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Like a Boss: Moving from the Front Lines into Middle Management

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Like a Boss: Moving from the Front Lines into Middle Management

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Study Purpose

The path to management for entry-level academic librarians working in public services is not straight-forward as it is in other types of libraries, with **few if any stepping-stone positions between the front lines and department head**. While individual librarians have anecdotally explained their paths to management on blogs and other informal forums, little formal research on this topic appears to have been conducted.

Methodology

We used qualitative research methods—**interviewing** and **content analysis** of job advertisements—in order to elicit both statistically analyzable raw data as well as freeform advice and suggestions. Specifically, **topical analysis** of the research materials (interview transcripts and summaries, field notes), and content analysis of relevant job ads posted within the past 5 years, were used.

Informal Management Experience

Know your own strengths and see how those strengths can translate into being a good leader. So read up on some...books on leadership or articles on leadership and see how...what are you lacking or what are you good at and work on that stuff.

Integrating yourself as much as possible into important projects or things that are innovative or things that are going on that you know are going to be a big deal. Trying as best you can to **get involved in some way**. Volunteering to do stuff that may be outside of your job description, but yet would be kind of part of it.

You always want to see is a certain trajectory in terms of **moving beyond learning how to be a good librarian**. So what you want to see during that time is the person's doing different work than they started doing. And whether that's the institution giving them new work to do or asking them to do a different job or something in addition to the job they were hired for. You certainly don't want to see anybody who's static.

Flexibility

We're really looking for people that can interact, can be adaptable, flexible, they **don't dig in their heels** as much.

Rolling with the punches when they don't happen. I think there's an awful lot to be said with how people deal with situations when they don't get what they want and if they're able to move forward and move on and exhibit professionalism in that process.

Often the thing that separates someone who is going to be successful [as a manager] ultimately versus being successful in the job search is that adaptability and that ability to **be more like a willow than an oak**...that ability to both flex with the situation, the environment as they change around you and yet still stay strong and keep your own convictions in front of you.

You want to see someone who exhibits the ability to be **nonplussed**. You don't want anybody who's going to run for the hills when things start to go down.

Helpful Advice

it's important to shape your application materials so that they're not just a narrative. Shape it **into themes that demonstrate your leadership potential** and talk about **impact**.

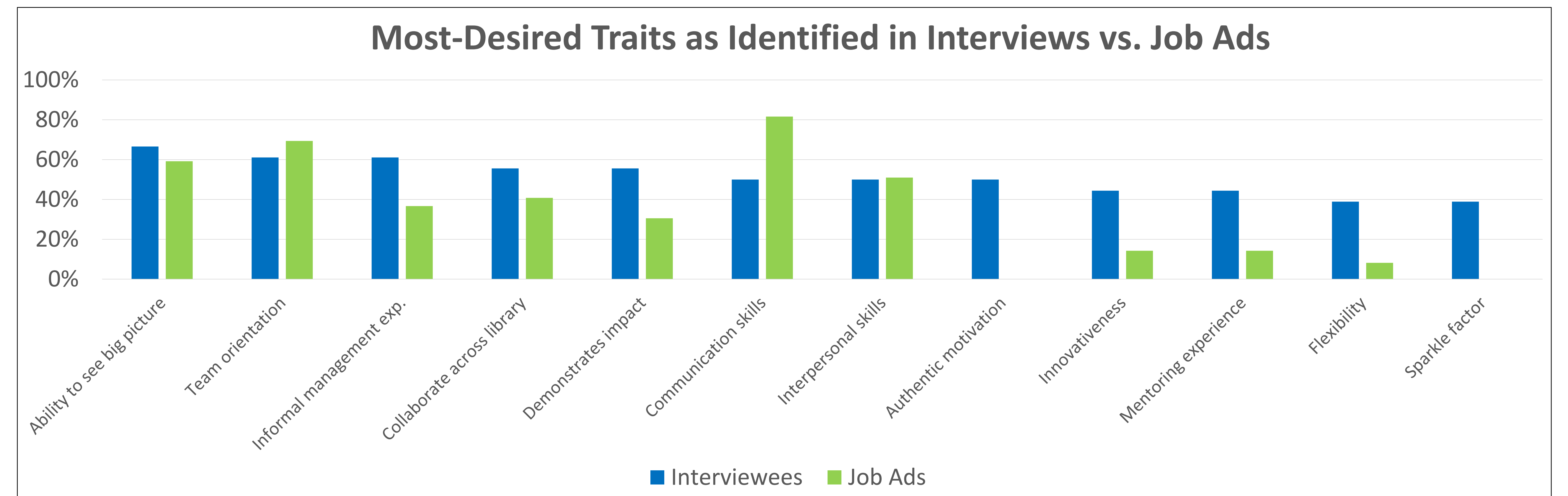
If you know you're interested in making that leap and you're in the fortunate position to have a supportive supervisor, who you can **be candid** with that about, then tell them that. A lot of people will help you find avenues to actually pursue it.

I said these are the things that a good leader or manager would have, these are the traits or even other experience, not necessarily formal supervisory experience, but other experience that are **good transferable skills**. And I mentioned that and I listed the things that I had that would be transferable to being a good manager.

I had taken initiative in a lot of things that it **wasn't just something that someone asked me to do**, I went above and beyond and sort of proved that I could not only see the big picture but I could also stay focused enough to **follow through** with what that big picture would include.

Try to be that person who has solved the problem before someone tells you it's a problem. **Be a pusher**. I would rather be the person who the boss is having to say, 'these are so many great ideas, we can't do all of them,' than having to pull something out and really be like, 'okay, so, what ideas do you have?'

Can you engage as well with someone who needs to go away and think about it as [well as with] someone who can sit in a meeting and throw their ideas out and, you know, 'let's move!' and it's like, 'no, we need to get opinions from those who also need to ponder things and who can come back to the table with good ideas.' So, that's a lot of it too, **people management skills** and **conversation management skills**.



Ability to See Big Picture

I made it a point throughout my time to try to understand the library as more than just my job. I really wanted to **avoid being pigeonholed**. And also always expressed, pretty openly, a strong interest in management and how the library was run.

I tend to not be too shy about talking about the big issues in the profession. I really like to be **engaged in the high-level discussions** about, 'Where are we going?' and 'What are we going to do?'

[Have] a vision for **what things could be** and then either being able to focus on the details to get it done myself or to identify people who have the skills that can supplement sort of my weaknesses or the areas where I'm not as strong, to pull them in and have them either work on the project or collaborate with me on the project.

If you don't have a fairly good understanding of **what your institution looks for in an undergraduate student**, then you're probably not going to be a good manager. Because you're lacking that **greater understanding**.

'Sparkle' Factor

Do they show **initiative in engaging with others**? Do they come in the room on interviews and it's like they're scared of the people in the room? Or do they come in the room with some confidence and 'I could be comfortable here'?

I'm always looking for somebody with a **sparkle factor**. I really want somebody who is an **excellent communicator, an excellent advocate, an excellent public-facing leader**. Those people tend to be slightly to greatly more charismatic, and people tend to accept and follow people that are charismatic and strong.

Having the confidence to believe what I was selling at any interview. Being able to convincingly and confidently talk about my past experiences and relating them to whatever would be required of the position.

#likeaboss

Future Directions

Participant responses will be used to create a **survey** to be broadly disseminated for maximum respondents, with the intent of the resulting paper to **address the gap in the literature**.



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