

**LIBRARY HANDBOOK NO.
1. SOME PRINCIPLES OF
BUSINESS-LIKE CONDUCT
IN LIBRARIES**

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Library handbook No. 1. Some principles of business-like conduct in libraries by Arthur E. Bostwick

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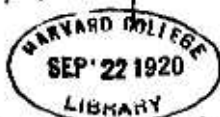
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FOREWORD

This pamphlet is an endeavor to answer the questions, "What is a business-like way of doing things?" "How does it differ from an unbusiness-like way?" "Are there any underlying principles?"

It does not attempt to recommend specific methods, still less to describe them, although they may occasionally serve as illustrations. To specify and describe would be simply to duplicate other accessible material. The author believes that to be business-like is as worthy an aim for the intellectual and the high-minded as to be, for instance, artistic or literary; and he has tried here to emphasize and illustrate this point of view.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Business-like Conduct | 5 |
| Some Ways of Doing Things..... | 6 |
| Some Personal Qualities..... | 14 |
| Some Arrangements | 22 |
| Some Words in Conclusion..... | 26 |
| Index | 31 |

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
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78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100

BUSINESS-LIKE CONDUCT

What constitutes a "business-like" way of doing things, as opposed to an "unbusiness-like" way? Not system alone; for that may be carried to an extreme that is the reverse of business-like. Not honesty alone; for the scrupulously honest man may hopelessly lack business sense. Not promptness, not quickness of apprehension, but rather such a combination of all these things, and of many others, that the best results will be obtained at the least expenditure of money, time and energy. The business man must not only produce or distribute good articles, but he must do so at a profit; otherwise his procedure is not business-like. A man who advertised that he sold all goods at less than cost was asked how he managed to get along on that basis. "I couldn't," he replied, "if I didn't have such a big business." The size of a business, or the quality of its goods, does not make its methods business-like, if it is not making money.

The public library is, or should be, a business institution. Those who do not like to admit this do not realize that business, conducted in a "business-like" way, is the most honorable of occupations and the most useful to the community. To say that librarianship is a business is to pay it a compliment. To assert that a librarian's administration is not "business-like" is to make one of the most serious charges that could be brought against it.

The public library does not operate for a money profit, but it must show that it has rendered services to the community that are well worth the money that the community has put into it. The very fact that its success can not be measured financially, like that of a commercial concern, is all the more reason for making sure that its work is carried on in the same manner that would bring success in commerce.

Any public-service institution, whether operated free or for profit, is, or should be, primarily for its clients and not for its employees. When a change is contemplated in any rule, method or device connected with a public library it may be tested by asking the questions, "Will it benefit the staff? Will it improve service to the public?" It may, of course do both, but if it benefits the staff at the expense of the service, it is not business-like.

SOME WAYS OF DOING THINGS

Taking Chances. "Be sure you're right; then go ahead," was Davy Crockett's maxim. But if we interpret it to mean, "Never act except on a hundred-per-cent assurance," we shall remain inactive. One can have such assurance of mathematical propositions, such as $2 + 3 = 5$, but of practically nothing else. What we do we must do, not on positive assurance, but on great weight of probability. In other words, we must be always taking chances. We shall be judged business-like or unbusiness-like by the kind of chances we take, by the value of the

thing for which we take them, and by our estimate of the necessity for taking them.

It may be good business to take a very big chance even for a slight advantage, where the penalty of failure is small. Thousands of experiments may be made in a library on this principle. It is always justifiable to try some new device or method, or to make some change in methods, where the experiment is easy and failure involves no expense and does no harm. In fact, in such a case it is not the experiment that fails. That always succeeds, since the result is always one more bit of library knowledge. There is even excuse for taking such a chance when the penalty of failure is not negligible, provided the reward of success is great; but if this is carried to extremes, we have an unjustifiable "gamble." Suppose, for instance that the alternatives are death and a fortune; just what risk might be taken would depend largely on the taker's temperament, and it would not be a business question at all.

In some instances, however, one is not allowed to decide whether to take a risk or not. He is obliged to do so, and his exercise of judgment is limited to the choice of several courses in each of which the risk is great. He may even lack all means of choosing among them and select one wholly at haphazard. He is like a man, pursued by a bear, who approaches a fork in the road. He must take one way or the other, and must take it quickly, even without knowing anything about either. In library business, as in other kinds, dis-

aster is often avoided by the quick recognition of this kind of situation and by ability to make an immediate decision.

Good Will. This is so important a factor in all business that it has a well defined money value. The "good-will" of a business may be worth thousands of dollars. It represents the combined feelings, toward the concern, of its customers; their likelihood to continue to deal with it, even if it changes hands. This is one of the "intangibles" that are so important in life, from statesmanship down to family relations. A business concern may have worked for years to build it up, and the successor who has bought it may lose it in a day. Good will is two-sided: the "good-will" of the customer toward the concern is dependent on the concern's good will toward him, and the manner of its expression.

This all applies to the library, for it is a business concern, and its users are paying for what they get just as really as if they handed coin over the counter. If their good-will is forfeited, the library loses, and in more cases than one the loss has been monetary. Libraries that receive large, ungrudged grants of public money are generally those that have earned the good will of their respective communities.

Directions for gaining and keeping good will can hardly be given in detail, but in all business it may be said to be dependent on a feeling that the relations between the concern and those who deal