

Managing oneself in the face of downsizing

Strategies for empowering academic librarians

The academic library landscape has experienced a significant shift in recent years, resulting in many institutions adopting new working methods and operating with reduced staffing levels. According to now-retired ACRL Associate Director Mary Jane Petrowski, total full-time equivalent academic library staffing decreased by nearly 20% from 2012 to 2021.¹ The trend toward managing your workload with smaller teams or as solo librarians in academic departments has emerged and may become commonplace, driven by budget cuts, lower enrollment, technological advancements, staff attrition, and hiring freezes. As a result, it is crucial for library professionals to embrace self-management principles shared by Peter Drucker and leverage technology tools to navigate these challenges effectively and continue providing valuable services to their communities.

In this article, I delve into strategies for navigating the challenges of working in a library setting with a reduced workforce by drawing on the principles outlined in Drucker's article "Managing Oneself."² I examine the ways in which one can embrace self-management to empower library professionals and overcome obstacles, adapt to new realities, and continue providing vital services to their communities.

The changing academic library landscape

In the face of drastic changes to the academic library landscape, including budget cuts and reduced staffing, it is essential to embrace the self-management principles articulated by Drucker to navigate these challenges effectively. As an academic librarian, it is crucial to take stock of one's strengths and gaps in knowledge, understand how you learn and work best, develop your values and ethics, determine where you belong in an organization, take responsibility for your relationships, and plan for the second half of your life.

By leveraging project management software tools librarians can still work efficiently and maintain a standard level of service and productivity despite the trend toward downsizing. Using project management software can help streamline workflows, reduce the stress and burden associated with managing a drastically reduced staff, and ensure effective communication and collaboration with project collaborators.

In light of the changes in the academic library landscape, such as downsizing the workforce, it is essential for librarians who work in smaller teams or as solo librarians to adopt Drucker's self-management principles and use project management software tools to effectively navigate these challenges. By embracing these principles and leveraging technology, academic librarians

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can continue to provide critical services to their communities and maintain a productivity standard despite the reduced workforce.

The principles of “Managing Oneself”

To navigate this new landscape, one can turn to Drucker’s “Managing Oneself” for guidance. Drucker’s article focuses on the importance of self-management in today’s rapidly changing workplace. The key principles outlined in the article include:

- Know your strengths and weaknesses.
- Understand how you learn and work best.
- Develop your values and ethics.
- Determine where you belong in an organization.
- Take responsibility for your relationships.
- Plan for the second half of your life.

Know your strengths and weaknesses

Embracing the challenge of assuming numerous responsibilities previously divided among many colleagues and leading the library was the initial step I took in adjusting to my role in a downsized academic library. This required me to thoroughly assess my strengths and acknowledge any gaps in my knowledge. Recognizing these strengths and gaps has been essential in effectively managing myself, especially since my responsibilities have significantly expanded and diversified compared to what they were before.

I’ve also made it a priority to uphold the values and ethics integral to my work. To facilitate collaboration and open communication with cross-departmental project collaborators, I’ve leveraged project management software such as ClickUp that aligns well with teams and my work. Project management software has allowed me to streamline my workflow, improve efficiency, and be transparent about my time, capabilities, and limitations.

In adhering to Drucker’s principles, I’ve successfully established strong working relationships through effective communication and collaboration with faculty partnerships, student affairs staff, and students.

Project management tools like ClickUp have enabled me to better track my strengths and gaps in knowledge regarding my roles and responsibilities. This has allowed me to assign tasks and set deadlines based on my strengths, ensuring optimal use of my skills while compensating for any potential gaps in knowledge. This way, I’ve managed to maintain the quality of service despite taking on some administrative tasks.

Understanding how you learn and work best

Drucker’s principle of understanding personal learning and working preferences is crucial. By recognizing my preferred methods of organization, planning, and execution, I’ve been able to better prioritize my tasks and adapt my routines. Additionally, acknowledging my learning style—whether it’s through reading, writing, or listening—has facilitated communication with my supervisor and colleagues.

Building on this principle, supervisors can enhance employee productivity by embracing autonomy and leveraging project management tools. Allowing employees to set their schedules and providing structured to-do lists enables staff to work according to their unique

strengths and preferences, fostering self-management. Project management software supports library professionals in staying organized, setting priorities, and efficiently managing work aligned with individual learning and working styles.

To optimize my productivity, I've embraced autonomy and harnessed the power of project management tools. By managing my own schedule and providing structured to-do lists, I've been able to work efficiently, catering to my unique strengths and preferences.

By using project management software, I've effectively organized and prioritized tasks, tailoring my workflow to align with my unique learning and working style. This strategy has not only enhanced my productivity but also minimized confusion. It has fostered a seamless flow of communication and ensured efficient scheduling, leading to a more streamlined and effective work process.

To further improve productivity and prevent burnout, I've learned to adapt to my working style, recognizing the need for regular breaks and adjusting my expectations based on the time required for task completion. Overall, understanding and tailoring my schedule and work habits to my preferences has maximized my efficiency and well-being in my library.

Develop your values and ethics

In line with Drucker's advice on self-management, I've focused on cultivating my professional values and ethics, especially as I transitioned into a role with more individual responsibility or in a smaller team. This meant ensuring my actions mirrored the ethical principles integral to the library profession and were in alignment with our library's mission.

To promote transparency and collaboration—core values of library professionals—I again turned to project management software. This software has not only helped me manage tasks, deadlines, and communication effectively but also foster a culture of accountability, reducing the risk of miscommunication or misunderstandings.

Taking responsibility for my actions and decisions is a crucial part of developing values and ethics, a lesson I've learned while managing tasks once shared among many colleagues. Adhering to Drucker's principles of self-management, I've successfully ensured my actions and choices align with ethical principles, thereby efficiently navigating the challenges of my role.

Determine where you belong in an organization

Drucker's principle of determining where one belongs in an organization has been particularly crucial for me as a library professional in a reduced workforce. I've reevaluated my roles and responsibilities, using a project management tool to streamline workflows and improve efficiency without compromising service quality. This shift has led me to take on more hands-on duties in daily library operations while still providing strategic direction and guidance.

Library professionals who are in teams with fewer people or are working as solo librarians face the challenge of managing reduced staff while maintaining the library's quality and relevance. Focusing on building a strong team culture with project collaborators is vital, and project management software can help achieve this. This involves fostering open communication, establishing shared goals and expectations, and recognizing and celebrating team members' contributions.

Collaborating with project partners from different units within the college has posed challenges, particularly in maintaining the library's quality and relevance, and in advocating

for staff expansion. To tackle these issues, I've centered my efforts on cultivating a dynamic team culture with my collaborators. Using ClickUp, I foster transparent communication, set shared goals and expectations, and recognize and appreciate the valuable contributions of each team member.

To collaborate effectively with my colleagues, I've identified tasks that could be delegated while recognizing my strengths and gaps in knowledge. ClickUp has facilitated clear communication and collaboration, helping all team members understand their roles and responsibilities.

In this new setting, I've assumed more administrative and operational tasks while maintaining my previous leadership role in the library. Allocating time for collaboration and relationship-building with campus and community partners has been crucial to achieving our shared goals and serving the library's stakeholders effectively. As a result, some tasks and projects have had to be postponed or given adjusted deadlines to prioritize projects with high impact and value.

By reevaluating my roles and responsibilities and determining where I belong in this downsized library, I've been able to develop a rhythm and successfully navigate my new reality, thanks to the help of tools like ClickUp.

Take responsibility for your relationships

In my experience, one of Drucker's key principles from "Managing Oneself," which emphasizes taking responsibility for relationships, has been a cornerstone in my self-management approach. This principle revolves around acknowledging the impact my actions may have on others and actively working to foster positive relationships in my work environment.

Being an academic library professional with fewer colleagues but the same or even more responsibilities as I had before downsizing, has underscored the importance of self-management in my relationships. I've found it essential to maintain open communication, collaborate effectively, and build trust with all stakeholders. To accomplish this, I've made it a point to be transparent about my capabilities and limitations while forging strong relationships with my project collaborators.

Setting clear expectations, offering guidance, and illustrating how tasks align with the library's mission and vision have been critical in nurturing these relationships. I've found that leveraging project management tools significantly aids in promoting open dialogue and providing feedback, enhancing my efforts in building relationships.

Indeed, taking responsibility for relationships is a crucial aspect of self-management in the workplace. By prioritizing open communication, collaboration, feedback, and trust, I've established a supportive and productive work environment with my collaborators, despite the challenges and obstacles we often face.

Plan for the second half of your life

In "Managing Oneself," Drucker stresses the significance of planning for the second half of one's life, a concept I've incorporated into my self-management approach as a library professional. This involves contemplating my long-term career aspirations and understanding how my current position aligns with those goals. I find it crucial to acknowledge growth and development opportunities in my current role, while also envisioning what lies beyond.

With a proactive mindset, I've pursued a range of professional development and networking opportunities, both within and beyond the sphere of library associations. The diverse perspectives and strategies I've gleaned from non-library courses have enriched my outlook and refined my professional approach. This active pursuit of knowledge and connections has been instrumental in directing my personal growth and shaping my career path.

To maintain a work-life balance, I have prioritized my personal well-being, including regular exercise and quality family time. This self-management practice helps me sustain focus, energy, and resilience, enhancing my effectiveness at work.

Volunteering has transformed how I approach work. I've sought to give back to my profession and community by volunteering for committee work at library associations, such as convening ACRL's Leader Discussion Group's leadership webinar series³ and co-writing and editing for the posIT column in the *Journal of Library Administration*. These activities have enabled me to build strong relationships, share, and learn from others' experiences.

To align with my personal and professional values and goals, I continually reflect, evaluate, and adjust my career plans every semester. This regular and ongoing self-assessment ensures I stay true to my values and objectives, fostering long-term fulfillment and success.

By planning for my life's second half by adopting Drucker's self-management principles, I've been able to approach my current role with a clear purpose and direction, make strategic career decisions, and prioritize my personal and professional growth.

Conclusion

When you are faced with challenges such as working with smaller teams or as a solo librarian with the same or more responsibility (which is increasingly becoming more common in the current landscape of academic libraries), you can draw on Drucker's "Managing Oneself" principles to navigate these challenges effectively. The principles include knowing one's strengths and weaknesses, understanding how one learns and works best, developing values and ethics, determining where one belongs in an organization, taking responsibility for relationships, and planning for the second half of one's life. By embracing self-management principles, one can turn challenges into opportunities for growth and success by striving to demonstrate the value of academic libraries to students, staff, faculty, and the community. ❧

Notes

1. Joshua Kim, "3 Questions on Academic Library Staffing for ACRL's Mary Jane Petrowski," *Inside Higher Ed*, February 23, 2023, <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/learning-innovation/3-questions-academic-library-staffing-acrl%E2%80%99s-mary-jane-petrowski>.

2. Peter F. Drucker, "Managing Oneself," *Harvard Business Review* 77, no. 2 (1999): 64–74.

3. Urooj Nizami and Alexandre Enkerli, "People, Programs, and Personalities: Striking a Balance in Library-Led Justice-Oriented initiatives," ACRL Leadership Discussion Group Spring 2023 Meeting, <https://youtu.be/-Bp0SMk138Y>; Karissa Thacker, "Art of Authenticity," ACRL Leadership Discussion Group Spring 2023 Meeting, <https://youtu.be/s96O2ZeFyc>; Maradith Wilson and Lindsay Cronk, "Same Old Problem, Brand New Playbook: Applying Project Management to Negotiation," ACRL Leadership Discussion

Group Spring 2023 Meeting, https://youtu.be/GzHfkc_AOUo; Annie Belanger, “Centering Our Collective Humanity through Inclusive Leadership Practices,” ACRL Leadership Discussion Group Fall 2022 Meeting, https://youtu.be/2qXVycM_TjY; Jennifer Nutefall and Jayne Blodgett “Strategic Planning in Academic Libraries during a Pandemic,” ACRL Leadership Discussion Group Spring 2022 Meeting, https://youtu.be/0dh-I_j9iMY; Elizabeth Dill and Jennifer Nutefall, “Academic Library Leadership Transitions: Lessons and Best Practices while Navigating a Pandemic,” ACRL Leadership Discussion Group Fall 2021 Meeting, <https://youtu.be/aynA8j8lVp0>.