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## In Review: Fundamentals of Library Supervision, Third Edition

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In Review:  
*Fundamentals of Library Supervision*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.

McNeil, B. (2017). *Fundamentals of Library Supervision* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Chicago, IL: Neal-Schuman. ALA Fundamentals Series. 256 pp. ISBN 978-0-8389-1554-7 (paperback). \$59.00.

In the library world, as in almost every organizational environment, it is reasonable to assume that there will always be a need for supervisors. Equally likely is the possibility that not every candidate for such positions has a background in supervision, by experience or training. As Shakespeare observed in his comedy *Twelfth Night*, “[S]ome are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon ’em.” Regardless of how librarians arrive at responsibility, a gentle introduction to the art and science of managing individuals, groups, and teams should be greatly appreciated. Beth McNeil, Dean of Library Services at Iowa State University, provides exactly that.

Part of the “ALA Fundamentals” series, *Fundamentals of Library Supervision* offers an authoritative introduction to management by establishing a foundational base of knowledge any new supervisor can build upon. Dividing her work into three sections, McNeil expands her focus from supervising individuals to managing groups to overseeing complete library systems, using a thorough approach that incorporates best practices developed within a variety of industries. Citing professionals from environments as varied as Walt Disney Studios, the Harvard Business School, and Amy Poehler’s “Smart Girls Society,” she thoughtfully identifies the intersections between creative endeavors, commercial organizations, and contemporary libraries. The result is a methodical collection of detailed observations intended to guide new managers into a successful supervisory career while simultaneously offering a helpful refresher to established executives.

From my perspective as a librarian charged with developing a new program, McNeil’s book is an excellent resource. Having recently hired my first staff member, I compared my experience with guidance provided in the second and third chapters, covering interviews and orientations respectively. Although my first hiring process was conducted successfully, the book helped me appreciate areas where I could clearly stand improvement, such as crafting questions better aimed at demonstrating competencies. As obvious as this point may seem in hindsight, having a clear, well-organized reference can make the difference between overlooking a critical detail and launching a constructive professional career.

In addition to techniques for managing individuals and groups, the analysis of budgeting is particularly insightful. Librarians already familiar with the methodologies described can further benefit from the conceptual examples included, which are illustrated through the perspectives of two hypothetical library supervisors: Chris, hired to build a new research services office, and

Jamie, internally promoted to head an acquisitions department. Subsequent chapters cover topics ranging from legal policies to career management to institutional culture, and feature interpretations drawn from research in business psychology and organizational behavior.

Intended for the general library community, *Fundamentals of Library Supervision* is broadly applicable to public, educational, and institutional environments. Guidance specific to the academy is occasionally provided (including a brief discussion of tenure systems), but the contents are otherwise domain-independent and comprehensive. As a librarian tasked with supervising technology professionals, I was primarily interested in discovering recommendations relevant to my occupation. I found the “Project Management” chapter well-suited to IT work. The section discussing communication styles insightfully addressed the diversity of talents and dispositions typically found in an effective contemporary library.

However, beyond the above examples, there was little specific to the practice of “herding cats,” a term often and humorously applied to the management of software development. Lifting another phrase common to the technology world, such details are clearly “beyond the scope” of this work: When considering the book’s principal audience of newly appointed managers, criticizing it for lacking narrow, industry-specific detail would hardly be fair. After all, McNeil’s stated goal is to cover the basics, offering practical advice to both new administrative arrivals and veterans revisiting the management landscape.

It is commonly accepted that people are the most important resource in any organization. Building a foundation of effective leadership directly contributes to a thriving environment, and in the process, can help ensure that a library’s people enjoy rewarding careers. By supplying an introductory overview, *Fundamentals of Library Supervision* advances the competencies a library supervisor requires to accomplish these aims. As our profession evolves, I look forward to discovering how forthcoming changes will be reflected in future editions.

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