Sweetman, Kimberly Burke. **Managing Student Assistants: A How-to-do-it Manual for Librarians**. New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2007. 187 p. \$59.95 USD. ISBN-10: 1-55570-581-2; ISBN-13: 978-1-55570-581-7. ∞

Without a doubt, finding enough people to staff a library can be a daunting task. Never mind the professional librarian positions; there are many jobs in any academic library that must be filled, each with a range of tasks and skill requirements. Given the location of such libraries, employing students is not simply an obvious choice; in most cases it is the *only* choice.

Kimberly Burke Sweetman, Head of the Access Services department for New York University's Division of Libraries, is out to dispel what she sees as a myth that "student workers, being such a transient population, do not have much to offer" (5). Hoping to guide the harried librarian through what Sweetman views as a minefield of potential problems, she lays out constructive advice on not only how a student should be hired, but why. Unfortunately, despite her best intentions to present the management of students as unique, the overall result in **Managing Student Assistants** is one of redundancy.

Sweetman begins by discussing the history of using students in a library setting, going back to articles in the 1910 *ALA Bulletin*, which advise the use of students for routine tasks such as book repair and filing. Going through the decades, she sees a major shift in the 1970s, as hiring students becomes seen as a way to "improve the cultural diversity of library staff" (2). Coming close to the present, there is widespread and accepted use of students for a myriad of tasks, but the stigma remains that using students can often be more trouble than it's worth.

While the impetus to encourage the hiring of students is admirable, Sweetman risks negating her position by suggesting that categorizing mass numbers of people by the time in which they were born can ease a manager's woes. Quoting several studies, Sweetman lays out the idea that "Baby Boomers...are inner driven and competitive" (13), and members of Generation X are "independent workers who don't trust authority, consider loyalty naïve, and are loyal to projects and teams as opposed to companies" (14). By contrast, the Millennials (those born between 1981 and 1999) are "outer-driven team players who exhibit good fellowship. This culturally diverse group trusts authority, is intensely loyal, and...desires continual feedback" (14).

Sweetman posits that altering policies and techniques to better manage such groups is essential to good management. Certainly, there are shifts in mindsets and attitudes over the years that any good manager must accept and adapt to in order to keep a library functioning smoothly. However, lumping an entire generation into a few key traits dismisses the concept of individuality and personal strengths, and any manager would be warned to allow for mass discrepancies in Sweetman's overreaching analysis.

A strong point in the presentation is an ongoing Managers' Roundtable Discussion, wherein several professionals offer personal opinions on managing student assistants. Insights into expanding the student workforce, hiring and evaluation, and the inevitable flakeout of students at the end of their school year provide perspectives on what to expect, especially when it concerns the unexpected.

That aside, the bulk of the text concerns management techniques, and it is here that Sweetman fails to achieve anything remotely fresh. Put simply, there is nothing new under the sun. Traveling the well-worn path of recruitment tips, hiring dos and don'ts, interviewing, training, and assessment, Sweetman presents nothing that is in any way specific and unique to the management of students. A newcomer to library management would likely find much of value – especially in the well-researched and presented Sources section – but most of *Managing Student Assistants* treads the same path as any current treatise on management. Aside from the aforementioned lip service to the importance of students in the academic library hierarchy, there is nothing in Sweetman's presentation that is in any way specific to the management of students. Her advice can be gleaned from almost any guide to management techniques, rendering the book itself superfluous.

Establishing and maintaining an ever-shifting employee populace can be a vexing task for any manager. The significance of keeping such a base alive and fluid cannot be understated, and Sweetman is to be commended for emphasizing the importance of such a resource. Nevertheless, by adding nothing new to her argument or her theories, she risks marginalizing the entire process.

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