitask. Juggling is a necessity, as is being “detail-oriented, but not detail-obsessed.” She cited a favorite quote of one of her supervisors: “Never let the perfect be the enemy of the good.” In other words, one shouldn’t become so focused on perfection that one actually misses the point of (and ultimately fails at) the task at hand.

#### Lessons for Someone Entering the Field

Ms. Krabappel’s first five suggestions for an LIS student with an eye toward administration all dealt in some way with networking and professional interaction, so it is apparent she views this as an essential. Her specific comments on this subject were:

1. Do lots of internships.
2. Be willing to talk to people.
3. Network and get to know people.
4. Join appropriate organizations.

She also offered two other suggestions: that individuals “learn to smile through the disasters” and that “attitude is a choice.” All these philosophies are consistent with the concepts of emotional intelligence -- managing emotions or “moods” and recognizing their “contagious” nature - and resonant leadership (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). They also suggest a strong “people first” management style in general.

#### IV. COMPARE AND CONTRAST

##### The Three Secrets

The majority of STLRC's clients are internal, and the library has, in general, done a good job of meeting the needs of these internal customers. While there is no external competition in the strictest sense of the word, from which the STLRC can differentiate itself, the "three secrets" of developing "raving fans" identified by Blanchard and Bowles (1993) can still apply here, as both a means of attracting and maintaining patrons -- and funding.

An aspect of the first secret -- "Decide what you want." -- is the determination of who the client is. According to Ms. Krabappel, this must occur "before any questions can answered. You must know who your client is, who you want them to be." The library definitely has a good feel for who its clients are, and there is a vision, if not an entirely specific one. As such, the library works to make its internal customers happy by expediting the cataloging and shelving policy, and to define itself to external customers through outreach.

With respect to the second secret -- "Discover what the customer wants" -- Ms. Krabappel states that "visions are elusive animals. If you have plenty of money then you can chase your vision and not worry about the client. But oftentimes you must adjust your vision to the clients' needs and your budget."

As to the third secret -- "Deliver plus one" -- the library is "working hard to deliver this level of client service" within its budgetary and staffing restraints.

## The Twelve Questions

When shown the “12 questions” that, according to Buckingham & Coffman (1999, p. 28), are the most reliable predictors of employee engagement and performance, Ms. Krabappel agreed that they “would go a long way toward describing employee satisfaction if they are answered honestly,” and said she believed that it was essential for there to “be a mechanism in place to allow employees to discuss concerns about their job satisfaction.” Most of her concerns, though, were centered on the way the information would be gathered:

If you are talking one on one, many times the employee may tell you what you want to hear. If you do an anonymous survey then it can be difficult to know what to fix because you don't know who is having the problem. Ideally, you would have a relationship with your employees that would allow these questions to be answered honestly and without "retaliation" so to speak.

She had no specific comments about individual questions, although her responses to other interview questions suggest she has considered the impact of emotional intelligence and the “symbolic hug” as well as the issue of necessary materials and tools.

## Emotional Intelligence

Ms. Krabappel recognizes the need for emotional intelligence and understanding the emotional needs of one's employees, particularly within a non-profit organization, where “pay raises are scarce.” She had clearly done

some reading on the subject as well, and cited the book *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman as a helpful resource.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary

Ms. Krabappel is in something of a unique situation, much like a school librarian or media center coordinator. She has very few supervisory responsibilities, and most of her management is lateral in nature due to what she describes as a “flat” organizational chart. This is likely to change in coming years, however.

As I see it, Ms. Krabappel’s two biggest strengths are her extremely positive attitude and her understanding of the constraints of a non-profit organization. She is an extremely upbeat and positive person, with no trace of cynicism, and she is very passionate about her work. She also knows her limitations, not just her personal ones, but those of the library as well, which is an essential aspect of the first secret, or “defining what you want.” Given the fact that non-profits are constantly struggling for funding and resources, her lack of cynicism and negativity are all the more noteworthy. As a subordinate, it would be easy to “buy into” her vision.

### Potential Areas for Improvement

That said, there is always room for improvement. By sharpening her goals, and making them more specific, Ms. Krabappel’s vision for the library might be easier to implement, and her future employees might be better able to understand it. While most of her time is currently spent on non-management tasks, this may not be the case in the future, and it will be necessary for her to

more clearly state her goals and priorities while delegating these day-to-day tasks to others.

Ms. Krabappel has stated that her job will involve much more outreach in the coming months, in an effort to grow her client base. This is a great thing, as long as her focus remains clear, and her outreach activities remain on the specific types of clients he hopes to serve, rather than becoming a pure numbers game. Fortunately, this seems unlikely.

Ms. Krabappel's approach to management is consistent with the literature in most ways, in spirit if not necessarily in terminology.

## REFERENCES

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