

St. John's University School of Law

St. John's Law Scholarship Repository

Faculty Publications

2015

Librarian Director as Manager of Union Employees

Courtney L. Selby

St. John's University School of Law

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/faculty_publications



Part of the [Law Librarianship Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Selby, Courtney L., "Librarian Director as Manager of Union Employees" (2015). *Faculty Publications*. 173.
https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/faculty_publications/173

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact selbyc@stjohns.edu.

Librarian Director as Manager of Union Employees

Case Study 2: Staff

Christopher had a rapidly developing headache, brought on largely by the recently announced University-wide budget cuts requiring reductions-in-force (RIF).¹ He had never before worked at a library with a union, so had been unfamiliar with all of the requirements and restrictions associated with union workers until he had accepted the law library director position here a year ago. Since then, it had just been one issue after another, but the RIF was bringing them all to a head more rapidly than he would have liked.

One week ago, the University had announced significant budget shortfalls and the expectation that each campus unit would give back 5% of the year's budget. Christopher's dean had determined that the law library's cuts had to be greater, to preserve the financial aid budget for admissions. Therefore, the library was required to come up with a 10% giveback, including a minimum 10% reduction in staff.

About six months after Christopher had started, the head of cataloging had approached him with a disciplinary matter with one of her employees, Kim. The employee, who had worked for the library for twenty years, had not been showing up on time. Her supervisor had, in the past, given her some leeway in this, but her tardiness had reached a level where it could no longer be ignored. She was not calling in advance on such occasions, always had an excuse (e.g., car repair), and had not made a request to change her schedule. Working with human resources, the library had started disciplinary proceedings, starting with verbal warnings, followed by written warnings with improvement plans that Kim continued to fail to meet.

Kim had requested, and received, union representation for all of these meetings. Though there was no dispute as to the facts, the union was fighting any disciplinary measure, arguing that Kim had always received acceptable performance reviews in the past and that the university should be more humane with staff who happen to run into occasional life issues. Two weeks ago, after the written warning, they encouraged Kim to file a grievance, and she did.

Christopher had challenged the grievance, on the basis that the cause of action was not one recognized by the contract as being grievable. There were no allegations of discrimination or violation of union terms. He was overridden by both Human Resources (who thought that it would be faster to just let the grievance go through) and the union. Kim, in addition to filing a formal grievance, complained directly to the dean about the library's treatment of her. This was the first that the dean had heard of the problem and he sent Christopher a concerned inquiry on the matter.

¹ Reduction-in-force is an action whereby positions are eliminated for long-term financial savings. This differs from layoffs, which are intended to be temporary reductions due to lack of work.

According to the union contract, RIFs were required in order of reverse-seniority² without any mention of job positions and their relative importance to the unit. As Kim was one of library's most senior employees, and the disciplinary process unlikely to be concluded before the cuts took effect, Christopher felt that he was being forced to keep a position that he would otherwise prefer to cut.

To make matters worse, he had just filled a position in electronic services, where use was high and expertise critical. The previous occupant of the position, Joe, had realized that he was unqualified for the direction the library had taken and had applied for another university job a month ago; Christopher had been pleased when he got it, as this meant that Joe recognized the poor fit before anyone had to sit down with him about his job performance. Christopher had been able to fill the position in record time, and the new hire had been doing a fabulous job in the weeks that she had been there.

Unfortunately, the union contract allowed for "bumps" of employees, where employees in good standing that move to other university jobs have the ability to move back into their old jobs within sixty days. Bumps were permitted even if there are occupants in the old positions. Joe had just informed Christopher that he intended to come back to the law library, as his position was being RIF'd in his new department. There, he held the lowest seniority, despite having ten years at the university, but at the law library, his seniority would place him above most other employees, ensuring that his job would survive the current RIF.

Under union rules, it looked as if Christopher would be forced to retain Kim, take back Joe, and let go of three well-qualified, highly-liked recent hires to meet the 10% mark.

To cap off his worries, the custodial union announced its expected strike by the end of the week over their failed contract negotiations, and several of Christopher's staff plan to show solidarity by not crossing the picket line. The faculty have indicated their support for union workers and those refusing to cross the picket line. Exams start in a month, and Christopher wonders how he will staff the service desks without staff. Librarians are covered minimally by the university's faculty union, but only in respect to grievances and academic freedom.

What should Christopher do?

² Seniority is typically defined within a union contract. For an example, see Agreement Between Princeton University and Princeton University Library Assistants/American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Local 956, AFL-CIO, July 1, 2008–June 30, 2002, Art. VIII, <http://www.irl.berkeley.edu/library/pdf/0044.pdf>.

Librarian Director as Manager of Union Employees: Staff

Analysis Two

Courtney L. Selby

*Associate Dean for Information Services
Director of the Law Library
Associate Professor of Law
Hofstra Law*

As each of the issues confronting Christopher coalesce into one large administrative and managerial dilemma, he will be well-served to focus on three fundamental things: clear communication, creative thinking, and a detailed record supporting and reflecting all of his decisions going forward. While there are certainly steps Christopher could have taken during his first year that might have lessened some of the pressure he is currently experiencing, he will need to focus on making the best choices available to him in the existing circumstances in order to assure the best outcomes in each situation.

If Christopher hasn't already familiarized himself with the union contract, that should be his first plan of action. Reading the contract and consulting with Human Resources (HR) representatives is an important step, but Christopher should also consider contacting his predecessor in the library director position and asking her about her own experiences with HR, the union contract, the grievance process at the institution, and any other structural, or personnel changes she encountered during her time in the position. Because each union contract is unique, understanding a bit more about how the contract has been used and what university processes regarding personnel and organizational structure are in place could be useful. If Christopher's predecessor isn't available, he should quietly seek out another administrator in the law school who oversees a number of union employees. While confidentiality about the details of personnel matters is critical, discreet inquiry into the institutional culture and patterns related to personnel matters may provide invaluable information that can shape his decisions.

Kim's Performance and Grievance

Regardless of the planned reduction in force, Christopher will need to deal with Kim's grievance and chronic lateness using the process in place at the institution under the union contract. If Christopher hasn't already scheduled an appointment with the dean, he must do that immediately. Ideally, he should have informed the dean when he and Kim's supervisor made the decision to issue a written warning as part of progressive discipline, both to provide the dean advance notice of a develop-

ing personnel issue in the department and to demonstrate to the dean his ability to handle the situation. At this juncture, explaining the existing situation to the dean and asking if he has any specific concerns is Christopher's best opportunity to open their lines of communication on this and other personnel matters. Christopher should also offer to make all of the department's documentation related to Kim's lateness available to the dean. Though the dean may not wish to review it immediately, he may ultimately be brought into the grievance process if it goes further than the initial stages.

With respect to documentation, Christopher must also sit down with Kim's supervisor as soon as possible to discuss both the existing documentation on Kim's lateness and his expectations going forward. Documentation should include the supervisor's notes recording the dates and times of Kim's lateness, notes about any verbal communications they have had regarding the issue, e-mails or memos from the supervisor to Kim noting the ongoing problem, and any responses received from Kim about the matter. Documentation should demonstrate the supervisor's attention to the progressive discipline process outlined in the union contract, including clear notation of verbal or written warnings to the employee, the improvement plans put in place for Kim, and her resulting failure to meet the improvement plans. It should also be clear from the documentation that the performance problem has an existing or potential negative impact on the work unit. The supervisor should not be documenting instances in which Kim arrives only a few minutes late. Reprimands for such minor infractions may appear petty to the union representatives or give the impression that the supervisor is engaged in retaliation, and will not ultimately advance the supervisor's goal—the correction of the performance problem. Clarity and detail is critical in documentation about performance issues, both for union and non-union employees. If the documentation is not detailed and well-organized, Christopher's chances of defending against the grievance are diminished.

This may also provide an opportunity for Christopher to have someone from Human Resources (HR) formally meet with everyone in the library who has supervisory responsibilities to discuss the progressive discipline process and documentation. Christopher must make sure that Kim's supervisor continues to document her performance problems, even as the grievance proceeds, so that they can show a clear picture of behavior over time should the problem continue. This may mean that Kim's supervisor will need to be even more diligent than usual about making sure that he is in the office on time every morning before Kim arrives. Moreover, if he truly believes that Kim's performance will not improve, carefully recording Kim's continued lateness can help him justify her eventual termination should the need arise. This is particularly important in light of the fact that Kim is a long-term employee, and the union and institution will often give great deference to workers who have no record of performance issues over a long period of time.

Finally, Christopher should consult with HR about the possibility of expediting the grievance proceedings. Under many contracts, the filing of a grievance is generally followed by a meeting between the grievant (here, Kim), a union representative, the grieved administrator (here, Christopher), and an HR administrator. During such a meeting, Christopher would have an opportunity to present documen-

tation supporting his written warning, while Kim would have an opportunity to provide support for her grievance. Thereafter, a memorandum is usually drafted by the grieved administrator wherein he summarizes the meeting discussion and formally responds to the grievance. Preparation of the grievance response is something Christopher should work through with HR. They are in the best position to help him determine precisely how to phrase his response so as to effectively move the grievance forward or end it. Assuming Christopher does not intend to withdraw the written warning, his response would clearly state that he declines to retract the warning because the documentation supports the warning under the guidelines for progressive discipline set out under the contract. The contract may make provisions for expediting this process,¹ or Christopher may simply choose to schedule a meeting to respond to the grievance as soon as he is able rather than waiting the full amount of time the contract provides for his response. While a quick response won't change the process he must follow, moving the grievance forward is the only way to bring it to an end once the union and university have committed to it.

Should the grievance be resolved in Christopher's favor, he will be free to continue progressive discipline with Kim as needed. If her performance does not improve, a final warning supported by appropriate documentation will move Christopher one step closer to having Kim separated from the university. It will be much easier for Christopher to give up an empty position as part of his 10% staff cut than it will be for him to eliminate another staff position that is filled. Christopher may also attempt to negotiate with the dean to determine if the completion of the 10% staff reduction can be postponed until the personnel matter is resolved. If he is in a position to make budget cuts in excess of the 10% required, perhaps those cuts could be offered to offset the cost of the delay in making the full staff reduction.

Should the grievance be resolved in favor of Kim, Christopher will need to talk seriously with Kim's supervisor about documenting performance issues in the future. Depending on the wording of the contract and the resolution of the grievance, the written warning will probably be removed from Kim's file, leaving only the existing documentation and the verbal warning in her employment record. Kim's supervisor should continue to document performance problems with Kim as she would any other employee, but the progressive discipline process for Kim's chronic lateness will likely begin from scratch with new documentation, or at most from the verbal warning stage. Additionally, Kim's position will probably survive the reduction in force (RIF) due to her seniority unless Christopher is able to push for the RIF to be

¹ An example of a contract that includes a provision for expediting the grievance process can be found in the Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the Alaska State Employees Association (ASEA), American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME), AFL-CIO Local 52 and the State of Alaska Covering the General Government Bargaining Unit, July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2007, <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2295&context=blscontracts>, reprinted in part here:

16.09 Expedited Arbitration

Nothing shall preclude the parties from mutually agreeing to submit any grievance(s) to expedited arbitration under the following procedures

conducted with respect not only to seniority, but also with respect to the value of the job function to the institution. Christopher's options in dealing with the RIF are discussed in greater detail below.

Joe's Return to the Library

Because Joe's performance issues were not addressed prior to his departure from the library, Christopher should think seriously about how he might make Joe's return to his former position a positive experience, both for Joe and for the department. Though Christopher can't change the situation with respect to Joe's performance to date, he can certainly help Joe's supervisor to be more proactive and communicative about any employee performance issues in the future. In fact, since Christopher is already considering providing some training for his supervisors with regard to progressive discipline and documentation, he may want to offer the supervisors a full day of professional development that includes a broader array of vital management skills and procedures as they relate to the supervision of union employees. HR can either provide the training needed for the supervisors or recommend other resources for training that would be appropriate.

Job training for the entire department may also be a useful tool for Christopher and for the head of the department. Ideally, training could be provided by the department head, allowing him to communicate his expectations for all department employees in detail with reference to the work each performs. If the head is not prepared to develop and deliver departmental training, he should consult with local library organizations, such as the regional chapter of AALL, to find out if there are others in the region who might be willing and able to do it. Designing a department-wide training that will take place shortly after Joe's return can serve a number of purposes. Giving the entire staff training that includes an overview of the complete work of the department can help employees better understand how their work contributes both to departmental success and to the broader success of the library. It can also help clarify for each employee what is expected of him or her and illuminate the department head's vision for the future of the department's work. While some union contracts make provisions for regular written evaluations of staff, other contracts do not. In the absence of written performance evaluations, clear verbal feedback, accurate job descriptions (discussed *infra*), and regular opportunities for training that improve performance are essential.

The fact that Joe's return is the result of a university-wide RIF may also provide Christopher an opportunity to think about possible changes to the organizational structure of the library as a whole. Even if Joe is unable or unwilling to develop the skills necessary to perform the job to which he will return, he may have skills that could be useful for some other function of the library. Moreover, if Christopher must keep Joe and lose other excellent employees, he would be well-served to consider the library's essential functions, the employees he is likely to retain following the RIF, and the best allocation of the human resources in the library to meet the institution's needs.

Structural Solutions

Christopher's opportunity to make structural changes associated with the RIF will be defined by the union contract, contracts with non-union employees (if any), and the dean's response to recommendations that Christopher may make about a new library structure. Christopher's relationship with HR, his creativity, and his understanding of the library's mission and essential services to the institution will be his best guides when exploring this possibility. HR can certainly provide Christopher with examples of ways in which other departments have been restructured in the institution, and they may help him determine what is permissible under the relevant contracts. However, they will not have the kind of understanding about the unique work of the library that is essential to a successful structural change. Only by reaching out to his colleagues in other libraries can Christopher get a broader understanding of existing library structures and a sense of the costs and benefits of alternative structural arrangements. He would be well served to solicit information about the experiences of directors who have used structural change as a mechanism for working through personnel reductions, either by reaching out to the library directors' listserv or contacting those he knows have had similar experiences.

In an ideal world, structural changes would also be contemplated in part through conversations with the library's department heads. While a good director understands the work of each department in the library, Christopher has only been in his position for a year and it is unlikely that he knows the library's work at a truly granular level. He would certainly benefit from asking his mid-level managers to think critically about all the tasks their departments perform and then to evaluate which of those tasks is essential to the ultimate mission of the library. If Christopher has the freedom to discuss potential structural changes with his mid-level managers, he should begin those conversations soon. If he is not at liberty to discuss the RIF with his team, then Christopher must do his best to think through each department's work on his own. In this case, he should also reach out to other directors he knows and respects to discuss the potential for changes that will have the most positive impact.

Job Descriptions

While consideration of structural changes may prompt Christopher to review the existing job descriptions for each of his union staff members, he really should have made a point of reviewing the job descriptions soon after he began work as the director. In union environments, job descriptions are vitally important for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the descriptions communicate to staff members precisely what is expected of them. They are typically detailed enough to make sure that each worker's responsibilities are clear, but broad enough to be flexible about the way particular duties are performed and to allow for changes in departmental processes over time. Job descriptions are also a significant part of the standard against which employee performance is measured. Moreover, accurate job descriptions can benefit union employees by providing managers an opportunity seek to

have a particular position paid at a higher rate because of an increase in the skill required for a job that has changed over time.

Accurate job descriptions are also crucial when filling positions that have been vacated. When Joe initially left the library, it would have been an appropriate time to work with HR to update the job description for the position to include the new skills required for the direction the department has taken. Changes to the description, particularly the new skill and duty requirements, might have caused Joe to reconsider a return to the library as opposed to another position on campus that would be more suitable for his existing skill set. Finally, having accurate job descriptions for each of his employees could help Christopher argue that the RIF should be implemented in the library both with respect to reverse-seniority and job function. If the job descriptions clearly show that some essential functions are performed by those who do not have seniority, and that those functions aren't performed by those who are more senior, Christopher may be able to make a case for eliminating positions by function first and then by seniority.²

Communication

When the potential for structural change enters the discussion, the way Christopher communicates with his library team is absolutely critical. Even without any fiscal, structural, or personnel issues to address, a director's communication with his team sets the tone for the workplace atmosphere. Every director will have her own personal and professional communication style, but some elements of good communication are universal. Discretion is arguably the single most important tool Christopher has at his disposal. Through conversations with the dean, other senior administrators, and HR, he should gain a clear understanding of the issues he is free to discuss and the issues he should refrain from discussing with those he supervises. Once he has decided which issues he can discuss with his managerial team and which he can discuss with his entire staff, he should be prepared to approach his conversations with as much honesty and optimism as he is able. Part of any professional leader's responsibility is to guide his team through adversity. If Christopher has earned the confidence of his managers and staff, his tone and attitude toward the coming changes will help

² While some contracts require that RIFs be completed only with respect to reverse-seniority, others may make provisions for considering the operational needs of the department as well. One example of this contract language can be found in the Vermont State Employees Association Contract from 1999–2001, available at <http://www.irl.berkeley.edu/library/pdf/0371.pdf>, reprinted here:

METHOD OF SELECTION FOR RIF

The right to determine that a reduction in force is necessary and the time when it shall occur is the employer's prerogative, pursuant to the provisions of Article 2, Management Rights. Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed to imply otherwise.

Once management has determined the class from which a position is to be eliminated, the selection for layoff shall normally follow the order of separation listed below in this Article unless the operating needs of the department, as determined by management, result in a different position being selected.

shape the way they respond. If he has not yet earned their confidence, his handling of the challenges they face provides the perfect opportunity to do so.

Christopher's communication with his dean is also absolutely essential before, throughout, and after the RIF. If he isn't already meeting regularly with the dean, Christopher should request regular meetings throughout and after the upcoming changes. Before meeting with the dean, Christopher should consider possible solutions to every potential problem he faces. For example, if the RIF is likely to leave Christopher without sufficient staffing to perform some essential library functions such as document delivery or book processing, he should explore the costs of outsourcing book processing to a vendor or the potential of sharing document delivery work with another library on campus. Letting the dean know that he is actively seeking solutions to potential problems can help Christopher demonstrate his capacity for thoughtful leadership in the face of challenges. He should also consider the overarching message he wants to convey to the dean about the mission and value of the library to the law school. The more clearly he can demonstrate the relationship between the library's work and the success of the law school's mission, the more likely he is to find support for initiatives that advance the mission. Christopher should also be careful not to limit his discussions with the dean only to those matters that are part of a personnel, fiscal, or structural crisis. Each of his encounters can also provide an opportunity for him to share at least one positive or innovative note about the work of the library and the members of his team.

This is also the time that Christopher should establish, if he hasn't already, a strong relationship with the HR administration. It is highly likely that those in HR have extensive experience with the institution, the union contract, the procedures that are typical in an RIF or structural reorganization, and the details of disciplinary proceedings. Know what opportunities are available for professional development for the library team. Moreover, this set of issues will not be the last that Christopher faces while at the university. Not only can HR assist him with the existing departmental and institutional issues, they can also help him better prepare to approach, and possibly prevent, future difficulties.

Finally, Christopher should carefully consider his communication with the employees he must ultimately let go, either as a result of the RIF or because of performance problems. For those excellent employees lost through the RIF, Christopher should strive to make their separation from the university as easy as possible. If he is comfortable doing so, he may offer to write letters of recommendation for them or forward them information about other opportunities outside the institution. It is entirely possible that the individuals lost through the RIF will return to the university when other job openings are available, and the entire institution will be well-served if he has helped to maintain a strong and positive relationship with those employees. For those workers who are separated due to poor performance, Christopher should strive to be even-handed and kind in communications with the individual. Letting an employee go is a difficult and stressful experience for everyone involved, and Christopher's kind handling of the situation may give the employee an opportunity for introspection at a later date when anger and frustration have subsided.

Comprehensive Fiscal Review

As he struggles with the complicated personnel issues he faces, Christopher should not forget that part of the task set before him is a 10% overall budget reduction. He must set aside appropriate time to work through the budget in detail. While he absolutely must find a 10% reduction in his expenditures, he should consider the possibility of deeper cuts as well. If he has the opportunity to reduce personnel cuts by making acceptable additional spending cuts in other areas of the budget, it may be to his advantage, and to the institution's advantage, to do so. In any library budget, the two largest expenses are found in personnel and acquisitions. Though it clearly isn't an ideal time for an intensive collection development review, some acquisitions expenditures must be curtailed. Input from the public services librarians and law faculty will be critical in deciding where acquisitions dollars can be saved. Not only may their buy-in reduce their frustration if reduced acquisitions spending presents obstacles for their research and teaching, but it may also provide an opportunity for Christopher's colleagues to develop greater trust in him as they see him working to make collaborative decisions. The library may also have to forego expected updates to equipment, consider reduction or elimination of expenditures such as bindery, and reduce funds available for professional development. A review of regular supplies expenditures may also result in unexpected savings. No budget line should remain unconsidered.

Once he has a good sense of the ways in which he can achieve potential savings in the budget, Christopher will then face the challenge of determining which of the cuts should be made first and which should be avoided if at all possible. While Christopher should already have a firm sense of the mission of the library and its essential services, seeking feedback from students, faculty, and senior administration about which of the services they find most valuable can help him make difficult choices about reductions. For example, some services offered in libraries are simply legacy practices rather than responses to existing needs. Perhaps the maintenance of a separate collection of materials in a faculty suite or career services office was once highly valued, but changes in access to information have resulted in decreased use of the material. If so, the time, money, and effort expended to maintain those satellite collections could be used for more highly prized services. Only by seeking feedback from the library's constituents, both internal and external, can Christopher ultimately determine which expenditures he can eliminate or reduce without jeopardizing the services the users value most.

Sympathy Strike

The sympathy strike may be the simplest of Christopher's existing challenges. It is highly likely that the response to a sympathy strike will be determined at a university level. If not, then it should certainly be determined at the law school level by the dean. Christopher's department will not be the only one with union staff, and the response should be coordinated by the dean so that it is uniform from department to department. If Christopher's staff does participate in the sympathy strike, he should

work closely with HR to determine which of his remaining staff and administrators can perform the functions critical to keeping the library open. Work performed by union staff may not be done by non-union employees in day-to-day operations under most contracts, but he should check with HR and consult the contract to see if this is still true during a strike. Christopher must take care not to assign union work improperly.

If Christopher is not at liberty to assign union work to non-union workers already employed in the library, he may explore the possibility of bringing in temporary workers or using student workers to meet some needs. HR should be able to help Christopher determine if these alternatives, or others, are appropriate under the contract. He should then discuss with the dean the number of hours he is able to keep the library open given the remaining staffing and restrictions on the work that can be performed. He should also consider ways to continue to provide some library access to faculty and students without a full complement of staff. He may decide to close the circulation and reference desks, but keep the library building open with a small staff available for emergency issues. Christopher might also consider asking librarians to spend their work hours outside of the library in student or faculty lounge areas if he is unable to keep the library building open because of the strike.

The Impact of Tenure Status

The impact that Christopher's tenure status will have on his decisions is related, in great part, to his contract terms for the granting of tenure. In a perfect world, tenure status would be independent from Christopher's efforts to make the best decisions he can for the library and for the institution. However, both institutional and political pressures may be important to consider as he makes decisions both for his future and for the library's. At present, the tenure requirements for law library directors are highly varied, if tenure is available at all. If Christopher doesn't have an opportunity for tenure, then he is subject to the performance standards in his contract. His primary consideration is likely the dean's evaluation of his effectiveness as a library administrator. However, if Christopher is on a tenure track but is untenured, the terms of his tenure may influence his decisions. Some directors' tenure terms are identical to the standards for full-time faculty and are not predicated on the quality of administrative work. Others are heavily dependent on the tenure committee's evaluation of a library director's administrative success. Like many of the issues Christopher must consider, this issue is something he may want to discuss with a mentor or respected colleague at another institution. As a newer director, the wisdom that comes from experience can only benefit Christopher if he seeks it from others in his professional community.

Delegation

With this many serious issues to tackle, Christopher must consider both the work he has already delegated to mid-level managers, staff, and colleagues and the additional work he may be able to delegate. In order to give his attention to two significant

individual personnel matters, a reduction in force, a potential structural reorganization, a meticulous review of the budget, a sympathy strike, and his relationship and communication with all of the constituents in the university community, some work simply must be delegated. Work that cannot be delegated will have to be prioritized. This may mean that Christopher will need to reevaluate initiatives he was considering before the RIF. It may also mean that he will need to refrain from accepting new responsibilities, to the best of his ability, at least until the RIF is complete and structural changes have either been made or decided against. If he is actively involved in professional organizations or has committed to publication opportunities that are essential to his own professional growth, he will have to think seriously about balancing those career building opportunities with the work before him.

Conclusion

This will undoubtedly be a time of testing and growth for Christopher. His good decisions will teach him how he can prepare for future challenges. Decisions that are less well-reasoned or well-received may actually teach him even more about how to proceed when he faces difficulties again. Perhaps more importantly, Christopher now has an opportunity to build and strengthen the relationships he has begun to develop at the university. In a bureaucratic environment driven by processes, procedures, contractual boundaries, and existing expectations, it is the relationships with his employees, his dean, HR, and his colleagues at other institutions that will help Christopher work successfully through adversities. Moreover, these same relationships will help shape his professional experience once the challenges at hand pass.

Christopher also has the chance to learn in great detail the ways in which the union contract at his institution controls how he manages the work of the library and its employees. Taking this opportunity to understand how the contract can be used to benefit and protect union employees is as important as understanding how it can be used to clearly and fairly address performance issues that impact the success of the library. Additionally, Christopher's facility and familiarity with the rules pertaining both to union and non-union employees can help him better support and instruct his mid-level managers and demonstrate his own commitment to excellence in running a successful academic law library.