

5 Tips for Success as a New Law Librarian

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You made it through library school and clutching your new master's degree, you set out to find a job. It's not necessarily an easy thing to do. But after many applications and perhaps a relocation, you've done it. Now what? Below are five tips that I have learned as a new Law Librarian at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law.

When starting a new position do not expect to know how to do everything on your first day or even in your first month, so don't worry if you haven't gotten everything down in the first few weeks. Often you will be filling a position which your predecessor held for many years. That person had years to learn and build up the position around them. You need to take the position one day at a time. Learn new tasks, new procedures as they come. In approaching a new position in this way you won't feel so overwhelmed when just starting out.

Learn about your organization. I'm sure you investigated the library before your interview but it is now time to go more in depth. Study documents such as the library's strategic plans and collection development policies. These will help you understand what your library's focus is. Very few law libraries stand alone. So whether attached to a school, law firm, or court, these organizations also have strategic plans that should be studied. Understanding if your organization is more focused on research or transitioning to electronic resources or certain areas of practice will give you a better idea of how the library fits into that plan. Look for ways to fit and grow your position into these overall goals.

You should also ask questions. When facing something new, ask colleagues or your boss how it is done. You don't have to figure things out on your own. You need to first understand how a process or situation is handled and why it was done that way. Approaching this with new eyes and different experiences, you may have insight in how to improve these things going forward.

Finding a mentor is very beneficial. A mentor can be your supervisor, a colleague, or someone in a similar position at a different institution. This person has experience and institutional knowledge which can help guide you in your career path and help you better understand your own position within your organization. A mentor can also help you get involved in library communities either locally or nationally. When you are given a new project, bouncing ideas off someone will help you gain new perspective. A mentor is a great help in starting out your career.

Finally, be sure to get involved in your community. There are often committees within your organization which will help both you and your library get noticed. If your library is part of a consortia there are groups within it that will help you stay informed, both on what is happening in the library field and opportunities within the consortia. There are also the larger library organizations such as AALL or ALA. Their size can be intimidating but you can find your niche within them through committees, round tables, or local chapters (like LLAM). There are plenty of leadership and writing opportunities in these local sections. Librarians are very welcoming people and love to have new members join their groups.

Good Luck in your new position!