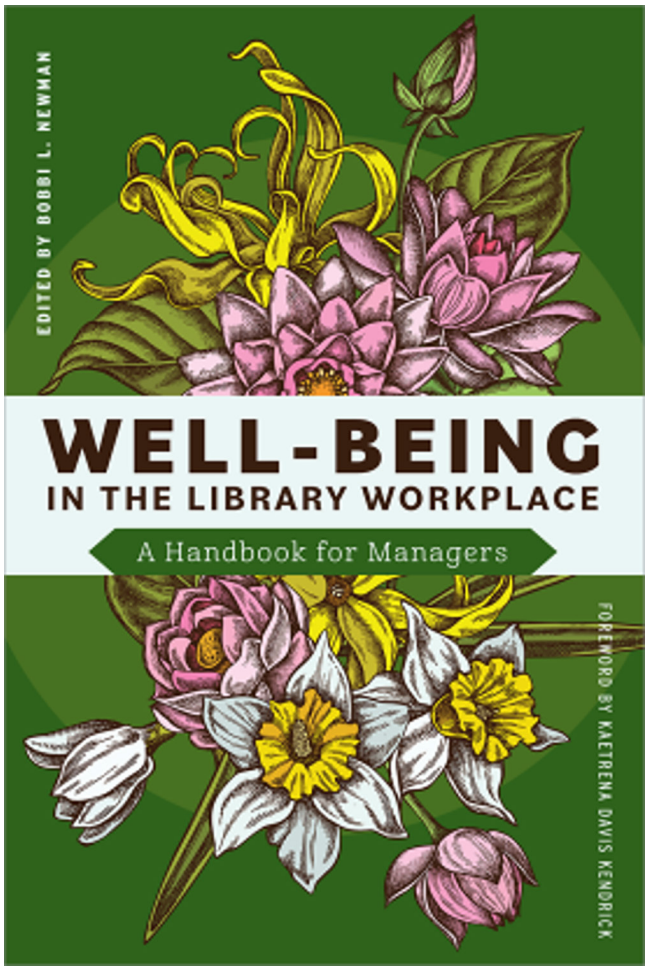
Well-Being in the Library Workplace: A Handbook for Managers, Bobbi L. Newman (ed.), ALA Editions, 2025. 257 pp. Softcover, $59.99. 9798892552943.

March 2020 marked the onset of the global COVID-19 outbreak, a pandemic unprecedented in scale since the Spanish Influenza of 1918. Beyond the substantial loss of life, the pandemic disrupted global supply chains, led to widespread shortages, and forced the U.S. to adapt rapidly to a "new normal." Many individuals transitioned to remote work and online education, often with little preparation. The sudden need to learn new technologies and secure appropriate hardware added significant stress to daily life. Although the country continues to grapple with the aftermath of the pandemic, it has become increasingly evident that it placed profound mental strain on individuals and organizations alike. Burnout had an acute effect on library staff, causing the "Great Resignation" that resulted in workers leaving their perceived thankless jobs for new ones in the hopes of being valued and appreciated.

Bobbi L. Newman's *Well-Being in the Library Workplace: A Handbook for Managers* is a timely and significant contribution to the field of library and information science (LIS) addressing, in part, the fallout from the pandemic. Newman is a certified wellness practitioner and a recognized expert in workplace well-being, who has served on numerous national and local committees. A scan of the library literature provides numerous articles that address staff morale and well-being; however, Newman offers a more comprehensive and practice-oriented examination of workplace well-being in this book, bringing together 18 chapters written by librarians and library professionals. The chapters explore topics such as foundational wellness, navigating difficult conversations, communication, recognition and appreciation, professional development, social connection, stress, and burnout. The structure of the book enables managers to learn from authors' personal experiences while also drawing on relevant LIS literature, creating a balance between reflective practice and scholarly grounding.



An analysis of the chapters reveals several recurring themes, including vocational awe, work-life balance, effective communication, staff wellness, trust, and recognition. In their chapter, Sheppard and Pierce-Farrier examine how the pandemic intensified burnout and dissatisfaction among library staff. Many employees questioned their roles

within their organizations and felt uncertain about how their personal goals aligned with institutional priorities. The pandemic further exposed longstanding organizational challenges, leaving staff feeling underappreciated and inadequately acknowledged for their efforts during an exceptionally difficult period. As a result, many sought opportunities elsewhere.

Sheppard and Pierce-Farrier remind readers that library staff spend a significant portion of their lives in the workplace, often away from family and loved ones. Consequently, managers bear responsibility for fostering safe and supportive work environments in which staff feel heard, valued, and trusted. Meaningful recognition does not require substantial financial investment; simple gestures, such as acknowledging a job well done or recognizing exceptional service to patrons, can have a lasting impact. Appreciation may take place during staff meetings, through written commendations, or by acknowledging significant milestones in employees' lives, such as years of service. Such actions can contribute meaningfully to staff morale and retention.

The concept of "vocational awe" (p. 5), another prominent theme throughout the book, highlights the strong sense of purpose many library workers feel toward their profession. While this dedication can be positive, it often leads to unrealistic expectations, encouraging employees to neglect their own well-being and mental health. Staff may work extended hours or consistently exceed expectations without receiving corresponding recognition or support. In their chapter, Turner and Cromartie discuss strategies to counter this tendency, emphasizing the importance of setting boundaries and resisting the pressure to be "always on" (p. 1). They further stress the need for compassionate leadership, particularly for staff from underrepresented communities, who often shoulder additional invisible labor. These employees are frequently asked to serve on committees and represent diverse perspectives, both within and beyond their organizations, adding to their workload without formal acknowledgment.

Turner and Cromartie's contribution align closely with Darby's chapter, "Not an Emergency Room." Darby reframes librarianship as a service profession that, while inherent, is often burdened by unrealistic public expectations. Library staff routinely navigate challenging interactions with patrons, including demands that fall outside policy boundaries or professional scope. The persistent perception of librarians as omniscient knowledge keepers can lead staff to feel as though they have failed when they are unable to fully satisfy a request. Darby effectively reminds readers that libraries are not emergency rooms; when an answer is unavailable, no one is harmed. Recognizing this distinction allows staff to release feelings of guilt and reduce the emotional toll associated with perceived failure. For a profession rooted in helping others, learning to accept limitations is crucial for sustaining long-term well-being.

Newman's edited work highlights the need for organizations to look within themselves to ensure that staff have a good work-life balance and to not place any undue pressures to perform duties based on an exaggerated belief in providing idealistic service to patrons. While all library staff will do their best to ensure patrons get the answers they want, managers must remember to model a culture of openness and trust so that staff can come to them with new ideas that may improve service. Keeping the line of communication open between managers and staff will help align one another with the organizational goals. Libraries in turn are responsible for ensuring that employees are provided with development opportunities that will help them learn and grow. Making this investment will make staff feel valued and heard.

Organizations and managers should also remember to acknowledge and recognize staff accomplishments, helping them feel valued for the work they do. All the chapters in this book provide help, guidance, and suggestions for ways to improve staff morale, well-being, and mental health. Newman's work is a valuable guide and tool for all levels of librarians and managers in public or academic libraries. It reminds us that a happy, appreciated staff will provide more output, which benefits our patrons. — *Christina Tooulias-Santolin, User Services Librarian, University of Toronto*