

Law Librarians

in the new millennium

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The Magic of a Closed Day

by Penny A. Hazelton



A day reserved for long-neglected housekeeping tasks can yield unexpected benefits for your staff.

All of us feel overwhelmed by the pace of change and the increasingly sophisticated needs of our patrons. When do we have time to file paper or electronic records? Can we efficiently find policies, working documents, and needed historical information about library administration? Do we ever have time to reduce the number of documents on our hard drive, in our e-mail account, or on our organization's servers?

Here is an idea. Years ago I decided to close the library for a day. We did not make this decision lightly; the mail is still delivered every day even if there are no library patrons. On this day, no patron services would be provided, but staff would be required to be

present. We selected the first Monday after the end of the quarter to minimize the inconvenience to our users.

Staff members had to do at least two things:

- Clean out their desks.
- Recycle files and papers no longer needed.

No one was permitted to do regular work, such as answering the phone, checking e-mail, cataloging, or going to meetings.

Our staff enjoyed a sense of accomplishment as they took care of things they never had time to do. We worked on projects that required uninterrupted time. We recycled more than a ton of paper, giving us much needed file cabinet space, and we restocked the library supply cabinet for six months!

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Professional Edge

The Magic of a Closed Day

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We shared food found in people's desks. Our offices were dusted and cleaned!

Our Closed Day tradition began.

We now have a Closed Day after every quarter and no longer require staff to be present. Like a staff retreat, the Closed Day provides an opportunity to step out of the normal routine and do something different. In this busy age, variety can lead to creativity, increased energy, and a renewed sense of commitment to work.

Now that more things are in electronic form, the sense of accomplishment at the end of Closed Day is not as dramatic (there is something about hauling all that paper and tossing it cavalierly into the recycle bin), but this fact makes Closed Day activity even more important. Most of my files are mixed—electronic and paper. It is necessary to make sure we have a complete file somewhere (in cyberspace or file cabinets) in case we need to reconstruct important documents.

I have talked to firm librarians who feel that they cannot possibly close the library during regular hours. Some alternatives might include having Closed Day only once a year, having some staff provide services while some clean up their spaces, closing for only half a day, and closing except for emergencies (advertising both the closure and an emergency number for users).

Your staff will find ways to keep control of their paper and electronic files more regularly once they know such efforts are valued by you and your organization.

Closed Day in our library makes my staff happy. And happy staff means productive staff who provide innovative and needed services. ♦♦

Tip:

- Provide people with and arrange for extra mail pickup.
- Designated place where staff can put anything they no longer want, then be sure someone is responsible for handling them.
- Provide cleaning supplies.
- Provide meals, food, or movies for the day.
- Provide learning/learning opportunities. We placed colored pens, stickers, and a large piece of poster board next to the food and encouraged people to write notes on it all day. "Small through 13 files! Yay! Deleted 300 messages from e-mail inbox." "That feels good!"
- Give patrons lots of notice. They will think all library staff are just getting a day off if you are not clear that it is a staff work day (rather like teacher in-service days).