Ask a Director: Reporting Accomplishments

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Recommended Citation
Question: What advice would you give to librarians to help them more effectively inform those they report to about their accomplishments?

You should openly share and talk about your successes. When we share our accomplishments, we become more memorable and we reveal something about our true selves that leads to meaningful connections with friends and co-workers.

Ideally, your goal is to create a narrative—a story or a sound bite. Telling a story demonstrates your expertise and engages your audience in a memorable way so they are more likely to remember your story. Your first step is to do some brainstorming. Think about the “w” questions: who, what, when, and why. Be honest when you are considering the w’s, because if you are not, your story is likely to miss its target and fail to create that meaningful connection, and you may ultimately defeat your intended purpose. Start by thinking through the following questions:

- Who is your intended audience? Think about how you appeal to that specific person or group of individuals. Are there multiple audiences? What makes a specific audience distinct? How might you shape your message for different audiences? Consider why your audience will or...
Whether I am telling my supervisor about a recent success, or receiving good news about an accomplishment from a member of my team, the best communication results from applying four basic principles.

1. **Tailor your format to your audience.** Think about the ways you enjoy getting information. Your preferences may be shaped by type of content, what you’re expected to do with it, the amount of time you have, or the number of people and issues vying for your attention. Supervisors, directors, and deans are influenced by these same factors, so set yourself up for success by aligning the way you deliver good news with what you know about your supervisor.

   If you have regularly scheduled meetings, put your recent success on the agenda. If you provide quarterly reports, include your accomplishments in the report. If you don’t have a set structure for providing updates, consider the following: Does your supervisor have an open-door policy, or would they rather schedule meetings? Would they prefer a brief email, a more formal executive summary, or a phone call? Good news will be received more warmly if it is given in a way that works for the recipient.

2. **Focus on the impact of your accomplishment.** Talking about professional success is a delicate business. How can you highlight your accomplishments without seeming to brag? Instead of describing the specific tasks you completed or focusing on the minutiae of a project, describe the positive impact of your work. Put your individual success in the context of institutional or professional innovation and advancement. For example, when you’ve finished a complex and time-consuming weeding project, you can report that there’s now more shelf space for growth or that the next phase of a larger project can begin.

3. **Give credit where it is due.** If there was any teamwork in the project, credit your team at the outset. As a director, hearing about the accomplishments of librarians and staff is more meaningful when I know that the success grew out of collaboration and that the person reporting the success is recognizing their colleagues’ success as well.

4. **Tighten your prose.** When reporting your accomplishments in writing, find an editor to help you write more effectively. Brevity is almost always an asset. However, tightening your prose is more than reducing your word count. A good editor can help you balance an emphasis on impact with inclusion of enough detail to help your supervisor understand the extent and value of your efforts.