

[Download this article in PDF format.](#)

Should You Do More With Less? NO!

By [Judith A. Siess](#)

In these trying financial times, many libraries are being asked to do more with less or at least do the same with less. What should we say to those who ask this of us?

First, find out if everyone else in the organization has been asked to do the same. If the answer is yes, then perhaps you will have to comply. However, in all likelihood, not everyone has been asked to cut back or work more. The library is often one of the first places that administrators try to save money. After all, most of them aren't library users, so it can't possibly be that necessary. (In reality, they probably do use the library, but indirectly, through those who report to them.)

If the library is the only or one of the only departments to face cuts, you have to be firm with management about money. Do not, repeat do not, accept budget cuts without explaining to management the consequences of the cut. It is really very simple: no money, no service. Former dean of the Indiana University library school Herbert S. White said, "absorption, without impact, is a self-indictment for yourself and for your staff. If cuts are made and nothing happens, then indeed you were overstaffed" [or had too much money]. He continues, "attempting to do more with the same staff, or as much with fewer people, or, more absurdly, more with less... is the great shell game" and harms not only you but all librarians.¹ If you do give in, you can be assured that the next time the administration needs to cut they will come right back to the library.

Another reason we are asked to do more with less is that often we are not seen as professionals on a par with lawyers, doctors, accountants, and scientists. Because our work is not as important as theirs, they think, we don't need the same level of resources to perform our jobs. You also owe it to the library profession to stand firm.

Some librarians attempt to cope with cuts in staff by working more hours, that is, overtime. **No** librarian should work overtime on a regular basis—never! That's not to say that you shouldn't put in extra hours when there is a crunch on or when **you** want to finish a particular project. But to regularly work overtime is to give your employer a gift of your time. Once he (or she) gets used to free labor, it is very unlikely that you will get your funding for staff restored. After all, why should he (or she) pay for something you've been providing for free? The only exception is if you are getting paid for your overtime and even then you should limit your hours so you don't burn out.

If you've decided to cut some services, make sure that they are services that will be noticed, that will "hurt" someone. Cutting back office services will hurt no one except the already-overworked librarian. For example, if your budget's been cut by \$10,000, find services that add up to that figure and are relatively heavily used and cut them. When your users complain, direct them to the administrator that cut your budget. He or she is much more likely to respond to their complaints than to yours. White also said, "in the absence of money, there is always money. If it is worth doing, someone will find money to do it."²

All of the above require you to say no, yet saying no is very difficult for most librarians. We all want to help people—that was a major reason we chose this profession. We are afraid that if we say no to a client, he or she will not like us and we want to be liked. Another reason we have trouble saying no is that we simply do not know how to say no or haven't the time to think of a better answer. You may think that you can't say no to your boss, but there are very few situations in which a no response will cause your boss to fire you. Bosses are notorious for asking us to do things that we should not do, either because they do not want to do the task themselves or because they think you will say yes because you are afraid not to. Perhaps you think that if you say no you will not be seen as a team player. Working as a team is important, but getting your own work done is more important. Ultimately you are judged on your own work.

How should you say no? Not knowing how to refuse a request frequently is a problem for librarians. Saying no firmly

and gracefully is an art you can learn. There are several kinds of no according to an article in *Arthritis Today*.³ The sweet-talk no: sugarcoat it, but say no nevertheless. The *bait-and-switch* no: suggest something else in its place, but still say no. The *to-the-point* no: just say no. The *explanatory* no: give a reason—a reason, not an excuse—then say no. And finally, the *silent* no: the one you say to yourself. “It’s always smart to say ‘no’ when it allows you to say ‘yes’ to something you really want to do.”⁴ Note that the ultimate result of each of these statements is no. No matter how you say it, be sure your message comes through loud and clear. Now you know what to do the next time you’re asked to do more with less—just say NO!

References

1. Herbert S. White, “The Funding of Corporate Libraries: Old Myths and New Problems,” *Managing the Special Library: Strategies for Success within the Larger Organization* (White Plains, N.Y.: Knowledge Industry Publ., 1984), 363.
2. Herbert S. White, “Getting the Word Out: Marketing Your Library’s Information Services,” Federal Library and Information Center Committee, Symposium on the Library Professional, Dec. 1966. *FEDLINK Technical Notes* 15, no. 1 (Jan. 1997), www.loc.gov/flicc/tn/97/01/tn9701.html, accessed 26 Oct. 2004.
3. The Art of Saying “No,” *Arthritis Today* 15, no. 2 (Mar./Apr. 2001): 46–47.
4. *Ibid.*, 47.

Judith A. Siess, *President of Information Bridges International, Inc. and editor and publisher of The One-Person Library: A Newsletter for Librarians and Management since 1998 is the author of articles for publications such as American Libraries and Searcher, and four books: The SOLO Librarian’s Sourcebook, 1997, The OPL Sourcebook: A Guide for Solo and Small Libraries, 2001, Time Management, Planning and Prioritization for Librarians, 2002, and The Visible Librarian: Asserting Your Value Through Marketing and Advocacy, 2003. The third edition of The OPL Sourcebook will be published later this year, as will The Essential OPL, 1998–2004: The Best of Seven Years of the One-Person Library: A Newsletter for Librarians and Management.*

We would love to have your [feedback](#) on this article!

Copyright 2004 ALA-APA. Contact Jenifer Grady, 50 E. Huron, Chicago, IL 60611, 312-280-2424, for more information.