

CHAPTER 13

Interim Management During a Hiring Freeze, Salary Freeze, and Salary Reduction

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Introduction

Call me crazy. I didn't take on this interim role because there was a future opportunity to move into my boss's role. And no, I didn't have extra time or a gap in experience in this interim area. The embarkation of this journey started with the university offering a retirement incentive of five months if one made the decision to retire within two weeks and retired five weeks after that. Since the associate university librarian (AUL) for Public Services and Outreach, my peer and mentor to whom I had managed as an interim in her absence before, took the retirement incentive after the university announced a hiring freeze, a moratorium on reclassifications, and no merit increases, it seemed like my responsibility to my organization. Well, that and I had the most experience in managing public services and could readily manage a large number of staff with my other role more easily than most of my peers at that level. Leaving the position empty



was not an option as two of the four managers in that division were interim department heads themselves and the other two were relatively new to the role. I took this interim AUL for Public Services and Outreach role, providing leadership for Access Services, the Student Multimedia Design Center, Reference and Instructional Services, and the Education Resource Center, because I am a public services librarian at heart and want to help—and to be seen as helpful. But isn't that the same for most of us library professionals? We want to be helpful and needed. In addition to the hiring freeze, reclass moratorium, and no merit raises, I took this interim position while continuing my existing responsibilities as the AUL for Communication and Space Planning during the COVID-19 pandemic, working in a distributed work environment (read: remote) and with all staff taking a 5 percent salary reduction by way of nine furlough days (six taken with the rest of campus and three scheduled individually). I would like to share some lessons learned.

Understanding the Hiring Freeze, Salary Freeze/Reduction, and Implications

First of all, as a manager, it is essential to fully understand the hiring freeze, reclass moratorium, and/or salary freeze/reduction and its implications on your staff and the services of the library. Likely, it means no hiring for the foreseeable future, but sometimes special dispensation can be made to provide exceptions, such as if a search was already in process or a job was already offered. Discover whether student assistants, miscellaneous wage staff, or volunteers also fall under this freeze. Find out what the end of the hiring freeze depends on and whether an end date will be communicated by the organization or if there will likely be a new process to approve any new hires. Learn how the salary freeze impacts increases previously approved—for instance, a promotion announced for a new fiscal year start. Many organizations may institute hiring freeze guidelines that may answer these questions.¹

Regardless of the definition and full understanding of the freeze, the implication is that there can be no new hires to help fill the gaps in staffing that have occurred or may occur, going forward. Those who decided to retire earlier because of the incentive left management with a brief time to prepare for their absence and little time for training of other staff to take over their responsibilities. Instead, you will be relying on the existing staff to do more, better, and in some ways completely different than what they may have done in the past—and with the opposite of reward, given the 5 percent salary reduction and no merit increases.² You will be assessing priorities among the job responsibilities and shifting responsibilities of staff to meet those priority needs. Staff will be wary of you as interim manager, even if you worked with them as a co-worker previously.

They may not be sure how much they should invest in you or your ideas unless the end date of your interim role has been communicated. In my case, based on the uncertainty of the time, no role expiration date was shared with me or with the staff. Overall, staff will feel burdened by the knowledge that they will be doing more work—and not necessarily work they want to do—while not being compensated monetarily for their additional efforts. This is in addition to the possibility that staff feel the loss of their previous manager, fear that more cuts or job loss may happen, and that there may be additional budget cuts in other areas of the library (i.e., collections, professional development, maintenance) that will also impact their work, salaries, and quality of life.

Even as an interim leader, the work you do to support your staff while meeting the mission of your library can have a longstanding effect. You want to have a positive impact while also maintaining a growth mindset. To do this, it's necessary to understand the strengths and potential of those you manage, understand the services your staff need to provide to meet the organization's mission, and develop solutions to match those staff with those services. Although the steps themselves may be similar to advice given to all new interim managers, the communication that is an integral part of each step takes on an even more critical role due to the knowledge that there will be no new staff and no monetary reward for staff's efforts any time soon.

Understand the “Who” and Communicate the “You”

A colleague in another department on campus once told me that we were part of the “I” team, for “interim,” so we had to stick together. While I admittedly volunteered for this role and had a couple of months to transition with the outgoing manager, as she was given special permission to stay a while longer than others and still receive the retirement incentive, not all of us on the “I” team are created equal. Some are appointed to interim positions with little experience in the areas to manage and no advance notice. I was told that this interim position would last at least until the end of the fiscal year. I was given the directive to plan for continuing the single service desk on the first floor that was created in the time of COVID; to permanently close one public service unit, merging the unit between two departments; and to reorganize two units into one department (with the eventual plan of hiring one department head to fill the two open positions). This meant rethinking our service design, arranging staff coverage, and coordinating staff training—all of which meant significant change ahead for the division. Review goals or priorities that you were given for your new role, asking directly about expectations, if need be, and consider how that impacts your way forward.

Regardless of how you became a member of the “I” team, first things first: get the lay of the land. Get to know the staff you will support. Understand who is in what role in the unit, department, or division you oversee as interim manager. Ensure that organization charts are up-to-date, list (at least internally) the recent vacancies within your reporting line to understand what areas are impacted the most, and peruse the hopefully up-to-date job descriptions and last year’s performance appraisals of existing staff to give you a better sense of their responsibilities, overlap in tasks, and strengths. You do not have to remember all the details, but you will remember enough to give you a broad overview of the staff.

As soon as possible on your official start date as interim, send an email to your new staff. See figure 13.1. They will all be wanting to hear what you plan to do while you are interim (and may be thinking the worst about the situation), so tell them the goals you have related to their work upfront. It is worth repeating that you will not be able to fill open positions right now and saying out loud that you’re going to support each other, which likely means taking the opportunity to learn new skills or do things that you haven’t done before. Tell them what you are doing to understand their roles and why you are doing it because you know that there are gaps due to the hiring freeze and want to have the background to help the staff work better. Be authentic when communicating with them about whether or not they will have input into any big plans, and remind staff that while it is easy to complain, it is better to focus their energy on taking the opportunity to do things better.

Acknowledge the known and anticipated concerns of staff and alleviate those concerns if you can or own up to known changes coming if appropriate at that point. For most staff, they are worried about the possibility that you will take away what they love to do, change their shifts, or give them work that they hate or have no idea how to do. How will you communicate with them and bring them into a discussion about potential changes? How will they have input or be able to express concerns to you? There should be multiple streams of communication and, preferably, a way to respond directly to the person.

Most of all, pledge your support to staff during this time. They are all overloaded with doing the work of others who have left, perhaps not doing any of it well, and without an end in sight. Be empathetic and sincere and demonstrate your support with actions. Be ready with jobs ready to post. Reassess workflows or processes to find ways to make them more efficient. Are there some projects or job functions that they can put off doing at this time? Staff will be looking for honesty and consistency in what you say and what you promise, so continuing to address this content in various ways each time you communicate will reap greater benefits.

An important part of this open and ongoing communication also includes giving a piece of yourself. I found that giving a bit of personal information,

particularly if the staff are new or haven't reported to you before, can be helpful. Don't give them your CV, but explain why you're interested in management or if you've done work similar to what they are doing. If nothing else, saying a few words about what you like about working in your library and what you like to do outside of work goes a long way to show the authentic you and provide that connection to your staff. Being able to laugh at your own expense and own up to your mistakes along the way can be helpful as well; it can help settle the nerves of those who are afraid to make mistakes themselves or do not know whether they can joke around you or not. If those who report to you were peers previously, you may want to acknowledge what will be different in your relationship; in other words, set expectations. For example, one expectation I routinely communicate is that while we all can turn a meeting into a complaint session, it does not help us move forward. I ask them to focus instead on conveying plausible solutions to an issue.

- Work undertaken to understand their mission, roles, and why you are looking
- Goals and expectations you have or were given related to their work
- What your support looks like (i.e., training, the ability to not do some work, etc.)
- Acknowledgment of known and anticipated concerns
- How you will communicate and how they can give feedback
- Honesty, consistency, and repeated information
- A piece of yourself

Figure 13.1

Contents of communications sent by the interim leader.

Plan for Communication

Once the initial email is sent, it is important to structure a plan for further communication. Opportunities for staff to provide input should be offered multiple times and in different ways to appeal to the various comfort levels of staff, whether having online or in-person meetings, group or individual meetings, holding open office hours, using an online suggestion box (via an online form, for example), utilizing instant messaging or chat services, or preferably some combination of the above. Meetings of your entire staff should be scheduled in advance and with clear agendas, with outcomes from the meetings made available for staff to refer back to. If your total number of staff is low enough that you can meet them individually, please do. Here are some suggested reflection topics to share in advance of meetings that may help you in your role as interim manager:

- Tell me about your experience in your current role and how that role has changed recently.
- Who in the organization do you collaborate with the most as you perform work tasks?
- Are there any colleagues you rely on and seek to work with? Why?
- What are your strengths and what would you like to learn more about (either in the short term or as a longer-term career goal)?
- What are the biggest challenges you or your unit face in doing your work well?

In any case, commit to the communication methods and frequencies you chose—hopefully, more than one. Follow through with your plan and demonstrate the importance of those meetings by sharing what you’ve learned with your staff and with others in the organization (more on that later). If from these conversations any low-risk changes or improvements emerge that can happen right away, make those changes to demonstrate both that you are listening and willing to change. Let staff know that you’ll be talking with them and their peers, colleagues, and supervisor about how you can help them with these challenges without hiring anyone and that you look forward to their input. In other words, make it worth their time to talk with you.

Of course, the biggest question in a freeze is what to do when there are not enough people to do the work and there is not a way to fiscally reward staff right away for doing work beyond their normal job due to the merit freeze and reclass moratorium. This information will come from distilling what essential services the library will provide to users or other library staff.

Distill the Essential Service Needs

What are the services and functions of the area you manage that are essential for the staff to provide? Start from the top and make a prioritized list. If you do nothing else, you know that these are the functions your staff must do to meet the shared mission of the library. Luckily, time during the COVID-19 pandemic helped us all narrow down our important functions realistically. But sometimes as a manager, you will need to ask more questions to arrive at an agreed-upon set of basic services.

Concentrate on those top needs. Ask yourself and then the staff these questions:

- Can the service or function be done differently?
- Is there an essential part of the work that needs to happen while other pieces are non-essential?
- If they have been done virtually, can they continue to be done in that manner and still be understandable to our users?
- How many staff can provide that service as a minimum?

- What does that mean in a time of remote work (if applicable)?
- If we no longer provide the service/function, what is the impact on library users?
- What would it take to train others to provide the service/function?
- If we continue to provide the service/function, how does that impact other processes, units, staff, and budget in the library?
- What does success look like in providing this service if it is a service directly offered to library users? What does success look like to the staff you manage and to staff in other parts of the library?

Develop multiple scenarios for accomplishing each of those needed services and functions and follow them through to the end, noting the impact on different staff, completion of work, training, budget, and other areas of the library. This will require deep and focused thinking about anticipated answers based on what you know about the staff, not because you'll necessarily use those answers, but they will help you plan for the next step in the process. What do those multiple scenarios look like when you start to introduce other complementary services? For example, with the closure of our film and video service desk, which is on a separate floor from our consolidated service desk, we had to think through the scenario of what we would do if a user forgot that the desk was closed and arrived in the space wanting to use the collection on-demand. The other service desk on the floor needed access to that collection checkout in the ILS, needed keys to the collection space, and needed to ask the library user to wait at the service desk while the item was retrieved. (The user could not go into the space with the staff person.)

Take a broad look at the service scenarios across the area you manage. This helps gain efficiency in the workflow. Consider the following:

- Can you bounce the work to one fewer person in the workflow or give one person the responsibility to see the work through to the end?
- Is there a benefit from involving others in the work?
- Can you cross-train another person to be responsible for doing the work during other times of the day or a couple of days per week to allow the initial person responsible to have more time to concentrate on other equally essential tasks on those in-between days?
- Could you make do with not accomplishing the complementary tasks at all, even for a short time, with little detriment to the library user or staff?
- Can you combine multiple instances of overlapping work into one task instead of several?

Knowing the timing of further changes or factors that may impact work scenarios will help staff understand how fast, slow, or drawn out the efforts will be. In some cases, the planning work you are doing may progress beyond the end date of your interim role, so having buy-in from the managers on your team and

the staff will be important to the continuance of this scenario. A list of questions that would need to be considered as you move forward with planning is helpful for staff in your area to discuss. Asking direct reports to add their own questions and feedback to the document helps to keep you all on the same page. For example, the initial scenario for the division I led was to plan for a consolidated service desk by the opening of the fall semester. We included how we would continue to assess the success of that desk and tweak the service design to reflect the needs of the library users. All of this would be done with the anticipated eventual hire of only one of two vacant department head positions.

Structure the Bigger Conversation

Structuring further discussion by looking at themes for what success looks like across the area you manage is important to keep the conversation focused on a positive impact for library users. While it would be easy to get bogged down in a passionate discussion about what supplies should be handed out to library users, keeping the focus on the larger overall effort that impacts most of the staff and considering questions as factors of a whole service design would be most helpful. I found that the managers in my division were looking at questions intended to be considered as a group, as individual questions. The manager answered those questions individually based on what the department did in the past and what they anticipated doing in the future. For example, I found that even though we had started by making the decision to eliminate one of the service desks and folding those staff into two other departments, those new staff were the only people performing the work functions from the former desk. After this happened, I knew I had to structure the broader discussion with all the managers in my group and suggest ways to discuss this service design with the whole division. In folding in the services of the former service desk, was it acceptable to have only one person who was able to do that specific work and answer those questions? Two things I did helped focus the importance of the conversation with division staff: committing to the bigger picture components (not going down rabbit holes on specifics) and reviewing this plan with our organizational development librarian and other mentors in management.

Environmental scans are one way staff research to find and learn from what other libraries have done related to their area of expertise. It may be useful to ask some staff to recommend a few articles that are more general in nature and written for different levels of audiences. These resources can be sent to your staff to read as background information, making it clear that these are being sent only as case studies and in no way represent decisions about their own situation. Since some of these articles may involve physical library renovations, it is critical to be upfront with staff as to whether there is the possibility for facilities work to happen.

Next, you may want to ask staff to give feedback on what they think currently works well for the group (whether unit, department, or division) and more specifically on the individual tasks that they like and would like to continue. This feedback will be something for the entire staff to refer to as planning continues so that you never lose sight of what is working well and the type of tasks that individual staff like to do. I recommend tracking this input in a document accessible to all and in which the staff person attributes their comments with their name. This attribution allows follow-up with the right person if you have further questions about their feedback.

If there is any way to hold a staff retreat during this time, you should, even if it has to be an online retreat or you divide the retreat into two days of the same topics so that staff can choose to attend one of the days while covering time-pressing work during the other. There will inevitably be some challenges that you cannot do anything about right away, due to the hiring freeze and reclass moratorium, so put those in a “long-term planning” section on your own list to show the team you are acknowledging these challenges and will not forget them, but you need to concentrate on what can be discussed and who you can empower to do that work, whether it is additional work, a revised process, or more efficient workflow. If remote work is necessary, you may not be able to employ those oh-so-satisfying in-person moderated discussions, where we all fill out Post-it notes to put on self-stick easel sheets. Some online tools can allow you to be a bit more creative in the online-only realm—perhaps using online whiteboards or virtual tablets. Be real with the staff if a decision has already been made and what that decision is, including the “why” of what you are working on overall. There will be a feeling of loss for your staff; acknowledge that loss with any changes that you will plan.

Reaching a level of consensus with the staff about the needed services/functions helps not only within the area you manage but also with the library overall. Discussion about the themes related to the essential services and grouping those themes establish a baseline for all departments and a place to ask for the commitment of the staff to provide those services.

Get Into the Nitty-Gritty

After you have the commitment from staff to accomplish the agreed-upon services/tasks, the real nitty-gritty work begins by turning those themes into action items and goals. These conversations will need to take place between multiple levels of staff and together as management. Present the tasks that need more staffing and utilize small group conversations to talk through the task and the strengths needed to perform the tasks. Ensure that everyone feels heard and has the opportunity to think creatively and contribute to the conversations leading to solutions. Remember to update the full staff in your reporting line

on the action items as they happen and track them in a place all staff in your reporting line can refer to.

If you have direct reports who are managers, you may want to get out of the way by leaving the operational pieces you do not directly manage to those that do, offering to help and coach, and requesting a verbal progress report after. Encourage sharing through shared documents or other information-sharing tools in use at your institution. Affirm with staff that their thoughts were captured and ask if there is anything major that was missed.

The action part of the planning process can be gnarly as you work through more specific workflows and tasks with managers or specific staff based on their strengths and capacity to do additional work. As managers work with direct reports to communicate with them about these new tasks, staff are likely to respond with apprehension and trial and error, which can be softened if you acknowledge them.

One tactic that can help in this process is taking a time sample for the function: about how long did it take you to perform this task each day of a normal workday or week? Is the work something that can happen sporadically in between other work or must you commit to one continuous time block? The complexities of the work overall and making the process or workflow more efficient is enough to parse through with the staff at this point, but do not forget to check the earlier document that included what individual staff like to do and do not want to lose.

Once you understand which staff have the capacity to do more, which staff have the necessary skills, and the time requirements of each task, you will need to identify specific individual staff to assign responsibilities and provide training for those responsibilities. Does it always seem that the same one or two people take on more responsibilities? If so, look at the other staff with the same strengths to provide more of a balance in workload. Avoid the temptation to ask more of your most competent employees and less of your poorer performers, which has the effect of punishing success and rewarding failure. Look for ways to share the load fairly. Of course, there are some tasks that you might want everyone to be responsible for or one person per shift responsible for. A priority order of tasks helps, but also accountability during times when you know the work could have been done by staff on an earlier shift. Sometimes what is needed is just giving the small group of staff the space they need to work on the initial distribution of tasks on their own. Being flexible within reason for how staff learn their new responsibilities or how quickly they transition into these new roles is helpful, but a structured process for assigning job roles also ensures fairness.

A structured plan for training should include tag-teaming services/tasks while training occurs, encouraging staff to ask questions, and checking in with them to see how they are doing with their new tasks. The whole process will need patience, honesty, and time. It can take years of trying new things, tweaking

functions, forgiving others, and extending grace until you are comfortable with new roles and tasks, even when those tasks are not related to hiring freezes. Updating job descriptions once you're comfortable that tasks will stay with a particular person is an important follow-up step. At that time you'll again review for equity of those at the same level and look at others to be ready to request a reclassification/promotion when you are able.

Let's pause and reassess our thinking at this point. Be sure that you are not so caught up in shifting and pivoting that no one can move. Reiterate to staff that this is an initial plan and that the work will continue to change. Be clear about work changes that staff can decide among themselves and how those modifications should be communicated to you. Now that you have a better idea of how new tasks and responsibilities have been spread out among the staff, take another look at those tasks that fell outside of the "needed" responsibilities and how they might be integrated into the positions of those who have capacity.

Regular conversations should continue to happen with your staff. Encourage staff to ask questions of each other and extend support to their colleagues during this time of learning. Pick times throughout the year that coincide with quarterly goal check-ins, perhaps, to ask individual staff questions: How is it going? Has anything changed, gotten more challenging, etc.? What is the impact on the service itself? How can we do this even better or do we need to continue to do it? Are you talking to your colleagues to try to brainstorm solutions? Must the work be done by staff and not student assistants?

When it comes to tasks that will require more staff to accomplish them, whether it be related to the hours the library is open or a particular expertise that your current staff do not have, make the conversation even broader by using established (hopefully) communication channels between you and your supervisor, your colleagues, other stakeholders in your organization and HR.

Consider Options Outside of Your Direct Reports

In addition to shifting responsibilities among the staff you manage, you may want to consider having conversations at a higher level in the library or organization to leverage other staff who have the capacity in their jobs. This past year, my library participated in an organization-wide Talent Share program.³ More well-known, now that most of us needed to have at least some staff working remotely, this program gives each department the ability to ask for assistance in filling gaps due to the hiring freeze with other staff in the organization who have had some reduction in workload. It also gives staff who have the capacity in their current work the opportunity to assist colleagues and develop new skills and experience through exposure to other departments on campus. For instance,

a staff member in Athletics, a department that had a reduction of activities due to COVID, helped me with graphic design up to ten hours per week. Several library staff in technical services entered student course schedules online for the university registrar.

Within the library, we asked staff participating in Talent Share to pick up some regular hours on our single service desk, while other service desks were closed completely. Talent Share ensured that we were using staff's paid time to the fullest and were able to distribute hours in the building and on the service desk more fairly among the public services staff. Going forward, some of these relationships are continuing; twenty hours per week of the shifts on the service desk are staffed by Talent Share staff from within the library. It is absolutely the case that it is a bit of work for staff at both ends of this to train and supervise staff that may ultimately be short-term, but with a hiring freeze or reclass moratorium, this work would need to happen regardless, so extending the opportunities outside of the area you manage is worth it.

Another option for having staff outside of your management area help with an overwhelming amount of work is using alternate remote work projects. Although less formalized, this is a process by which project leads post a brief job description on the staff intranet for available projects, including the approximate amount of time per day or week the leads would expect someone to commit to this project. Then, staff who have capacity in their current work, after talking with their supervisor, send an email of interest to the project leader to kick off training for the project. This option worked well for a number of projects within the library, many involving digital collections work. Library HR also worked to identify staff who had capacity in their workday and contacted the staff member and their supervisor to try to arrange alternative work to fill that time. These assignments were included in performance appraisals along with performance notes from the project leaders. Some informal alternative work was already customary throughout the library, including using the talents of other creative staff to work on communication projects, so this strategy was not unheard of.

As ongoing hiring freezes and budget cuts loom for university campuses, ensuring full workdays for the remaining staff is imperative to keeping those staff and their positions should they become vacant. Managers should be realistic and empowered to use the strengths of their staff to help them become employees who are impossible to be without. Keep your department HR up to date on the growth of staff responsibilities during the hiring freeze and in their upcoming appraisal so that assumptions are not made about what certain staff do or do not do.

Appreciate, Be Empathetic, and Repeat

Retention of staff is always important—and even more so during a hiring freeze. Existing staff are undoubtedly doing more than they ever have during a time of

heightened uncertainty. Show staff, including any temporary staff, your appreciation for a job well done, be empathetic to what they are going through, and be flexible as much as possible during this learning phase. When you show appreciation in a regular, timely, and authentic manner, let them know specifically what you appreciate them for at the time they do something or the time you find out about it. I recommend saying words of appreciation in person or in online meetings whenever you are given the opportunity so that your tone and body language can also communicate your sincerity.

Extend your appreciation to those who are willing to learn something new or who tried to modify a process and it didn't pan out. For example, you can tell a member of the non-exempt staff that you appreciated her speaking up in a committee meeting and that her participation led to further discussion, which ignited change. Part of the appreciation could come from staff using existing strengths to put toward a new skill, especially job responsibilities that they wish they didn't have to do, such as, "Your attention to detail really came through for us today in asking questions during the training. I know that you don't love the idea of being responsible for this task, but seeing your dedication to learning how to perform this responsibility best is appreciated." Appreciation also comes in the form of sharing your pride in their accomplishments, and these accomplishments should be shared specifically with leaders above you.

Aside from showing your appreciation, show empathy to demonstrate to staff that you see things from their perspective and can identify with what they are going through. Being empathetic can mean listening without judgment, caring about their wellbeing, considering their work/home-life balance, and being aware of their feelings when you respond. Of course, rewarding staff, when you can later, with justified HR reclassifications, higher merit increases, one-time bonuses, or a happy hour you pay for would also help.

Communicate with Leadership

As a leader, it is your responsibility to ensure that other stakeholders clearly understand the correlation between the staff you have and the services you can provide.

Being upfront with library leadership about the tough situations and the decisions they necessitate in your area of management creates a better understanding overall of the culture in your workplace and the morale of library staff. Communicate regularly and encourage your peers to do the same. Summarize the plans you established to increase efficiency as well as empower the existing staff on your team. Communicate why some functions may take longer for the staff in the area you manage to complete. Discuss and get confirmation from your manager about the priorities in your area(s) to help tell the story of the staff to upper management, who may not be able to see or understand the day-to-day workings

of your area. You can justify the energy spent having retreats and training staff as not only a way to retain existing staff but to also groom potential managers. Having regular check-ins with your HR liaison will assist you with personnel issues and help you stay ahead of the curve and partner for an overarching hiring strategy to use once the hiring freeze ends.

Take Care

If you already made promises to the staff you are failing to keep or getting very behind due to your own immense workload, that is normal. Cut yourself a break! If you've already put in your 11.5-hour workday, turn off your laptop and make your list of three to four items to complete tomorrow, or maybe for the week. Schedule those few open hours on your calendar as time to perform specific tasks and do not be afraid to block out a weekly meeting-free day. There is an emotional toll to taking on all the new challenges you have had to face, so take care of yourself.⁴

When this hiring freeze ends, you will be ready with updated job descriptions and will know the specific needs or the areas of emphasis that staff did not have time to work on due to the freeze. Having administrative-wide discussions about each job that becomes vacant helps the organization understand and agree on a priority order in which to fill those positions. In some cases, combining some library gaps in a way that makes sense for multiple positions (i.e., a subject specialty with another functional role) creates a situation in which you and your staff can feel empowered for the overall good of the library. Since it is likely that cost-cutting by universities via hiring freezes, salary freezes, and furloughs may continue until universities get back on better financial footing, it is best to keep these near- and longer-term plans ready to go.⁵

Since interim roles are also sometimes a product of the same circumstances that created the hiring freeze, you can only do the best you can and acknowledge mistakes. Usually, these happen during fast and furious decision-making as you try to remember the details. Agendas and outcomes become even more important to mesh the capacity of the staff with the needs of the library during a difficult time and will help keep your details in check. Asking for continued staff feedback, offering support, and assessing how things are working will all lead to doing the best you can. This applies to your own responsibilities as well. There might be a shift in responsibility that is needed to help cover your work, especially if you are still doing your previous work plus the interim work.

Conclusion

I contend that it all boils down to communication. If you have gotten to know your staff and their needed tasks and have demonstrated your support with

regular, authentic discussions with them, the outcome of your leadership work as their interim manager will be keeping the library running as best as possible during the toughest of times. Placing yourself in the learning situations your staff are going through not only models good leadership behavior but is also another way you show your support and commitment to the overall success of your staff and the library. Between distilling the essential service needs, structuring training, and including other stakeholders and staff in this process, staff will come to realize that just because you are interim doesn't mean the implications of your work and their work are short-lived.

Endnotes

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