

NEW ON THE JOB

A SCHOOL LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO SUCCESS

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NEW ON THE JOB

A SCHOOL LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO SUCCESS

HILDA K. WEISBURG AND RUTH TOOR

SECOND EDITION



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To our Husbands,

who have been a constant support

Marvin A. Weisburg

Jay Toor

our Children,

who continue to make us proud

Rona Gofstein and Jeffrey Weisburg

Mark Toor and Cary Toor

and our Grandchildren,

who fill our lives with joy

Benjamin and Matthew Weisburg

Ethan and Max Gofstein

Catherine and Joshua Toor

Skye and Erik Toor

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FOREWORD

I am so pleased that Hilda Weisburg has ably updated the 2007 Toor and Weisburg *New on the Job* book. As soon as it came out, *New on the Job* became an instant staple for me—and so many others: school library graduate studies professors and their students, school library supervisors in larger districts, and, most of all, newbie school librarians who needed to start their jobs with confidence and direction.

When I was elected to my first statewide president’s leadership role as the president of the then School Library Media Section of the New York Library Association for 1993–94, I traveled to visit regional associations around the state carrying my two or three favorite professional books everywhere I spoke to use as props as I quoted the authors and recommended them to school librarians. I’ve continued to do that with newer leadership roles and as a speaker and consultant. In 1993–94, the authors of the books I carried were Keith Curry Lance and Gary Hartzell. Others were added over the years, and as soon as the 2007 *New on the Job* was published, it became one of my “faves.”

Hilda, in person, is visionary and practical, analytic and strategic, and, most of all, ready and willing to share her expertise and advice. She has done so at conferences, the American Association of School Librarians’ Affiliate Assembly, and through publication of *The School Librarian’s Workshop* (which I appreciated long before I met her and Ruth Toor), books, articles, and webinars. I found *New on the Job* to be just like her.

With the book, new school librarians now had a mentor on their desk. It became a favorite present to interns and student librarians from their supervising school librarians. Many school library programs required it for their

capstone courses as students finished their studies, readied their resumes, and scheduled interviews. I know that their marked-up copies were revisited after they landed their jobs, reread as they prepared to meet the faculty, administrators, and staff of their new schools at the first day of school meetings and referenced often during that first year. And the second one. Then less so as they hit their strides as school librarians but pulled out again as a suggested purchase for a colleague beginning a new job in a new school library.

I found it to be excellent for self-reflection for veterans in the field with its interactive boxes at the end of each section with questions to ponder. What can I do to “up my game?” What are the holes in my practice that need a bit of attention? I especially appreciated the “Advocacy and You” chapter with its clear definitions of the difference between promotion, marketing, and advocacy and why each are important. My copy became a bit bedraggled as it was dragged out again and again.

You will find that the updated edition relates to the *AASL Standards for the 21st Century* and uses the term “school librarian” which I find to be more inclusive in a profession where titles differ around the country but we are all librarians. Technology has a bigger role reflecting its prominence in our professional life. For instance, interviewees are advised to consider their digital footprints, not a concern in 2007.

Thank you, Hilda, for taking on the work of revising, on your own, a valuable book written with a co-author. This version will be as practical, visionary, and strategic for our profession as the 2007 book—and it’s much needed!

—**Sara Kelly Johns**

President, New York Library Association

Member, ALA Executive Board

INTRODUCTION

After seven years in print, it became obvious that *New on the Job: A School Library Media Specialist's Guide to Success* needed a facelift. In the world of technology and education, seven years is a very long time. Although the core aspects of your job—relationships, instruction, and building lifelong learners—have not changed, how these are achieved has undergone some transformations. The purpose of *New on the Job* is still the same as it was. It is meant to help you hit the ground running when you walk into a new school. Whether this is your first job or you have already been in the field for a few years but are changing your building level or starting in another district, our total of more than sixty years of experience successfully managing library media centers will help you feel comfortable in situations never discussed in your coursework.

You learned how materials are cataloged, heard about automation, reference sources, databases, and the Internet, and were told to read *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*. What you didn't spend much time on and will discover in this very practical guide is how to

- » conduct yourself at a job interview;
- » get started once you are hired;
- » find the most important people you will need to work with;
- » connect with your students (beyond teaching lessons);
- » get along with teachers;
- » have a good relationship with your principal;
- » run the media center (from preparing budgets to dealing with vendors);
- » become an advocate and publicize your program;

- » determine your philosophy; and
- » deal with subjects such as intellectual freedom, copyright, plagiarism, and your professional growth.

When you step into a new position, so many things are thrown at you so fast that you end up just focusing on the immediate details. We hope this book gives you a way to view your job as a whole, starting by developing a philosophy that unifies everything you do, allowing you to make connections among its often competing elements. By keeping in mind this larger view, you will stay more on track and be less likely to feel overwhelmed. This also prevents you from operating with a “duct tape and fire extinguisher” approach in which you *react* to situations rather than being prepared for them. Just keep in mind that there is *no way* you can accomplish everything in your first year. However, while it takes at least five years to establish an exemplary program, you should feel you are heading in the right direction by the time your first school year ends.

If you are experienced and moving to a new location, it may appear in some places as if we are giving too many details, but for those of you just starting out the additional information can be reassuring, reinforcing your already good instincts. Accept the fact that you will make some mistakes. You’re only human. Learn from them and move on.

It has always been a guiding principle for us to write in such a way that our readers are not put to sleep after a long working day. While superintendents, principals, and other administrators can be either male or female, we refer to superintendents as “he” and to principals as “she” throughout, rather than using the awkward “he or she.” We have also used the abbreviations SL and SLP for the terms *school librarian* (i.e., you) and *school library program* (your program) respectively.

What You Will Find in the Chapters

Beginning with a discussion of *Empowering Learners*, chapter 1, “Your Philosophy,” discusses your philosophy and how it relates to everything you will be doing on the job, as well as introducing the three parts of your school community—students, teachers, and administrators (all covered in greater depth in later chapters). From there, chapter 2, “Getting the Job,” walks you through everything from your resume and application to the interview and follow-up.

Once you have accepted a position, chapter 3, “Finding Your Way,” helps you view your library media center as others see it, check the collection, acquaint yourself with the building layout, meet the faculty and staff, and learn about your district and community.

Chapter 4, “Getting Yourself Organized,” focuses on ferreting out information before the school year begins; highlights policies important to your job, such as the absolutely critical selection policy (telling you how to prepare one if there is none), the acceptable use policy, and other documents; discusses how to handle your schedule, whether fixed or flexible; suggests how to spruce up your space and prepare your office; advises how and from whom to order everything you need; and describes how to handle purchase orders.

The next three chapters—chapter 5, “Reaching Your Students,” chapter 6, “Reaching Your Teachers,” and chapter 7, “A Matter of Principals”—offer you detailed information and suggestions for the many aspects of dealing with these most important people in your working life. Chapter 6 also provides an effective plan for running an author’s visit.

Chapter 8, “Advocacy and You,” defines the difference between public relations, marketing, and advocacy, and describes your relationship with volunteers and parents in general, as well as school board members and business and community groups outside the school.

Chapter 9, “Planning,” explores various types of planning under many different circumstances: everything you need to know about your budget, buying books and periodicals, obtaining alternative funds (and even running a book fair), collection mapping, weeding, and managing your support staff.

“Technology and You,” chapter 10, begins with the key issue of becoming friendly with the technology department, something that can make your job much easier. It also talks about filters and unblocking sites, acceptable use policies in action, online databases, library management systems, and what to do if your vendor goes out of business and your system is no longer supported.

Chapter 11, “Ethics, Standards, and You,” incorporates professional and individual ethics into your program—including how to combat the problem of plagiarism—and explains the driving forces of national and state standards, and the overriding presence of the Common Core Learning Standards.

Chapter 12, “Looking Back, Looking Forward,” brings your year to a close, but, in addition to providing details on how to manage this, mirrors chapter 1 in going beyond the basics of your job to address more weighty issues. By knowing what being a professional entails, you will return after the summer vacation ready to take your school library media program to an even higher level.

Two additional aids appear as appendixes. “Essential Resources” lists titles for your professional shelf and websites to bookmark. “Jobbers and Vendors” names some major companies that support the library market. Following the appendixes, a glossary identifies some key terms used in libraries and education.

Depending on what you need to know at the moment, read or flip through the chapters, using the index if you want a quick answer, to give you replies to

questions and problems that all of us face. Look at the “Key Ideas” (important concepts to take away with you) at the end of each chapter. Use the interactive boxes after major topics to help you think through what you have just read and anticipate what you would do in similar circumstances. Even though you have been taught that it is wrong to write in a book, do not hesitate to jot your responses in these boxes—perhaps in pencil. You may change your mind as time passes and can then erase or add to your original comments.

What Is Not in This Book

Although we have written many books about how to present information literacy skills to students and how to collaborate with teachers, none of this is included here. Our focus in this book is on all the critical aspects of doing a great job that are not discussed anywhere else in the literature.

We wish you well as you begin this phase of your career, and we remember when we were once in your shoes. After Ruth received her MLS degree, she realized she did not know how to select and purchase books. Colleagues came to her aid and she soon figured it out. Years later, after she and Hilda had published a number of books and had begun writing and editing *The School Librarian's Workshop* (www.slworkshop.net), her former professor commented that these resources were a great asset since they dealt with “all the things that hadn't been covered in library school.” With *New on the Job*, we hope to be your guide through what is often an overwhelming challenge.

Good luck!

1

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Typically the workday for any school librarian (SL) begins as soon as the door to the library is open and ends when it is closed because, unlike teachers, you can always expect that someone will drop in who is grateful to see that you are there. Your job is often frenetic and disjointed as you move from one class, teacher, student, or parent to another with no logic and, most often, without being able to complete any one task before having to move on to the next. In such an environment, it is easy to lose track of a large overall design for what you are doing.

How you begin your new job sets the tone for everything that will follow. You do not want to launch your new position by plunging into its myriad details without something to anchor you and provide a framework for what you are about to do. You need to determine what your philosophy is and what vision you want to hold for your school library program (SLP). While you have a natural urge to get down to practicalities, having a philosophy and vision in place will serve as a foundation for the many decisions and choices you will be called upon to make.

Begin by Identifying Your Philosophy, Mission, and Vision

According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, a philosophy is “a theory underlying or regarding a sphere of activity or thought.” Philosophy is rooted in beliefs. Later you will craft your mission and vision. Mission explains purpose; and vision is about how you wish to be perceived. Keep these brief definitions in mind as you proceed as the terms are often confused.

Although not labeled as philosophy, the nine Common Beliefs presented in *AASL's Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* offer ideas and language you should consider incorporating into your Philosophy Statement. Among these are “Reading is a window to the world”; “Ethical behavior in the use of information must be taught”; and “Learning has a social context.” The explanation for these nine Common Beliefs can form the philosophical basis for your program.¹ Play around with the wording until you have something that fully expresses your philosophy about the SLP. It should be three to four paragraphs and not longer than a page. If there is an existing philosophy statement for the SLP it might be usable and not need any tweaking. In that case, all you need do is keep it in mind as you plan for the future and conduct your daily routines. If changes are required, make them for your own use until such time as you have established yourself. You can then suggest a small committee of faculty, parents, and, in middle and high schools, students to help develop a new philosophy statement.

A *Mission Statement* identifies your purpose—your reason for being. The *mission* given in *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* is clearly spelled out in two sentences: “The mission of the library media program is to ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information. The school library media specialist (SLMS) empowers students to be critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information. . .”² The bulleted ideas beneath this passage detail what is necessary to achieve the mission. Note that the first sentence explains the purpose of the program while the second defines the critical role played by the school librarian.

As a new school librarian, you may be most comfortable in using this as your mission statement, citing the source, or modifying it slightly to better represent what you see as your purpose in your school setting. Whatever you end up with should be brief. You want to keep it as close to twenty-five words (not counting “the mission of the Blank School Library program”) and definitely fewer than fifty words, and then memorize it. If the statement is longer than fifty words, you will not remember it, and if you cannot remember it, you really do not have a mission statement.

At the ALA Annual Conference in 2014, the AASL Board approved the following new mission statement for the association, “The American Association of School Librarians empowers leaders to transform teaching and learning.” This is probably the most succinct mission statement you will see. Consider incorporating the concept of transformed teaching and learning into your own statement.

Empowering Learners does not offer a vision for the school library program, but it can be an uplifting experience to create one. This is where you imagine an all-perfect world. With that in mind, consider what the SLP would look like. You will probably never get there, but it reminds you of what you are fighting to achieve every day. If it is sufficiently compelling, it can motivate others such as parents and teachers to help you reach your inspiring vision. As with your mission statement, your vision statement should be close to twenty-five words and not more than fifty. Once you have both written, print and frame them. Hang them prominently in the library so everyone can see them—especially you.

Before you complete your philosophy, mission and vision statements, check to see if there are existing ones for your school and district. Most have mission statements and many have vision statements. High schools evaluated by an accrediting agency invariably have a philosophy statement for the school and for the library program. Review all of these to see how well they are aligned with what is in *Empowering Learners*. You want to be sure that your program emphasizes the core ideas of the national standards, but you should also recognize that the SLP must demonstrate how it advances the school’s or district’s concerns.

CREATING A PHILOSOPHY, MISSION, AND VISION

What words do you want to include in your philosophy?

What words do you want to include in your mission?

What words do you want to include in your vision?

Use these terms to create a draft of each.

Your Philosophy and the School Community

Once you have a working philosophy in place, keep it in mind as you meet and get to know students, teachers, and administrators. While your philosophy will affect your dealings with everyone, these three groups are the ones you will be working with on a daily basis.

Students

However you worded your philosophy, you undoubtedly indicated that the SLP needs to be student centered. What does this really mean? If you ran a business and you had just identified your most important customers, how would you treat them?

Chapter 5 of this book goes into detail about the relationship you will build with your students, but the first step is to acknowledge that they are the reason you are there. If they dislike you and hate being in the library, nothing you do will matter. While this statement may seem extreme, and many will not recognize its truth, the fact is that your impact on students is heavily affected by the way you interact with them.

When students withdraw from you, the cost can be high. You can teach, grade, and demonstrate that they have attained certain skills, but you will have failed to show them the role libraries can play in their lives. One of the underlying messages of every lesson you present is that learning is more than just something students do for a good grade. It leads to their growth as individuals. When they explore topics, the knowledge they gain becomes a part of who they are.

However, if students are disengaged, they will not hear the lesson, let alone respond to your ultimate goal. If they don't hear the lesson, they are less likely to seek information for its own sake. If they don't seek information for its own sake, they will not become lifelong learners.

Teachers

While being student centered is your focus, access to students is through teachers. Even if you are in a rigidly scheduled elementary school, teachers' attitude toward you will affect how students perceive you. Connecting with teachers is an essential aspect of your philosophy and job. They need to see the program's "dynamism" and to feel that you are eager to meet their information needs.

Although chapter 6 focuses on specifics for developing, maintaining, and expanding your relationship with teachers, you need to pay attention to this from the beginning. The first step is to acknowledge that *you* are the one responsible for creating this vital link. From their perspective, teachers are doing fine without you. What do you have to offer them? Starting on day one, you have to be proactive, seeking them out and establishing a collegial bond.

You will probably develop personal friendships with faculty members, but, unlike them, you must not actively dislike anyone. In order to implement your philosophy, demonstrate your mission, and achieve your vision, you must get along, at least on a professional level, with each teacher in the school. Every staff member is entitled to receive your best possible service.

Administrators

Principals and supervisors are usually not incorporated into your philosophy, but you will be more successful if they know and support it. You will frequently hear SLs bemoaning that administrators have little awareness of what they do. Large-group instruction, creating a budget, and buying books and supplies seem to be administrators' concept of the sum total of your job. As a result, they observe only your teaching as part of the formal observation process, ignoring everything else you do.

In chapter 7 you will discover ways to bridge this gap in understanding, but, as with teachers, the responsibility is yours. You must be the one to reach out to administrators and do so in ways that will get you heard and respected. Complaining is easier than finding the right approach to communicating regularly and positively with your principal, but the rewards of the latter are well worth it.

Your objective in all your dealings with administrators is to have them recognize the scope of what you do and how it increases student learning and achievement. To be successful, you must present yourself as a team player and the SLP as a vital part of the solution.

THE BIG THREE

With which of these three groups (students, teachers, and administrators) do you think it will be easiest to build a relationship?

Which of the three groups do you think will prove the most challenging?

What aspects of your philosophy will most appeal to each group?

Your Philosophy, Mission, Vision, and Your Job

In library school, being an SL seemed rather simple. You were expected to develop and/or carry out the SLP, which entails working with students and teachers, teaching classes, ordering print and online resources, demonstrating their use, and providing open access to ideas and information. But once you are on the job, it sometimes feels as though these critical areas take a back seat to the numerous other demands placed on you.

As you cope with many things that you had not expected, your philosophy, mission, and vision will once again serve you well. No matter what you are asked to do, filter it through your core beliefs so that you can view all your tasks as advancing the SLP's fundamental values in some way. Consider whether a given task reflects your mission—or how to reframe it so that it does. Try to identify where it can be seen as a step toward achieving your distant vision.

Scope of Your Job

The first place to determine what you are expected to do is the official job description. You might be surprised to discover what is required and what is missing. Are you expected to have a “duty period” which may take you out of the library? Is your day longer than that of classroom teachers?

Although some of the duties in your job description seem extraneous to your primary function, approach them from your philosophical base. Instead of seeing them as tasks that detract from what you are trying to do, look for ways to use them

to further your SLP. At the elementary school level, you may be assigned bus duty. Rather than regarding it as an annoyance, embrace the opportunity to greet or say good-bye to students for the day. This is one more way of building your relationship with them and through you they see the library as a welcoming space. Even better, offer to keep the library open for the same amount of time as the required duty would take so as to increase access for students, teachers, and parents.

Do not overlook what is generally the final item listed in the job description. It usually reads something like, “and all other duties deemed appropriate.” As you have probably guessed, you are not the one who determines whether a duty is appropriate. This umbrella clause can cover a lot of surprising territory, including covering for teachers (even in physical education classes) when the office cannot find substitutes.

Whatever you may think of your job description, you will not be able to change it easily. The board of education passed it, and board action is required to alter it. However, you can sometimes be creative in how you accomplish some of the tasks in the description. For example, when substituting, you can ask to meet with the class in the library. If the teacher did not leave a detailed plan, you might be able to adapt what you are given to include aspects of information literacy.

Other Jobs

Among the jobs you may not have anticipated are caring for aging copier machines, finding information for teachers' children, performing reference services for parents, or being called on to help with a computer or printer problem in a classroom because it is easier to ask you than to get someone from the district technology department (if the district even has one). Just because these tasks were not listed in your job description does not mean you should refuse to do them.

The worst thing you can do for your program and your own future in the school is to respond either in your tone of voice or body language with, “When did this get to be *my* job?” If one of the phrases in your philosophy statement is about being an “essential link,” you can view any of those “special requests” as an opportunity to show the diversified ways you make a contribution to the school community.

In every situation, the choice as to what to do is yours. Some SLs look on these assorted tasks as showing a lack of respect for their professionalism. After a while, their attitude will send a message and they will get fewer people asking for this type of help. However, there is a cost. They are perceived as difficult and complaining. Taking care of these jobs will consume some of your precious time, but if you do them graciously you build friendships and earn respect as someone who can be counted on in a pinch.

In middle or high schools you might be expected to serve as an adviser for a class, club, or team. Any of these gives you access to students in a less structured setting, allowing you and the students to get to know each other better. Whether you coach them for an academic competition or meet with graphic novel fans, you will learn a lot about how they think, what they like and don't like, and what they want from the library. This contact is invaluable.

Tech Takeover

The balance of your job is increasingly being skewed toward technology. In the early days of "AV," this meant setting up 16mm film projectors and changing lamps in overhead projectors. Later it necessitated managing VCRs and preparing carts for the classroom, often keeping track of them as they went in and out of the library. Sometimes the SL was the one expected to videotape class and school events.

Several of these types of jobs will still be part of your responsibilities, but numerous others have been added. Many SLs are now webmasters for their school's web page as well as the one for the library. Once again, turn to your philosophy and mission to see how these added duties fit. While many of these duties help you become a more visible presence in the school, others take away more than they add to what you are trying to accomplish.

Eliminating these tasks takes time and patience. If they are not in your job description (aside from "all other duties deemed appropriate"), you might be able to make changes later. After you have built up your credibility with your principal, you can discuss how these added responsibilities are preventing you from developing the SLP in specific ways. Be prepared with ideas as to who would be the more logical persons to get them done and offer to do other jobs more aligned with your philosophy and mission.

Added Teaching

Although rigidly scheduled SLs anticipate having classes most of the day, you may be surprised to discover that you have been assigned to teach computer classes or are expected to teach a basic skills reading class. At middle or high school, you might be required to provide a course on the research process. Since such a course is disconnected from other teachers' classroom activities, the topics you might suggest for students to explore will probably have little relationship to what they are currently studying. As a result, much less learning occurs than when you develop an assignment in collaboration with teachers. In essence, this type of course poses as much of a challenge as hosting students during the teachers' prep period at the elementary school level.

Reconcile yourself to the situation. You will be unable to change these assignments for quite a while—and perhaps never. Rather than waste energy being annoyed by an administration that has no understanding of what you could accomplish without this added burden, seek ways to turn it to your advantage.

Find methods for bringing information literacy skills to computer classes you teach. Complement basic skills texts with great books from your collection to nurture a love of reading even in students who are struggling with the reading process. For middle and high school classes, talk to subject teachers at those grade levels, and see if you can collaborate on a research project that will have them grade the content areas while you do the rest.

TASKS BEYOND THE SLP

Which of the responsibilities described in this section did you expect?

Which one (or ones) do you think should not be part of your job?

What have you learned that will help you take on these tasks with a positive attitude?

Can Anyone Do It All?

You might have noticed that the extensive list of what you will be expected to do overlooked some major requirements. Your library teaching duties and the ongoing backroom tasks were among the omitted items. By now, you are probably wondering how you can possibly get everything done. It would seem to be a job for Super Librarian, for only someone with super powers would be able to accomplish it all.

A Bit of Balance

A little perspective is helpful here. First, reassure yourself. You will not be doing everything every day. While even those with a flexible schedule will almost

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