

Wow. This gave me a stomachache the first time I read through it. It really did. I could feel my stress level rising with each message. When I reminded myself that it was just “pretend” I was relieved – yet still had a sick feeling in my gut. My first instinct was to run and hide – or quit (the imaginary job that is). After reading the messages a few times I feel ready to tackle it. However, I had the realization that if this were reality, I wouldn’t have a few days to read the messages over and ruminate on what I wanted to do – how I wanted to prioritize. It would be something I would have to do right then and there – in those few hours before my day and a half long meeting, so I’d better get started...

I am going to work under several assumptions. The first assumption is that I let my staff know my schedule – whether through the use of something like Meeting Maker – or simply by an In/Out wipe board where people put their daily schedules up. I’m also going to assume this is a small college library.

To begin, communication is one of the most important parts of management. Therefore, while all of the problems presented will not be able to be “solved” in just a short morning, acknowledging people’s comments and/or questions is important. That is why as you will see below, I try to touch base, through direct contact or delegation, with as many people as I can. (while trying to remain “realistic”.)

**Communication 1 – Employee Tardiness:** Given the time constraints, this issue is not one to tackle this morning. There is obviously a history that needs to be learned before diving in. I would send a quick email back to Al explaining that I probably won’t get to speak to Ralph this morning. I’ll tell Al to continue to keep paper records of tardiness, and also to find if there is a personnel policy that speaks to this particular issue. If the claim is going to be made a policy needs to be found to back it up. If I went and spoke to Ralph this morning it could open up a can of worms that would absorb the whole morning.

**Communication 2a/b – Hector and the Summons:** Ok, perfect case of someone sitting on something until the last minute. Dear boss Hector has presented me with summons that is very time sensitive. It states that after 30 days from time of delivery of summons – if there has been no communication on my

part, then the plaintiff wins. Depending on how you count the 30 days, I have about three or four days to get myself to court. I need to try to talk to Hector this morning to see what he is thinking. If that isn't possible, I will ask Diane to look into seeing if I need to make an appointment or if I can just show up at the courthouse. I would also have her look for whatever paperwork or past due bills she can find. She could see also if I have to actually go, or if a representative of the library could go in my place. This meeting/appointment must be a priority.

**Communication 3 – Search Committee:** Diane should schedule a meeting for Tuesday afternoon if possible. Assuming that this committee was given the power to recommend a candidate, but not actually give the official seal of approval, it puts me in a hard spot. It seems this search committee was not adequately informed about what criteria a candidate must fill in order to be hired, particularly legally – or they simply chose to ignore it. Their hiring decision simply sounds very misguided. If a meeting cannot be scheduled then I would leave it up to the Search Committee chair to inform the candidate that it will take more time. It was wrong of them to assume in the first place that it would be done as early as they thought it would. You don't want to make a fast hiring decision simply so someone can plan for a wedding. And after reading all my email – I might not want the position filled anyway.

**Communication 4/5 – Elmo:** Neither of these messages appears critical. In fact they could be dealt with together. I'd respond quickly to Elmo telling him that I will have Diana look into getting a plumber in to look at the bathrooms – and if he could give some special attention to the front of the library that would be great. Validate his feelings and concerns – while at the same time asking a favor. It often works and might mean more coming from me than Diane. (and her computer isn't working well anyway...)

**Communication 6 – Problem patron:** This matter is also of importance – because what it boils down to is a staff member calling a patron a liar. And they very well may be a liar, but until they are actually caught in the act of “replacing a book” on the shelf that judgment must be suspended. Also, the main goal is to get the book back in the library – and it is there. I realize this may sound a bit soft – but it is a

slippery slope if you start accusing people without hard evidence. You never know who they may know or what influence they may have. Council members have overdue books all the time – as do institute faculty who may sit on the budgeting board. I would simply tell M. Baumgartner that it is actually not okay – there may even be legal issues involved. M. should take no action until we have a chance to meet and discuss the matter more fully – if the patron returns library services should not be denied to them. Ask Diane to set up a meeting for this week or next week.

**Communication 7 – Library Filters:** This message could go unanswered for a few days. I would add in a line about this to the email I plan to send M. Baumgartner regarding situation above – simply telling them that we can talk about it further later in the week. Deciding to install filters isn't something that can be decided in just a day or two. This will need a larger group discussion – and a discussion with the administration. This did not come up due to a patron complaint – it came up from a staff member looking in the cache – which I'm not clear on why you need to go looking for problems. An easy solution could be to set up the computer to clear the history and cache each night at shutdown. But if the person's issue is they don't want people viewing pornography on the computers – then that opens up a huge discussion that as mentioned before – will involve many others.

**Communication 8 – Computer Problems:** This is fairly important. People can't really function without a working computer. There should be in house computer people – or at least people that can come in. Even the smallest of college campuses should have computer technicians. I would tell Diane that she can use my computer while I'm away, and instruct her to call the centralized IT person and ask for help. I will check in to see what progress was made tomorrow when I return. Diane doesn't sound like a computer guru – and so the problem may be solved more easily than she is expecting. If the problem persists there also might be a spare computer that she could use (the Head of Tech Services).

**Communication 9 – Staff cutbacks:** Even though Muki is my boss – I would not blindly follow this message. It appears that he hasn't even been given this directive – but he thinks he will be – so it is much

to early to show any potential list of expendable positions. I would try to speak to him about this briefly at the same time I'm discussing the summons with him. Let him know that I will be tied up for the next few days with both the meeting and dealing with the summons. I will think about ideas for cost savings ideas and I will diplomatically tell him that I think all angles should be discussed before "giving in" and suggesting staff that can go. Also, I may learn something new in my workshop. Without knowing more it is hard to say what else I might plan for. Three middle managers for six support staff does seem like a lot though. The fact that there is an empty position might make me think again about filling that position if these cuts truly do have to happen. Reshifting positions and workflows might do the library good and keep someone currently working from losing their job. I would also keep in the back of my mind Elmo's threat to retire early (could be well timed) and Sylvia's seniority. In the long run perhaps either or both would like to take early retirement – but there is of course no guarantee.

**Communication 10/11 – Vampire vs. Sungoddess:** It is clear that mediation is needed between these two individuals. I would want to sit down with each of them either together – or perhaps first individually and then together. The workspace needs to be looked at and ideas for compromise to be discussed. I would definitely send a quick email to both of them (separately) telling them that we should get together to discuss these matters later in the week. Mia is feeling harassed – so ignoring this email would only heighten her negative feelings. Sylvia sounds like she thinks she owns the place because she has "seniority". And I love the use of her manipulative language. If I had time to only get back to one of them it would be Mia – as she seems a bit more traumatized by the situation.

**Final Thoughts:** In the end I decided to have a conversation (phone or in person) with Hector, which takes care of two communications. I will then send emails to Al, M. Baumgartner and the search committee. If time permits I will then send very brief emails to Mia and Elmo. I'll also talk to Diane directly (assuming she is very near) and ask her to look into other computer repair options, get the campus plumber over here, and have her schedule the list of meetings I came up with. Depending on how my conversation with Hector goes, she may need to assist there as well.