The Anatomy of a Museum

The Anatomy of a Museum

An Insider's Text

Steven Miller

WILEY Blackwell

This edition first published 2018

Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, USA

Editorial Office
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, customer services, and more information about Wiley products visit us at www.wiley.com.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some content that appears in standard print versions of this book may not be available in other formats.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Miller, Steven, 1947– author.
Title: The anatomy of a museum : an insider's text / by Steven Miller.
Description: First edition. | Hoboken, NJ : Wiley, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017015266 (print) | LCCN 2017026720 (ebook) | ISBN 9781119237105 (pdf) | ISBN 9781119237112 (epub) | ISBN 9781119237037 (cloth) | ISBN 9781119237044 (pbk.)
Subjects: LCSH: Museums. | Museums–Philosophy. | Museums–Management.
Classification: LCC AM5 (ebook) | LCC AM5 .M627 2017 (print) | DDC 069–dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017015266

Cover Image: Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.
Gift of Mrs. Sarah Harrison (The Joseph Harrison, Jr. Collection)
Author photo: Courtesy of Steven Miller
Cover Design: Wiley

Set in 10/12pt Warnock by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Foreword

To paraphrase Will Rogers, I've never met a museum I didn't like. Large or small, rich or poor, grand or narrow in scope, holding many or few collections, well or badly operated, easy or difficult to find, museums in my personal experience have largely been places of discovery, fascination, and enjoyment. On occasion they have been places of frustration, annoyance, and even anger. They have rarely been boring.

When people hear I am in the museum field they comment on how "interesting" the job must be. I could not agree more, but unless they have spent a lot of time employed in museums, few people actually know what they are about. I am still deciphering them while simultaneously never losing the opportunity to explain their value, though from a still-evolving perspective. Perhaps that is the critical reason for my sense of daily engagement. If a person feeds on learning, wants to avoid mindless daily routine, can accommodate superfluous distractions, and has a capacity for ceaseless curiosity, museums can provide absorbing mental and emotional habitats.

I have had the adventure of pursuing a museum career almost all my life. My late parents enjoyed telling a story about me when I was five. We were leaving the great Spanish fort in St. Augustine, Florida during a vacation there. I said to them, "I would like to work in a place like this when I grow up." My mother was an early childhood educator and my father was an interior designer. Both loved history and art. They were sympathetic to my career path and extremely supportive and proud of my work, as only doting parents can be.

In spite of my love for museums I continue to wonder why they exist, really. The question has become more acute of late. Museums fulfill no fundamentally requisite practical function such as hospitals, grocery stores, banks, farms, or schools do. When people put together their daily to-do list, they are apt to include things like picking up dry cleaning, making a doctor's appointment, mowing the lawn, or having the car washed. Going to a museum is not a common item. For most people, museum attendance is either entirely absent from their lives or rare.

In the grand scope of human existence, museums are late-comers to the world scene – only a few hundred years old. Yet, they abound and seem to be growing in number, size, and repute. Why is this? I have intuitively and experientially concluded that there are several reasons. I reference these in the following pages, yet I have no comprehensive, encompassing, quantifiable, scientific, research-based evidence of any magnitude to support my perspectives. To my knowledge such does not exist. I hereby put out a call to the psychology profession to find out why people give museums credence. What in the inner reaches of our psyches has caused these unique places to be?

Because mental inquiries tend to start with the self, I have begun asking my "self" why I find museums of value. I used to simply embrace them and proceed with appreciative glee. My financial reasons are obvious: I can make a living and get a pay check in a museum. But, I can do that elsewhere and probably for more money. Why did I chose to work in museums? What are the emotional, intellectual, and social reasons for my decision? As I understand those I will understand others' reasons more acutely.

Only recently has it dawned on me that there might be developmental causes for my museum affliction. My grandparents on both sides, maternal and paternal, never threw anything out and lived in the same houses for a zillion years. They were neither collectors nor hoarders, just practical people who, for whatever reasons, found it easy to keep things even if not needed at the moment. Those moments stretched into years. I spent countless hours in attics, a barn, and a garage digging through boxes of family things of great curiosity and discovery. Fortunately my parents loved old stuff and interesting art. Because of my father's work, our house was always beautifully decorated. We rarely bought new furniture as inherited things filled our rooms and striking fabrics left over from my father's various decorating projects covered furniture and became draperies. Everything had a story. Living in a show-and-tell environment is exactly what making a living in museums is about.

In addition to loving parents, I have been extremely fortunate to have had a few mentors, especially early in my career. I'm not sure mentoring is as common these days as it once was, but it can be enormously helpful for newbies. As a kid planning to get into museum work, a close childhood friend of my father's provided encouragement and even a few jobs when I got to college. Dr. Earle W. Newton had a peripatetic career as a museum director on the East Coast. He hired me during two college midwinter academic field periods and one summer break to help him at Florida museums he headed in those years. I got a lot of experience and, in retrospect, had more responsibility than might be expected. When I started as an entry-level curatorial assistant in 1971 at the Museum of the City of New York I had two mentors, Joseph V. Noble, the director, and Albert K. "Barry" Baragwanath, senior curator. (The last name is Welsh.) They were generous, helpful, amusing, smart, savvy, and not afraid to instruct me regarding improved employment habits, such as getting to work on time.

Paul Rivard was a management guru for me when he was director of the Maine State Museum and I was the assistant director. He was an ideal museum leader and probably the funniest person I have ever met. I occasionally refer to these men in this book.

I don't know what the opposite of a mentor is, but I have reported to a couple of them. The time spent dealing with their stupidity was an excruciating "learning experience." This phrase never connotes something pleasant, but I did learn how not to treat staff. I also learned that when it comes to bad museum directors you cannot expect swift corrective action from trustees. I learned that sociopaths in positions of museum power can be there for a very long time. I learned how to implement a philosophy I have abided by all my life. If I find a situation is untenable and feel I am wasting my time because of bad bosses (including trustees), I move on. I don't refer to these men in this book but I owe them some level of appreciation. They all contributed to my deciding to be a director. In that capacity I am in charge, mostly, and I only have to report to trustees. What could be better than that …?

Finally, and most wonderfully, I have had the extraordinary great fortune to enjoy the love and support of my wife, Jane, and children, Andrew and Katherine. I am without question the most fortunate man alive in this regard. A heartwarming home has assured fun and balance in my personal and professional life. Love is what it's all about. Thank you!

Introduction

You can't have too many museums.

The author

The *Anatomy of a Museum* offers my thoughts on why museums exist as they are now and how they accomplish their work. This is not an objective explanation of museums. My perspective is completely subjective and somewhat "old school." I believe that museums exist to explain subjects through objects.

What I have written is based on more than four decades as a museum curator, director, consultant, writer, educator, and trustee. While that may sound boastful and suggests my observations are insightful and wise, I have learned over the years that in the museum field, every day is a new day. I have plenty of ego, but I will leave insight and wisdom to others. There are many who think they can provide that. Most either never worked in a museum or if they did it was not for long. Those actually on the job for any length of time reject self-declared museological know-it-all-ism.

Museums have never lost their fascination for me; in fact it has only grown. Museums are a blend of the philosophical and practical. They claim to exist for reasons that are quite lofty. Founding documents list highfalutin purposes, missions, goals, societal meanings, and essential proclaimed cultural contracts. The altruistic values are totally self-assigned and we should all be grateful. Right? Maybe? Whatever.

Museums as we know them receive a lot of attention. I am not sure how much of it is deserved but I am very happy to have these places front and center when it comes to community conversations. This should cause those of us who work in museums or are otherwise affiliated with them in influential ways to gladly accept measurable responsibility and comprehend institutional inner functions for the outer, and we hope, greater, good.

This book discusses museums as if they hold certain common anatomical characteristics; its chapters are divided by components reflecting structural, operational, and philosophical aspects regularly encountered on the job. It is not comprehensive. Some topics, such as maintenance, can involve much

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

more in the way of printed materials for references, codes, warrantees, operating manuals, etc. Other topics, such as exhibitions, are finally beginning to be well-explained in lengthy publications devoted to that subject alone. Museum education seems to be awash with writings – but that is the talkative nature of educators. A few subjects, including directing and curating, woefully lack relevant and valued books about the responsibilities they involve.

In selecting and arranging my chapters I have attempted to establish an outline for how museum professionals as well as the general reader, especially those new to the field, might want to think about these oddball institutions. My friend Charles Clancy, a retired lawyer, helped keep me on track in this regard by providing superb editing.

Museums can be simple or complex and a varying combination thereof. If they are small, safely funded, and focus on a single subject, they might be simple. If they are large, financially robust, and cover lots of subjects, they can be complex. This book is especially mindful of my colleagues who work in smaller museums. They often have a harder time explaining, reflecting, and dealing with matters of professionalism on the job.

Museums are precarious inventions. I desperately want them to succeed, improve, and continue doing what they can do so well at their core. If this is to happen we must recognize that museums are experiments. Not a day goes by when something is not being tested in them or by people associated with them. The often meandering quality to their purpose allows for extraordinary latitude in what happens, how, and why.

As I have worked my way up "through the ranks," my museum experience covers everything from painting gallery walls to designing gallery walls, from being an entry-level staff member to managing large staffs, from following all sorts of directives to giving all sorts of directives, from reporting to trustees to being a trustee. (The only area I have not worked in is bookkeeping and accounting.) I have found my background to be enormously helpful on the job. Oddly enough, when I was preparing for my career, I actually got paid for what I did at various temporary part-time museum jobs during high school and college. This is unusual in today's era of unpaid internships. It reflects how fortunate I was, and I am most grateful for it.

In an age when museum workers tend to specialize from the start of their careers (e.g., educators, curators, administrators, fundraisers, and conservators) the kind of broad if occasionally quixotic involvement I have had with every aspect of museum operations and outcomes is increasingly rare. Indeed, it may be entirely outmoded. This reflects the professionalization of the field. I am not one to wax euphoric about the good old days in museums but there is something to be said for having a broad range of rank-and-file experiences. I have been fortunate to put my "hands-on" labors in perspective on the job and in the classroom. Presumably it reassures staff with whom I interact, my students enjoy it (I hope), and trustees are appreciative (when they listen). It has certainly helped me be more aware of the many sides of a museum's operations and activities.

In addition to drawing upon my employment background in museums, *The Anatomy of a Museum* is infused by my museum-studies teaching. I have been an adjunct professor in museum programs at New York University, The New School for Social Research, Case Western Reserve University, and, for more than a decade, with the Seton Hall University MA Program in Museum Professions. A required class that I teach every year is entitled "The Anatomy of a Museum." I thought it an ideal title for this book. The course presents an introduction to museums and is organized along the lines of this volume. As with my teaching, I try to balance ideal museum aspirations with real museum situations. The ideal is what we in the museum profession strive for. The real is where we land.

Class Questions

At the end of each chapter are some questions without answers. I use these in my teaching to encourage discussion. Everything described happened to me in my career or has been reported by reliable colleagues. The questions are suggested fodder for conversations, real-life springboards for commentary and student and faculty response. I encourage participants to offer their own examples. The museum field is not static. It is a roiling world full of engagement with diverse attitudes, involvements, opinions, and actions. Some of my questions have obvious answers; others might be dealt with in more nuanced or contradictory ways.

Along the lines of my class questions, at the start of every class I ask students if anyone knows of a "museum issue in the news" we might want to discuss. The issues may be controversies, new ideas, interesting developments, whatever, and they can be drawn from hardcopy or on-line sources. Museums are always in the news. Most of the time, it is problems that are discussed as they are much more revealing about how museums operate and exist in a public context.

1

What is a Museum?

> A "Museum" in the American sense of the word means a place of amusement, wherein there shall be a theatre, some wax figures, a giant and a dwarf or two, a jumble of pictures, and a few live snakes. In order that there may be some excuse for the use of the word, there is in most instances a collection of stuffed birds, a few preserved animals, and a stock of oddly assorted and very dubitable curiosities; but the mainstay of the "Museum" is the "live art" that is, the theatrical performance, the precocious mannikins [*sic*], or the intellectual dogs and monkeys.
>
> *(Ward 1997 n.p.)*

In defining museums, several characteristics blend, but having a permanent collection of things original to a museum's subject is what makes them unique. Indeed, as far as I'm concerned, getting and keeping stuff for the long term is the only assignment that, in the final analysis, ultimately sets museums apart from any other human invention, endeavor, or function. Everything else museums do, be it teaching, hosting parties, running retail operations, organizing travel tours, presenting exhibitions, developing real estate ventures, selling art and antiques, and so forth, is also done by other organizations, institutions, agencies, and businesses. Acquiring, maintaining, and holding original physical evidence of the human and natural world in perpetuity for evidential reasons makes museums singular.

By a "permanent collection" I mean the material museums acquire in a deliberative process that results in items being accessioned (numbered) and held with every intention of being around forever – for the long haul – until death do us part – 'til the end of time – not for the moment, etc., etc., etc. The concept is odd, no? Is it any wonder that museums range from being magnets for the magical, warehouses of wow, accumulators of the actual, to packrats of property or dumping grounds for things intended for the scrapheap?

Conceiving and causing a permanent collection covers a variety of intentions, disciplines, practices, and motivations. Thus there are museums for an

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

astonishing (some might say alarming) mix of subjects, topics, stories, and reasons. In practice it is the permanent collection that defines all. One could say: No collection, no museum.

Size and quality are not determining factors when defining a museum, at least insofar as having a permanent collection is concerned. Museums may consist of one item or zillions. The content may be considered superb or laughable. The collection may be well-cataloged, stored, understood, cared for, and used, or not. I know of highly reputable museums, even some accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, that are remiss in aspects of collection stewardship while I am also aware of little-known museums that provide excellent coverage for collections. It is the fact of a collection that counts.

I should note that in requiring a museum to have a permanent collection I am not differentiating between museum typology, magnitude, name-identity, ownership, or governance status. Whether government, private, corporate, or individually owned, be it an art, science, or history museum, or an amalgam such as a children's museum, having a permanent collection is the common thread they share in both concept and reality. Thus we see, literally, permanent collections of art, scientific specimens, and historic artifacts acquired and held by places that may call themselves museums, galleries, historical societies, collections, and foundations. We also see such titles applied to places that do not collect. Whatever the case, names do not matter when it comes to museums. To emphasize my point, it is the existence of a permanent collection that in the end differentiates real museums from those desirous of the status but not the duty deserving it.

Not incidentally, I am limiting my discussion of permanent collections to non-living things such as chairs, guns, clothes, skeletons, paintings, boats, rocks, dead bugs, radios, silverware, and so on. I am avoiding so-called living collections that are found in zoos, aquaria, and botanical gardens. There is a reason these endeavors do not refer to themselves as museums, by the way, and the idea of a permanent collection that has longevity is one of them.

So – what is the role of the permanent collection in and for a museum? Why have stuff? Museum collecting is based on an assumption that providing meaningful proof of and about some aspect or aspects of the human and natural universe we all inhabit together has merit. Psychologists are more equipped to investigate in depth the human nature of this notion but the fact that there are so many museums suggests it has credence. Museums are a (*the?*) designated place for us to selectively use and engage with things intellectually and emotionally for enjoyment, contemplation, celebration, enlightenment, discovery, entertainment, knowledge, and understanding. Whether or not these were motivating factors for inventing museums, they are operating realities today.

For permanent collections to have value in both the long and the short run, we must think they hold bona fide intrinsic veracity values. Most museums have a pretty good idea about what their collections mean to them, but evaluation must be ongoing, reaffirmed, and continually assessed. Generally speaking, collections must be original to a subject being explained or explored. This is why most museums usually avoid accessioning reproductions or copies. They might use them in exhibitions or for educational purposes but it is the original object that usually gets an accession number.

Thus, what is held by a museum must be content-specific. Things should not be randomly brought in. They must be acquired for their evidentiary power and meaning. Museums exist because of the belief and feeling that tangible items have informational, emotional, and psychological stature. That belief and sense is at once visceral and actual. It can be proven or implied or a little of both. In these capacities collections are the dialectic of a museum.

I liked the concept that the two opposite sides of the brain were markedly different, with the right side being visceral, intuitive, and nonverbal while the left side was logical, verbal, and rational. I could explain that initially and in the blink of an eye, the right zone might dominant as people first optically responded to whatever physical matter engaged them in museums. Then the left zone was involved as the literate side of the brain kicked in to sort things out. This cranial ping-pong game was happening at warp speed in museum visitors' minds as they navigated, absorbed, and explored what they found themselves in the midst of, which they were told was a material world of meaning. That meaning evolves out of what visitors know when they come to a museum and what museum workers try to convey via their stock in trade (the collection) through and with which they attempt explanations.

Museum employees are the interlocutors who decide what a museum will own and why, and how its possessions will be used. Museum audiences, however one defines them, are the end-users of museums. In application they are the ultimate recipients of what museums hope gives worth to being in them. Moreover, museums want a visit to have a long afterlife. The magnitude and depth of museum meaning happens in and through the orchestrated and highly concocted public information forum called an exhibition, which relies on presumed and desired connections between objects and people.

Though the public may be the ultimate beneficiary of museums, mainly through the medium of the exhibition, most visitors have little immediately direct influence on what they see, how it is presented, and why. These duties all rest with museum staff – and only a handful at that. From the outside there is an assumption that those responsible for acquiring collections, caring for them, conducting research, and enabling exhibitions and education do so with the best interests of the public at heart. For the most part I suspect this is the case as it is verified over the long term by how little changes in the collection arena of the vast majority of museums. We may hear about museum deaccessioning these days but the bulk of what museums have remains in them, at least for now. It is this retention-longevity that supports voiced arguments and assumed thoughts regarding the impact and importance of permanent collections.

Museums claim to be places of truth. Whose truth is a matter of conjecture and opinion, but whatever the circumstances, meaningful museums rely on objects original to the subject for which the institutions were established as sources of information. When an object is acquired, studied, put on display, and published, dutiful museums at least strive to present facts regarding the object itself: "The public has a right to believe what it reads in a museum label" (Thompson 2014).

How objects are used in the larger context of museum interpretations will vary and be quite subjective, but the veracity of individual collection pieces is essential regardless of their applications. That is one reason museums avoid and are quite sensitive to fakes, frauds, and phonies when it comes to collections. It is why matters of provenance, condition, behavior, and employee ethics is of paramount concern, or should be.

Collections connect us to people, places, epochs, ideas, events, theories, accomplishments, conundrums, you name it. We know George Washington was a historic figure, but we know he was a real person when we visit his home, Mount Vernon. We are told Leonardo was a great painter, but we know it when we see his original art. We believe dinosaurs lived once but are convinced of that when we see their bones.

I have often wondered why museums came to exist when they did. After all, for thousands of years humans were content to exist without them. The reasons are several and revealing. They grew out of the age of Enlightenment, of exploration and cheap, often bawdy, entertainment. As European inventions they reflected what was happening in that part of the world during a time of great intellectual ferment, turmoil, and theatre. To a degree, science led the charge as evidence of newly "discovered" continents became the stuff of Cabinets of Curiosities in the palaces of royalty and a newly rich merchant class. Research was the purview of rigorous academic institutions and approaches to learning. But art, which has always been available to the masses in places of worship, for instance, started being seen elsewhere in abundance. Evidence of history was largely visible in the built environment and religious relics. The museum as a popular place of common entertainment was perhaps best personified in P.T. Barnum's mid-nineteenth-century museum at Broadway and Ann Street in New York City.

In addition to the origins briefly cited above for the mainstream sorts of museums we are familiar with today, ideas for art and history museums also emerged from idiosyncratic private and ecclesiastical collections not contained in personal cabinets. The thought that all these treasures should also be made available to the general public, perhaps even in a nonsectarian, nonpolitical, "neutral" environment, flows from concepts of democracy, public education, and equality of access that especially evolved in the nineteenth century. Supporting the idea of museums as places for people to come together of their own free will and in a collegial manner was the argument that museums would have educational value, especially for the "masses." America's creation of an unprecedented public education system influenced the notion of the museum as a locus of learning. So strong was and is this concept that museums in the United States continue to be in the global vanguard insofar as broad-based teaching is concerned.

I suggest that in addition to the customarily referenced causes of museums, it is no coincidence that they developed at the same time that humans were creating methods for physical destruction more devastating than ever before and making irreversible social, cultural, environmental, demographic, and political changes. Saving what was being lost or seriously altered became, if not the original or main mandate for museums, something that they either quickly championed or had thrust upon them. Natural history museums have been especially noteworthy in this regard.

I define a museum as a public service preservation organization that explains subjects through objects. Let me dismantle this.

The public service aspect of museums may be obvious and a given, but that is not always the case. Public service, in my opinion, means public access and public governance. The effectiveness of public service starts at the top of a museum's human hierarchy with a governing structure at least purportedly accountable to the general populace. In the United States this would be a museum board of trustees. In other countries it might be a government, organized religion, or private owner. Of course, public governance does not necessarily translate into public transparency. Museums can be quite secretive about their inner workings. Just ask for salary information for all positions. Programmatically, though, the concept of museums existing for some common good is generally apparent from the outside. It is seen in collection acquisition, care, access, education offerings, security, and operational professionalism.

Once a museum has been founded to explain a subject, be it in the arts, history, or sciences, it needs the requisite evidence to support its job of explaining. Things are acquired with this idea in mind, and those things evolve into collections. When well and judiciously assembled, these collections take on a permanency as proof. They become, to an extent, inviolate public treasures devoted to the service of learning, discovery, reassurance, celebration, study, and memory.

The idea of a museum as an organization is worth considering in all its manifestations. Most museums, even tiny ones, have some sort of organizational structure. The nature and quality of that structure will vary. In small institutions it may be largely on a governance level. There are very many little museums in the United States, many of them so small that it is not unusual for them to have more trustees than paid staff. There is nothing amiss in this. Fortunately, as a result of the rise in more defined and rigorous professions within the museum field, there is a heightened awareness of how things should be accomplished, be they "best practices" or headed in that direction.

Increased professional standards have slowly caused improved functions for museums as organizations. Let us hope this continues.

The preservation duty contained in my museum definition is central to what a museum does. It sets these places apart from other endeavors that might traffic in or focus on physical stuff. The preservation imperative they have declared for themselves, and ceaselessly postulated over the years, hinges on my concept of museums as places that use objects for educative purposes. It is this decision that causes the fact of the permanent collection. Whether realistic or not, it is the concept of permanence that causes the responsibility of preservation.

The role of objects in museums is accepted as an ordinary fact of life for most people. Museums = things. For some wonky reason there are a few heretics in the museum field who have trouble with this notion. They suggest that objects are not all that important to museums and indeed museums might even be better off without them or at least without making such a fuss over them. Oh for heaven's sake! If you don't like objects and the prominent role they are given in museums, go into another line of work, preferably far outside the museum field.

Like it or not, museum collections can have a sanctity that is almost spiritual in effect. We simply need only think about how tragic events such as collection theft, loss in war, destruction by natural causes, and so forth, are lamented. Whether such a focus on material goods has merit can be debated, but for the moment museums, at least as they exist in the democratized world, have the upper hand. If and how they will continue to believe in the importance of the tactile and tangible remains to be seen. For now, museums will continue to lead in the emotional, pedagogical, and cultural elevation of objects to positions of shared societal meaning – even if and when parts of a society have no idea, or care, what that meaning might be. Museums are held in such regard that the concept of the permanent collection requires holding it, in bulk, as some sort of common DNA for anyone to connect to. Preservation is not a maybe.

I divide museums into three types: science, art, and history. Occasionally there are blends. As places of learning my museum types pursue widely divergent paths that rarely seem to cross. This begins with the training, interests, and academic background required for curators of these institutions. As the intellectual soul of a museum, curators must be the experts, specialists, and core knowledge people about the subject embraced by their place of work and the objects collected to explain that subject. Consequently, their career trajectories are quite specific when it comes to fields of interest. Fine art curators will rarely have science backgrounds. Science curators will rarely have history backgrounds. And history curators will have minimal fine (especially studio) art backgrounds. There are exceptions to be sure, but for the most part division is the rule. I do not see this as a difficulty, by the way.

Most museums in the United States are private and unaffiliated with other entities or government bodies. They are institutions governed by a board of trustees of some sort. They usually own the physical structures and the land they occupy as well as the collections and other contents. There are also quite a few government owned and operated museums. These can be found on a federal, state, and local level. Obvious federally operated museums are those of the Smithsonian Institution and the National Parks Service. At the state level can be found state museums and historic sites. Local governments often own or support regionally valued buildings and museums, as might be the case with a county museum. Cities own museums or have quasi-ownership support arrangements. This is the case with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which though private is on city property, and part of the annual budget is contributed by the City of New York.

What I call subsidiary museums are those owned by larger private entities. This is the case with college and university museums. They can also be art, science, or history types. The country is full of them, and many are excellent. My favorite is the one at the University of Pennsylvania. It specializes in archaeology and anthropology and has absolutely fascinating collections. A drawback to these museums is the fact that they are not under the watchful eye of a governance structure solely and exclusively legally devoted to their well-being. Oh they might have boards of advisors, visiting committees, or departments that look after them, but these groups generally have no meaningful independent binding authority responsible for the museum. The downside of such situations was dramatically exposed in the case of the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, which was nearly eviscerated by the university's board of trustees in a desperate attempt to raise much-needed operating funds for the school. The art in the museum was discovered to be quite valuable on the open market and its sale was pursued. Fortunately saner heads prevailed and no art was lost – but that has not been the case in other such museums.

Occasionally museums will be created and owned by commercial businesses. The subject of the museum may or may not be connected to the purpose of the business. These are rare and rarely survive for long. Inevitably new management takes over the owning business and decides operating a museum is totally outside the company's financial interests. The collections are sold or otherwise dispersed and that's the end of that. A wonderful exception to this reality is the Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, New York, which, while a private, non-profit entity, receives significant support from the Corning glass company. Museums owned by individuals are also brief in their private existence, though they can morph into the customary not-for-profit publicly oriented museum structure reflecting my definition of a museum.

Regardless of the type, subject, contents, budget, size, or location of a museum, when people enter they should have a sense they are about to experience something they would not otherwise in their daily lives. I think this is usually the case, but it requires emphasizing for several reasons. Certainly the old stereotypical art museums immediately declared this idea with their temple-like facades and grand stairs leading up and into them. You walked – transitioned – from your everyday world to another world. There is no question that smaller and other kinds of museums can to a degree replicate such a feeling.

For several decades we in the museum field have heard noise from some colleagues that we must make museums more user-friendly, easy to access, less intimidating, and so on. Frankly I think they are already user-friendly and easy to access. As for intimidating, I feel that when I'm in an airplane, see a cop car on the highway as I'm driving, or walk into a casino. Lots of places and situations are intimidating for some. I am ill-prepared to judge the intimidation factor of a museum, but considering the millions who visit them every year, they can't be too off-putting. What might be considered intimidating might also be considered the awe factor we feel as we enter some museums. Or, maybe it is the curiosity factor. I have long held that if people were not curious museums would not exist.

"We live in an age without memory – this makes museums even more important" (Salman Rushdie, Keynote Speech at the American Association of Museum's Annual Meeting, Chicago, May 2007, from the author's notes).

Class Questions: Beginning of First Class

1 Why do you want to work in a museum?

2 What is a museum for, and why?

3 Do museums deal with truths, and if so, what might those truths be?

4 What are your favorite kinds of museum?

5 What are your least favorite kinds of museum?

6 What sort of museum would you like to work in?

7 Do you want to work in a big city, suburb, town, or rural area?

8 Would you prefer to work in a large or small museum?

9 Of the museum disciplines with which you are familiar (administration, curation, education, security, conservation, fundraising, etc.), which ones appeal to you most? What skills and abilities might you need for each?

10 What do your family, friends, significant others think of your wanting to work in a museum?

11 How do you keep current with what is happening in the museum field?

12 Is there a legal definition of a museum?

13 Are you a member of a museum?

14 Have you ever donated anything to a museum for its collection?

References

Thompson, Glyn (2014) Did Marcel Duchamp Steal Elsa's Urinal? *The Art Newspaper* (November), p. 59.

Ward, Artemus (Charles Farrar Browne, 1834–1867) (1997) *A Quire of Quotes*, gathered by Wendell Garrett. The Sun Hill Press, n.p.

2

Museum Governance

Unless trustees are deeply and properly engaged in the life of an organization, they are likely to act inappropriately …

Reynold Levy, 2015

The nonprofit sector in the United States is governed by amateurs. What! You mean my local animal shelter, the library downtown, the college I attended, that conservation group monitoring endangered turtles in my back yard, and even our regional art museum are not operating under the watchful eye of trustees with deep and extensive experience in animal welfare, books, education, environmental science, or art?

That is exactly what I mean.

As organized in the United States, nonprofit entities are entrusted to volunteer groups of people usually called boards of trustees. They can have other names such as the vestry, or board of directors, or council of overseers, or whatever, but most of the time, and especially in museums, they are known as trustees. These people voluntarily serve on self-appointed bodies to represent society at large and assure that the mission of whatever organization they are responsible for is being fulfilled as expected. They are, in short, a governance body.

Because the stewardship role assumed by a board of trustees is for the general good, most members are drawn from the ranks of ordinary people rather than a small circle of professionals with deep knowledge about the enterprise being governed. A handful with relevant direct experience might be represented on a board but they are a token presence, at least with boards of organizations that need to raise money regularly and often.

The optimum governing body will have a majority of trustees who show a respectable interest in the subject being pursued by the outfit they serve. And, for the most part, that is generally the case. An animal shelter's board will have animal lovers. A college will have people interested in education. An environmental organization will have trustees who are concerned about conservation. And, presumably, museums will have boards comprised of people with an interest in the art, history, or science the institution celebrates.

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

Some trustees couldn't care less about the function of the nonprofit on whose board they serve. Happily they are the exception.

Part of the arrangement under which nonprofit entities operate customarily allows them to enjoy a tax-exempt status. For museums the most common Internal Revenue Service designation is the alphanumerical one of 501 (c) 3. These organizations meet a public need which might otherwise go unaddressed or fall to the government. We see this in Europe, where governments provide for public culture, health, and select societal needs.

Occasionally groups exist within nonprofit endeavors that may appear to have some governing authority along the lines of a board of trustees. They might even be referred to as a board. Without the self-defined institutional directive authorizing their responsibility for an organization in its entirety these groups are usually advisory in nature. In museums they are mostly seen in those owned and operated by larger entities, such as universities, governments, or commercial businesses. These boards are not to be dismissed as immaterial or irrelevant; it is only that they have no or very little legal standing to make and enforce decisions of broad-ranging and ultimate consequence.

As a result of the nature and structure of nonprofit governance bodies, the absence of trustees with training, experience, and accomplishment in the professions represented by the staff makes trustees, in my opinion, amateurs. This is definitely the case with museums. Yet, considering the scope, vitality, and health of museums in the United States, governance by amateurs appears to be an acceptable arrangement. At best it can result in superb outcomes. We see this to be so when museums amass great collections, erect and expand impressive buildings, attract and keep respected staff, and stand as proud cultural venues with distinguished local, national, and international reputations.

Over the years museums in the United States have taken the global lead in nurturing and appreciating audiences from all walks of life. Looked at as a group, museums in this country have not been passive or simply responsive. On the contrary, they can be outgoing and proactive. Their impressive cumulative accomplishments are built upon ideas about democracy, individual rights of access, and public education that in turn are grounded in the notion of popular good caused by personal commitments led by private governance authorities.

While it is easy to point to prominent museums as illustrations of the wisdom of the United States' nonprofit governance structure, the same also holds for thousands of smaller, less well-known outfits. Frankly it is amazing how rarely the all-volunteer governing concept fails to the point of museum closure. Museums do indeed seem to be in it for the long haul, though for how long remains to be seen.

Boards of trustees tend to have similar operating structures. There is usually an established range or set number of members. There are elected officers, designated committees, and a regular schedule of meetings. There may or may not be term lengths for trustee service, and those may or may not be subject to limits. Trustees should know (and if not, require) that a museum has requisite governing documents including founding certificates, articles of incorporation, bylaws, a mission statement, code of ethics, a personnel policy, trustee indemnification insurance, job descriptions (including one for trustees), and conflict of interest statements (again, including one for trustees). As the ultimate fiduciaries for a museum, trustees must insist that responsible financial operations are in place and happening.

It is important to understand that while private, the world of nonprofit entities is not immune or exempt from government oversight or the law. Certain religious organizations may think so but it is not so. On the contrary, charities must be as law-abiding as other individuals and entities in the United States. This means meeting legal requirements regarding personnel and employment; accounting; and building code, environmental and other applicable regulations.

Usually, legally, charity entities in the United States fall under the jurisdiction of their state's office of the attorney general. On the surface this might be somewhat reassuring, yet for the most part these offices only become involved when things go horribly awry for an organization. Barring that, museums, as with their nonprofit kin, largely fend for themselves.

How are nonprofit governing bodies created and continued? They are formed by people who have an interest in a particular charitable pursuit. Museums offer good examples, and I am always fascinated by the creation of new ones. They result from the vision, passion, and hard work of one or a few individuals who feel strongly that a subject needs to be celebrated, memorialized, studied, explained, and so forth, through the medium of a museum. As this enthusiasm plays out in practical ways, various organizational elements emerge. These usually include formally incorporating, establishing nonprofit legal status, writing bylaws and other governance documents, looking for and finding a home, and forming a board of trustees. Once in place, that board is supposed to be in charge.

How does one become a museum trustee? There are several ways. For newly forming organizations, the people with the initial passion tend to comprise a founding board. They hope to attract kindred spirits to participate. For established museum boards, trustees and directors are (or should be) always on the lookout for potential trustees. Finding qualified people for board service is challenging. Finding excellent people to chair boards is even more challenging. In searching for museum trustees, many refusals are encountered. Desirable candidates may have little interest in the subject of a particular museum or museums in general. Directives regarding fundraising scare people away from board service. And being a good trustee can mean devoting quite a bit of personal volunteer time to an organization.

There is enormous competition across the country for well-suited generous people of trustee material. That is why, in my opinion, when a museum has a person of this stature it should do everything possible to keep him or her, and to do so for as long as possible. In my experience the best trustees are often the ones who have been on the board the longest. There are exceptions, and they should be gently "rotated off" a board, but such departures can be difficult to implement.

There are two schools of thought regarding how long a trustee should serve on a board, and both are implemented through trustee terms. Terms are measured in years, with three being the most common term. Some boards have term limits while others do not. I am a fan of the second option. It takes a long time to "train" a museum trustee, and once this training settles in and a person is proving to be of value, I hate to lose them because of something called "term limits." Curtailing the number of consecutive years a person can serve on a board is often presented as a way to avoid "deadwood" or to keep people with entrenched interests from running a place or suffering governance hardening of the arteries. In my experience the approach has drawbacks as good people can be lost and institutional memory constricted. I believe in terms which, if well instituted, can be used as control mechanisms to avoid the negative syndromes cited by proponents of term limits. When a problematic trustee's term expires, simply avoid renominating him or her.

Because the nonprofit cultural sector in the United States relies overwhelmingly on private funding, it is common to want trustees of means who are also generous financial donors. This not only works against the presence on the board of members drawn from the professions represented in a particular institution's field – as they tend to have modest incomes – it also reduces the possibility of building the kind of board diversity to which the nonprofit sector in the United States pays lip service. Depending on how one defines them, minorities are in the minority on museum boards.

From the beginning of the board form of nonprofit governance in the United States, the constant hustle for money by charities has resulted in a peculiar set of realities that both engage and repulse trustees. Large and famous entities, such as major universities, hospitals, and museums with big budgets, often appear to have a majority of very rich people on their boards. For the most part these individuals well understand their role as fundraisers and givers. They also know how to play the philanthropy game to their advantage. Even the wealthiest may avoid being as generous as one would expect, or, if you are a director, hope. Indeed, Philippe de Montebello, former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City once commented, "There are some trustees not as generous as their means permit them to be" (Eligon 2009). Nevertheless, sometimes the dollars emanating from wealthy trustees can be impressive.

An unprecedented article in *The New York Times* a few years ago actually listed what members are expected to give for the pleasure of serving on a major board of trustees (Pogrebin 2010). The article was astonishing because the word "money" and the listing of customary dollar amounts when it comes to trustee service are just not expressed in "polite society." At least that used to be the case. It was crass and unacceptable behavior. One assumed trustees knew what was expected of them. They would be generous quietly and behind the scenes. That *sotto voce* approach to philanthropic giving, while not absent, is increasingly passé. Having worked with scores of trustees over the years, I think being up-front about their role as sources of money for nonprofits in general and museums in particular, is essential. How many museums suffer the presence of trustees who are unproductive, even counterproductive, cheapskates. I suggest museum boards operate like private clubs. Require an initiation fee and set annual dues. As with clubs, the payments should be increased periodically. In addition to these costs, trustees should participate in museum events during the year and pay accordingly. A required minimum financial payment (cash not in-kind contributions) might even be set in this regard. Many trustees are members of private clubs and this structure would be readily familiar.

Most museum boards of trustees are self-perpetuating. This means they choose their own members. There is usually a process by which this happens, but not always. The ideal approach is to have a diligent board-nominating committee responsible for vetting and reviewing potential trustee candidates. Those candidates can be found through the board or in other ways. I have had individuals approach me asking to serve on a museum board, and I have gladly recommended appropriate candidates. If it is made up of trustees who understand the critical importance of their work, a nominating committee's job will be made easier. I should add that in addition to seeking and securing good candidates for a museum's board, a wise nominating committee will also block awful suggestions. It is easy to do in a socially acceptable manner without offending – blame a candidate's rejection on the "committee."

I strongly favor a thoughtful and disciplined nominating process. I remember a nasty dustup when a museum trustee unilaterally took it upon himself to tell a friend that he was welcome on the museum's board. The usual review process was ignored. This resulted in the chair of the nominating committee sending a rather curt letter to the friend saying he was *not* a trustee candidate. An unpleasant kerfuffle ensued. My sympathies were with the nominating committee chair for three reasons; board members should not make independent decisions on behalf of a museum or its board; a proper nominating procedure should be in place and adhered to; the candidate in question was known to be a difficult, self-aggrandizing person who coasted on his wife's substantial bank account. Alas, he secured a place on that museum's board. Predictably he was a cranky presence, and none of his wife's wealth rubbed off on the museum.

A good nominating process includes an assessment of the candidate's character and what he or she will really bring to a museum's governing body. People worth pursuing should meet at the museum with the director and a couple of trustees. Often a lunch or dinner is involved in this process. During those conversations I am always grateful when a trustee explains the importance of board fundraising. I can certainly do this, but when it comes from a respected volunteer, which is what trustees are, or should be, it has more impact. I have an obvious vested personal interest in the outcome of a fiscal discussion. A trustee benefits less in this regard.

It is imperative that a prospective trustee take a tour of the museum with the director and one or two trustees. They need to see the entire operation, especially behind the scenes. I want the opportunity to indoctrinate them about my view of the organization. It also gives me the chance to assess candidates and offer my opinion to the nominating committee. If, after a thorough but not onerous process, an individual is deemed ideal for a museum board and has agreed to serve, I hope he or she has a good initial sense of the organization. New trustees should never be brought up short or blindsided at their first board meetings by an unexpected significant issue. There will be enough surprises.

So what do these august people called trustees actually do? Well, as usual, it depends on the museum and the trustee. Ideally trustees help assure a museum adheres to its mission and do so in a professional manner while being fiscally responsible. As representatives of the community, however that is defined, it is my hope they will promote the museum to and amongst their friends, family, fishing buddies, club colleagues, business associates, monthly book circle, you name it. It is to be hoped that they contribute some advantageous talents to the museum in a positive way. In my experience most trustees strive to do the best for the museums they govern.

Directors should rely on trustees for all manner of advice, consultations, assistance, and insights. A well-balanced board of trustees can bring a wide range of abilities and expertise to a museum, often in areas in which staff knowledge is either very limited or nonexistent. I have found this to be especially true in the financial arena, but there have been other contributions.

Once I had a board member who loved landscaping and excelled at it though it was not his profession. He was our one-man grounds committee, generously paying for and supervising all the work done on our eight-acre site in accord with the museum's maintenance staff and to the enjoyment of the public. Another time a marketing professional on a museum board conducted a highly professional public assessment survey and included a follow-up a few years later. Then there was the board member who was a construction consultant and oversaw for free a large, costly, and complex museum expansion and renovation project. At several museums where I have worked, volunteer committees organized hugely successful annual fundraising events. An architect on a board provided free plans for a new education pavilion we wanted for public programming.

A museum trustee who was a lawyer walked the board and director through an employee personnel complaint (which thankfully had no merit – whew!).

The list goes on. Suffice to say, the goodwill and valued work trustees are capable of can be of help for the museums they serve.

I especially appreciate trustees who are well connected socially and like to host or organize parties and other gatherings. Maybe that's because I am comfortable with such schmoozing. Presumably these trustees know and socialize with people of their ilk and want to occasionally include a museum director and his spouse at a soirée. (My wife is a development director with a major international environmental conservation organization and excels in these settings.) It is important to understand that trustee involvement with a museum mostly happens outside the usual nine-to-five workday. Directors in particular have to embrace and accommodate this reality. Some of the most consequential things that have happened for museums I have directed were not initiated in my office.

Hobnobbing with people of power and influence can make for beneficial museum dividends – often literally. The old fundraising adage is true: people give to people. I have learned that seeing and being seen in a community, especially amongst its financial, political, social, educational, and other leaders can result in a positive cash flow for a museum. This happens when annual fund solicitations are sent, memberships are sought, invitational galas are presented, and major capital campaigns are pursued. I love fundraising, but it takes an enormous amount of time to develop the contacts, associations, and rapport to achieve eventual success. I need entrée to those who have significant funds, and trustees should provide that. Cold and calculating as it may sound, it is the way of the nonprofit world in the United States. There are at least three alliterations for trustee responsibilities, and especially money: give, get, or git; work, wisdom, and wealth; time, talent, and treasure. I espouse them all.

We know, of course, that trustees should focus on policy and not meddle in the day-to-day workings of the museum. This is an optimistic concept. It is not always the case. Even large museums with highly qualified staff, work procedures, and protocols can be subject to trustee interference in picayune and outrageous ways. The vast majority of the trustees I have reported to and worked with have understood and accepted their role *vis-à-vis* the professional museum staff. But when I think of problematic trustee situations, they were almost always the result of the line between institutional governance and personnel involvements having been crossed. A particularly bothersome quagmire trustees can cause is blithely engaging in projects that involve museum employees in burdensome additional work. Staff have their own assignments without more being piled on them by haughty, ditzy, or lazy trustees, no matter how well meaning. The vast majority of trustees avoid this behavior, but it happens.

One of my great personal frustrations is not succeeding in getting certain trustees to actually see and appreciate what a museum really does in and for its particular public sector. Apparently this is not unique to my circumstances as

I hear colleagues say that it can appear they are directing two museums; the real one people work in every day and the one a handful of trustees are vaguely aware of on occasion. All too often when boards and board committees meet, certain participants spend an inordinate amount of time talking about what they think the museum should do rather than what it does. Financial reports can be given to the boards; programs can be explained; exhibitions discussed; and accounts of collections can be narrated, but for a few interested members, the information falls on deaf ears. The conversation veers off into predictable territory as those who refuse to listen push pet causes and perspectives, usually starting with such opening phrases as "I have long said you should do …" or "Why are you still not doing …?" or "You need to …" or "Have you ever thought about …?" or, my favorite, "When we were at the Louvre [fill in any big museum name] they were doing [such and such]. You should do that here." The conversations always have the effect of giving staff unrealistic work that diverges from assignments underway and for which there are no resources and will be no involvement on the part of the trustee ordering the assignment. To be fair, sometimes good ideas do come out of these discussions. It's the nonsense that causes difficulties, and no one espousing it ever gives up. Should a stupid idea be enacted and predictably fail, the trustee is never held accountable as there are many easy excuses for the abysmal outcome, most of them having to do with staff. A friend of mine once said to me, "Just as there are 'activist shareholders' in companies (e.g., Carl Icahn) there are 'activist trustees' at museums. They are never happy. They seem to have nothing better to do than to make people's working lives miserable. Sometimes you just want to tell them to go find a cactus and sit on it" (e-mail from Joseph Serbaroli, 26 September 2014).

A good antidote to these scenarios accrues when trustees, with some regularity, see museums and staff in action with the public and observe visitors' positive reactions to programs, activities, events, exhibitions, and so on. The more the public's appreciation of a museum is understood by a board, the better.

Why do people become trustees? There are many reasons. In the museum field we hope they have a deeply felt commitment to and interest in the mission of the museum they are helping to govern. For the most part this is the case, though the depth of such commitment depends on a trustee's intellectual bent, emotional engagement, and discretionary time. Because museum directors are so totally immersed in the museums they direct they may want everyone to be equally immersed. This is woefully unrealistic. We have to remind ourselves that trustees' lives do not focus on "our" museums all the time. In fact, museum trustees usually have many and divergent interests. Heck, they even serve on several nonprofit boards at one time. Over the course of their museum service the hours they devote to volunteerism can vary widely: such activity may be frequent or rare. Their time will ebb and flow depending on what involves them and what they are doing elsewhere.

In addition to an assumed love of a particular museum, other reasons people become trustees can simply reflect a desire to be community minded. For some, being part of a certain family might almost require trusteeship with a museum: "Oh the Millers have always been on the board of the American Jug Band Museum." Businesses and corporations often want their executives to be involved in noncontroversial philanthropic ventures as it looks good on company web site profiles and might make for advantageous connections. Status is why many people serve on museum boards. I have encountered instances where people are clearly building their resume (or eventual obituary), and service on a museum board looks good in print. Occasionally individuals will surface who like exercising control over something and having their say and way in life. Being a trustee might meet this need.

Some board members are trustees because they head a volunteer museum support group. These bodies are often called the "Friends of …" The group inevitably has a fundraising duty. It chooses its own leader, who might automatically be placed on the museum's board. This procedure bypasses the usual self-perpetuating board nomination process and therefore has pluses and minuses. If the group selects someone who is clearly not "trustee material," difficulties can arise. Most of the time, in my experience, these leaders of auxiliaries have done well by the museum their group serves. In fact, they are often more engaged and positively involved than trustees who came on the board in the more customary fashion.

Occasionally people use trusteeships for blatantly personal gain. This is one reason why museums shy away from having antiques and art dealers on their boards (not to mention the fact that, in my experience, they are averse to philanthropy when it comes to museums). (They are also a cranky lot.) I worked for a museum once that had more than a few money managers as trustees. It was assumed they would have access to potential clients of means. This is one of the great fallacies of board building. Lawyers and doctors are also often sought for museum boards on the assumption that they make a lot of money and are generous. The latter rarely appears to be the case.

How trustees treat staff, and vice versa, is a terribly important conversation to have at a museum. The director should take the lead in defining behaviors and actions to minimize trustee/staff misunderstandings and conflict. Or, at least try. I always prefer that supervision and reporting structures and practices at a museum be between employees rather than trustees and employees. This is not always possible or even desirable in some instances, but the director should insist on a structure and practice. As always there are certain exceptions. For instance, I have never had any difficulties with a museum chief financial officer, accountant, or bookkeeper working directly with a board treasurer. These people live by and love numbers, and I have not been blindsided or thrown off by their fiscal discussions. In the development area it is not uncommon for fundraising staff to work closely with certain trustees.

Regardless of these contacts, museum directors need full reporting on when and why meetings and conversations happen, what transpires, and what outcomes accrue.

I believe it is a museum director's responsibility to explain to staff how they should deal with trustees and to trustees how they should deal with staff. The instructions need to be repeated periodically, especially for new staff and trustees. Employees should treat trustees with respect and expect the same in return. If there are difficulties in this regard, directors need to intercede or be the go-betweens. We must be appreciative of trustee time, energy, and contributions. If there are areas of a museum's work that would interest a certain trustee, be open to discussing how he or she might be able to assist. Museum trustees should be invested in and proud of the institution they serve.

A most, indeed some people might say *the* most, important single task of a board is hiring and monitoring a museum director. Generally, seeking and employing qualified directors happens smoothly, though it is a lot of work. When the exercise fails it is because boards did not do their homework, clearly hired the wrong person, or once on the job the person hired turned out to be a bad fit in spite of diligent screening. Trustees find directors in two ways, they do it themselves or through an executive search firm. I am a fan of the former as I have been disappointed with search firms both as a candidate and a client.

From the very beginning, museum directors spend a lot of time with trustees, or should. It is important to understand that board members cannot be managed as staff might be. Contrary to what might be the case in interactions between employees in a formal personnel reporting structure, a museum employee cannot instruct, direct, expect, anticipate, tell, or require a trustee to do anything. We can request, ask, suggest, hint, recommend, inform, and advise.

Usually the most critical relationships in museum governance is the one between a director and a board chairperson. In my experience this should be a comradeship of mutual respect, confidentiality, support, and understanding. It is imperative that they are able to talk frankly with one another. A director should be free to discuss the museum in all its ramifications and chat about trustees honestly. The chair should feel comfortable relaying to the director any concerns the board may have about the museum and its leadership. I have worked closely with several board chairs and with one exception my rapport with them has been excellent. The exception was a total surprise. I thought I knew the person well and felt he would make a wonderful board chair but he turned out to be a spineless turncoat.

Every once in a while leadership as a subject of concern will pop up in board conversations. One would think trustees would understand their place as community and institution leaders and the role directors play as leaders. If that is not the case, problems can erupt. At worst they result in the departure of a director, at best they result in a simple course correction regarding roles and expectations.

When people are unsure of who is running things in an organization, drift and confusion set in. For museums, strong trustee or director personalities are the norm. Mostly this causes no major and constant difficulties. It is when trustees think directors are not leading or directors think trustees are not leading that problems can emerge. All too often the accusations have no substance but that makes little difference. Perceptions are reality. Defining leadership is at the crux of such conversations. A director may provide leadership but that leadership may not be to the liking of every trustee, especially if it runs counter to what a trustee or trustees want.

Good trustees tend to be quite independent, self-reliant, and self-assured. It is not uncommon for them to be bright, well educated, thoughtful, keenly observant, and highly articulate. Some think they know more than they do. As movers and shakers, or heirs thereof, they are accustomed to being heard, getting their way, making and influencing decisions, and otherwise being in charge. Or they like to think they are.

This might explain an odd phenomenon in museums (and perhaps elsewhere), which is that of trustees being more inclined to accept ideas, suggestions, directions, and information from each other than from staff. It has taken me a very long time to learn that when I want some governance action to happen sooner rather than later, or at all, one way of achieving this is to enlist an operative trustee as stakeholder and champion. I will then sit back and hear my words come from another person's mouth to be gladly accepted by various trustees assembled. (Incidentally, it has long appeared to me that board members who talk the most do the least.)

The fact that trustees generally listen to each other reinforces the role of board committees. Most boards have several. Customary ones include the aforementioned nominating committee, finance committee, investment committee, personnel committee, education committee, collection committee, buildings and grounds committee, and education committee. Presumably these will be populated with people interested in the particular aspect of a museum to which their committee pertains. Depending on an institution's predilections, board committees can include non-trustees too. This allows for talent expansion and the bringing in of expertise that otherwise might not be available to an institution.

The most powerful of all board committees is usually the executive committee. This is often composed of the officers of the board and chairs of the other board committees. The executive committee tends to meet more frequently than the full board and does more work. Criticism may be leveled at it based on perceptions that it is running the museum with the ignorance of the full board. Those making such accusations tend to confirm the idea that 10 percent of a board does 90 percent of the work.

The egos and personalities of trustees play out predictably in board meetings, albeit in sometimes complex and intricate ways. In these forums we see how socially based their allegiances and interpersonal relationships are. Most are exceedingly polite towards one another. After all they are apt to encounter their fellow board members outside the museum, at clubs, on the golf course, in places of worship, at business, and at other meetings for other organizations they support. Or, they may aspire to such interactions unfolding in the future.

Being a trustee requires cultural finesse in more ways than one. Rarely do trustees openly and vehemently criticize their peers face to face in a meeting in any nasty way. They may tactfully disagree or digress during discussions but vitriol is outside the code and highly unusual. Directors might be told of the dissatisfaction or dislike one trustee has for another, but that is kept behind the scenes. Angry encounters do happen but they are few and far between. Typically such incidents boil over during periods of financial difficulty or board power plays, or when strong trustee personalities clash. Directors tend to be observers of these exchanges. We can duck, cover, and try to pick up the pieces later. More often we attempt to intercede to diplomatically move the conversation along in a more pleasant and productive manner. If the director is the focus of trustee debate, he or she needs to defend and explain the nature of an issue and hope for the best.

The vast majority of museum boards of trustees are positive influences for the places they govern. In the more than four decades during which I have been in the museum field I have witnessed the good effects of wise leadership by scores of trustees. Certainly the survival, growth, and fiscal health of museums attest to trustee care and concern. Ultimately the quality of a museum's staff, collection, programs, reputation, and so on, result from good governance over the very long term.

The care and feeding of trustees is a refined art. When well-practiced it can be highly rewarding for the director especially. Trustees require a certain kind of attention, some more than others. Because directors are the connection between a museum and its board, it is essential to be on call 24/7. Moreover, it is essential to constantly monitor trustees' social, cultural, political, and economic proclivities. The slightest thing can profoundly affect their museum service. For that reason museums need explicit, comprehensive policies governing trustee behavior. Such monitoring and agreements must be understood and applied judiciously as situations will call for deviations, innocent or otherwise. Because trustees are always right (just ask), the existence of and adherence to codes of ethics, conduct, and behavior can exist on paper but in practice are irrelevant.

A note of uncomfortable reality must be inserted. Americans may think they live in something approaching an egalitarian society, but this is not so. This can be especially evident in museum work, where the wealthy have an important role to play. Those of us who are not in this group need only recall F. Scott Fitzgerald's observation that the rich are "different from you and me." The difference plays out on the job in how trustees treat staff, and especially a museum director. While rare, I have seen and been in situations in which museum employees have been treated like servants. At its worst this scorn makes for a completely miserable work setting. At its best (can there be a "best" to scorn?) it is tolerated. A beautiful and financially secure historic house museum had four directors in 10 years with gaps as long as 18 months between appointments. Any professional who took the job soon realized he or she was not accepted by the trustees for the ability they presumably sought. Rank and file staff survived the mess by simply doing what they were instructed to do by whatever board member happened by on a given day and thought directives were needed.

For the most part I have been exceedingly well treated by trustees during my career. But when push comes to shove, the richest amongst them side with their own and live lives quite separate from the rest of us. We work for them just as their attorneys, accountants, housekeepers, or hairdressers do. Ours is perhaps an intellectually loftier perch, but it is wise never to forget one's place in this socioeconomic food chain. I know several highly qualified former museum directors who were surprised to discover the condescending inequality of their relationships with plutocrat museum trustees when a job was lost for no good reason.

Class Questions

1 At a board meeting of a large museum in northern New England, the trustees are discussing the subject of board diversity. One person notes that the board is quite diverse, after all, it has two Democrats on it. Everyone looks around to see who, amongst the approximately 30 members, those people might be. What does the word "diversity" mean in the context of museums? How can it be defined and does it matter?

2 If a museum does not have a "Conflict of Interest" form for trustees to sign annually, should it? Does it matter?

3 Should a museum board of trustees limit the number of years people can serve on it?

4 The chairman of the board of trustees of a large urban museum always organizes a Christmas party for staff. It is held at the museum in its public event spaces, which are decorated with Christmas trees, wreaths, and other seasonal decor. There is a Santa Claus, the singing of Christmas carols, and the giving of gift certificates for the museum gift shop. Is this appropriate?

5 Certain members of the board of trustees of your museum like to grumble about the sales shop, saying it should be a popular money-maker. The director of the museum recommends establishing a sales shop committee of the board. The board chair agrees, and the director suggests a presumably appropriate trustee to head the committee. The committee includes other trustees and one or two non-trustee volunteers. The members of staff involved are the two part-time shop employees and the museum's chief financial officer, as the shop is part of her department.

Meetings are held and a shop consultant is hired. For the next few months various changes are made in the shop fixtures, merchandise, and pricing. Costs for these are covered by committee members' financial contributions and the museum's existing budget. There are debates about how much and what merchandise to have for various kinds of visitors, especially for children but also for well-heeled adult visitors. As the changes take effect, shop income declines and discussions ensue about the direction the shop should take. The chair of the committee (who is a trustee remember) and the shop employees disagree on some of the items selected for sale and the quantity. The chair becomes increasingly argumentative, insisting things be done her way. She accuses employees of malfeasance, lying, obstructionism, and incompetence. The situation reaches an untenable situation full of acrimony and vitriol and employees threaten to file legal actions against the museum. Should this situation be brought to the board of trustees' attention, and if so what should it, as a body, do – if anything?

6 Should minutes be kept for board meetings? If minutes are kept, should they be available to the general public, and if so how?

References

Eligon, John (2009) Former Met Museum Chief Tells of Mrs. Astor's Charity, and Decline. *The New York Times* (5 May), P, A23.

Levy, Reynold (2015) *They Told Me Not to Take This Job*. PublicAffairs.

Pogrebin, Robin (2010) Trustees Find Cultural Board Seats Are Still Highly Coveted Luxury Items. *The New York Times* Arts section (3 April).

3

Museum Directing

Wanted: Charming, erudite executive with the diplomatic skills of a foreign service officer, the financial skills of an investment banker and the social skills of a 1950's wife. Position requires the academic background of a serious scholar, with the willingness to let most of this knowledge go unused in favor of poring over budgets and staffing issues. Long hours, low pay and the chance to see your name in the papers every time you make even the slightest wrong move.

Paul Goldberger, 1994

As with most humor, when the art and culture critic of *The New York Times* suggested his tongue-in-cheek generic classified ad for a museum director's position there was more than a little truth to it. The spoof began an article about the difficulties museums were having with leadership. At the time, in 1994, 13 art museums were looking for directors. Those were tumultuous years in the cultural leadership sector of the United States. Things have calmed down quite a bit. Though controversies surrounding museum directors still flare-up, most museums experience less vitriol these days when it comes to attracting and keeping directors. As for the public …? Except for the exhibits they see, people have no idea what goes on inside a museum, especially when it comes to staffing.

Good museum directors are an unusual bunch. They like to be in charge and are so, both overtly and covertly. They have a confidence that can range from insightful to reassuring to obnoxious. They are accustomed to standing out, as it comes with the role. Directors need to be both comfortable in their skin and thick-skinned. These folks tend to be quite smart, often very creative, and usually amusing, though this last quality might not be readily apparent. Occasionally they can be highly manipulative, calculating, two-faced, disingenuous, and untrustworthy, but fortunately these sorts are few. Directors can have quixotic interests. They might know a couple of languages, boast prestigious academic degrees, have an impressive employment resume, but also hold a pilot's license and play a mean fiddle. As with most leaders, the best museum directors are

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

practical visionaries. Whatever the character of a particular director, staff grasp it quickly. Boards can take longer.

In the twentieth century there were a number of famous museum directors whose personalities stood out. These included Fiske Kimball (1888–1955) of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Alfred Barr (1902–1981) of the Museum of Modern Art, Marsha Tucker (1940–2006) of the New Museum, Duncan Cameroon (1930–2006) of the Brooklyn Museum, and Thomas P.F. Hoving (1931–2009) of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Today museum directors tend to be less flamboyant. The stature, power, and corporatization of the job has caused them to be more conservative, buttoned-down, and businesslike. The change has been evolutionary and reflects improved ways of running museums. Given the better quality of museum operations and audience experiences, the change in leadership profiles is natural, but we need to remember that our predecessors were pioneers in a field very much defining itself, and they were hugely influential. What is absent today is the entertainment value these creative and oddball types provided! The age of the notorious museum director may be gone but the place of the role in a museum structure and the demands of the job have not changed.

Directors are hired by boards of trustees and report to them. It used to be said directors served "at the pleasure" of the board, and that still holds. This meant, and continues to mean, they can be dismissed for any reason or no reason as long as the reason does not violate any laws. Contracts are now the norm. It used to be that a "letter of hire" did the trick, or a simple handshake. My first full-time museum job (in a curatorial capacity not as a director, but a good example nevertheless) was with the Museum of the City of New York. A small and short one-page letter of hire came from the senior curator. He welcomed me, confirmed my title, gave my start date, and listed the salary ($6000). That was it. Upon arrival I had some papers to sign in the accounting office and was given information on the pension and health plans, but there was no job description, personnel manual, or other written material that now customarily make up a bound notebook documenting directives, instructions, and caveats. There was no orientation process, no probation period, and no annual performance review (which was fine with me as I consider every day a performance review).

What is almost entirely absent in the current duties of a museum director that was not lacking in the "old days" of the position is any scope to pursue academic or specialist work in a given field of study. Rarely is such activity expected of directors, and rarely can they do it anyway. The days of Sherman Lee (1918–2008), director of the Cleveland Museum of Art and a recognized authority on Asian art who actively pursued his scholarly interests, are gone, the exception, or on the wane. I don't know if this is a positive or negative development.

Though I am a curator at heart, I have, usually, found being a museum director highly satisfying. The job has rewarding perks and privileges, not the least of which involve being in charge of something worth crowing about or helping to create such a circumstance. I have always been proud of the institutions that employed me, and I hope they felt the same about me. It is truly a privilege and honor to work with great collections, staff, volunteers, and communities for the public good. We are temporary stewards of what has gone before us, and I hope we not only sustain a particular museum for future generations but make it better in appreciable and obvious ways. I should note that one of the joys of museum work for me is spending time observing visitors. They are the ultimate beneficiaries of all that museums do.

As I say to my students, please assume that no matter how small or peculiar the museum in which you work is, operate on the assumption that it is the Metropolitan Museum of Art or a branch of the Smithsonian Institution or the Louvre. Attitude is everything. Moreover, the heightened professional standards and practices that have permeated the museum field over the past half century make it possible to maintain a superior level of excellence on the job regardless of a museum's size. I do recognize that resources will vary, but that does not always translate into an easily opined assumption that size is the determining factor in a museum's professional attainments.

Whatever the size of a museum, it should be competently managed, and everyone associated with it should have a sense of fulfillment for what they do. Unfortunately, when we say the word museum today the vast majority of people think of large institutions. This has given smaller ones something of an inferiority complex, or it at least puts them in a certain shadow. I would like to see this nonsense dispelled. On the job, the goals and objectives, issues and outcomes, purposes and work are pretty much the same regardless of a museum's magnitude.

In certain circles of the museum field today we read and hear a lot about what museums should do socially, economically, politically, demographically, educationally, and so forth. Words like rubric, matrix, paradigm, delta, business model, metrics, algorithm, model, and rethinking are thrown around willy-nilly. When these clichés emerge my eyes glaze over and I look for a quick exit, be it from a talk, blog, list-serve, or hard copy essay. They are always voiced against museums in accusatory diatribes. Directors must be wary when encountering this argot. I think most are, for we need to be realists when it comes to museums. Otherwise the institutions for which we share responsibility will fail miserably, or at least not succeed to their full potentials. Highly competent directors I have known actually and intuitively understand "their" museums. Though that understanding may be highly subjective it always includes why they exist, how they work, who does what in and for them, and, perhaps most importantly, how their trustees operate. Some directors realize this to the benefit of the museum, some mostly to themselves.

When I was slowly moving into museum management I thought of the job as a higher form of curation. It is. But not in the way I initially envisioned. Instead of curating collections, exhibitions, and scholarly pursuits, I gradually discovered, directors curate people, projects, problems, potential, and planning. To reiterate, the day of the curator-scholar who could maintain a collection-based academic specialty after becoming director is, for the most part, past. This reality should not suggest avoiding the hiring of collection-nurtured directors. On a macro level collection-savvy directors assure not only the healthy survival of collections for which they are ultimately responsible but can lead the charge to upgrade the collection content with excellent new acquisitions, collection-focused scholarship in exhibitions, distinguished research and interpretation, improved collection conservation, and, guaranteeing appropriate access to what a museum holds.

For the most part, being a museum director often has little to do with immediate collection concerns. A person's time will be well filled by an incredible mix of assignments generated, accepted, or, thrust upon him or her. These include but are not limited to fundraising, staff administration, assuring educational content in all a museum does for the public, dreaming and making those dreams reality, social-networking (not electronically but face to face with actual people), program planning, media relations, conflict avoidance or resolution, and dealing with various business endeavors (how many contracts, agreements, and deals have I written, edited, or signed?).

I think the most dramatic and drastic career change that happens within the museum field takes place when a person becomes a director. I know of no way a person can learn to be a museum director before taking the job. Arts administration degrees, being a high-level museum administrator, knowing the content skills expected of a director are helpful, but there is nothing like having and doing the job. Tremendous personal strength of character, resolve, patience, and tolerance are required to meet necessary, anticipated, and unexpected challenges. This is true for both those of us who came up through the ranks and those who came in from outside the museum world. Our experiences on the job are full of recognized and unrecognized realities.

The job of directing a museum can be quite singular, some might say lonely. Belief in oneself is a skill and asset that is of tremendous value. Some "attitude" doesn't do any harm, but wield it judiciously. While in the final analysis you are largely on your own and thus great inner strength is a must, directors can cultivate support from at least five groups of allies: certain staff or trustees who will like, admire, or respect you; special interests, who curry favor for various reasons; the museum profession; the media; and the public.

Museum directors have two obligations: to keep things on track and to get things done. This requires an unusual blend of skills, knowledge, creativity, social grace, experience, instinct, and patience. Competent directors understand the nature of their jobs both intellectually and instinctively. Highly effective directors elevate their jobs to a stellar art form that melds wise management with visionary and passionate leadership. In time, as they succeed, they are naturals at moving museums along in positive ways while assuring recognized public expectations and assumptions. Much of what they accomplish happens as if by magic because most people are totally unaware of how it all occurs. Directors know otherwise.

Museum director positions pay more than other museum jobs. There is often a shocking difference between the top level salary and others in a museum. I have been in the lowest and highest paid jobs and often marvel at how decisions can play out in salary determinations. It can be an unconscionable situation that rankles with staff, but it will not change.

Directors can literally make or break a museum. Fortunately, destructive outcomes happen less than constructive ones. During my career I have reported directly or indirectly to six museum directors. One was fabulous, one was good, one was mediocre, one was ignorant, one was lousy, and one was horrible. The lousy and horrible ones caused me to change jobs, the good and fabulous ones taught me how to manage, lead, and, get things done, on my own terms and for the best interest of the public. To this day I remain enormously grateful for the skills they instilled and brought out in me. Hardly a day goes by that I do not draw upon their nurturing guidance.

Being a good museum director is about accomplishment. It is about setting wise plans and adhering to them, avoiding costly and stupid diversions, and assuring a museum's high reputation always. The job requires the skills of a facilitator, developer, and clairvoyant. What this means and how all these things unfold at work depends on many factors. The comfort level has to start within a director. It takes time to learn the job. Once in a while a director is just totally unsuited, unprepared, untrained. Yet these circumstances can evolve and even evaporate with experience. Usually, most museum directors have an appreciation for leadership and being a boss (which is not the same). I'd like to assume they come by these characteristics naturally, which is true insofar as their upbringing and innate personalities might be concerned. However, they really develop their supervisory sensitivities, instincts, and capabilities in the workplace. You can study nonprofit administration, read management books, attend seminars galore online or off, but that does not mean you will be a good director.

Being an instructor, sometimes of the self and sometimes of others, is an important part of being a director, and always an essential job requirement. We must be very clear, concise, logical, and obvious in what we say, how, when, to whom and why. From advising a maintenance person to do such-and-such a task to explaining a program to teachers, writing for museum purposes, giving talks, cultivating donors, sorting out problems, nurturing trustees – words and positive actions are what we traffic in. People look to directors for reason and reasons. We are expected to provide guidance, reassurance, meaning, and vision for an organization.

I try to manage from a personal populist approach drenched in my love of museums, curiosity, respect for people, annoyance, manners, humor, and, a dose of intellectual prestidigitation. Because I think I know my craft well (?), I can insert myself into everything but bookkeeping, while I hope I let employees and volunteers do their jobs without interference. This can be a delicate dance. The museums where I have worked allowed a more hands-on involvement than would be the case in very large institutions. By "hands-on" I mean doing things that usually have obvious physical outcomes such as moving a display case, making artwork for a brochure, being a musician at a program, writing words the public will encounter, and even curating an exhibit occasionally. It has been proven that multitasking usually means no tasks are done well. However, as a director you must be comfortable with doing things in some logical, closely related, sequential manner even if the sequences change at a moment's notice.

Much as I try to avoid categorical analogies between museums and businesses, directing a museum is no different from running a business in many respects. Attending and organizing meetings, reading and writing reports, setting and reviewing budgets, responding to expected and unexpected situations, and, grappling with personnel issues can fill the days. A person should have no problem with this, but only if things are kept in check. Letting the mundane duties and expectations of a director rule the clock and calendar guarantees a boring stasis at best and catastrophic failure at worst. Control your time. This is perhaps wishful thinking, but if attended to rigorously, it is possible. Scheduling spaces in a day or week to dream, think, organize, and most importantly plan, is time well spent.

Museum directing is a craft. The character of that craft will be defined by a director's personality. For instance, people seem to be of two minds about meetings: some like them and some don't. I like them, but only if they are appropriate, productive, helpful, and timely. Directors rely on meetings for many reasons. I have a regular schedule for some, and these are usually for particular staff and special subjects. Others are with trustees, and in addition to meetings of a full board there are committees to meet with and projects to be discussed. Many meetings are held only once or twice. All meetings need to stay on track, be respectful of participant's time, avoid narcissistic domination, and, be polite. Productive meetings usually call for some sort of follow-up.

How directors engage their craft is occasionally understood when looking at their office desk (Figure 1). I see the surface of my desk twice: when I start a job and when I finish it. Otherwise this piece of furniture is awash with papers, files, notes, and reminders, all piled around a paper calendar. As an artist by training and proclivity, I see my desk as a flat studio full of works in progress. I am not averse to new technology, and I use my Smart Phone calendar when I think of it. But my Week-at-a-Glance desk calendar is a critical tool to keep on track. It is something of a diary also. The key to a desk like mine is knowing what's on it, and that requires taking regular inventory of the contents. Visually remembering what pile, or file, or note, or piece of paper is what and where is

Figure 1 Typical office desk of the author. *Source*: Photograph by Steven Miller.

essential. It is always impressive to reach for something and fish out exactly what I want when I want it. Finance people usually break out in cold sweats at the sight of my desk. A trustee who had been with a large international accounting firm actually refused to set foot in my office he was so flustered by my flotsam. I must note that my approach to desk management is not recommended, it simply works for me. I reported to a director at one time who spent the last hour of his day filing and putting whatever he was working on in a designated desk drawer, cabinet, bookcase, or whatever. His desk was empty when he left the office. His productivity was exemplary.

Everyone develops his or her own management approaches, preferences, and habits, and directors must be especially clear in these matters. I have been fortunate that the museums I have directed have been of a size that made it easy for me to have an "open-door" policy regarding my office. In spirit this means anyone may see me to discuss anything whenever I am at my desk. In practice this is not always possible, but when the concept is understood, staff feel comfortable about approaching me in or out of my office – at least that is a goal. And, they know that no confidence will be violated. Trust is absolutely essential when managing people.

Employees can learn more in museums by walking around during the day than by staying in an office. Museums are physical spaces where things happen. Seeing those spaces, observing and conversing with staff, and watching visitors is always informative. As a boss, staff have to pay attention to me, but even when I was entering the field and few at my workplace knew who I was, taking time to move around taught me much. As a director, the trick when walking the premises is to not appear critical or judgmental, which apparently is often how I look, so I try to smile a lot This actually has merit as people are less threatened when supervisors smile.

Because I am prone to become distracted in my work and may miss a matter requiring immediate attention, I need and want people to keep me on track. This includes all staff. I have no problem letting employees remind me of things, ask questions, voice opinions, offer ideas, or register complaints. I'll decide what is worthy of my attention. This does not mean others will agree. My failure to recognize or care about certain things has landed me into trouble on occasion, especially with trustees.

Any difficulty I may have with staff and trustees who like to remind me of inconsequential matters escalates when such reminders are designed to cause problems, avoid work, point blame, aggrandize special interests or individuals, disrupt an institution, or support lame excuses. When a workplace culture regularly tolerates such staff behavior it means management has failed to manage. Some supervisors totally avoid dealing directly and in a timely manner with disruptive personnel. Unfortunately, when trustees are the cause of the discomfort, corrective action can be enormously difficult to realize. A word of advice about how trustees treat directors is in order. Boards need to be supportive, kind, and understanding of the person they hire to lead an institution. While most governing bodies are well-behaved when it comes to their relationship with museum directors, debilitating attacks, demeaning ridicule, or undermining behavior is not unheard of. Boards should be cautioned to treat directors well. It is very hard to find good museum directors but very easy to lose them.

Regarding the aforementioned idea that museums are businesses – there is a difference. Museums are charities and businesses are not. I use the word "charity" because that is often the statutory category museums are lumped in, in the US legal system. I worked at Tiffany & Co. at its flagship store in New York City for four months over the holidays in 1969/1970. I was in a department that had corporate clients and executives responsible for those clients. The executive I reported to was German and she handled a lot of German companies that had accounts at Tiffany's. They included Mercedes Benz, Volkswagen, and a couple of chemical firms. I had the run of the store, and the job was much more interesting than I anticipated. I soon learned how the bottom line was the bottom line. Products I thought were well-designed and beautiful were scuttled if they did not sell. Obviously businesses have to take this approach or they won't be in business very long. Nonprofit entities can afford (literally) to be a bit lax when it comes to justifying programs or actions based on income expectations.

Tiffany's does not receive money from individuals via philanthropic donations. Museums do. This essential operating variance is a core element of how and why profit and not-for-profit endeavors differ. I should note, however, that a museum's nonprofit stature should not be the sole consideration when setting its annual budget.

There is nothing wrong with a museum making money, but when the tail starts wagging the dog and a capitalistic approach reigns supreme, parts of an organization that are vital to its mission (collection management comes to mind) can suffer greatly. Directors need to appreciate this reality. A reporter for the *East Hampton Star* quoted Philippe de Montebello, former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, about this in an interview when he stated,

> The role of money in the museum world and the stress to act like a business are real … the number of museums being compelled to run like businesses is troubling … Visitors are not coming to the Met because of a particular department's bottom line. They are interested, he said, in the variety and quality of the exhibitions, the intellectual life of the place. "Obviously you need to balance the budget if you can and be run efficiently. Yet, there is a major difference between being run in a business-like manner and being run like a business."
>
> (Landes 2014)

For some reason it is assumed that museum directors know every detail of everything regarding the museums they direct. Whether it is a deep knowledge of the subjects the museum is about, an intimate familiarity with all its collections, or remembering each number in its financial records, directors have to have total recall instantaneously. This is of course ridiculous but it does keep directors on their toes, and frankly I am amazed at how much they can tell us about so many different aspects of "their" museums. It is to be expected that the larger the museum the fewer extensive departmental details a director will be familiar with, but that is the case with every large business. And, as with large businesses, the person at the helm needs excellent direct-reports on staff.

I have relied on wonderful people who were variously responsible for education, collection management, maintenance, and especially finance. The last category has been of critical value for me when people are asking all manner of budget-related questions, be they about costs for a project, investments, salaries, benefits, or other such matters. These inquiries are fine, and I should probably be able to answer them always but frankly while numbers tell stories and are often indicators, they are more a consequence than a cause. If a museum is competently and responsibly run, and its financial house is in order, laboring over the minutiae of a spreadsheet to show-off one's presumed expertise is a nice collegial exercise. All too often at the board level it is an avoidance mechanism employed to pretend to be contributing while really deflecting more important trustee duties, such as getting and giving money.

I would estimate that on average 50 percent of a director's job is focused on working with staff and the other 50 percent requires dealing with trustees and people outside a particular museum. To suggest the creative financing math of the play and movie *The Producers*, another 50 percent of a director's time must be devoted to fundraising. Therefore a director's work is both inwardly and outwardly oriented.

The 50 percent of my work with staff is generally productive when daily operations are assured, plans move along and diverse matters are positively addressed. Occasionally staff work is unpleasant. I have always appreciated those who report to me. In my experience, most people are diligent workers. It is my responsibility to understand every museum job; make sure the person doing each job is capable; see that he or she has sufficient resources; monitor effectiveness; give guidance where necessary; and deal with issues, however they may be defined, in a timely, effective, and fair manner. Supporting, showing appreciation for, and advancing staff must be a constant duty of museum directors. Correcting employment problems is also a responsibility, but if a caring approach to management is the norm there will be fewer negatives to deal with.

My humorously calculated additional 50 percent of a director's time devoted to fundraising is no joke. The old saying "The buck stops here" is true of a director's responsibilities, though the reverse is more to the point: "The buck starts here." Like it or not, fundraising is an essential aspect of a museum director's work. It infuses just about everything that goes on in a museum, or that might. The task of seeking money cannot be relegated to others all the time.

No matter the size of an institution, directors need to be involved in money-raising activities, be these of an earned-income or philanthropic nature. The latter requires a director's time as it involves personal contact with individuals who are being cultivated for support or have a long-standing association with the museum when it comes to providing financial assistance. People who make major, or even minor, monetary gifts to a worthy cause often want to meet and get to know the person responsible for it. With successful museums, the CEO is usually, literally and figuratively, the face of the organization. Location doesn't matter. When he was director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Philippe de Montebello was without question its public persona. This built on the work of his predecessor, Thomas P.F. Hoving, who almost single-handedly invented a museum-director-as-P.T.-Barnum-impresario profile. On a smaller scale, and in a different part of the United States, Pamela Schwartz, the executive director of the Boone County Historical Society, Boone, Iowa, is the identity of that organization. Boone is rural and has a population of only 12 500 people.

Successful museum directors never let a fundraising opportunity go to waste. They may not be able to act right away when a possibility comes to their attention but the potential is noted. This is not to say all ideas on how to raise money are good ones. Many are not. I have spent a lot of time doing research, cultivating prospects, and preparing to "make the ask" only to stop or fail when

I learned my thinking was ill-timed, misplaced, or totally incorrect. When it comes to obtaining donations from individuals, fundraising is a fluid pursuit. The science of an approach can assure all your informational ducks are in a row, but nuance, timing, and connectivity is absolutely critical to reaching a positive outcome.

I recall hearing that only 1 of 20 grant applications was successful. These were tall odds then, and they have not improved. But applying for grants is a much clearer process than chasing people for money. Most Foundations have guidelines about what they give to, how, and why. There are schedules, content requirements, and procedures. Please adhere to them. Do not waste staff or your or valuable time writing and submitting a grant application that is inappropriate simply on the assumption that because your museum is a good cause it will be considered for a grant. There are exceptions, and they are usually known to applicants in advance.

How to become a museum director may seem obvious:

> Museum directors traditionally come from within the curatorial and administrative museum ranks. That's sensible, given the institutional complexity of a job that requires administrative skills to marshal the talents of a large staff; fundraising know-how for both short-term, projects and long-term stability; an ability to work with professionals in the field, including artists, and the volunteers who make up the board and support groups; and a commitment to the art public in whose name the tax-exempt operation functions.
>
> (Knight 2013)

Having eased into being a museum director I was fortunate to learn the trade gradually and in a deliberatively calculated apprenticeship manner. Others jump right in. I have no idea which approach is better. One of my students was hired immediately after graduate school to run a county historical society. In her mid-twenties it was no little challenge, but she is without question a natural leader, and in spite of the stress and work involved, in my opinion she made the right choice, I even gave a reference for her.

Given specific professional interests within museums, we see individuals "tracking" early in their careers now. People are deciding on employment goals more towards the beginning of their working life than might have once been the case. This, when combined with the sort of specific training required for particular areas of museum work, means there is less fluidity or crossing over of disciplines. Educators are educators, curators are curators, conservators are conservators, and exhibition designers are exhibition designers. Each might eventually become a director, but that is either a planned option or one that unfolds over time. Some museum professionals start out as directors with a small organization. They will then move on to move up.

Curatorial experience is not as common or as much required as it once was for directors. In my opinion this is a loss. Fortunately, art museums tend to stick to the custom when seeking leaders. Because of my entrenched commitment to the central importance of collections, I believe directors with considerable collection backgrounds have a far better core grasp of what a museum really is than those without it. This doesn't mean that directors who are not collection based are weak; they just need more handholding when it comes to collection cognition.

It is now pretty much required of museum directors that they have a graduate degree, or two. The PhD has not yet become the "union card" the great Metropolitan Museum of Art curator A. Hyatt Mayer (1901–1980) feared it might when he wrote, "The Ph.D. is the union card for teaching, and may become so, alas, for curating. It is a lazier yardstick than performance" Mayer (1983: 154). It is required of science museum directors, which given the nature of that realm of learning comes as no surprise.

Unless a person is so extraordinarily well-suited to and supported in a particular museum directing job, a sufficient academic background is expected that trustees aren't lampooned when they make a hiring selection. I have rarely observed that an advanced degree made much of a difference for a person once he or she became a director. Few, if any, academic paths prepare one to lead a museum. Arts administration graduate programs may help as they aspire to address matters of personnel, fundraising, management, and finance, to name four areas that occupy a director's time. Paul Goldberger (1994) was correct when he chuckled that a director had to have the "academic background of a serious scholar, with the wiliness to let most of this knowledge go unused."

In the 1980s, a common topic of conversation regarding museum management, and directing in particular, roiled around the value of hiring leaders who held an MBA. There was a lot of palaver about how important it was to run museums as businesses and apply the principles of the marketplace to radically transform what were perceived by a few uninformed observers to be stodgy, cocooned, and financially hidebound private preserves of cosseted special interests. Fortunately the move never really caught on: another close call for museums, in my opinion.

A preview of the failure of this approach to running a museum occurred when the board of trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art decided to split the job of directing in half. The position of president was established, and William B. Macomber Jr. (1921–2003), who had a background in the diplomatic corps, was hired to handle the operational part of the museum. Philippe de Montebello, already the director, was to manage the art part. It was not quite a dual directorship but close to it. When Macomber retired things returned to a more standard and managerially practical hierarchical museum staffing pyramid.

Without question, the most frightening instance of putting a business person in charge of a museum occurred when the Smithsonian Institution hired a banker to run its vast multidimensional operation. In 2000 Lawrence Small was appointed secretary of the Smithsonian. He had no appreciable nonprofit management experience and no background in any of the many fields embraced by the Smithsonian. He was roundly criticized for traveling with his wife first class at government cost. This was a surface indicator of deeper failings. After seven years of turmoil he stepped down.

Inferior museum directors, alas, can cause unsettling institutional decline and havoc, especially insofar as staffing is concerned. These misfits tend to exhibit one of two poor characteristics. They are insecure and know they are not suited to their positions. Alternatively, their position goes to their head. Either way their judgment is weak and destructive. They reject or ignore the advice and support of competent people. They can be dishonest. Their judgment stinks. Some adhere to the "kiss-up–kick-down" syndrome of management that calls for total fawning towards those who have power over you and totally unsupportive and even nasty behavior towards those whom you supervise. Others act like gods and assume a ridiculously snooty attitude and posture. Whatever the weak qualities of a bad director, staff deal with them and adapt. Some leave, some hide, and others simply muddle through. Unfortunately it usually takes a while for museum trustees to recognize their mistake in hiring a nimrod. It then takes time to do something about it. During all this foolishness, personnel suffer needlessly. Oddly, though, somehow museums survive even if terribly incapacitated. Institutions can be larger than individuals.

Regardless of who fills the position of museum director, a constant concern is job security. This is especially true at museums that have experienced a lot of change in administrative positions. Some directors I have encountered devote an inordinate amount of time to currying favor with a board of trustees or its most powerful members. This is usually done at the expense of staff relations. If a person does his or her work as the board thinks it should be done and doesn't alienate a trustee, a director can be employed for years. However, "the average length of service of a museum director in a position is less than four years" (Genoways and Ireland 2003: 17). I have known excellent directors who were fired simply because a trustee or two didn't like them or refused to listen to their advice. This is especially true when financial difficulties unfold. Sometimes these are indeed ascribable to a director but often that is not the case.

Though museums have succumbed to improved business practices and aspects of the marketplace they are rarely directed by someone with a business background exclusively. While there is no mission without margin, there is no margin without mission. I pray this continues. There is a reason accountants are rarely found in the ranks of museum directors. Leading a museum requires a knowledge of relevant subjects, an outgoing optimistic personality, and a depth of pertinent experience that falls outside the realm of spreadsheets. Museum directors need to be "people" people and number-crunchers rarely are.

I like the obvious and easy analogy between a museum director and an orchestra conductor. The comparison is appropriate. As with conductors, directors need to see and hear their museums in action. While we are hardly required to play all the instruments we conduct, we need to understand their role in the ensemble, no matter how large or small. As with musical performances, so too with museum performances. Much labor unfolds to reach a final outcome. Constant and rigorous attention needs to be paid to every aspect of these collaborative ventures. With so many moving parts, risk of failure is a constant variable and stress is always present. Directing requires an acceptance of this reality and the nerve to avoid letting it interfere with potential accomplishments. Directors well-versed in their work and knowledgeable about their institutions understand the range of control mechanisms available to them, how and when to apply these, and under what circumstances.

Finally, given the all-encompassing nature of being a museum director, how does one take a break? There are many options, and the usual ones include family, hobbies, and travel. I have found solace in music, albeit of an odd sort. When the great American folk music revival hit with a vengeance in the early 1960s, I began playing jug band music with some high school friends. We have been at it ever since, if only a few times a year. Our comradery and music have been a joy and an escape. As I have moved around I have found opportunities to play with other similarly inclined musicians. I play washboard, blues kazoo, and I sing. I can't go a day without listening to music, usually jazz. I consider jug band music part of that genre. On the domestic front, my most relaxing escape is the week my family spends on a lake in Maine most years. Fishing, reading, painting watercolors, and simply hanging out are rejuvenators. Any time I can enjoy a good cigar and a bourbon on-the-rocks is also relaxing. For those directing museums, or contemplating such work, inner escape options that recharge psychic batteries are a must.

Class Questions

1. Your museum is in the midst of a $2.2 million renovation and expansion capital campaign. A donor wants to give an anonymous significant gift in honor of the director. The director wants to honor the donor with a small bronze plaque next to the door of the director's office. What, if anything, should the board of trustees or director do?

2. A somewhat prominent, but hardly wealthy, artist in your community wants to give his house and property to the museum you direct when he dies. He has already given you much of his own art work, which you have gladly accepted. He has no immediate family. He would like his home

to be used as a center for the study and celebration of aqueous media (watercolors, acrylic, etc.). The house is about a half an hour from your museum in a once rural area of the state. It is perhaps 3000 square feet, with three bedrooms, a living room, dining room, small kitchen, and a studio the artist uses. It is sited on four acres. The artist will also give the museum an endowment to care for the property. At this time the endowment is estimated at $150 000. How should the museum respond to this idea?

3 A prominent trustee of the museum you direct often visits the museum in the afternoon, frequently smelling of alcohol. There are some bottles of liquor owned by the trustee and kept in a museum office refrigerator. The person sometimes pours a drink or two from them. The trustee is obstreperous, critical of staff, and prone to giving employees work instructions without the knowledge of the director or other relevant supervisors. These instructions are never part of a preapproved work plan. How should the director handle this?

4 When seeking to fill the position of director, should a board of trustees look for a candidate with a background in business and finance or in museum work? What might be the pros and cons for each choice?

5 When seeking to fill the position of director, should a board of trustees look within the institution for a candidate or outside it? What might be the pros and cons of each approach?

6 The museum where you work is seeking a new director. You apply for the job and are interviewed but not hired. The departing director gives you a promotion and a substantial salary increase. The new director arrives and views you with suspicion. In the converse of this scenario, you are the successful candidate of a museum director search. When you arrive on the job you learn that an employee was an applicant and is clearly angry that he was not hired. How might you handle either situation?

7 Two of the most difficult members of the board of trustees of the museum you direct resign together in a pique over what they consider your poor directing and the complicity of the board. They convince a couple of their friends on the board to step down also. All write critical letters of resignation, which are distributed to the full board. They have never before expressed their dismay to you or the board or its chair. Following these actions the board chair and remaining trustees offer you a substantial retroactive raise and generous bonus as well as a lucrative three-year contract. How might this scenario be interpreted?

References

Genoways, Hugh H. and Lynne M. Ireland (2003) *Museum Administration: An Introduction*. AltaMira Press.

Goldberger, Paul (1994) Doesn't Anybody Want this Job? *The New York Times*, Arts & Leisure (26 June).

Landes, Jennifer (2014) Philippe de Montebello: Man of Reflection. *The East Hampton Star* (4 March). Available online at Easthamptonstar.com/Lead-C/2014304/Philippe-de-Montebello-Man-Reflection (accessed 9 February 2017).

Knight, Christopher (2013) MOCA and Director Jeffrey Deitch as an Oil-and-Water Mix. *Los Angeles Times*, Arts & Culture (30 July). Available at www.latimes.com (accessed 28 February 2017).

Mayor, A. Hyatt (1983) *A. Hyatt Mayer: Selected Writings and a Bibliography*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

4

Curating = Connoisseurship = Collecting

He can tell pearls from fish eyes.

Old Chinese saying

Curating

For a museum to have collections, it usually requires staff knowledgeable about those collections. This has traditionally been the role of the curator. In spite of periodic assaults on the job from within the museum field, I believe curation must continue to function as it always has. I have two reasons for saying so: it works, and I have yet to find other museum positions well-suited to the assignment over the long term. To fulfil their role as places that explore subjects through objects, museums must have someone who understands the objects. This assignment has suited curators.

The ideal curator is more than a little familiar with aspects of what a museum owns and why. The job takes a long time to learn. Ultimately these people are the core information-absorbed interlocutors who, we hope, willfully engage in self-motivated conversations with and about objects. Those conversations unfold for the public in explications of object identity, function, and application, as well as an awareness of physical attributes contained in styles, materials, scale, composition, and so forth. This knowledge is usually contextual. In other words, curators understand the broader associations objects have, or once had during times of use. The idea that "no man is an island" applies to museum collections. Few objects exist or existed alone, divorced or unrelated to anything. The *Mona Lisa* was made in concert with various forces. Good curators understand this and spend a lot of time connecting collections to intertwined meanings. In this role they also seek additional items for museums to own that will in turn amplify, expand upon or refine existing collection strengths, or even cause new aspects of a museum's identity. This work can, albeit rarely, involve removing existing collections from museum ownership.

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

When well-defined and implemented, the role of the museum curator is central to the content-value of its collections. Accomplished museums have accomplished curators. Weak museums suffer the opposite circumstance. Good curation does not necessarily depend on institutional size, scope, budget, location, or collection subject. Small museums with limited budgets can have excellent curatorial coverage while larger and more financially robust ones can falter in this regard. Mostly, though, the larger and more typical the museum, the more curatorial strengths it has. Less well-funded museums have fewer curators, some only one. In such situations, they are in charge of a diverse array of collection typologies, and while individually they may have certain specialties, they are in essence generalists.

In no particular order the responsibilities of a curator include research, ongoing collection assessment and development, exhibition planning and implementation, and providing explanations or interpretations of collections and the subjects they reflect. The research aspect of curation unfolds as collections are examined and understood for their individual intrinsic values and the information they can impart about a topic. Reasons for research can be quite practical as it is usually conducted to learn about specific objects, ponder future acquisitions, and plan for exhibitions, publications, and viable ways for scholars to access a museum's holdings. On-the-job research needs to be selective, controlled, and, especially these days, applied. Given the varying scope of curatorial interests this is often a difficult balance to achieve. While research-for-the-sake of research is fun and the desire to undertake it is understandable, I have tried to apply my curatorial activities specifically to a museum's collections in the context of whatever work program is being pursued at a given time. I have attempted to insist curators who reported to me do the same. Frequently, good curators are an independent lot and effective supervisory control may be elusive. This is not necessarily a detriment to an organization, but it is something of which managers to be cognizant.

The vast majority of people only appreciate the work of the curator as they see it in exhibitions; they do not realize what curators do behind the scenes. It is through these communication forums that concepts are conveyed, ideas transmitted, and opinions expressed. No matter how small or large, how complex or simple, how cheap or expensive an exhibit is, success or failure and whatever lies between those outcomes, is primarily caused by the level and quality of its curation. The reason for an exhibit, its collection content, how it is presented, and what words are used are critical to meaningful public engagement. Deciding upon, selecting, arranging, and explaining the object content of an exhibit is essential for a positive visitor experience. All of these duties are usually the responsibility of curators, be they on staff or off. "Think of curating an exhibition as a series of interrelated and overlapping steps, which include – but are not limited to – research, thematic conceptualization, selection, strategic arrangement, and interpretation. Multi-tasking is required for this job" (Friis-Hansen 2001: 67).

I tend to want a curator to be the first and foremost person leading an exhibition project. He or she will not always be alone in developing ideas and seeing them to fruition, but as a general rule, a particular curator, if well qualified, is the appropriate person to assure desirable exhibition outcomes. I recognize that this may be thought a bit "old school," but in fact, it is a viable way to proceed when it comes to organizing exhibitions. Generally, when non-curators are directed or invited to bring together exhibits the results are disastrous at worst or boring and disjointed at best. Of course, these outcomes can occasionally result when good curators are in charge of exhibitions, but that happens less frequently. I particularly warn against putting verbal-centric academics in singular positions of authority over exhibitions, especially for history museums. I have yet to meet one who has any affinity for objects or understands their potential learning power.

The traditional approach to assigning curators the job of exhibition development and implementation means it is a curator who suggests an exhibition topic, selects the objects to be shown, generates, edits, or approves all writing, outlines the preferred arrangement of the items to be displayed, and signs-off on ancillary interpretive materials such as online components of an exhibition, gallery audiovisual content, graphics, and so forth. If a competent curator is doing his or her job well, there will be a clear editorial perspective and uniform "curatorial voice" in an exhibition, thus minimizing perceptual and actual information confusion. Ideally the "voice," by the way, will reflect the museum's, in some shared and obvious manner.

Once upon a time it may have been assumed that museums were neutral presenters of exhibitions and neither generated nor inflicted strong opinions through what they put on view in their galleries. This, of course, was and remains an incorrect notion. The very existence of a particular museum happens because of an opinion. The collection content of a museum is decided by opinion. And, how that content is shown is based on opinions. This reality was boldly recognized and its existing applications often vehemently assaulted as the turbulent decade of the 1960s came to a close. In the United States especially, museums were not immune to the unfolding pressures for social change at the time. They were criticized for being racist, sexist, antidemocratic, and elitist bastions of the social, political, and financial interests of the military–industrial power structure ruling the country. Exhibitions were often cited as cultural affronts by leading proponents for democratic change. A legacy of that time, and a welcome one as far as I am concerned, unfolds when museums foster collecting and exhibition practices that encourage a broadly inclusive perspective. This populist approach is now one of the several considerations curators should give to the collections and exhibitions for which they are responsible.

Curatorial positions in the museum field vary. Often they are identified by an object area of responsibility such as the title I had once of Curator of Paintings, Prints and Photographs. Sometimes a title might denote a zone of interest, such as curator of the American Wing. Art museums tend to be more collection-specific in titles while science museums might be subject- oriented, and we would see the title Curator of Ichthyology. There is also the title Curator of Education. This resulted from educators demanding parity with curators in a museum structure. I'm not sure how one curates education, but it is a name here to stay and I have reluctantly used it. When I did, it signaled a museum's focus on an important primary public responsibility that had been given short shrift.

Curatorial rankings are fairly simple and obvious and might start at the top with chief curator, a curator-in-charge, or senior curator. Curator, associate curator, assistant curator, assistant to the curator, guest curator, volunteer curator, will be used in a descending hierarchy. Fundraising creativity has seen the implementation of curatorial positions named for a donor, such as would be the case for me if I had millions to give to a museum to endow the Jane and Steven Miller Curator of Jug Band Music.

When I was a curator, people would sometimes ask me how that happened.

Though luck and happenstance remain factors in curatorial aspirations, a combination of requisite defined academic training and relevant experience are absolutely essential. It is especially helpful if the experience can be gained with an excellent curator, notable collection, and at a distinguished museum. This obvious background is newer to the field than might be thought. In the past it was not unusual for curators to find their way into jobs by chance or hobby. This did not mean such people were bad at what they did, but from my observations there were enormous gaps in professional abilities, inclinations, and applications. The day of the dilettante curator is, I hope, dead. Which brings me to the idea of curation as a calling rather than a career. In my opinion the greatest curators are so absorbed by what they do that notions of a nine-to-five job, simple employment, a paycheck, benefits, and suchlike are afterthoughts. A burning desire to be a curator is essential to career planning and advancement. Avoid curators who are tepid about what they do for a living. Fortunately I don't think I've met one. Yet.

Given the knowledge of their work, their opinionated nature, and their strong perspectives on what they do and why, it is odd that so very, very little has been written by curators about the practice of curation. There are a few books related to curating contemporary art, but books about curating in history or science museums are conspicuous by their absence. I emphasize books because while the Internet offers extensive opportunity for personal and professional expression, books will last longer and be easier for people to find. Besides, they can always be put online. I therefore ask curators to please write about curating.

Connoisseurship

Connoisseurship as both a practice and idea is generally considered the stuff of esoteric aesthetic pursuits. These might include the arcana of knowing about Rembrandt etchings, Ming dynasty ceramics, or Russian icons.

Images spring to mind of scholarly types immersed in rare texts and pondering the most minute and picayune details of some object before them. Scenarios involve magnifying glasses, references foreign to most of us, comparisons to related objects under scrutiny, and, in the case of men, the wearing of bow ties. We see this play out in the television series *The Antiques Roadshow*.

Popular perceptions aside, when it comes to museum collections, connoisseurship is absolutely essential to any thoughts of excellence. Therefore it needs to be understood and embraced by everyone even remotely concerned with quality, knowledge, and content regarding museum collections. Great collections usually result from rarified and highly refined connoisseurship that plays out on an individual basis and, in the aggregate, over time. Museum directors especially must understand and vehemently support what is essentially a relentless intellectual activity based on looking. They must champion the continuity of the function otherwise an institution will languish in the arena of collecting and collections and even reverse course.

So what is connoisseurship? It is a combination of academic scholarship and sensory judgment fused by an almost undefined feeling for quality, meaning, and value in a particular segment of the physical realms in which we exist. It is acquired by extensive object-centric contemplative experience and thought, sometimes seasoned with a dash of chance encounters. Often the connoisseurship under discussion seems quite narrow in scope and content, almost to the point of being the manifestation of an obsession abnormal to the rest of us, being of no practical application. For museums, connoisseurship goes far beyond studies of and about the fine and the decorative arts. Highly developed object-appreciation is apparent for those involved in automobile collecting, comic book studies, or the scholarship of cigar-box labels. Regardless of the things under scrutiny, the skills, experience, and "eye" of a connoisseur are developed in similar ways and over a long period of time.

When the late John Carter Brown (1934–2002), long-time director of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, was considering a museum career, he visited the great art historian Bernard Berenson. He told Brown to "look, look, and look and look, until you are blind in the looking. And from blindness comes illumination" (Harris 2013: 28).

Great museums have great collections. Obvious examples are the Louvre, the British Museum, or the Metropolitan Museum of Art. But size does not matter and smaller, often gemlike museums are equally respected for their holdings, be they art-, science-, or history-centric. Three examples are the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, the Mutter Museum of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Philadelphia, and Sir John Soane's Museum in London. Lots of other museums come to mind that have valued collections, and the list can be long. The point is, whatever museum we consider, if it has a distinguished and admired reputation, those notions are based mostly on what people think of the collections. To be sure, there are places where the collections might compete with a cherished view, interesting building, exciting temporary exhibitions, or convenient location, not to mention a good restaurant. It is collection quality, though, that, over the years, establishes institutional meaning. And rightly so. Few really want to visit a museum of mediocre, irrelevant, bogus stuff or the momentarily chic, at least not repeatedly or over decades.

So how does a museum establish a good reputation when it comes to collections – one that will last a while? Through disciplined, enlightened, knowledgeable connoisseurship that is not undermined or blocked by the indignities of blasphemous managers, ill-advised political intrusions, wrong-headed cost-cutting, or misdirected and short-sighted collection management shenanigans, not to mention acts of violence.

Museums admired for what they own usually enjoy this reputation because of a well-founded long-term understanding and application of a highly refined sense of judgment when it comes to the processes of acquiring, preserving, studying, and explaining collections. What is essentially a combination of knowledge, experience, visual acuity, and relevant intuition regarding collections and collecting should not be thought of as a frivolous and outdated notion. These tools of the connoisseur's trade must be practiced, indeed insisted upon, daily. This is true regardless of museum size, location, or budget. Historic Deerfield in Deerfield, Massachusetts, exercises extraordinary curatorial sensitivity when it comes to acquiring new collections. The Philadelphia Museum of Art has and obtains superb acquisitions. The American Museum of Natural History is to be applauded for its collection of dinosaur fossils. In these and scores of other examples we see connoisseurship at play in history, art, and science museums.

Museums that are indifferent when it comes to connoisseurship are so as a result of damaging lapses in the visual intellectualism so central to their meaning. Some years ago my friend and colleague, the worldly wise and museum-experienced Mansfield Kirby Talley, writing at different times on the subject, said the following:

> Connoisseurs – the word conjures up images of polished gentlemen indulging in a highly refined pastime, giving unidentified works of art to this or that artist. They are sometimes looked upon as magicians or conjurors and it must be admitted at once that there is an element of magic in connoisseurship, just as there is in mathematics and physics … Connoisseurship depends upon a well-defined notion of the individual personality, and furthermore upon the belief that this concept is of importance. Awareness and comprehension of the work of a given individual as being unique to him is the cornerstone of connoisseurship.
>
> *(1989: 175)*

> When we look at a work of art, a dialogue is opened between the work of art as an aesthetic object and our eye; that is, our ability to distinguish quality, hand, and, to whatever extent possible, original intent;

which includes the artist's image-intent and how the artist's choice and use of form, color, materials, techniques and surface finish contributed to the realization of it. This, in essence, is what is meant by *aesthetics*, whether we think of it as a science of beauty, as having a sense of love for the beautiful, or as having to do with rules, principles, and practice of the fine arts. The extent of our historical, technical, and material knowledge will determine our ability to evaluate – as an artist might – what we see with what we know.

(Talley 1996: 4)

The way in which connoisseurs, whether they happen to be art historians or conservators, study, evaluate and appreciate works of art depends upon a type of insight or intuition which cannot be logically explained and/or defended. Bertrand Russell refers to Henri Bergson, the 19th-century French philosopher and a great advocate of intuition over intellect: "There are, he says, 'two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing. The first implies that we move round the object: the second that we enter into it.'" Bergson defines intuition as: "the kind of *intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and therefore inexpressible." This is what Bernard Berenson, the renowned connoisseur of 15th-century Italian painting, saw as the very foundation of connoisseurship.

(Talley 1997: 273–274)

As I noted earlier, connoisseurship – whether it be giving unidentified works of art to specific creators, or, more generally, intelligent appreciation – cannot be logically explained and/or defended. However, before you dismiss such an approach as a 19th-century pseudo-science laced with a generous tot of mystical romanticism, may I remind you that approximately 85% of Berenson's attributions have been accepted by subsequent scholarship. It should also not be forgotten that when Berenson was working the *mappa mundi* of his chosen field of expertise was still quite sketchy. Berenson's success as a connoisseur depended not only upon his "eye," or his intuitive ability to recognize a particular hand or style, but also upon his visual memory and wide-ranging erudition and scholarship. Connoisseurship is obviously not infallible, but then neither is science nor the scientific method. Like the effectiveness of any tool, the effectiveness of connoisseurship will depend upon the abilities of the person using it. While connoisseurship is certainly a subjective method, it should not be seen in terms of "my opinion is as good as yours." Anyone who knows anything about the history of connoisseurship and the achievements of its best practitioners will readily understand that, unlike Annie Oakley, it is not simply a matter of "I can do anything better than you."

(Talley 1997: 276)

In their capacity as aspiring or actual connoisseurs (and I certainly hope all curators embrace this status, though there is no question that it is an ongoing and never ending personal quest), curators spend enormous amounts of time studying objects to learn how they were created, what they are made of, how they were used, by whom and why. They want to know the history of an object, which is otherwise referred to as its provenance. Connoisseurs also want to know about an object in the context of its life and applications with and around other objects. What might be thought a bizarre preoccupation in others is essential to what a connoisseur does.

Spending time with highly qualified curators in any museum can be enormously rewarding as they explain objects for which they are responsible and hopefully have been for a long time. The insights and information they provide is fascinating and only gained by years of constant looking, thinking, and research, all of which has to be object-based. Becoming such a connoisseur happens not just by looking at reproductions and reading about a collection subject. It happens through close and constant interaction with the *real things* that absorb meaningful directed attention.

Connoisseurship in all its ramifications must be central to any museum's collecting activities. Even the slightest failures in this arena will plague a museum long into the future. Acquisitions that are not totally based on refined, informed, experienced, and highly disciplined connoisseurship will be nothing but trouble down the line. There are exceptions, but they are just that. Permanent collections should be a joy not a burden.

As one who loves museum collections for all they can mean, express, and impart I have, however, over time come to the conclusion that not everything in a museum necessarily belongs there. This reality has taken me years to accept, but during those years I have worked with tens of thousands of collection items, and on occasion I have been totally baffled about the reason some were in a particular museum. Close examination and research always revealed they came into the museum for inexplicable and even spurious reasons. The dross arrived because no staff (qualified curators) were employed who had the interest, knowledge, or power, to decline an acquisition based on even a hint of connoisseurship.

A museum's acquisition process should be formal, disciplined, and articulated. It is where the connoisseurship object-based cranial rubber hits the road. Given the implied and actual commitment museums make regarding the permanency of their collections, taking in things for reasons peripheral or unconnected to a museum's core mission is foolish and irresponsible. Most major professional museums work hard to assure that what comes into the permanent collections is appropriate and will have value for the long term. So far, for the most part, the approach has been successful.

The late Thomas P.F. Hoving, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, articulated an approach to object appreciation that applies perfectly when undertaking an acquisition exercise, regardless of the object contemplated. To a degree it summarizes connoisseurship. In looking at a potential acquisition consider its

1) Immediate impression
2) Description
3) Condition, wear, age
4) Use
5) Style
6) Subject matter
7) Iconography
8) History
9) Bibliography
10) Outside expert advice
11) Scientific analysis
12) Doubts list
13) Conclusion: does the work stack up to the original impression?

(Hoving 1975: 11)

Highly qualified and experienced curators intuitively, if not always consciously, apply Hoving's exercise when they are looking at a painting, chair, insect, car, rock, dress, or whatever encompasses their scope of expertise in a museum context. To reiterate, this ability comes from lots and lots and lots of looking, and that looking must never cease. For the most part it will focus on actual things rather than reproductions. Having a good "mind's eye" is no different from having a good sports or musical ability. Regular practice and application is necessary to keep it current. As a curator at the Museum of the City of New York, one of the great collections in my department was lithographs by the nineteenth-century New York City tandem printmaking firms of N. Currier and Currier & Ives. The museum owns about 3000 of the more than 7000 different pictures the company made in multiple copies. Over a 16-year period, regular encounters with one or more of the prints sensitized my eye to them. The pictures have been wildly and widely reproduced and a couple of "restrikes" from original lithography stones have been made. The vast majority of copies are ridiculously easy to discern, even to the mildly trained eye. The few "restrikes" made in the twentieth century are not so easy to spot, and in fact, to my knowledge I have only encountered two. In those instances it was my first impression that made me suspicious, but I could not immediately say why. Without meaning to sound arrogant, it was a connoisseur's reaction. Though unaware of Hoving's guidelines at the time, they were pretty much what unfolded as I studied the prints in question and eventually settled on a conclusion. I still give illustrated talks on Currier & Ives, but since I stopped looking at original prints with any regularity or at any length, my connoisseurship has slipped. Also, because I was only working with fewer than half the images they produced, even when my familiarity with the artwork was at its height it was incomplete. The Library of Congress holds a collection of equal importance to that of the Museum of the City of New York's. I should like to spend time there someday, looking at each and every print. While a "mind's eye" can go on an extended hiatus, I believe it can be rejuvenated too!

Another approach to understanding and appreciating the things museums have, or want, has been succinctly listed by Maxwell Anderson, director of the Dallas Museum of Art. While his perspective is on art and how to assess it from an aesthetic perspective, his "five features of artistic quality" are valid points of connoisseurship that can sometimes be applied to other things museums own or are thinking about owning. Indeed, he notes that they "can be applied to anything made by human hands." This leaves out the zillion specimens natural history museums collect, but I suspect there is some transference of approach to these nevertheless.

Anderson's five features consider the extent to which art (and other things) is

1) *Original* in its approach
2) *Crafted* with technical skill
3) *Confident* in its theme
4) *Coherent* in its composition
5) *Memorable* for the viewer.

(2012: 50)

Presumably the absence of one or more of these features will cause a museum to reconsider acquiring or keeping whatever is under investigation. But a word of caution is advisable. My assessment of history museums indicates they often have great collections of dreadful paintings because those pictures have documentary value rather than artistic merit. Such art might fail to meet all five of Anderson's measures in the context of an art museum but it is important to have and to hold for a particular history museum. This simply points out the complex variable nature of connoisseurship in its many applications.

However museum collections or potential acquisitions are looked at, part of assessing meaning includes being watchful for fraud. By this I mean fakes. Because museums are in the truth business insofar as collections are concerned, they strive to obtain and keep things that really are what scholars purport them to be. When I see the three Vermeer paintings at the Frick Collection in New York City, I feel safe in assuming they are actual Vermeers. When I see a presidential limousine at the Henry Ford Museum, I assume it is such a vehicle. And, when I encounter a lavish gem and mineral exhibition at a natural history museum, I have no reason to think the rocks and stones on view are anything other than what I am told they are.

The focus on avoiding fakes in museum collections does not mean they do not exist. Every so often a diligent museum will discover a complete phony in its collections. (This is true with staff too, but let's stick to stuff.) When collection fraud is confirmed, the news might be made public or not. I have no strong feelings in this regard. It seems to vary according to the importance of the object, who discovered the fraud, the public relations value of the news, and institutional policies. What is absolutely necessary is to record the information in accession and research files. The museum also has an obligation to somehow "mark" the item as a fake in a way that cannot be undone later. Conversations will ensue about whether the piece should even exist. I tend to prefer to retain it simply to keep it in some museum context. All measures must be taken to assure it will not show up elsewhere as "genuine." Of course, perhaps the worst sin is branding something a fake when it really isn't. There have been instances of art shunted back and forth between accusations of being bogus or legitimate.

Then there are the relatives of fakes, such as composites, copies, and reproductions. These have a place in museums as they can be used in many ways to advance or support knowledge. Usually their role is ancillary and takes the form of exhibition props or disposable education materials. These applications require obvious and accurate identification for the public about the non-genuineness of a thing. This is absolutely incumbent on museums and should be high on the list of ethical practices. It is not always so. I know of a lovely small museum devoted to a prominent American sports star. An impressive commercially designed exhibition about the person's life contains a display of championship rings he owned over the years. Amongst the 20 or so of them are two copies. He had kept all the rings he had received except a couple. The exhibition label does not explain which rings are real and which are not. This oversight was hardly done to deceive. Visitors to the museum, unaware of the slip, could probably not care less. But, it provides an innocent example of how attentive we in the museum field need to be.

Collecting

The urge to collect is an oddball human phenomenon. Not everyone exhibits it but those who do are destined to suffer from the affliction all their lives and enjoy every minute of it. Collecting takes many forms and embraces many things, be they automobiles or hubcaps, guns or bullets, first edition books or *Mad* magazines, you name a category of stuff and there will be someone collecting it. The psychology of collecting has been examined and studied insofar as individuals are concerned. What has not been dealt with at length is the psychology of institutional collecting, which is what museums do. I like to think museums have a loftier and more publicly spirited reason for collecting than individuals might and that museums pursue their collecting in a more rigorous and disciplined manner. The first part of my bias is probably true as museums really are public service entities. The second part of my assumption is incorrect as there are museums with weak collecting impulses and individuals who are highly focused in what they acquire.

Without question, a favorite aspect of my museum life has centered on acquisitions. It was reassuring to hear the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art say this also, during a conversation he had with Glen Lowry, the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2014: "Acquisitions are the most rewarding thing a museum director can do" (Desmond-Fish Library Benefit Luncheon, Garrison, New York, 2 November 2014, author's notes). For me the rewarding aspects of making acquisitions are the presumed benefit the objects will have for people and the desired permanence of their purpose. What I acquire for a particular museum will, presumably, be around for a long time to be appreciated by generations to come. I hope my selections were and remain sensible. Collecting is an attempt to predict what one believes will be of value and relevance in the future. It is an exercise in wishful thinking, but unless during your lifetime a museum jettisons what you brought in, you won't be around long enough to know how things unfold in the decades to come. Future generations may look askance at the things I collected and mutter, "What on earth was Miller thinking when he brought in this dreck?"

I have never been a fan of acquisition committees as they tend to be formed in museums these days. They are largely made up of people who have no idea what a museum should be collecting, why, or how. But, because they are a fact of life, I suppose they might be useful in helping curators refine an acquisition argument. The more precision that is developed in this regard, presumably the more positive will be the long-term outcome. One simple approach is to draft a label for whatever is being contemplated for acquisition. This exercise should force a curator to say what the object is all about as a *primary document.*

Anyone who has studied history knows the value of primary documents. For the most part museums think of collections in this manner, which is why things that might be described as secondary or tertiary documents may receive less attention. The object-as-document exercise engaged in during acquisition deliberations is not always adhered to once an object is acquired, nor need it be. For example, we often see, especially in history museums, collections used in exhibitions in a backdrop or stage-set capacity. This in no way diminishes the documentary value of something. The object in question is simply playing a less prominent role for a while.

The idea of non-word-things holding information must be obvious in a museum context. It is absolutely essential when making acquisitions. To see (literally) a chair, shirt, or seashell as a document suggests that collection items cease their original functions once they are accessioned by a museum. In their newly institutionalized guise a chair is no longer sat upon, a shirt worn, or a seashell occupied by an animal. Placement in a museum causes these items to take on storytelling roles with a host of possibilities. Art may not experience such a metamorphosis because it can still hang on a wall or be placed on a pedestal to be looked at as originally planned, but not always. Art once made for a specific setting, such as a church, loses its religious place in a museum.

If a museum is on the ball when it comes to collecting, and has been for a while, its collections are often the sum of its parts rather than the parts alone.

> In forming collections, museums *recontextualize* objects; they remove them from their original contexts and place them in the new context of "the collection." This recontextualixation of objects primarily in terms of other objects with which they are considered to be related, is a fundamental aspect of the kind of collecting legitimized by the museum. In a collection, objects take on additional significance specifically by dint of being part of the collection; and, in most cases, the life of objects once in a collection is notably different from their pre-collection existence.
>
> *(Macdonald 2011: 81 – 97)*

Because collections for me are documents, I need to appreciate their cultural value and how that might evolve in years to come. It is helpful to thus differentiate items based on the depth of their individual as well as possible group context following the proof or prop notion I discuss elsewhere in this book. When it comes to acquisitions, an item that is proof of something is evidence. An item that is a prop is simply playing a role in a theatrical capacity. Deciding what a museum collects should rest on seeking obvious and clear proof rather than a random background prop.

In the 1970s the Bowery in lower Manhattan was changing from a place known for its flophouses, winos, and wholesale restaurant supply stores to being a mecca for artists. Single-room-occupancy hotels catering to the destitute abounded, as did bars selling cheap booze. In my capacity as the curator of the photography collection at the Museum of the City of New York, I welcomed contemporary documentary photographers as I wanted to support them, organize exhibitions, and acquire pertinent work. Occasionally I'd have someone show me a portfolio that included a picture or two of the Bowery. They were always of a derelict man passed out on the street. One day a woman came to see me who had done a fabulous documentary project that showed not only the stereotypical Bowery bums but also the neighborhood bars, flophouses, restaurant supply businesses, and new artist's studios and living spaces.

She had, in short, documented the early stages of a transition that would completely alter the character of the street as it became more upscale. Unlike a single photo that was a requisite portfolio insert, her work was encompassing. Not only did she contribute her photographs to the museum but we presented an exhibition of them. Acquiring her work was clearly important for the museum in my opinion. New York City is a place of change, and the sort of change it experiences is most notable in its neighborhoods. The Bowery is one of the oldest thoroughfares in Manhattan and has gone through more than a few transitions. It is my hope that the images I acquired will resonate long after I'm simply a name in the museum's old annual reports.

Oddly, there are people in the museum world for whom collections, connoisseurship, and curation are meaningless. They are uninterested in concepts of material culture and consider such foolishness irrelevant object-obsessiveness. Collections are annoying intrusions that take up space, cost money, and occupy attention that could be better spent on making museums word-centric rather than thing-centric. For the most part this approach to redefining a museum has not been warmly embraced for long, but when it has, the results have been unfortunate as resources are shifted away from collections, connoisseurship, and curation to fuzzy-headed, sociologically argued initiatives and programs of no merit or continuity. What often masks as radical intellectualism boldly contradicting tried and true mainstream museum precepts is really just the whining of peripheral voices who can't for the life of themselves accept the fact that people come to museums to see stuff and that stuff should be authentic in some meaningful evidentiary way. Why the nay-sayers insist on acting in this way is beyond me. Most are self-absorbed word people ensconced in, but ostracized by, the museum world for failing to grasp the obvious. It's hard enough to get good collections, take proper care of them, and, present them to visitors in a telling manner without harpies yowling from some self-constructed sacred pulpit they have within the vast and varying universe of museum pedants. Stereotypical museum logos often feature a portico of Greco-Roman columns. We need to be watchful of fifth columnists within our midst who are diversions at best and destructors at worst.

Museums acquire permanent collections in one of two ways: they are given or purchased. The vast majority of museum acquisitions are donated. Purchases are exceptional. One can argue that field-collecting, such as science museums practice, is a form of either purchase or donation. The same holds true for collection exchanges between or amongst museums. Whatever the case, the collecting motivations discussed in this chapter and elsewhere can be the same regardless of whether an acquisition is the result of purchase or donation.

Part of the process of considering acquisitions is to learn how to avoid dross. Too many museum collections (local historical societies are especially vulnerable in this regard) have things that don't belong. This is not to say they have not been honestly acquired, properly cataloged, and well cared for, though that too happens. I mean they have minimal standing insofar as the museum's core mission is concerned. Over the years I have seen how some inapplicable things have ended up in museums. People responsible for acquisitions were either oblivious, weak, overruled, or absent when irrelevant items wandered in. There are many reasons for taking things, but there should be more reasons for not doing so. I have probably declined 99 percent of what I have been offered for museum collections. I do this politely, respectfully, and enthusiastically, and I use my decision as an opportunity to educate actual and potential donors about why museums collect and how. I have never had difficulties with people whose offers were turned away.

The practice of museum deaccessioning can elicit strong emotions. It is a valid collection management tool that can be used for debatable reasons. When that happens, museums are the subject of vitriolic assault. Decisions leading to deaccessioning should be as rigorous as those leading to accessioning. Unfortunately that is not always the case. There are many examples of poor arguments for deaccessioning, but a particularly short-sighted one is using an object's lack of exhibition activity as a reason for removal. Museum collections do not have "expiration dates" stamped on them. Just because something in a museum collection has not been put on view for a long time (ever?) does not mean it should be jettisoned.

As I note in the last chapter of this book, one of the great issues museum will face in the future will be collection magnitude. Actually, many museums are struggling with this problem now. How much can museums hold and sustain in their collecting work as they move forward? The world is awash with stuff. There are far, far, far too many pieces of art, historic artifacts, and scientific specimens for museums to take. Concomittantly, there must be more highly refined, directed, and disciplined curation, connoisseurship, and collecting. Let museum leaders well understand that they need at least one person in authority who can tell pearls from fish eyes.

Class Questions

1 How would you respond to the following letter to your museum?

Dear …

I have ten important paintings by the major American artist John Sloan. For several years these have been on loan to the New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT. That museum is renovating its galleries and is therefore returning art it has on loan from private collectors such as me. I am seeking other museums that might be interested in borrowing these and other art from my private collection.

The Sloan paintings are superb examples of the work he did in the southwest. There are landscapes, Native Americans, still-lifes, and nudes. The distinguished status of your museum suggests you may want to borrow works from my collection.

I would be happy to discuss a long-term loan and welcome your response.

Sincerely,

PS For Further information on my collection, please look me up on the Internet ...

2 At the recommendation of a new curator at your museum, a grain-painted six-board box is purchased for the decorative arts collection. It has been found by the curator in an antiques mall which consists of over 50 stalls owned by various dealers and featuring a wide variety of objects. The curator claims the box dates from the second quarter of the nineteenth century and was made by a member of a prominent family known for its furniture productions in the museum's area. A six-board box is just that, a box made of six boards – one for each surface of the box. The box in question is about a meter long and a half a meter square. The top of the box hinges open. The interior is divided into a couple of compartments. There is a name handwritten on the outside of the bottom board of the box. It is the last name of one of the local furniture makers to which the box is attributed by the curator. The town he lived in is also written on the board.

Based on the curator's recommendation, the museum director agrees to acquire the box (for $250), and it is put on exhibition. The museum registrar, who has been with the museum for 30 years, is skeptical about the authenticity of the box but says nothing.

Not long afterwards the museum exhibits the box. The director then receives a telephone call from a descendant of the furniture-making family. He lives nearby and insists the box is a fabrication. He explains that he once owned a number of old boards with handwritten names of the family scrawled on them. These boards had been used for packing crates in the nineteenth century. An antiques "picker" from a neighboring state heard about these boards and bought them from the man about 10 years ago. Not long after, the box the museum had just acquired appeared at a local auction. At that time the museum was approached to bid on it but the museum curator at the time declined. The box was purchased at auction by a private individual who then brought it to the museum for authentication. The curator at the time cautioned against its antiquity so the purchaser returned it to the auction house and received a refund.

The director arranges to meet with the curator and the furniture-maker's descendant who had allegedly sold the signed board to the "picker." The descendant is almost apoplectic in asserting that the six-board box is not old and was not made by his ancestor but is in fact a pastiche of old boards made to look antique. The new museum curator become quite testy, contradicting the information. By this time the museum director is already suspicious of the box and word is beginning to circulate amongst local antiques dealers that the museum had bought a fraud. The new curator insists his connoisseurship is unquestionably correct.

What, if anything, should be done about this?

3 It is 1976 and the Museum of the City of New York has an item on temporary exhibition that was discovered by an antique dealer in Connecticut. Using a metal detector, he found a piece of a lead statue of Britain's King George III that was once at Bowling Green in New York City, at the south end of Broadway, in lower Manhattan. At the beginning of the American Revolution, the statue was pulled down by colonists who then chopped it into pieces and hauled most of them up to Connecticut to be melted into bullets. While taking the pieces through Connecticut, the colonists stopped at a tavern. Loyalists attacked the wagonload of lead and threw the contents into a local swamp. Over the years, pieces of the statue have been periodically discovered.

This most recent discovery of a piece of the statue of George III was featured in an article in *The New York Times* written earlier in the year. The Connecticut antiques dealer had found it in the swamp. The director of the museum saw the article and immediately sought to acquire the piece, or at least to exhibit it. The timing was fortuitous as America's Bicentennial was underway. The director asked the museum's senior curator to track down the piece and its owner to see if the museum might exhibit it. They were successful and the item was placed in a protective vitrine and became the focus of a large display in the entrance gallery of the museum. The museum began negotiations to purchase the piece for $5000.

One weekday morning in August, after the George III display has been on view for several months and the museum has received positive publicity, Steven Miller, an assistant curator, receives a call from the museum security attendant at the admissions desk. The senior administrative staff member is on vacation. A man has arrived at the museum and is quite angry about the piece of the statue of George III. Steve asks the guard to put the man on the phone. He is furious and threatens to sue the museum, claiming the piece of the statue was found on his property in Connecticut and it belongs to him not to the antiques dealer. He wants to take it then and there. What does Steve do?

4 In past centuries it was common for artists, when producing prints, not simply to take prints from the finalized piece but also to do so at various stages or states of completion. These "states" have obvious or subtle differences. If a museum collects such art, what should it consider regarding "states" when doing so and who is best qualified to make those determinations?

5 You are on the collection committee of a state museum. One responsibility of this volunteer group is to review and approve proposed acquisitions. The museum has three divisions: art, history, and natural history. Each collects things made, used, or otherwise reflective of the state in which the museum is located. The committee makes acquisition decisions based on presentations by division curators at the committee's quarterly meetings. At your next meeting three items will be presented. One is a *c.*1958 American Flyer toy railroad engine owned and played with in the state by a native of the state, who still owns it. He wants to donate it to the museum. Another item is a painting by a famous, deceased twentieth-century state artist. It is a representational image of a known location in the state. It is also being offered as a gift. The third item is a rock field-collected at a quarry in the state by a member of the museum's geology department. Though these objects are quite different and specific information will be offered by the curators, and sought by committee members, a set of similar questions regarding each item will be asked of the proposers. One of these will be: Are there restrictions regarding how the items may be used by the museum? What might some of the other common questions be?

6 During the process of assessing potential museum acquisitions, what might be the connoisseurship considerations involved when looking at a car, a painting, or a collection of bird's eggs?

References

Anderson, Maxwell (2012) *The Quality Instinct: Seeing Art Through a Museum Director's Eye*. The AAM Press of the American Alliance of Museums.
Friis-Hansen, Dana (2001) Notes to a Young Curator, in Carin Kuoni, ed., *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum on Contemporary Art*. Independent Curators International, NY.
Harris, Neil (2013) *Capital Culture: The National Gallery of Art and the Reinvention of the Museum Experience*. University of Chicago Press.
Hoving, Thomas P.F. (1975) *The Chase The Capture: Collecting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, p. 11.
Talley, Mansfield Kirby, Jr. (1989) Connoisseurship and the Methodology of the Rembrandt Research Project, *The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, 8: 175–214.

Talley, Mansfield Kirby, Jr. (1996) The Eye's Caress: Looking, Appreciation, and Connoisseurship, in Nicholas Stanley Price, Mansfield Kirby Talley, and Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro, eds, *Historical and Philosophical Issue in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*. Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute.

Talley, Mansfield Kirby, Jr. (1997) Conservation, Science and Art: Plum Puddings, Towels and Some Steam. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 15(3): 271–283.

Macdonald, Sharon (ed.) (2011) Collecting Practices, in *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Wiley Blackwell.

5

Managing in Museums

There are a lot of publications about management, whether online or in a bookstore (big university stores are good sources for hard copy volumes). You will be impressed by the scope of authors. But, note their biographies. Most never had to actually manage anything of consequence in the real world of getting things done in an appreciable way over a long period of time, especially in the nonprofit sector. They certainly were not responsible for raising money, setting budgets, meeting a payroll, initiating and directing people and projects, sustaining venerable organizations through inspired leadership, grappling with financial stress, making decisions of consequence, or translating their learning into practical action for the public good. And none had to survive in the job in a glasshouse setting 24/7 as is the case for directors of most museums, or should be. Despite this lack of experience by authors, I have always learned something of value in management books.

Customarily management texts address topics according to various business disciplines. You'll find volumes about real estate, banking, IT careers, construction, entertainment, human resources – you name it. A very few are about the management of nonprofit cultural organizations. There are almost none relating to museum management.

The absence of books about museum management is unfortunate. Museums are, or can be, peculiar undertakings calling for an unusual range of administrative skills and experiences. My observations suggest they have unique characteristics that need to be both practically and philosophically understood to be successfully managed. Those circumstances and realities wrestle with the tangible in the service of the intangible. Anyone responsible for management in a museum needs to appreciate this definitional fact as it is applied daily.

Managing in a museum is both an art and a science. As with most jobs, there are things you want to do, things you have to do, and then there is all the other stuff that bubbles up along the way. The art and science of museum management calls for being in charge, or at least, being influential in some capacity. If a person is uncomfortable with this arrangement he or she should avoid being a manager. There seem to be two kinds of people in the world, responders

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

and initiators. On the job we need both, but it takes management awareness and sensitivity to know who is inclined to do what, when, where, and why – and, who is not.

The science of management tends to center on quantifiable officially issued and required systems, calculations, and procedures put in place and usually found in human resource manuals and instructions about communication methods such as memos, e-mails, meetings, phone use, or IT regulations. Sometimes these directives are required by law. Measurement calculations are popular as people try to numerically assess operations and outcomes. Measuring tends to involve understanding and being able to quantify the time used or required for projects, activities, and visitation; physical content relating to collections owned, on loan, or both; the dynamics of planning, scheduling, and implementing; outcome assessment; and budgets.

Management as a science is especially evident when tracking budgets and dealing with all things financial. Creative accounting has a bad name and rightly so as I have seen it misused by museums. Most often though, it is appropriately applied to honestly meet needs and achieve goals and reflect facts. In a museum workplace, fiscal duties should be based on sound financial practices and honest realities rather than manipulated wishful thinking or wacky accounting caused by desperate times. Making up income projections simply to present an attractive spreadsheet for a grant report, accreditation process, or loan is foolish. Ignoring logical annual budgets drafted by staff and approved by boards of trustees is unwise. I find that constant monitoring of and adherence to an annual budget during the course of a year is reassuring and of the utmost value, but this is only so if that budget and those procedures were wisely generated at the start and prove to be sound and accurate in application.

The art of museum management is not quantifiable, yet when well applied the results are obvious. It relies on being opportunistic, knowledgeable, intuitive, and creative while overcoming the challenges of limited resources. One must be able to work well and in a productive and timely manner with a great variety of people and personalities. Being able to understand and verbally respond to whatever question or inquiry is presented to you, or that you wish to explain, is a constant. Always, regardless of your position in a museum, you need to lead with passion and conviction.

The longer a person is devoted to a particular museum, and the more experienced they are in and with it, generally the better their work. This can make management processes if not easier at least clearer. It is what separates accomplished athletes from mediocre ones. The fact is no different for museum workers. A highly refined grasp of reality and possibilities can be especially helpful when one considers museum operational limits. But not always. Sometimes a deep knowledge base can lead to managerial blinders that block new ideas, cause an overly defensive mindset, or keep people from being flexible when necessary.

Management is about getting things done, keeping daily duties on track, deflecting inappropriate operations, and avoiding regression. To do all this with any meaning and intelligence requires agreeing and adhering to a clear institutional purpose then setting goals and achieving outcomes. In museums this can happen on an individual level, in committees, or as a result of outside involvements (or interferences). Once everything is agreed upon and in place, good management causes good results. Bad management causes the opposite.

Keeping daily operations on track usually means monitoring customary needs and seeing that they are met, be they for the public, staff, collections, buildings, or property. Obviously people with management authority are essential to positive ongoing outcomes in this arena. Regression means falling far short of reaching beneficial museum goals, or failing to have any at all, and tolerating slipshod work.

When a museum's leaders, and especially its board of trustees, let an institution slide precipitously the fault more often lies with bad management than bad circumstances. I had to deal with a terrible financial mess at the Morris Museum, Morristown, New Jersey, in 2008 when the Great Recession hit. My goal as director was to keep staff employed and not let funding reductions appreciably change operations as far as public perceptions and use were concerned. Success was apparent as employees stayed, programs continued, and visitors had no inkling that I had reduced the institution's budget by nearly a $1 million. Yes, furlough weeks were imposed and we closed two days a week, salaries were reduced, the board spent-down unrestricted endowments, and certain maintenance projects were put on hold. But, we continued to present exhibitions, enhance the collections, attract school groups (bolstered by a new major grant endowing this activity for underserved participants), and offer our regular array of customary programs. The museum sustained a vigorous agenda, attended to daily operations, and avoided regressions. Confirmation of how responsible the approach was came in the form of the museum being reaccredited by the American Alliance of Museums not long after I retired.

Often the most valuable lessons I have learned about management came from bosses who took the time to explain how and why they made decisions, assessed situations, gauged opportunities, and otherwise plied their craft. Hardly a day goes by that I don't recall the actions and advice of Paul Rivard, who was the director of the Maine State Museum during the five years I was the assistant director, or Joe Noble, director of the Museum of the City of New York, and Barry Baragwanath, senior curator, when I was a fledgling curator there. I strongly encourage those in museum supervisory positions to share management tips with people who report to them regarding what they do as head honchos. It is exceptionally valuable information not found in any book. Moreover, please write about your skills – that would be enormously helpful for those pursuing leadership positions in museums.

When contemplating museums and museum work, management skills and abilities might not spring to mind as an obvious career necessity. Outsiders may still think of these institutions as fusty places of collegiality inhabited by like-minded scholars and learned personages all working respectfully to achieve mutually agreed upon, informed outcomes on behalf of and for the public at large. There is an ivory tower quality to museums that suggests a removal from mainstream life. This is caused by two museum characteristics: the precious informational content they seek, hold, and generate and their architecture.

Museums are places of arcane academic pursuits that can baffle the ordinary person. In spite of the leftover rhetoric of the 1960s calling for museums to be relevant and more accessible to all people, the self-declared hallowed nature of these institutions makes them odd citadels attended to by those in the know purportedly for those not in the know. The general public may accept why this state of affairs exists, but such a retardataire *noblesse oblige* approach to cultural enlightenment is not lost on them. It may be one reason why museums can be seen as peripheral to mainstream social intercourse. On the surface this circumstance might have little meaning, but it plays out when museums seek or have long been given what I call political money. These are funds supplied by governments, be they local, regional, or national, to museums for operations or special projects. When economies turn sour, such funding is considered nonessential and lost. It is very hard to regain.

The buildings museums either design for themselves or move into exude an aloof status. Because of requirements to be secure repositories of cultural materials, while assuming accustomed roles as temples to/of/for/about various political, cultural, or civic polemics, museums have never lost their emotional and physical stature as realms apart from or placed above (often literally) day to-day-life, especially when we consider most building types we normally interact with.

The idea that there is a central, strong, and ongoing role for management in the practice of research, study, learning, communing, and being a temple to the gods of art, science, and history is hardly a peculiar notion. Every human endeavor requires management of some sort, and museums are no exception. In their cases, management, however one wishes to define it, deals with objects and information, people, communication, planning, projects, spaces, ideas and opportunities, schedules, problems, resources, reputations, change, exhibitions, budgets, potential, and time. I will briefly comment on each of these elements of the craft of museum management.

Objects and Information

Generally speaking, the most important objects museums exist for are their collections. As conduits for learning these constitute the mute vocabulary through which information is sought and provided. There is a swirling and concomitant exchange of inquiry, investigation, and revelation that occurs when physical evidence is the basis for communicating concepts, stories, meanings, and so on. Essential museum management precepts wrestle with the sometimes inexplicable mysteries physical evidence holds in our lives, be those mysteries about human or natural realms. The role of the museum is thus one of conjurer, explicator, and decipherer. In accepting this expository notion, those of us in the museum world must figure out how to implement it for public good. We do this through the deft management of information that is imbedded in and thoughtfully extracted from the objects that constitute an institution's DNA.

As noted elsewhere in this book, objects in the service of information can play one of two roles: proof or props. As proof, objects provide evidence that dinosaurs really existed or van Gogh was a painter of impact or steam engines did indeed once power the industrial world. To be most effective, objects used as proof must be original to whatever is being proved. Reproductions of dinosaur skeletons, van Gogh paintings, or steam engines can have their didactic exhibition and teaching uses but they do not hold the same intrinsic veracity to connect people with aspects of science, art, and history as the "real thing" does. This is why we don't see mainstream museum exhibitions of the "Reproductions of the Treasures of King Tut," "Fake Moon Rocks," or "Pretend Civil War Armaments." It is also why museums generally avoid accessioning into permanent collections copies, reproductions, or fakes. There are exceptions to this practice but for very good reason. A copy of a Michelangelo drawing by a famous twentieth-century artist is valued not because it represents the work of a monumental Renaissance artist but because it represents the work of a renowned twentieth-century artist.

Information in the service of objects is usually defined as research, but that can and should be expanded to include cataloging, publishing, interpretation, and duties of an archival nature. Deciding how vital information collection and retention is, and at what level or depth it should be pursued, is very much a management decision. As places that purport to know things and know about things, museums are expected to be experts on what they own and exhibit (which is not always the same, by the way). After all, isn't that why they put on exhibitions and have collections? The best museums therefore welcome their role as informational repositories while also recognizing that such knowledge does not come easily, quickly, or inexpensively. Indeed, knowing as much as possible about collections is an ongoing and all-consuming responsibility that involves staff as well as experts outside an institution.

Accumulating information about museum objects can be a painstaking, slow, difficult, conscientious, and even serendipitous process. Actually, the word "process" is probably incorrect because it suggests a certain logic and continuity whereas information gathering on a collection can take decades and be subject to changing staff specialties, budgets, institutional directives, and such outside influences as politics, natural disasters, the economy, taste, and academic whim. Suffice to say, whatever is learned about museum collections needs to be retained and reexamined over time. This includes the collections themselves. Assessing the informational value, capability, and potential of collections with some regularity is vital for a museum. Management is central to insisting upon and making this happen.

When it comes to collections, new perspectives are constantly arising and different ways of thinking about them must be considered. These unfolding inquiries and discoveries have to be recognized when a museum decides to deaccession something. Every time this happens there is the risk of losing an object for which informational devotions have been predicated. Retaining information about a jettisoned object, or retaining an object for which there is no information, causes collection opportunities or frustrations. How information creation is pursued is a management responsibility.

Exercising quality control over information held by a museum is also a management duty. How good is a museum's knowledge of its collections? Large museums with long-standing curatorial staff tend to have a strong knowledge base insofar as most of its collections are concerned. And the same can be said of smaller museums, especially if they have specialty collections. When, as executive director of the Morris Museum, Morristown, New Jersey, I acquired the Murtough D. Guinness collection of mechanical musical instruments and automata, we were able to hire as its conservator one of two highly knowledgeable brothers who literally grew up with it and knew both the collection and the subjects represented.

To be sure, given the breadth, depth, and huge panoply of things museums acquire, information about them will often depend on staff specialties. This changes as staff do. For instance, for several decades a large Midwest historical society had a terrific curator for its terrific costume collection. A director of negligible collection awareness had little appreciation for the curator. Because the curator was somewhat lax in keeping attendance records and adhering to daily punctuality habits, he was let go. This meant that the society lost an extraordinary intellectual asset and the collection became less content accessible. It was a foolish management decision.

Naturally, not all great curators, museum historians, or other information people will be around forever at a particular museum. People might assume the information these employees hold can simply be transferred to a convenient electronic or hardcopy database. It can't, at least not in any comprehensive manner. What gives these individuals the value they hold is their familiarity with a specific collection, its context in the larger scheme of collections, how it reflects or doesn't particular relevant topics, and what is missing from it. They also know, or are familiar with, how a particular collection came to exist, what is in it, and, of equal importance, what is not in it.

A personnel management approach to museum information retention of which I am a fan is gradual apprenticeships when replacing and replenishing collection staff. Outgoing and incoming curators who overlap by years can support continuity and the carrying-on of content. Given the increasingly itinerate nature of museum employees (myself included), this idea is endangered. How to manage the long-term positive impact of an ever-shifting population of museum employees is a challenge to say the least.

People

The cliché that people are a company's most important asset is no cliché, especially at museums. The success, failure, or, ennui of a museum is the result of the quality, devotion, creativity, and energy of its staff. Obviously, when talking about management in a museum context, managing people is a top priority. The layers are often complex and untidy. How do you manage people you report to, those who report to you, those over whom you have no influence, and those you deal with only on occasion or just once? Who manages whom?

To say the least, one encounters an interesting array of personalities in museum work. The unusual intellectual involvements and practical requirements of museums bring together diverse perspectives. Museum jobs call for a sometimes peculiar mix of employees. During the course of a day I may encounter colleagues responsible for maintenance or marketing, security or sales, fundraising or photography, curation or customer service. Their personal and professional backgrounds will be as different as their positions. From a managerial perspective it is imperative to understand and appreciate the nature of various personnel responsibilities and how they can be collaborative or contradictory, and occasionally, confrontational.

Presently, perhaps the best structured way to decipher the psychological world of museum employees is through the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator tests. A more practical approach might be to borrow the one I learned from Paul Rivard when he was director and I was assistant director of the Maine State Museum. Paul wisely observed that museum employee profiles can be bundled into various disciplines as well as personality types. We were not managing a homogenous staff of like-minded museum-centric employees but people with allegiances to various specialties. Those specialties included archaeology, graphic design, photography, architecture, visitor services, history, conservation, retail sales, collection management, the natural sciences, carpentry, and accounting. It was our job as managers to facilitate the productive and timely blend of these interests on a daily and long-term basis. For the most part this was not difficult, and has not been in my experience. One reason is actually staff differentiations themselves. At the Maine State Museum the architect was not interested in being a collection manager. The conservator did not become involved in retail sales. And the carpenters did not want to be accountants. I learned early on that recognizing and equitably supporting the various staff in their specialties was essential to nurturing an atmosphere of respect, camaraderie, and progress.

On the flip side, I also learned that people who work with others for a long time understand their co-workers and how to deal with them to preserve their own jobs and perks. This personnel dynamic can lead to team accommodations that may not embrace a 24/7 gung ho spirit but it can mean smooth operations, for the most part. However, it can also lead to toleration of peer counterproductive work peculiarities or deficiencies. From a managerial perspective this tolerance can hamper corrective change as whoever is the boss might not have full or even partial support from staff. However, if a recalcitrant, obstreperous, or incompetent staff member is allowed by management to stay on the job, other employees, as well as being annoyed, will wonder what the heck is wrong with the higher-ups who are supposed to be in charge. (If the person in charge, such as a museum director, is the problem, the target of incredulity must be the trustees.)

Discussing the issues of dealing with problem employees brings up the truism that as a boss you should never assume you are everyone's friend at work, even if you are. In fact, friendships can make for awkward situations on the job. Sexual dalliances or love affairs can cause particularly explosive and pernicious employment repercussions not to mention awkward interpersonnel situations. Managers must manage professionally not personally.

The scope and extent of people management in museums obviously depends on one's job. Some staff, such as entry-level employees or those with specific assignments involving a craft or trade, may have few management encounters or responsibilities. Others, obviously those in supervisory positions, will be more consumed with management duties. As an entry-level assistant to a curator, I initially worked with few people. When my positions expanded and advanced, that changed.

In becoming a boss I took to heart good advice I had received from good bosses, and I was mindful not to act like bad bosses I had encountered or heard about. In addition to having a competence in one's field, supervisory sensitivity is an essential element of positive personnel management expertise. I have observed that most museum employees are reasonably competent people trying to accomplish a job, sometimes under challenging circumstances. Just ask them. There is never enough funding, even at the richest museums. Space is always at a premium, competition for resources within an organization can be annoying, scheduling is a challenge, and collections require never-ending attention. With a few exceptions I have thoroughly enjoyed interacting with the people I have worked with during my career. In spite of changing jobs and locales I have managed to keep in touch with many. The good ones who have died over the years remain fondly in my career memory bank.

Though I hate the idea of bosses having a particular "management style" there really is such a thing. As with others, mine is based on personality, training, and experience in the workplace, both as an employee and an observer. I might call it managing by being nice. Nice is not a word that suggests a decisive person of outgoing strength, verve, substance, strong opinions, and vociferous intellectual stature. The saying "Nice guys finish last" comes to mind. "Nice" is usually associated with pleasant individuals one enjoys being around because they are not abrasive, obnoxious, and demanding. This is a simplistic stereotype and one with which I would beg to differ. My experience has shown that a leader can be both nice and effective. The accomplishments I might lay claim to in my career happened because I have been nice to people. Managers may by nature be loners but little is accomplished alone in museums as you have to rely on others.

By the way, being managerially nice to people does not mean you have to like everyone. On the contrary, nice can be a wonderful way of controlling feelings of anger, frustration, and negativity that interfere with interpersonal engagement and productivity. For me, nice involves being polite, mannerly, and respectful without being a pushover or ignoring expectations. I have high expectations for myself, and I have similar goals for museums, especially those in which I work. I also have a tendency to anger quickly when terribly frustrated or pushed to the wall. This always catches people off-guard, including me. Anger is not a good management tool but sometimes it happens.

I like to empower staff to do their jobs to the best of their abilities over time. Managerially this means delegating a lot of authority and not meddling in a person's work. It also requires monitoring, if from a distance sometimes. My problem in this regard is that I may provide lax monitoring, and when some people are left to their own devices, poor outcomes can accrue. I have had to learn to be clear about my expectations, and this requires constant self-discipline and open communication, not to mention follow-up.

Staffing a museum means seeking and nurturing people of diverse backgrounds and interests whose talents, capabilities, and experience will sustain and advance education programs, collection development, exhibitions, maintenance, security, fundraising, accounting, and administration. However, regardless of individual disciplines, it is absolutely essential that employees be able to work together in a productive manner. I include that desire in job descriptions. Certainly conflicts can and will erupt, but the fewer the better. When they do, management is required immediately, even if that means being willing to let a situation work itself out without supervisory involvement.

When I began my career shift from curation to management, I had difficulty moving from the role of specialist to that of generalist. No longer was I the go-to person for information about and access to particular collections and subjects. Instead of being the final authority on a topic, I was the person approached at the beginning of an inquiry or discussion process. Often my job was to simply point people in a particular direction or give permission for something to proceed. Fortunately, because I had an extensive museum background, from the ground up, I could weigh situations quickly and with some feeling of competence. This was helpful but it did not make me an archaeologist, graphic designer, photographer, architect, historian, conservator, retail sales associate, collection manager, natural scientist, carpenter, or accountant – all disciplines represented in the museum where I became exclusively a manager. That job made me a manager. It was a tough learning process.

Being a manager does not mean having an expertise in all the areas for which you are managerially responsible. What it requires is an ability to contemplate, judge, deliberate, and evaluate to make and prioritize decisions and actions to sustain desirable consistencies and accomplish new things – without, it is hoped, a whole lot of messing around. Often, this means relying on instinct and experience as well as knowledge and facts. Good managers have good intuitions about people, situations, and subjects. I have learned to look to the opinions of those members of staff who have shown a talent for this.

While quantifying activities, programs, goals, and agendas is required in today's museum world, especially when dealing with boards of trustees and funders, some of the greatest achievements grow out of non-metrics-based decisions. Pie-in-the-sky visionaries are the leaders who propel museums into existence, greatness, or both. When I think of the late Marsha Tucker, founder of the New Museum in New York City, I do not remember an accounting fussbudget immersed in logically calculated voluminous business plans and spreadsheet arguments promulgated to inspire and foster her dream. My experience with Marsha was of quite the opposite kind of person. Her "management style" was totally people- and art-focused. She achieved things with the management tools of conviction and enthusiasm.

Knowing why someone is in the museum field (however he or she wishes to define that) is revealing. Motivations are important to me, and I never want employees who see their jobs as just that. Everyone working in museums, regardless of position, should see it as a calling. Of course, this is a terribly naive desire, yet hope springs eternal. After all, I work because I have to. I do museum work because I want to. Alas there are people, museum directors in particular, who are in museums for other reasons, such as prestige, stature, money, and power. These sorts are manipulative, selfish, diabolical, and often not very competent. What they lack in ability, they more than make up for in cunning, and they know it. For the most part, though, I encounter people who have a personal dedication to and love for what they do that is individually rewarding on behalf of the rest of us.

The lion's share of people management in museums involves employees. How this unfolds depends on a range of variables, but savvy psychological awareness on the job makes for generally satisfactory short- and long-term relationships and outcomes. This calls for managing to bring out the best in people while discouraging the worst. I believe in playing to peoples' strengths rather than concentrating on their weaknesses. Actually, I tend to avoid the word "weakness" as it can be misinterpreted. By concentrating on strengths, weaknesses can be minimized, lost, or made immaterial.

A modestly sized museum I once directed had two full-time maintenance employees. One was well-spoken and well-educated with a BA in a field relevant to the museum. He was excellent with staff of all backgrounds but preferred to avoid dealing with large machines, mechanical projects, or heavy equipment. The other maintenance person was less academically educated and a bit rough around the edges. He could do without the formal social situations encountered at special events in museums. He loved machinery and enjoyed working on his own to make and repair things and address all sorts of mechanical issues. Both employees were diligent and productive and they got along well together. After encountering problems with assignments given to the two that clearly did not suit their capabilities, I learned how to deploy these gentlemen in appropriate ways. The college graduate was the man to work directly with volunteer groups and the diverse staff usually found in museums. The other fellow was perfect for cutting down trees, fixing vehicles, repairing boilers, and dealing with the climate control systems. This blend of strengths offset weaknesses, and they were an ideally complementary team. I did not spend a whole lot of time trying to change their character or note deficiencies in performance reviews. In fact, for the most part I avoid performance reviews as I find them insulting, subjective, irrelevant, and inconsequential. Every day should be a performance review.

I must note that ignoring salient staff weaknesses can sometimes be unwise. If an employee is clearly not suited to his or her job, that is an issue requiring immediate corrective action. Some managers put off dealing with major problems, or even minor ones, but that escapist lethargy simply delays the inevitable and only increases workplace rancor, productivity difficulties, and a feeling on the part of competent staff that whoever is supposed to be in charge is not. I could list a few examples of where my personnel management skills foundered after I made a wrong hiring decision or mishandled an employee situation. Simply put, though I believe museums are about objects in the service of people, managing them is about people.

Because museums are something of a group effort, people in charge need to be cognizant of opinions held by others regarding particular staff. Sometimes those opinions have merit and sometimes they do not. In either case it needs to be understood that unless a director or supervisor makes, or is constantly making, bad decisions when it comes to employees and their management, people in authority need to be supported and their decisions not interfered with, especially by trustees. I had a situation once in which the board's support for a terrible employee was irrational to the point of creating a completely bogus and inappropriate job for the person against my strong advice. Try as I might, I was managerially unable to avoid the catastrophes that predictably ensued.

In addition to staff, there are other groups of people involved in museum management. Trustees and volunteers are two such and warrant a chapter each in this book. (I recognize that while both are volunteers in museums their main duties are usually quite separate.) Managing these folks ranges from easy to impossible. Naturally, the reality depends on the personalities of individuals, the nature of a particular museum, and how everyone defines volunteer roles and expectations, not to mention how management is defined and accepted.

In the case of contractors or consultants, strict management is absolutely essential because there are so many possibilities for things to go haywire. Contractual relationships can be one-time projects or long-term associations. The latter may require less forceful and constant management than the former but not always. The areas of concern with contractual and consulting relationships are obvious. What are the qualifications of the person being hired by the museum? How well do they work with people and how well will or can they work with museum staff? What security concerns need to be addressed, especially if a contractor is in close proximity to collections? Who will monitor contractors and consultants for a museum, and are they trained and able to do so? What recourse do you have if contractors or consultants fail at their hired tasks?

A museum I directed once had a contract with a vending machine company. As we did not have a food service, three snack and coffee machines sufficed to provide limited refreshments for visitors. After several years of a satisfactory business relationship, the company stopped paying the museum for the food sales, as was required in our contract. This went on for many months. There were repeated calls to the company. Eventually they would hang up on our chief financial officer, and then on me when I became involved. During this time the machines continued to be serviced and money removed by technicians who came weekly to perform these tasks. I lost patience and asked our maintenance crew to put the machines in storage on the premises but not tell me where. We then awaited the arrival of the technician the next week and a presumed call of alarm from management. The technician arrived and immediately contacted his supervisor. We never received a call about the machines and we never contacted the company. A few years later, when we were starting a major expansion and renovation project, we tossed them in a dumpster, after extricating what money was in them.

The vending machine incident is an amusing illustration of a simple contractual arrangement gone awry. I like the story and my response. Fortunately this kind of foolishness is not the rule. Most of the time, especially when expectations are made clear from the start, relationships with contractors and consultants work out well. I am extremely loyal to good ones. Museums can rarely do all they accomplish with existing staff or volunteers. For instance, I have often used freelance operatives to help install exhibitions. These are mostly artists. They usually have excellent manual skills and a keen eye for exhibition appearances.

Skilled managers are always on the alert for consultants, contractors, and independent specialists who can meet specific needs with quality work accomplished in a timely, cost-effective, responsible, and pleasant manner. Given the fluid nature of life these days, businesses and individuals can come and go without warning. Add to this the changing needs of museums, and having a good database of names and contacts is an essential management tool. In addition to keeping individual tabs on who can help a museum, rely on references from colleagues and keep aware of vendors who advertise in museum profession periodicals and have displays at annual meetings. Fortunately the museum field is still small enough for references and recommendations from other professionals to be trustworthy.

As with every other human endeavor, from any management perspective we need to understand the phenomenon of the ego in museum environments. Sometimes the best and the worst things arise simply because of collaborative or colliding egos. Good managers recognize this and proceed accordingly to get things done. Be willing to accept an unusual aspect of a person's ego if it is not causing an uproar on the job. But be warned, in my experience the only time this approach backfires is when a trustee does not share your stance. There have been situations in which an employee whom I thought was just fine for a particular job was not regarded in the same light by a board member. Conversely, I had a situation once where an employee was completely wrong for a job and in fact was poisonous for the museum. Sadly the person was adored by the most powerful museum trustee. Needless to say, these two scenarios resulted in unsatisfactory management situations.

Some people have egos that need to be constantly stroked, appeased, supported, and dealt with. Ego seems to be absent in others. On the job, and in larger museums, personnel reality covers the range. Managers I like are aware of staff feelings, needs, and emotions and work to keep them on track. Managers I don't like are insensitive to these things and cause constant upset. How awful is it when disrespectful, nasty, and selfish managers succeed in museums? But, be on the lookout for managers who are everyone's best friend, confidante, and drinking buddy. This creates an atmosphere of malaise and weak or wacky performance as employees soon learn how to manipulate the boss for their own benefit and job security.

The down side of ego management in museums usually surfaces when a staff member thinks she or he is not being respected. This reflects our need for fairness. More than salary or accolades or favors or perks, people want fairness. Are we being treated equitably, and if not, why? One of the most important jobs of being a manager is striving to bring balance, or at least the perception thereof, to a work day. In museums this often plays out in allocations of resources, including space; recognition of personal authority; and salary. Museum employees covet space. If someone, for no good reason, appears to have more and/or better space than someone else it can cause difficulties. Similarly, if one person's area of authority is infringed on by someone else friction can result. Salaries, at least in the private museum sector, are usually highly confidential, yet somehow everyone knows everyone's, or they think they do. To further aggravate this, the top management salaries tend to be public information as they are listed in public tax records.

The discrepancies between the salaries of the upper management of a museum and those of the rest of the workforce are often shocking.

As a subject, hiring is something that requires deep understanding regardless of what industry or field a person is in. It is the frontline of personnel development. Museums are no exceptions. I have been responsible for hiring many people over the years, and for the most part, the results have been positive. Anyone in such a position will be lying if he or she says they have always had success. We all make mistakes. Corrective action is not pleasant but it is another management job not to be shirked.

When it comes to hiring I have several recommendations that have served me well. Regardless of the job to be filled, regular and honest communication with applicants is important. There will be more applicants for a job opening than can be employed. Thus one person will be happy and several may be disappointed. You want those who did not get the job to go away feeling they were dealt with fairly. Hiring is as much a public relations venture as a personnel matter. As you seek to find the best candidate for a job, you want everyone to say how well they were treated and how much they admire the museum. After all, you never know where these people will end up in our field or what positions might open in the future at your museum for which they would be qualified.

How to assure, one hopes, a reasonable hiring experience for job applicants is set by top management but it must be followed throughout an organization. To begin with, knowing exactly what the position is that must be filled is critical. This means drafting job descriptions that are accurate, encompassing and not full of phrases like "and other tasks as assigned." Having a clear line for reporting and accountability is also critical. No one likes wondering who his or her boss is at a given time.

An essential part of any hiring process is requesting references and talking with those who provide them. Candidates are asked to supply references. Three is the customary number. Obviously candidates will list people who will compliment them. Listen closely to what is said and rarely accept written references. I almost never give generic ones myself. Who knows where they will end up? Presumably an applicant has alerted those who are willing to provide references to their role. In asking questions of previous supervisors one of the favorites is "Would you hire this person again?" Depending on the position being filled you may confidentially seek information about a candidate through informal channels, though your ability to do so will depend on the job and the community to which the museum belongs. If you are looking for a curator or collection manager, you might be able to call a few friends for comments. If you are in a small town where everyone knows everyone and a candidate is local, you might discretely ask key members of the community. As director of the Bennington Museum, when we were looking to fill a position that was largely being applied for by people from the area, I would ask our bookkeeper's opinion. She was a proud native. I could tell immediately by her face whether the candidate was worth pursuing. Caution is suggested when it comes to formal references as they can be disappointing. I once hired a person to work with collections who had references from two impeccable sources. It turned out one, whom I knew, was the candidate's married (to someone else) lover and the other was fearful of retribution if they provided a poor reference. Try as we might, as a manger responsible for hiring, you will make a few mistakes.

I like to hire from within if I think there are qualified candidates. When that is not the case, I inquire amongst peers and colleagues about potential candidates. When, or if, that proves unsuccessful, the customary route of advertising a job in various professional vehicles ensues, all are online. I generally prefer ones that specialize in museum jobs but I am ready to consider others, especially for positions in security, maintenance, and finance.

Managing people requires ceaseless vigilance about sustaining, changing, and adjusting positions, as well as planning for employee succession. Deciding what positions a museum can have and who should fill them is a constant subject for managers to act upon. Always consider the wisdom of having such-and-such a job while being prepared for staff changes, whether they are voluntary or otherwise. It is hard to find good museum employees and it can be equally hard to keep them.

Communications

Keeping everyone at a museum informed about what is happening in the place is critical to productive operations and staff morale. The difficulty is knowing how, when, where, and why to do so and managing the process. The commitment to communications should start at the director level. I have reported to directors who were either excellent in this regard or terrible. I suffer, variously, from both afflictions. Keeping people informed in a truthful and regular manner is important. It is accomplished in several ways, all of them obvious, including meetings, printed materials, one-on-one conversations, telephone calls, and the gamut of IT options such as e-mails, Twitter, and Facebook.

Deciding what needs to be communicated, how, to whom, and by whom is critical to successful information sharing. Deliberations surrounding these considerations are constant. Yet sometimes it doesn't matter. Does everyone need to know what brand of hammer a maintenance person uses or how many reams of paper a copy machine requires for a month or when a utility bill is due? No. But staff do need to know the museum's holiday closing schedule, what employee benefits are available, when rental events are taking place, and what departments or offices exist to do what. Once a common-base of communication requirements is agreed upon, the next question is how to disseminate information. There are formal and informal methods. The formal ones rely on printed, IT, and face-to-face encounters of some sort, mostly meetings. Informal communication happens at coffee stations, in parking lots and staff lunchrooms, during unplanned encounters and through informal IT contact. Whatever communication options exist, I encourage participation by those in supervisory positions – sometimes. Depending on the size of a museum and the personality of its bosses, their presence or absence can drastically change the character of a gathering.

However communication practices are followed at a museum, please maintain a polite and respectful tone, regardless of the issue or persons involved. In an age when lawsuits are bandied about willy-nilly, offense is taken at the slightest provocation, and incorrect information spreads like wildfire, it is essential to be accurate, timely, and considerate with information content and distribution. Museums are no different from any other workplace in this regard, but I want to be especially cautious in these institutions because they have a public dimension that can result in egregious misinterpretations, especially if the media is involved.

The communication onus primarily falls on managers. This is another reason why I like walking around a lot and on some regular basis in a museum where I work. It is easier to interact with staff, volunteers, and the public, and I am always learning. In turn, I can use the information I have gained from them in my communication with individuals and groups. I must add that confidentiality in communicating is essential if such informational endeavors are to be effective. Staff will not confide in a person if they think that individual is dishonest, cannot keep confidences, or respect opinions and perspectives. Information that might reflect poorly on other staff needs to be dealt with carefully. Should someone bring something to my attention regarding a particular employee I will investigate, but with care, caution, and confidentiality.

As a director it is essential to understand that managing how trustees are communicated with is as essential as managing internal employee communications. This is accomplished in previously mentioned ways. Whether information exchanges take place with or for trustees or staff, one has to be careful of end-runs, people circumventing established communication processes and protocols for self-gain. Most of the time museum personnel are collegial and even convivial!

Planning

If you don't know where you're going, you might not get there.

Yogi Berra, 2001

A day on the job at any museum is full of predictable and repeatable assignments. These are the routine things that occupy the admission desk, housekeeping staff, and bookkeepers especially. The value and importance of day-to-day necessary functions is not to be dismissed or diminished.

On the contrary, daily chores must be maintained and carried out continually and as best as they can. A poorly run admissions area, dirty restroom, or jumbled financial accounts will have all sorts of negative repercussions in the short and long term. Good managers understand this and attend to it. However, such diligence should not be at the expense of thinking about the future, planning accordingly, and regularly implementing an appropriate agenda of projects to improve and enhance ways for a museum to accomplish its goals. Or, when times are tough (all museums go through such times), good managers strive to keep an institution afloat with calculated reactions to unwanted, unpleasant, unplanned developments.

From a management perspective it is hard for me to overemphasize the importance of planning in museums. Sustaining the status quo is essential and no small challenge, but simply assuring business as usual leads to institutional malaise and worse, regression. Museums must be constantly moving but not just running in place.

Planning is deciding what you want to have happen next, when, how, where, and why. It needs to be built upon logic, reasoned experience, and dreams. Good planning reflects good sense. Bad planning reflects the opposite. Oddly enough it is probably beneficial that museums are accustomed to living on limited budgets most of the time. This fiscal reality should cause them to be watchful and not wasteful when planning.

Be savvy about the outcomes of costly undertakings in particular. The easiest examples to cite in this regard are evident in new construction projects. These require robust fundraising on the part of trustees. Most museums calculate a sufficient endowment increase as part of their capital campaign plans to cover the additional operating cost of a larger building. Some museums fail miserably in this regard and the consequences are burdensome.

On the surface the concept that a museum should always be looking ahead and often towards change might seem to contradict the sense of stasis they exude. Few established entities in our society suggest contented repose more than museums. This is because they have the audacity to think they will be around forever. The longevity hubris infuses collection considerations, exhibitions, buildings, and, yes, planning.

People tend to think museums are mired in the past and always looking back. This is not the case for museum workers, at least for people in management and leadership positions. It is hard for me to imagine places that assume more distantly forward-looking assumptions. While the subjects and collections many museums devote themselves to may be about history, art, scientific evidence and so forth of times gone by, it is the future that occupies a constant part of a museum staff's every waking hour. That future could be a few days away, a few decades away, or "to infinity and beyond."

We in the museum field today are temporary stewards of legacies placed in our hands to keep and improve not just for the living but also for those who come after us. Presumably we not only recognize and happily accept this assignment but plan to leave things better than when we arrived on the scene. And rightly so. After all, as previously mentioned, museums are supposed to be around for the long haul – the very long haul. This preposterous but hopeful, or hope-filled, goal is what drives museum planning. To survive the present and be a presence in the future, museums must ceaselessly think ahead when it comes to mission, collection, programs, audiences, operations, place, and resource development and allocation.

Over the past few decades, the value of museum planning has become a generally accepted institutional governance assignment. It is now outlined in official manifests with titles such as long-range projections or strategic plans or vision documents. These have become so important that evidence of them is required when being accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. Of course, one wonders what real effect and impact these documents actually have after boards of trustees and staff have written and officially approved them. I know a museum that wrote one just to achieve accreditation and completely ignored the plan afterwards. However, and in the interest of avoiding cynicism, even the exercise of planning has value. But, implementing goals and objectives laid out in planning documents is the desired outcome of their creation, and for the most part museums do proceed with trying to adhere to them. It takes rigor and discipline to stick with a plan, jettison unworkable parts, and avoid unwarranted distractions as it unfolds. Having a board committee or subcommittee devoted to regularly reviewing and monitoring a strategic or long-range plan is important.

In addition to the planning documents developed and sanctioned by the board, there are the personal and shared museum plans that good museum staff are always thinking of ahead of time and realizing whenever possible, appropriate, and feasible. Curators are contemplating coveted acquisitions, research projects, and exhibitions. Educators want to improve good programs, end useless ones, and create new offerings. Development staff constantly seek more fundraising opportunities. Collection managers are looking forward to improved cataloging technologies and storage facilities. Maintenance employees lay out agendas for infrastructure upgrades. The list goes on. If this sort of ruminating is absent at a museum it is a stalled institution.

Projects

Management on a big scale is caused by ideas that become reality through projects. Now, what constitutes a project? That depends. Some small chores can become projects. I am talking about larger endeavors that are planned and have a definable beginning, end, and budget of some magnitude. A good manager will understand the suitability of potential projects and make them happen usually. In museums, projects tend to be about collections, programs, and buildings. Collection projects can embrace exhibitions, storage, cataloging, acquisitions, and, occasionally, deaccessioning. Program projects relate to education work, research, personnel realignment, or upgrades (or, sadly, sometimes downgrades). Building programs are typically about new structures, renovations, additions, relocations, and so on.

Selecting projects a museum should pursue requires considerable deliberation and expertise. Successful outcomes result from good management. Projects should not be done as spur-of-the-moment, catch-as-catch-can activities – unless they are responses to emergencies such as a human or natural disaster might cause. The sort of projects I am referring to are those that meet a desired and appropriate museum need of obvious consequence. Determining what that is must rest with professional museum staff or sometimes consultants. I am leery of trustees, volunteers, or the "community," randomly deciding these things, much less acting upon them. Well thought-out projects that have obvious outcomes and applications are the result of logical (not to mention logistical) accountability for the immediate and foreseeable future. For instance, putting wicker furniture from a museum collection on display because a nearby garden supply store wants to promote the sale of its new wicker furniture will take precious museum resources and raise eyebrows. But, presenting an exhibition of that same wicker furniture because it is a good, well-documented historic collection that can be explained in a meaningful and interesting way is entirely appropriate regardless of what actions a local garden supply store may take.

It is of immense importance to understand the genesis of a project. Those forced on a museum by a trustee or other person or persons who could not care less about the best interest of the organization and have a personal agenda can be unrealistic, diversionary, or even disastrous. They are sometimes beneficial, but rarely. We see examples of poor trustee project entanglements when boards borrow large sums of money to pay for new museums, a collection acquisition, expansions or renovations in the expectation that the loans can be paid off through earned income rather than robust fundraising lead by philanthropically minded trustees who give and draw in significant financial donations. The absolutely critical role of the trustee as hardheaded fiscal realist is obvious when projects are fully paid for and well endowed with cash donations. This is how museums in the United States have grown and prospered over the years. It is to be encouraged!

Not all museum projects require significant financial support. Some, such as minimally rearranging galleries and exhibitions, relocating a few collections, or changing staff assignments and organizational structures, can often be done with existing resources and budgets. I did this once at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland when I was director of the museums there. At the time the Society had an automobile collection numbering about 150 cars. Half were made in Cleveland in the first couple of decades of the twentieth century.

Because they were intermingled in two huge galleries amongst vehicles made elsewhere, the point that Cleveland was, albeit briefly, the first car capital of the United States was completely lost. The car museum was a two-story wing of the museum complex. I moved (yes, I helped push and shove) all the non-Cleveland cars to the lower level and kept all the Cleveland cars on the main level. This simple rearrangement took time but cost little. Moreover, it set the course for a future exhibition emphasis on local history in the larger context of United States' and even global history. We were delighted at visitors' responses when they toured the first-floor display and marveled in surprise at all the cars made in Cleveland.

Whatever the goal of a project, it must be for the clear benefit of the museum rather than meeting someone's short-term whim or desire to enhance a personal professional agenda. I've seen more than a few exhibitions and accompanying catalogs created because it was what a curator wanted rather than because there was any anticipated or desired hope that the public might find the result of interest. There are times I think we run museums for ourselves alone. This is terrible management.

As often as it happens, I wonder about the wisdom of embarking on projects simply for the sake of appearances, ego, or the need to look as if things are happening. I suppose it is human nature. Again, I will use exhibitions as an example, especially in small local museums. Because we think the public is constantly clamoring to see what we have in storage, or a rearrangement of what we already have on view, we struggle mightily to concoct a changing exhibition schedule that is nominal at best and destructive at worst. Projects of this nature can consume staff time, be poorly realized, cause institutional frustrations, and they often see unnecessary employee turnover. To be sure, we in the museum field have created this phenomenon. We want to bring our collections to public attention, and the most obvious way for us to do that is through exhibitions. Over time, that is how the public sees museums. And trustees, being part of that public, can be forgiven for thinking that if the museum for which they are responsible fails to pursue an active program of changing exhibitions the staff is falling down on the job. It is now the prevailing belief that museums exist only to stage exhibitions. This places a huge project burden on an institution. Regardless, it is absolutely essential to remember that the more advance planning that takes place for an exhibition usually the better the project outcome will be. At a minimum I have always wanted at least a three- to five-year rolling exhibition schedule. I've never achieved it, but there is still time.

Spaces

Museums are space-dependent. The idea of the museum of the mind, imagination, Internet, is a cute intellectual conceit but just that. Museums are defined by the spaces they occupy. There are galleries, restrooms, storage facilities, hallways, loading docks, offices, classrooms, auditoria, meeting rooms, mechanical plants, gift shops, stairways, and so on. Space management is an underrecognized but critical aspect of running a museum. Few people understand this. During my career I think the two most common causes of staff friction have consistently been about space usage and encroachments on intellectual turf.

Museums are always tight for space. Even sprawling multi-building ones covering many acres, such as the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, or huge operations like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, struggle to accommodate multiple functions. Creating, designating, finding, retrofitting, allocating, preparing, and using specific spaces for specific functions is an ongoing and constant management challenge for museums. Given the expanded expectations for and assumptions about what museums do and why and how they do it, dealing with space issues will not disappear, certainly not in the near future. I have helped lead several museum expansion, renovation, and rearrangement projects. I always find them exciting and rewarding, but they regularly remind me of how little most people understand space usage in museums. Architects are especially out to lunch in this regard.

There are two ways of analyzing how museums need and manage space. The subject can be approached from the object's point of view or the visitor's. Either way can lead you to a common destination. If starting from an object's perspective, how does it enter a museum, how is it cared for, and how is it made available to the public are the first considerations. If starting from the visitor's perspective, public spaces are the first priority. Both approaches tend to end in the same place: at the object on exhibition.

When considering the management of space in museums, I am talking about how spaces are defined as well as how they are used. The list of defined spaces was once shorter. Essentially there were collection storage areas, exhibit galleries, and offices. Various ancillary rooms are now seen in floor plans for new museums and these include classrooms, an auditorium, a café or restaurant, a library, and a gift shop. Since the evolution of the museum as we know it now, the number of space definitions and allocations has grown radically. An excellent recent example of this can be seen in the new "support" building now meeting a range of functions at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston (Figure 2).

While the founder's original vision for the museum caused the creation of its Venetian palazzo on the fens in the city's Back Bay area, the charming structure did not include what we now customarily expect of museums. The new freestanding building designed by Renzo Piano is located behind the original museum. It hosts a restaurant, visitor service reception area, sales shop, meeting rooms, galleries for changing exhibitions, offices, and a conservation department. It is also the primary entrance to the museum with the space necessary to accommodate groups of visitors. These functions were previously shoehorned into the old building.

Figure 2 Entrance to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, Massachusetts. *Source*: Photograph by Steven Miller.

After decisions have been made about what sort of space a museum needs, how much and where it will be, the management of its use ensues. Galleries need to be actually and regularly allocated for exhibits. Collection storage must hold collections only. (This was not the case with the Museum of the City of New York's party liquor supply, which was occasionally kept in the painting storeroom in the 1970s. Every so often a bottle of bourbon would walk. Who on earth would do such a thing?) Meeting spaces cannot simultaneously be a place for people to gather and a place to temporarily park collections in flux. Hallways especially attract unwise incursions. How often do we see them used for temporary storage of collections, office furniture, or packing crates? Why do classrooms receive this same treatment? And what about all the things that end up on loading docks? Museums abhor a vacuum. If there is empty space, any flat surface, something will fill it. Constant monitoring is required to avoid poaching and the inadvertent or purposeful encroaching of uses for spaces set aside for other allocations.

Office locations and arrangements are always amusing to observe at museums. Older, larger, and more complex buildings tend to have offices scattered in odd places. Museums with multiple buildings or properties, such as Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, Historic New England or Colonial

Williamsburg, Virginia, will have people's work spaces located all over the map, literally. From a management perspective this can mean a lot of legwork, or driving, to actually see and meet people where they conduct most of their business. Fortunately, today's easy and instant communication networks and systems have vastly improved the ability to know who is doing what and where and when they're doing it. I am uncertain about current organizational thoughts on offices and their locations, but I like what the Parrish Art Museum did in its new building in Water Mill, New York, on the eastern end of Long Island. This very elongated structure clustered all its offices together in an open floor plan at its center. Work stations and office spaces with glass doors and walls keep everything and everybody viewable. And the two exterior walls at either side of the area are floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the landscaped property.

Urban museums seem to be especially restricted by space needs. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has pretty much exhausted all major expansion possibilities at its current site and configuration. It isn't allowed to spread into Central Park or grow much taller. It has done a masterful job of rearranging existing spaces and will continue to do so, but there are only so many options. The cramped circumstances helped propel the idea of occupying the Whitney Museum of American Art a few blocks downtown when it moved to a new location in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, also for space reasons. The New Museum, in New York City, finally got its own building when it erected one on the Bowery after functioning in several temporary locations. I predict that museum growth based on space needs will not abate in the near future. This, of course, brings up the subject of architects and museum management.

I have led and managed two larger museum expansion and renovation projects and two smaller ones. I have studied and written about other museum buildings as they were created, renovated, or both. I love such undertakings but am convinced that for the most part architects do not understand what museums do, or why or how they do it. This becomes especially apparent when discussing space creation and use with them. Talk about a management challenge! Good architects listen. Poor ones don't. I've had to deal with both. One of the best examples of an architectural space failure is the East Wing of the National Gallery. It was designed by I.M. Pei. A simple look at the floor plan explains the problem. Galleries, which is what museums always claim they want, are stuck in corners and given less authority than the huge grand atrium consuming so much air. Make no mistake, there is a charm to the vast expanse, but I am offended at what the museum – and public – did not get.

If you want to do something in one part of a museum, you have to think about how that will affect other parts. Space usage has consequences and repercussions throughout an institution. Change the application of one room and another is altered. This is often most obvious when museums add wings, engage in substantial renovations, or relocate their main entrance. But, it can also result from smaller and even minor adjustments in how parts of a building are put to use. The Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ohio, offers a revealing example of what happens architecturally when the principal entrance is moved. The museum is a chain of connected buildings that includes two historic houses with their original entrances more or less intact and three other "main" entrances put in place for visitors as the institution grew over the years. In addition to its other many collections, the society therefore has a collection of entry halls and lobbies, which makes for peculiar gallery encounters as one visits.

The Western Reserve Historical Society is an almost exaggerated example of a museum that when first built met its space objectives but has gradually morphed into an odd and indecipherable architectural mélange. We see this in many older purpose-built museums. As museums grow (they rarely shrink) and alter their ways of operating, what might have once been a perfectly acceptable floor plan and architectural look becomes outdated. This is especially true when museum collections require different storage and exhibition conditions and public expectations demand more and different amenities.

Museum expansions offer easy illustrations of how museums struggle to manage new space needs while resolving how to use existing spaces. What do you do with restrooms and an old coat-check area when the entrance to a museum is now in a new wing far away from the original entrance that needed these spaces? What happens when a gallery originally designed for people to encounter first when they enter a museum is suddenly no longer front and center after the museum expands and creates another entrance elsewhere? Stairways can be especially peculiar spaces to deal with, as can hallways or other transitional architectural areas. We are familiar with the grand entry stairways found in old fashioned Beaux Arts style museums but again, what do we do with these when the front door moves? The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, grappled with a nice but perhaps costly solution when it built a new wing and entrance in 1981 designed by I.M. Pei and closed its Beaux Arts 1909 entrance on Huntington Avenue. Some years later the museum reopened that entrance, but that was at the cost of duplicating staff and sales areas.

In thinking about museum space I recall Joe Noble's periodic reference to a mythical location called "elsewhere" when he was director of the Museum of the City of New York. "Elsewhere" was where he told us to put things he wanted removed from a particular place. Museums constantly play a game of musical chairs in this regard. We never did find Joe's "elsewhere," but all museums understand the reference.

Every museum I have worked in has had certain spaces that were being used in ways that were not intended in the original design. At some point, or points, the space arrangements and allocations were logical, appropriate, and even heralded. New additions and alterations were similarly considered logical, appropriate, and heralded. Over time, space requirements change. There is no absolute museum design.

Ideas and Opportunities

Museums are the perfect targets for big ideas. Their public prominence combined with the people attracted to them and the subjects and objects they address cause a regular flow of suggestions from all quarters. The promoters of these recommendations are sure they are wonderful, need to be acted upon immediately, and will catapult a museum to great heights of recognition, enviability, and stature or will redress some terrible wrong the museum has caused or been party to. Guess again. The promulgation, acceptance, and implementation of ideas in museums require management savvy.

Half of the ideas presented to museums by whomever, whenever, or wherever are stupid. A quarter of the ideas may have some merit but are usually inapplicable or not of direct relevance to the museum's core mission, don't hold up under scrutiny, or are just not feasible at the time of suggestion. A quarter of the ideas suggested may be sound and worth investigating. However, the lion's share of this 25 percent cannot be realized because in sum they would require far more resources than any museum has. And, money is not the magic elixir that will make them happen. Based on my somewhat simplistic but experience-based percentages, I suggest that in an average museum year, out of 100 credible ideas 10 can be investigated and possibly 2 or 3 of any magnitude put in place at some point.

The management of ideas that ceaselessly swirl around in museums is vital. The process is ongoing. Staff should play key roles though trustees will be involved, especially when it comes to big ideas. These generally require significant resource allocations of time, money, staff, space, and so on. Many, many smaller ideas that come up can often be accomplished or done away with quickly. If an employee has an idea about a new way to rearrange her office, that may not require the boss's approval and can be done. But, if that same staff member has an idea about how to streamline background checks for prospective employees, that might call for the considerable involvement of "higher-ups."

So, who is responsible for managing ideas at museums? It depends on the idea and the museum. I tend to let staff manage ideas that pertain to their various immediate and daily spheres of involvement and responsibility. This approach must conform with and support job descriptions. Therefore, if an educator has an idea for a new teaching program, I am apt to support it if it falls within the mission parameters of the museum and can be done appropriately. If a registrar wants to rehouse some of the collections in storage I take a similar approach.

And so on. I do want to know about any ideas being put in place. That is a management requirement to be assured a job is being done well and to avoid unnecessary diversions or waste resulting from an idea being pursued poorly. Ideas of magnitude are those that involve most or all staff, shift a museum's focus or operations, or will have a measurable long-term impact. These must be managed by museum supervisors who have applicable leadership and ability roles.

Assessing an idea is an exercise in reality and conjecture. The more substantive a museum decision-maker's institutional, experiential, and intellectual knowledge is, the better the outcome will be when deciding upon an idea. People who have worked successfully in the museum field for a while usually have a good understanding, both intuitively and actually, about what can work and what is to be avoided. Naturally, such familiarity can also breed conservative reflexes that guard against the new, different, or untried. Those of us who are responsible for considering ideas and putting the significant ones into effect are better at it when we embrace the former persona rather than the latter.

I love ideas. More to the point, I love seeing ideas become reality. How does that happen? Beats me – and I've been facilitating them for a long time. Given the frequency with which ideas pop up in museums, there must be something about the creative aura surrounding these places that causes opinions to prosper.

Then there is the phenomenon of ideas constantly being offered from outside staff parameters. Trustees are especially prone to this. Certain people seem to think museum staff just sit around twiddling their thumbs awaiting instructions to do something. This is far from the reality. Yet, regardless of the source, encourage ideas and be more than willing to listen to proposals from all quarters. Most of the time what is proffered is irrelevant, but enough ideas come from expected or unexpected sources to make encouraging them worthwhile.

Once an idea is accepted, what takes place? If the idea has made it this far in the deliberative process, presumably calculating the possibility of success has been realistically determined. This requires thinking about resources, scheduling, mission-adherence, and so on. If after careful rumination and research an idea is thought achievable it is pursued and managed.

Equally important as knowing how to assess and achieve good ideas is the management skill to deflect and avoid bad ones. When a poor suggestion is being forced on a museum by influential people, this is difficult. Tact and finesse are just two diplomatic skills required. Rejecting an idea put forth by a trustee can be especially tough because they are all-knowing, all-seeing, brilliant, and never wrong.

Opportunities are similar to ideas when it comes to museum management awareness and implementation. Both require visionary judgment skills, experience, and intuitions. I have great faith in being opportunistic on the job. While most work in museums is self-generated and centers on planning institutional missions and staff involvements it is always worth being alert to possibilities that are generated outside premeditated assignments. Management must be cognizant of ways museums can take advantage of attractive situations that may arise out of the blue.

As with ideas, management must also know when to avoid becoming entangled with opportunities that are foolish. Examples of this can be found in unvetted museum collecting. I know a museum director with no art background of any sort who abruptly and unilaterally took in three alleged Salvador Dali prints one December when a donor needed to quickly create a tax deduction. The prints had been purchased on a cruise from a shipboard shop run by the Park West Gallery of Southfield, Minnesota. Dali is one of the most faked artists in the world. The donation should have raised eyebrows immediately as even the most cursory online perusal would have revealed exposés and lawsuits embroiling the gallery in this regard.

A more positive example of opportunistic thinking might be seen in the scramble that took place for museums to acquire NASA space shuttles when that program was being retired (Figure 3). I love acquisitions and this was exciting. Six large space vehicles found their way into competing museums that obviously hustled to get the goods. Managerially they were on the ball as they

Figure 3 NASA Space Shuttle Enterprise, a test vehicle that never flew beyond the earth's atmosphere, being delivered to the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in New York City, 2012. *Source*: NASA/Bill Ingalls; www.nasa.gov.

effectively and quickly put all their resources into chasing an elusive prize they knew would be mission appropriate and popular. I am not a fan of allocating precious resources to a fool's errand but I too would have done everything possible to acquire one of these signature space exploration craft. And, I would have been sorely disappointed if my institution failed to procure one, as some did. Assuming that every effort was made to construct and present a viable argument for receiving a shuttle, those denials presumably did not result from bad managerial decisions and oversight but geography (an attempt was made to place shuttles around the country) and the luck of the draw as various political considerations were weighed by the donors.

The role of money when it comes to ideas is perhaps not as obvious as it appears. On the surface it may seem that if the funds are not available an idea cannot be realized. Sometimes this is the case, and sometimes it is not. When managing ideas, financial realities are an essential consideration. Just because money is available to do something does not mean it should be done.

Also, never forget to manage to sustain good past ideas that have proven fruitful and should not be abandoned in the rush to do something new.

Schedules

Given the complexities and peculiarities of museums, scheduling is clearly a management priority. The interplay of exhibition development, public programming, maintenance activities, and meetings (of which museums have lots) calls for rigid discipline in setting a calendar. I'm not especially good at schedule communications and I have to make an extra effort to pay close attention. This can be embarrassing for someone in a position of authority. I must thank three bosses for correcting my lackadaisical approach to scheduling on the job. When I was a curatorial assistant at the Museum of the City of New York, the director, Joe Noble, cured me of the habit of being delinquent in getting information to him when he asked for it. He instructed me rarely but eventually he had to tell me point blank to improve my response time. Barry Baragwanath, the curator to whom I reported at the same museum, tolerated my morning arrival tardiness for about three or four months at a stretch. A normally placid and nonconfrontational man, he would become almost apoplectic in his quarterly complaints to me. I would improve but soon slide back. Eventually, as my responsibilities increased and I became less of a gad-about, my lateness ebbed. At the Maine State Museum, Paul Rivard never had trouble with my scheduling difficulties because he instructed me on being a realistic planner. Experience had taught him how to organize projects, prepare ahead, and get things done. It was from Paul that I learned there is never an excuse for a project not to be finished on time if you plan ahead enough, start early enough, recognize project realities, and build secret flexibility into projections. As my experience illustrates, it is wonderful when aspiring museum professionals have well-meaning friends in high management positions nurturing them.

If museum management is a craft, and a craft is both a science and an art, scheduling is the science of that craft. To be effective it must involve, to some degree or another, as many people as is logically possible, whether they like it or not. Scheduling cannot occur in a vacuum. Museums are holistic in their daily operations. What would happen if the museum exhibition staff engaged in an intricate installation at the same time at which a fire drill took place that would totally disrupt gallery access? Suppose school tours were to happen and the docents were unaware of both the fire drill and the gallery change-overs. What would happen then?

Major deliveries can be especially pernicious when it comes to scheduling. I once was expecting a delivery of 20 large custom-made storage cabinets for the print collection at the Museum of the City of New York. We were assured it would arrive on a particular morning and not at lunchtime when the museum's entire maintenance crew would be unavailable. As morning came and went, I ducked out of the building for a quick lunch. That was exactly when the delivery arrived. Only because my boss and I got along so well with the maintenance crew were they willing to respond to his request for help and forgo part of their union-mandated lunch hour to unload the 50-foot tractor trailer double parked on the side street in busy Manhattan. Needless to say, we slipped them all a tip and expressed our heartfelt appreciation. Had they not been so helpful the truck would have headed out of town with its contents unloaded. The next time I was expecting such a delivery I was working at the Maine State Museum in Augusta. The same kind of storage cabinets were coming from the same company in a similarly huge truck. As chance would have it, they were to arrive on a Sunday when only my boss and I were available. I talked to the truck driver at the company in Cleveland and told him to call me when he crossed the state line. That would give us two hours to prepare for his arrival and *we* would unload the truck. That is exactly what happened, but it was sheer luck that the driver was hanging around the company offices when I called. Scheduling requires monitoring but it also helps when you can communicate with the people actually involved in it.

How often have I heard people say something was not on the calendar or they didn't know such-and-such was happening or the time was changed for a meeting and no one told them? In my work world this does not happen very often, but that is because I am surrounded by well-organized people who take great pains to insist on clear and ongoing scheduling. I have had to compensate for my own lack of scheduling attentiveness by enlisting people who are not only good at scheduling but take great satisfaction in telling me what's going on and when. I should add that confident managers have no problem directing staff to keep bosses on track and on time.

Problems

I always chuckle when I hear the saying that a problem is an opportunity (or however the adage goes). Sometimes that is true but sometimes a problem is just a problem. Period. An employee who is constantly disgruntled, incompetent, causing workplace upheaval, and generally being an unmitigated ass is a problem. I will have an opportunity after I get rid of that person, but until then, he or she is a problem. A leaky roof is a problem. When I arrived as executive director of the Morris Museum in Morristown, New Jersey, in 2001 the 12 known and identifiable roof leaks located throughout the complex were problems. An unanticipated $12 million renovation and expansion project corrected them, but not because it was an opportunity.

From a management perspective, problems require fixing if possible. Good managers know how to recognize problems, decipher them, determine whether they can be fixed, and, if they can, figure out the ways.

Recognizing problems is a management responsibility. Not everyone will agree that a particular situation is a problem. I have found that it can take time to educate people about problems a museum faces that have either not been recognized or were ignored. Conversely, it takes time to convince people that something they might think is a problem really is not. Museum attendance is at the top of my list of these misperceptions. When I hear trustees complain that too few people are coming to a particular museum, I feel like asking how many they think should be visiting. I have never done this but it has long been a temptation. How can anyone decide what attendance number is optimum? Of course I want lots of visitors, but more importantly I want audiences to have meaningful experiences. Chasing the gate is a fool's errand that will always be a driving preoccupation with some trustees. I have yet to figure out how to manage this problem.

Resources

Managing resources is as essential for museums as it is for any human venture. The wise procurement, husbanding, and allocation of resources is critical in the short or long term. But, what is a resource? Money would be at the top of such a list, as would personnel, buildings, capabilities, communities, locations, and reputations. A key museum resource would be its collections. Recognizing and judiciously deploying resources is a central management talent. I have seen resources used creatively and to great result, but I have also seen them wasted, ignored, and lost.

Resource management has to be assigned and delegated appropriately. It would be foolish to put me in charge of doing museum accounting but entirely suitable to have me lead an exhibition program. A museum with a great collection of fossils should not hide them in favor of showing a poor collection of inconsequential dead toads. Certain museum buildings are extraordinary resources. The most obvious is the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. While that great art museum hosts terrific exhibitions, the building itself is often the main draw. As a resource it is unparalleled.

Thinking about locations as important museum resources, one only has to look at the National Mall in Washington, DC. It is surrounded by museums and the land is coveted by every new museum seeking a presence in the nation's capital. Where once civilized societies established the agora, piazza, coliseum, stadium, or plaza as a free center for the citizenry's enjoyment, education, interaction, or entertainment, now such a space is often hosted by or for museums.

The museum's function as community resource has grown increasingly apparent. Though I am reluctant to recognize non-museum-savvy leaders as movers and shakers when it comes to promoting the value of museums, I am always appreciative of their support. While the outcome of the museum-as-economic-catalyst concept is dicey, there is no question that they can be beneficial resources for a place. Cooperstown, New York, is so synonymous with baseball that the town and Hall of Fame (which is a museum) are fused assets: just look at all the sports memorabilia stores lining the main street. Williamsburg, Virginia, hosts one of the oldest and preeminent outdoor multi-building museums, and it is clearly a community asset. Historic Deerfield, Inc. in Deerfield, Massachusetts, has long enjoyed an excellent reputation as a community resource. The quality of the buildings it preserves and the collections it holds reflects this fact. Similar realities play out in major collecting museums around the country. Those in positions of management authority at museums must understand and accept popular notions of museums-as-economic-engines and deal accordingly.

Reputations

Because a museum's reputation is its most important asset, what people think of your institution must be a constant management concern. Museums enjoy a very high level of trust and admiration. Studies consistently rate them far above most other civic institutions. Organized religions, the military, schools, or the Internal Revenue Service would love to be as respected at museums.

Reputation management is usually the stuff of marketing firms, corporations with large advertising budgets, or theatrical agents. For museums, reputation management rests on doing what they have done so well for so long without interruption or suspicion. Managing a museum's reputation rests with all staff, but those in administrative positions must be especially mindful of reinforcing this duty, even to the point of enforcing it.

Museum reputations rest on several shared presumptive notions. They are places people can believe in. They do good work for the general populace.

They are committed to sustaining their value for the long term. They purport to be accountable, open, and transparent. The public is comfortable with these perceptions. Unless some catastrophic cultural shift occurs in the near future or museums totally change the why and how of doing things, I think the future will continue to think well of museums.

I want to caution those of us in the museum field (oh how I hate the word "industry") not to become complacent about the positive continuity of our shared organizational reputations. We must be constantly vigilant regarding the veracity of our collections; the importance and impact of our scholarship; the meaning of our exhibits; the integrity of those in positions of responsibility (staff and volunteers); the appreciation for our programs; the role we play in the community (however we define it); and our appearance, be it in cyberspace or real space.

Museum reputations are at stake these days in controversies around the ownership of collections, especially things that landed in museums in possibly illicit ways. Many nations that were once European colonies or places with abundant antiquities coveted by museums are clamoring to have things returned they claim were stolen or taken without appropriate permission. The debate has caused some museums to simply acquiesce when approached by a claimant. Others are less accommodating.

Staffing and personnel issues can bite museums in the reputational behind, though I can think of few examples that had a long-term deleterious effect for an institution. Usually the bad news is aired, discussed, and if not forgotten, shrugged off, especially by the general public. Within the museum profession itself, little of adverse consequence happens. People are always looking for work and thus have no problem following in the footsteps of failed employees or working for a museum with a bad reputation in this regard. What remains is usually some juicy gossip we all remember and take great glee in relating to colleagues. This is yet another instance of museums having a life of their own that transcends specificity and eschews accountability.

Understanding and knowing how to work with (manipulate?) the media is essential when managing a museum's reputation. I always want whatever museum I am working in to be seen as a place of positive news. Certainly there will be adversities, but for the most part the upbeat far outweighs the negative. New exhibitions, interesting acquisitions, recent hires and promotions, gala events, renovation or building projects, awards, visiting dignitaries, and education programs all come to mind as nice things for media attention and public interest. On the very rare occasions when something unpleasant must be dealt with, managing how that is done is absolutely essential, and it should come from the top of a museum staffing organization. I am always reluctant to let trustees handle the media regardless of the nature of the news being disseminated or responded to. Managing the "voice" of an institution is critical to how it is perceived. And that management must include adherence to the truth. Lying or deceiving or concealing things from an inquiring media backfires.

Finally, when it comes to managing a museum's reputation I must caution against certain phrases that people of stature spout when approaching a museum for something. At the top of my list is "it will be good for the museum." When you hear this grab your wallet, circle the wagons, duck and cover, lower the portcullis, and pull up the drawbridge. Most people who say such things want to take advantage of a museum. They are users not givers.

Change

"No one likes change," the old adage goes. How many times have I heard this from people in museums who have no idea what they are talking about? Trustees are especially prone to boldly declaring this mindless observation when they have decided some sort of change to be necessary and the results are highly criticized. Sadly it is expressed in a haughty, condescending manner. I think the saying should be rephrased along the lines of "No one likes dumb change or change that is better for others than it is for them." If I win a significant amount of money in a lottery, I will like that change. If a bozo of a boss leaves, I will like that change. And, if a worthless politician is voted out office I will like that change.

Change is a fact of museum life, and managing it is of immense importance. I am fond of saying museums are supposed to change but stay the same. The contradiction is apparent whenever a beloved item on exhibition is moved or a popular program halted or a cherished building severely altered. On the other hand, if a museum does nothing and simply maintains its existing exhibitions, clings vapidly to meager programming, or subsists with an outdated and inadequate building it is, rightly, accused of being insular, moribund, and disengaged. Fortunately museums tend to be awash with change, but it is sometimes incremental and hidden. Every so often it is quite overt and for the most part, when logical, it is generally accepted and applauded. Management is critical to the cause, handling, and success of change.

I believe in evolutionary rather than revolutionary change in a museum. From a management perspective the results are more long-lasting and substantive. There are exceptions, and they usually reflect institutions in terrible condition or ready to grow radically and immediately. Because museums are collaborative ventures, it is hard for one or two persons to cause quick and substantial change unless they have a lot of money and museum power. Usually the most effectual change in a museum is a result of inclusive management that engages influential people who in turn engage others. The more people invited to participate in or at least agree with museum change, the better. How do managers manage to do this without having too many cooks spoiling the end product?

It is critical to know about the "players" at a museum. Who has influence, knowledge, and respect? Who can get things done? Who knows the museum well?

Who are positive influences? Who are potential troublemakers? Controlling or navigating these personalities and forces from concept to conclusion is a managerial necessity.

When it comes to understanding board "players" and managing them … good luck. A successful example I like to cite from my own experience relates to a collection which I once acquired for a museum. When I was alerted to the possible availability of this collection by an acquaintance, we immediately went to see it. I took our most difficult board member and another whom the difficult one admired. I figured if the good cop thought the collection worth pursuing than the bad cop would agree. That is exactly what happened, and from then on it was smooth sailing. The gift of the collection included a substantial amount for a permanent exhibition and endowment. I should add that on my next trip to see the collection I took our most powerful trustee along with the one member of our board to whom the others listened when discussing collections. Both thought the collection worth pursuing. My key "players" were on board and happy to promote the acquisition.

In a less successful management experience, I presented a plan to upgrade the care, exhibition, and content of a very large collection at a museum I directed. The contents occupied two big galleries on two floors. As I began my presentation to the thirty-strong advisory committee for that collection, I discussed my plans on flip charts. One by one the participants started picking apart my presentation. They did not do this in an accusatory manner but in a know-it-all way that caused them to take over the conversation and left me standing on the sidelines. Predictably the chair of the committee did nothing to come to support me as these were all his business, social, and philanthropy buddies. My plan never went further than the flip charts. I was not denigrated, pilloried, or ridiculed, just ignored. The whole thing taught me a lesson. I had prepared all sorts of cost figures, and it was these that got the lion's share of attention. Dealing with businessmen means if you say 2, they can say 8, or 7, or 1. Numbers cause ruminations. I have never given such a presentation since, and I have kept the selling of certain ideas to narrative documents and yammering by others.

When it comes to management, we have to start with our personal need to be managerially in control of ourselves, not to mention in our relationships within and without an organization such as a museum. Therefore, regardless of one's job, the first management requirement is self-management. This is my most important challenge. Sometimes I succeed and sometimes I don't.

After the "self," management branches out to ways we can productively, proactively, and protectively work in a rewarding, collaborative, timely, and meaningful way with others in various professional configurations, be they people to whom we report or those who report to us. These include volunteers, consultants, trustees, contractors, colleagues, and my favorite – the general public. For some of us, especially in museums, this is a daily challenge, especially if you like to daydream, are easily distracted, have little respect for bad or stupid bosses (not to mention trustees), are easily irritated by picayune niggling workplace requirements, want to be all things to all people, or have multiple interests. Add an overabundant schedule and pressing demands for one's time, talent, and presence and it's a wonder anything is accomplished in museums. To make matters worse, they are by nature distracting environments full of fascinating things. All sorts of people end up in them, some terrific and some not so terrific. The daily minutiae of a job can devour a day. In addition we have interruptive phone calls, impromptu meetings, unplanned encounters, and the omnipresent information technology that absorbs our regular and immediate attention. These things are constant workplace companions that suck the life out of disciplined progress. How often do I hear staff say they didn't have time to do such-and-such, or they had to stop something to do something else, or so-and-so needed their attention, or they were waiting for someone to get back to them, or there was an encounter with technology failure? The old excuses like my cat died, my car broke down, I got stuck in an elevator, or my alarm clock didn't go off have been added to exponentially. You have to make an appointment with yourself to get things done.

I like the practice of making a management appointment with myself to do certain tasks, meet specific project goals, or daydream. There is no difference between blocking out time on your calendar for a self-meeting or making an appointment for a meeting with other people. It is also beneficial to know when you feel particularly productive in your daily biorhythms. For instance, early in the morning or at the end of a typical workday are often excellent times for me to write creatively. Usually other people are not around or apt to call. I can ignore e-mail; I've handled most of the "assignments of the day" or put them off.

Given the fact that museums have meager resources, it is tempting to assume that accomplishing many things is impossible. I beg to differ. Much is possible in museums, but making things happen beyond the status quo takes imagination, commitment, clarity of vision, support or power from the right influences, and a little luck. Being opportunistic also helps, but this takes a board of trustees and relevant staff who are willing to take chances, turn on a dime, and trust their, or your, instincts.

Museums tend to be very cautious operations. There are good reasons for this, but I submit that taking a chance now and then can be rewarding if that chance is not dumb and can be carefully managed to successful fruition.

Exhibitions

Exhibitions are the topic of Chapter 12 but discussion of them must be included here also as a subset of the administrative skills we need in the museum world. Exhibition management ranges from quite simple to very complex.

It can be as rudimentary as placing an object on display and sticking an informative label nearby or as complicated as putting the same object in an elaborate multimedia arrangement with mounds of ancillary materials and information often amplified with expensive audiovisual equipment all overpowered by a complex architectural setting. Deciding how simple or robust an exhibition is depends on several obvious practical factors including where it will be, how it will be presented, how much time there is to create the exhibit, who will do the work of making it happen, and what information is to be conveyed to viewers. These considerations in all their ramifications and forms involve management at several levels.

In its simplest form a museum exhibition can be easily put on by one person who selects an object, writes and makes a label, puts the object and label on view, and accepts whatever lighting is available. At the other extreme, very complex museum exhibitions can involve a cast of characters ranging from designers, educators, and lighting specialists to security personnel, conservators, and curators. Usually the more intricate the exhibition the more managing is required to accomplish it, especially when diverse disciplines are involved. This can be tricky if there is no balance and hierarchy of decision-making.

Many an exhibition ends up being far more costly and poorly staged if the wrong people are making the final decisions or decisions are made by committee. Give a designer full rein and you'll have a hard time seeing objects for their individual value as they can become lost in a visual bouillabaisse of graphics, chromatic overkill, exhibition props, and design conceits run amok. Give conservators the final authority and all the objects will be in black boxes hermetically sealed against any and all elements (visitors can look at pictures – who needs to see original objects?). Let scholars rule and the exhibit will put you to sleep instantaneously with walls of words, some of them totally incomprehensible to the average museum visitor. If security staff dominate, visitors will be scanned, finger-printed, and subject to background checks before being escorted in handcuffs through an exhibit while being kept so far away from the objects they will need binoculars to see them. Educators will fill the exhibit with didactic material while the objects on view will be lost in the hands-on interactives and the detritus of visitor takeaways for children of all ages. The final say on how an exhibition looks and works needs to rest with someone in authority who has both an intuitive and experiential understanding of the ways the subject under discussion can be explained in a gallery format. That person must have management ability to grasp and balance the reasonable demands of the aforementioned museum specialties to avoid the obviously exaggerated outcomes I describe.

Whether you are managing exhibitions or anything else in museums, being familiar with the subject you have to manage is helpful. If you are not a specialist in the topic of the exhibition, be willing to learn quickly. Recognize you will have to rely on others. Know as much about your resources as possible. Have, or seek, someone with experience in the area you are managing. Understand your existing and available resources and capacities and work with them to the best of your own and the institution's abilities. Recognize what is being done, why, and how.

Budgets

Of all the things that need to be managed in a museum, budgets are perhaps the most critical. Annual institutional budgets are commented on in Chapter 10, but there are several other budgets to be mindful of. These include department or office budgets, proposed and actual project budgets, and budgets for which funders require reports. Setting budgets is one aspect of management, but monitoring them is also an essential exercise. Hardly a day goes by as a museum director during which I am not involved managerially in some aspect of budget implementation, assessment, approval, and questioning, even if only regarding a few checks to pay vendors. Presumably such costs are in the annual operating budget as fashioned by staff and agreed upon by the board of trustees. Trust but verify.

The sorts of "sub-budgets" noted above emerge in several ways. They are set by heads of museum departments. Curators write them during exhibition planning. All sorts of program development require budgets. Building and construction projects are especially complex financial undertakings. Who determines these calculations depends on who assumes or is assigned the task. Some people are excellent at budgeting while others fall short. I usually like to have more than one person draft, contribute to, or review a financial plan before I approve it. It is important that trustees be involved in this process in some meaningful way but especially regarding approval outcomes.

As critical as writing a budget is, monitoring it once it is in place is absolutely essential. This responsibility is paramount for any endeavor, but I believe it is especially incumbent upon a nonprofit entity. Being a public service organization such as a museum requires strict fiscal care. There is never enough money for even the smallest things museums want to do. Waste and loss is to be avoided at all costs. My experience has shown that museums can be good stewards of budgets, and frankly I think they stretch their dollars pretty far. But care is required to keep from running off the rails, especially during capital projects. Anyone who has managed a building expansion or renovation program knows how easy it might be to exceed cost allowances. This is especially true when renovations encounter unexpected existing conditions. Depending on the gravity of these, budgets can be skewed. Surprises can happen in other areas of museum spending such as exhibitions or program development. It is always helpful to include a fiscal contingency in a budget. Sometimes this has to be hidden or disguised to avoid loss or removal by unknowing or meddlesome participants. The more budgeting prowess one has the better one is at creating these protective cushions.

I believe in a strict budgeting process. It starts with staff generating a projected annual budget which is then reviewed internally by supervisors and the director. This can result in a lot of number crunching and most likely reductions in funding requests, desires, or expectations. After a draft budget is written it is submitted to designated trustees, usually the board's finance committee. This tends to further reduce staff wishes. Eventually a draft budget is given to the executive committee of the board for review and approval then to the full board for final acceptance. The process can take a long time, but that depends on who's in charge of it. I hate not having an approved budget in place when starting a fiscal year. Once set, a budget must be strictly adhered to. Monthly financial reports are critical, and constant monitoring of income and expenditures cannot be left to chance. Obviously there will be variations along the way but good management will understand and be able to address these as well as keep things on track.

Potential

Museums are full of potential. They hold the potential to have bigger and better collections. They should strive to offer improved exhibitions. There is the potential to raise the level of educational content and programming. Increasing funding is always a potential. And, the potential to expand physical facilities is constant.

Managing a museum's potential starts with recognizing there is such a thing. I have never encountered a museum that did not have enormous potential to do more than it was doing. This is not to suggest that museums constantly fail in this regard. On the contrary, the very fact of their continued existence belies failure. Accepting the idea of potential must go hand in hand with rejecting debilitating feelings of inadequacy for a museum. Just because there are opportunities for potential does not mean an institution has been ineffective. I believe potentials are built upon success and established capabilities.

Once a museum defines its potential the next steps require considering what action is possible, or can at least be reasonably considered. Refining potentials must unfold through a thoughtful process of deliberation about what can and should actually be done. Talk is cheap, action is dear. Museums, as with most places, are full of jabberers, especially at the trustee level. I thoroughly encourage ideas, suggestions, critiques, observations, and inquiries about a museum by all involved. But, I hate listening to balderdash. This is verbal noise that ignores what a museum does, is about, and can or should actually accomplish. In considering an organization's potential, I like realism. And, I'm a dreamer! My goal is to keep the idea of a museum's potential vivid while never letting counterproductive talk become a way for people to avoid doing anything or causing a great malaise to scuttle progress.

Time, Briefly

> *There's real time and there's museum time, and they are not the same.*
>
> The author

Time is a curious notion, especially in the museum world, where, to a degree, the collections are principal timekeepers. These things are markers of years, decades, centuries, and eons. Their physical presence offers a jumbled and disconnected sense of past and present human and natural passages. Through collections, museums have declared, and are thus assigned, the task of making sense of our universe over time and perhaps in a timeline manner, not to mention in both a timely and timeless way. How successfully museums meet this assignment depends on many factors. One factor is real time as it unfolds in the museum workplace.

The self-quotation with which I preface this section comes from years of learning how things happen in museums. It seems to apply to all, regardless of type. Time in the so-called real world is measured by the clock, in seconds, minutes, and hours. Time in the museum world is measured by calendars, committees, vacillating commitments, and funding. Comprehending the nature of museum time is absolutely crucial to successful management. What might be accomplished in a few weeks or months in other realms can take years in a museum. Even simple tasks might become bogged down in a convoluted decision-making process or falter because there is no decision-confirming process. The singular reality of time's impact on museum life must be understood when dealing with the other managerial topics discussed in this chapter. Be aware or beware.

Management by Walking Around

> *You can observe a lot by looking.*
>
> Yogi Berra, 2001

Quite a while ago I heard the term "management by walking around." It means spending time out of your office actually experiencing the place for which you have some managerial or leadership responsibility. I was doing this before

I knew it was a recognized and recommended management technique to be emulated and pursued on the job. It was introduced to me when I had a paid internship at a historic preservation organization in St. Augustine, Florida during a college midwinter field period in 1966. One of the supervisors I reported to took me on his "rounds" around town every morning. There were multiple buildings and projects to monitor and inspect.

Since I love museums, walking around them has never been a chore, and once staff understand I am not "checking up on them" (even though that is a natural response) they accept my periodic appearances, especially in places directors might otherwise not be seen, such as boiler rooms, basements, storage areas, or on the roof. I always learn things when I step outside my office, which I tend to do in the afternoon when my metabolism is lowest. But to be effective, management by walking around has to take place at other times of the day, and night too.

In addition to assessing operations, meeting staff, volunteers, and visitors in their accustomed "stations" alerts people to the fact that the director presumably cares about the museum. Soon those you encounter realize you care about them and the jobs they do. A few may use the opportunity to remind you just how good they are and how much work they are doing or what's wrong with things or otherwise complain about people and their performance. This sort of boasting or whining is to be expected in any workplace. I have little tolerance for it in a museum. That being said, I listen attentively, keep my opinions to myself, make a note that I heard their commentary, thank them, appear thoughtful, and move along. Every once in a while a self-appointed advisor has a point and that too is part of being a good manager. You may not like an employee or have little admiration for him or her or think a job performance is of negligible value, but helpful and even wise observations can come from all quarters.

Management by walking around requires access to every part of a museum, and staff must understand "their space" is not exactly "theirs." Presumably a boss is polite and respectful when entering someone else's "zone." For instance, as a director I would rarely go into a collection storage area without the presence and de facto permission of the curator or collection manager responsible for that part of the museum. Walking around a museum gives me time to chat with staff in ways that meetings or other situations do not. And vice versa.

Management by walking around should lead to assessing the effectiveness of a museum from the public's perspective. I love to watch museum visitors, and I try to put myself in their shoes. Sometimes I wonder how many museum professionals have the slightest concern for the public. Oh sure, we voice our devotion to visitors and cite statistics, projects, programs, plans, and torrents of euphemisms designed to make others think we are totally and exclusively devoted to the intellectual, emotional, psychological, and entertainment well-being of those we purport to serve. But, do we really? When I look around, I see us hidden away in offices, labs, meetings, workshops, and conferences, occasionally mouthing an allegiance to audiences of all kinds but really enjoying a separation that shields us from our public. I see this on the job when no staff person picks up a piece of trash or answers a phone or responds to a request (online or off) for information, or knows anything about the exhibits on view.

In defense of museum staff, I believe it is the nature of our jobs that keeps us hidden away or narrowly focused. There is a lot of work to be done, ultimately on behalf of the public, and little time and few resources are available. Management must take a hand – not only at reminding us of why we work in museums and for whom but also by leading us to act on that notion.

How can we help staff pay more attention to visitors and others? First I would recommend people work at a museum admission desk for a day. I would also recommend they do this on weekends. It is important for managers to test museum systems periodically. Call from outside and learn how the telephone system actually works. Write a letter to an employee and see if there is a response. Do the same with e-mails. Spend time analyzing every written and graphic design piece of information a museum generates, especially when it is online. Observe how visitors are treated a half an hour before a museum closes. And, speaking of admission desks, monitor how much useless paraphernalia is piled up and around these places. Remember, the most valuable real estate in a museum is the surface of the admission desk. Everyone wants their brochure or announcement or some information to be on it. That is why I have designed them to be very narrow with little space for junk. It is a losing battle but I keep trying. The same minimal respect for visitors can be seen in the proliferation of garbage cans and other intrusions that end up in a museum's entrance. While I love the new Parrish Art Museum on Long Island in Water Mill, New York, I am perplexed at why the loading dock is the first thing one passes when driving onto the property (see Figure 4). These places are always a mess.

When a museum is a pleasant place for people to visit it is because of the staff, especially the frontline employees. I have always said that a museum can have a terrible collection and yet, if it is clean and the personnel warm and welcoming, receive high marks. Conversely, a museum can have a fabulous collection but, if it is messy, poorly lighted, and has cranky and unresponsive employees, achieve only low marks. Years ago this sort of differentiation used to describe the visitor-service chasm evident between museums in Europe and the United States. Both sides of the Atlantic have since upped their game. May that continue.

Figure 4 Driveway entrance to the Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York.
Source: Photograph by Steven Miller.

Class Questions

1 You are the director of a museum and become curious about an employee's academic credentials. The person has been with the institution for several years and is in an entry-level position. She is known not to have a post-graduate degree. However, the individual never refers to any time at college, even in passing or in an informal way. You become curious and take it upon yourself to contact the registrar's office of the institution she said she attended. You ask when she graduated and are told she did not, and in fact is ten credits short of doing so. You contact the previous director of your museum, who is familiar with the person and is astonished at the news. They had done exactly the same sort of sleuthing and made the same discovery but the employee promised to go back to school to graduate. That trip happened but not with the desired result. What do you do?

2 You are the director of a museum that is part of a large historical society in the Midwest. The society has great collections in many areas and mounts several exhibitions a year. These, as well as long-term (what were once called "permanent") exhibits, are designed by a curator, the registrar, or outside temporary consultants. For the upcoming budget year, you are told that your museum can hire one more person if desired and at a salary competitive for curators, registrars, educators, and the like in your area. You request an exhibit designer. Your supervisor askes "What's that?" How do you respond?

3 The history museum you work in is organizing an exhibition about a certain ethnic group. The museum hires someone who is part of the group to guest curate the show. As the project gets underway, several members identifying with the same group contest the consultant's credentials regarding her authority to speak with knowledge about the group. Until that point, the consultant has been doing the job for which she was hired and the museum has been completely satisfied. As a result of this controversy she is fired, though she did not participate in the debate about her. What sort of management issues does this situation suggest?

4 You are the new director of a museum. As you come to know the staff and trustees you learn an employee enjoys a close relationship with a trustee and his spouse. As a result of this, the employee was recently able to gain a substantial raise far above what other staff members have received. Clearly this personal rapport rankles with other staff. How do you deal with this?

5 How can supervisors accurately know and assess the quantity and quality of employees' work performances?

6 During the Second World War a group of young men were in a class in the US Army learning to be officers. Amongst them was the author's boss who recounted this management story to him: The instructor outlines a scenario about a military unit setting up a campsite. One of the tasks is to erect a flag pole packed with the equipment. The men are asked how they would do that. They discuss digging a hole to drop it into, holding it up with ropes, piling rocks at the base to keep it in place, and other possible options. After about 20 minutes the instructor tells them all their ideas are wrong. The answer is: the officer in charge of the assignment turns to his top enlisted man and says: "Sergeant erect the flagpole." From a management perspective, what was the point of this instruction? How can it be applied in museum work?

Reference

Berra, Yogi with Dave Kaplan (2001) *When You Come to a Fork in the Road, Take It!* MFJ Books.

6

Audience

A Matter of Definition

> *There are approximately 850 million visits each year to American museums, more than the attendance for all major league sporting events and theme parks.*
>
> American Alliance of Museums, 2015

The people we see in museum galleries, attending events, participating in programs, shopping, and so on, have several identities to those of us "in the biz." They are visitors, groups, users, guests, tourists, neighbors, customers, demographics, members, and the public. Depending on the context, these words are used specifically or interchangeably when discussing people who come to museums for whatever reasons, be they social, educational, vocational, intellectual, recreational, or some combination thereof. Yet, however we define them in group-think, these people are our audiences. I use the plural purposely because museums have more than one sort of audience.

Overarching definitions of museum audiences are temporary as different delineations always unfold when superficially analytical types "drill down" into the numbers or ponder attendance sheets or seek visitor metrics or surmise public preferences or whatever. This especially happens at the end of a fiscal year when administrators and trustees fuss over admission profiles. This is when attendance subgroups are studied, usually identified by a fee structure divided into adult, senior, family, children, military, group, member, student, and so on.

The plurality of museum audiences results from various factors including the subject of a museum, its size, location, and level of proficiency. Small museums that are about highly specialized, arcane subjects of interest to a narrow group of people, such as a stamp museum, might have fewer audiences than large encompassing encyclopedic museums operating with multimillion dollar budgets. This is a simplified suggestion proffered only to make a point, though for the most part it tends to be true. And, that is just fine. Two museums offer excellent illustrations: The Museum of Modern Art in New York City

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

(population 8 million) and the National Clock and Watch Museum in Columbia, Pennsylvania (population 10 000).

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) attracts the so-called general public in droves. By "general pubic" I mean people who may or may not be cognizant of modern art, however you define it. They come to the museum because it is famous and has art they want to see, should see, think they should see, or are told to see. For instance, as a result of its prominent location and reputation the museum clearly attracts tens of thousands of tourists who may visit only once. Because museum attendance is rarely a solitary activity, MoMA visitors who have little interest in art of any kind are brought there by others. There are also school, tour, and other groups for whom MoMA is on the list of must-see places. MoMA's restaurants and sales shops are regular destinations. Certain items in its permanent collection are popular, especially van Gogh's *Starry Night*. Temporary exhibitions often attract large crowds. Some people go to the museum simply to enjoy the outside sculpture garden. Within the realm of its general public, MoMA sees thousands of visitors whose special interests attract them to the museum. There are people enamored of a particular aspect of its collections and programs such as film, architecture, sculpture, design, photography, or prints. This audience will no doubt be made up of repeat users. Personally, I like to make repeat visits to see the cubist and constructivist paintings. Suffice to say, there are many reasons for people to be in the Museum of Modern Art. They comprise its audiences, plural.

The National Clock and Watch Museum is a small museum devoted to a fairly specific topic. It is neither located in a major population area nor easily reached by public transportation. It may not be awash with tens of thousands of visitors each year. These facts hardly diminish the museum's value, prominence, mission, or operative quality. It and the Museum of Modern Art simply have different missions and, consequently, audience dynamics.

A museum must constantly define, observe, and assess the nature of its audiences: Who is attending, where do they come from, why are they visiting, are there patterns of visitation (such as the seasonal fluctuations experienced by museums in popular vacation regions), how do they get to the museum, does weather have an impact? (Urban museums love rain; outdoor, "living history" museums, not so much.) We need to be on the lookout for changes in audiences.

How are audiences defined and assessed? There are many ways, but all require forms of direct engagements with visitors. Individual, face-to-face interactions with the public designed to elicit information about interests, patterns, and behaviors that prompted a museum visit are of immense value. These can take the form of impromptu informal conversations or structured and organized inquiries such as surveys conducted by staff or qualified consultants. Talking with frontline staff is *always* revealing when it comes to soliciting information about visitors. People at admissions desks, gallery guides, guards, and docents often have an excellent sense of a museum's public. I also recommend spending time in museum galleries "incognito," blending in with visitors to watch how they use a museum. Eavesdrop on conversations. We in the museum field may think we know what our museums are for and how they are enjoyed by visitors but our perceptions can be erratic and incomplete if not entirely off base. When it comes to understanding audiences my advice is to shut up, listen, and learn.

I constantly encourage my colleagues (and I include my students in this category) to put themselves in the shoes of the average museum visitor and look at what we are offering in the way of exhibitions, programs, scholarship, published and online materials, and so forth. This is a rewarding exercise but one rarely practiced. Those of us who work in museums are so enveloped in our own pursuits with their associated jargon, vocabulary, expectations, participants, emotional landscape, personal interests, and familiarities that it is difficult to break out and see things in a new, fresh, innocent, unbiased way.

I was indoctrinated about playing the role of the average museum visitor by Joe Noble when he was director of the Museum of the City of New York and I was a fledgling curator there. As he discussed an exhibition idea and we neared the end of a conversation, Joe would say to me, "When George and Martha leave the museum and George turns to Martha and says, 'So, what did you think of the exhibit?' what do you want Martha to say?" Joe had made training films in the army during the Second World War. He then went into documentary filmmaking before joining the Metropolitan Museum of Art as its vice president for administration. His military and commercial experience taught him to condense and synthesize how a subject is explained so it could be understood by the least educated or sophisticated observer (especially a soldier). This was excellent preparation for his later career, not to mention his kind tutelage of me. Since then I have tried to assign the same approach to everything I do in a museum, be it with exhibitions, programs, publications, presentations, grand schemes, you-name-it. If I can't explain what I want to do in some concise way, in what is now called an "elevator speech," I need to refine the definition of my plan.

In thinking about museum audiences we need to be mindful of those who claim some expertise in this area of study. There are professionals highly qualified and well trained to study audiences and compile their results in helpful and revealing reports. There are also those who have no idea what they are talking about. The worst of these know-it-all types all too often claim to come from within the museum field. When you hear this, do some research. In my experience they tend not to be what I call "object people" and thus fail to agree with my fundamental principle that museums still serve their purposes through collections. On the surface this may seem immaterial, but when these consultants submit reports a content vacuum is apparent. Boilerplate, pabulum, and platitudes abound. Fortunately the public, at least, knows what and who museums are for. If they do not, why are more people going to museums annually than to sporting events?

In spite of my presumptive stereotyping of those who pontificate about museum audiences, and who often take great glee in pointing out who museums are *not* serving, these conversations are welcome and long overdue. Given the realities of finance, mission, location and so on that most museums face, it is essential that they work hard to define and meet the needs of the people they serve or would like to serve. Though I believe the public understands intuitively and overtly what museums are about, we who work for them need to be ever mindful of our stewardship roles and responsibilities. Part of that duty requires appreciating those we serve. The most sophisticated museums recognize the importance and value of visitors not simply as sources of revenue but as resources who contribute intellectual, emotional, and social capital so critical to institutional meaning. Remember, word of mouth is a, if not *the*, contributing factor for museum attendance over the long term.

People usually visit museums in groups of two or more. It is a pursuit either agreed upon by a family, a couple, or a few friends or organized by a tour leader, as might be the case with a school, club, or travel agent. In comprehending audiences, museums need to take this reality into consideration. When monitoring visitors it is important to remember that there will be some who are there willingly while this is less true of others, thus surveys and other measurement outcomes may vary. I caution against becoming over anxious if certain visitors are not as enthusiastic about a museums as others are. Constantly worrying about what a museum is not doing, or doing wrong, while wailing over who is not visiting can be a self-defeating exercise wasting valuable resources that can be committed to more necessary and rewarding institutional endeavors with an obvious return on investment.

To my way of thinking, discussions of museum audiences must include discussions of a museum's community, or, to be consistent, communities. A museum's place in, and as part of, a community can be described in several ways but it is necessary to define a community. In preferring a plural application of the word I suggest that museums can have many communities, be they geographic, emotional, intellectual, or combinations thereof.

The Museum of the City of New York is located at Fifth Avenue and 103rd Street. Its geographical community is East Harlem. Its audiences, however, are rarely drawn from the low-income, physically immediate community, which resides in public housing projects and old tenements full of rent-controlled apartments. The vast majority of visitors are tourists and New Yorkers with some interest in aspects of the city's history. Given its visitation profile, the museum could legitimately define its community as being far beyond the neighborhood. Of course, New York City being the changing place that it is, what was once a dangerous local community is changing as gentrification takes place. Though the public housing-projects remain, apartments along Fifth Avenue are growing in value, new ones are being built, and the tenements are being renovated and higher rents charged. In time the museum may indeed become a local community asset enjoyed by those who live nearby. I should add that some years ago a director advocated, almost successfully (and wrongly in my opinion), moving the museum miles downtown in the hopes of shedding the reputation of a bad neighborhood (read community) for a more attractive and prominent setting behind City Hall.

Questions about how a museum can, might, should, or could define its community are suggested by a large encyclopedic institution such as the American Museum of Natural History on Manhattan's Central Park West. Certainly the museum serves its immediate geographic community through programs, activities, and events that attract residents and especially families, but it obviously also serves more expansive audiences, be they from the United States or abroad. Yet there are specific subject communities it attracts, such as people interested in astronomy, paleontology, ichthyology, anthropology, or geology. The museum thus has several if not many communities from which its audiences are drawn.

Other less grand and diversified museums serve fewer communities. The Rubin Museum of Art in New York City comes to mind. It focuses exclusively on the indigenous art of the Himalayan region. While the people living near the museum, which is on West 17th Street, certainly constitute a community, they may not use the museum very often if at all. (It seems to be a museological fact that those who live closest to a museum visit it the least.)

"*If people don't want to come out to the park, nobody's going to stop them*" (Berra 2001: 40; emphasis added).

To emphasize an earlier point, sometimes I think we in the museum field dwell too much on who is not coming to visit rather than on who is. This is one reason it is essential to have a good sense of core audiences. Frankly, there are people for whom museum-going is of no interest whatsoever. Similarly, I have no desire, inclination, hope, or wish to attend, ever, a professional football game, or an amateur one for that matter. I trust the management of my local professional football team is not sweating bullets worrying about why Steven Miller has not and will not set foot in its stadium. Perhaps if it becomes a museum …

Naturally I want everyone to visit museums, but given the severely limited resources museums have, chasing audiences who unquestionably select to be elsewhere is a waste of energy. Concentrate your resources on known or reasonably potential audiences, especially children. A few years ago I attended a lecture by Michael Kaiser when he was president of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC, and amongst the many helpful observations he made was one very wise response to a question posed by someone in attendance. He was asked what worried him most about the future of the arts. Though I was expecting to hear about low funding, political assaults, lack of professional staff, and so forth, he said he was concerned for arts leadership in 40 or 50 years' time when today's children would be adults who could support and champion symphonies, museums, theatres, dance companies, and the like.

He explained that when children are involved in the arts, in school especially, though they may grow out of active participation as other commitments kick in during their early adult life, at some point they will have discretionary time to volunteer and otherwise contribute to various societal causes, including the arts. Often they will have fond memories of playing in a school band, acting on a high school stage, taking a dance course in college, or going to museums as a kid. Those memories often translate into social activism as these adults serve on boards of trustees, volunteer, and otherwise support the arts to one degree or another. By eliminating arts programming we are reducing the future of the arts in this country. This is not the only reason museums need to be child-friendly but it is a stellar argument.

In assessing and responding to audiences, museums must work hard to retain them and not cause them to go elsewhere. Museums must also be mindful that audiences change. Programs that might have been hugely successful once can become stale and of little interest. I am a believer in trying new things three times before keeping or scuttling them. If something is gradually declining in effectiveness it can be put out of its misery. If it is ascending it can be pumped up.

Having warned against wasting time constantly chasing new audiences, I must note that I never want to ignore possibilities for bringing more people into a museum. Creative leaders are always on the lookout for relevant opportunities to increase attendance. Traditional art museums often do this when it comes to art made by living artists. In addition to being appropriate for those museums, leaders think such ventures will bring in younger visitors. In the past 30 years we have seen art museums expand collections of African or African American art to acknowledge the changing demographics of their communities. Once, such art was only found in natural history museums.

Class Questions

1 You are the director of a museum that has a Holiday Tree Festival every December. The trees are decorated for the season by employees at area corporations or individuals and donated to the museum. The festival is an annual fundraiser. The museum seeks underwriting and hosts a private reception for attendees to see the trees before the public can. Tickets are sold for the reception. The trees are displayed in the museum and people can buy them. Other seasonal decor is also offered, such as wreaths, garlands, Santa Clause figures, reindeer, and so on. One year the director receives two letters. They are from different men. One identifies himself as a Christian and complains that the Tree Festival should be called a Christmas Tree Festival not a Holiday Tree Festival. The other man identifies himself as Jewish and says the same thing. Both writers give their names and contact information. Do you respond and if so how?

2 A major military academy has a considerable museum. The official mission is to serve the "students" of the institution. The museum is open free to the public but has no programs, exhibitions change rarely, the collections catalog is not readily accessible in hard copy or via information technology, there are no publications, and no research is happening. The museum has professional staff qualified to be curators, collection managers, and directors. What do you think about catering only to one audience these days? Can you think of other museums that might be as singularly focused?

3 How much will audiences care if the director of a museum devoted to a particular demographic identity, be it of race, ethnicity, or gender, is a member of that demographic? For instance: Does the director of a museum devoted to Jewish heritage need to be Jewish? Does an African American museum require an African American to be its director? Must a military museum have a veteran in charge? Will the director of a museum about women have to be a woman?

4 How should museums define audience, and does it matter?

5 A museum is founded to celebrate the unique ethic identity of a particular urban neighborhood. It organizes exhibitions, presents education programs, is a center for characteristic holidays, and forms a collection reflecting the group it is about. Over time the demographic nature of the community changes radically. Fifty years after the museum's creation no residents remain who were the catalyst for the museum. When it comes to audience what does the museum do, if anything, in response to this radical change?

6 Should a museum know why people visit it, and if so how is this done in a meaningful way?

References

American Alliance of Museums (2015) *Museum Facts*. American Alliance of Museums. Available online at http://www.aam-us.org/about-museums/museum-facts (accessed 28 February 2017).

Berra, Yogi with Dave Kaplan (2001) *When You Come to a Fork in the Road, Take It!* MFJ Books.

7

Fundraising

Cash is king.

Money to run nonprofit organizations in the United States is obtained in a combination of ways. It is earned by supplying goods or services. There can be returns on investments. There may be grants from foundations and governments. And people make free-will donations. The vast majority of the money museums receive comes from individuals. Chasing financial resources is a never-ending job. Few museums are always financially secure. Certainly some are in more fiscally robust health than others, but even they look for additional funding whenever opportunities arise. These museums might include the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts; the Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; and, Boscobel Restoration, Inc. in Garrison, New York. Again, size is no indicator of income health. Huge museums can be struggling while small ones stress less about money.

Museums are expensive to operate and they have become more so over the years. This has happened for three reasons: rising public expectations for improved services, be they exhibitions, restaurants, rest rooms, rental facilities, or gift shops; ever-growing collections; and vastly escalating improvements in professional protocols, procedures, and requirements within the museum field itself.

There are probably as many myths about fundraising as there are about the origins of the universe. Unfortunately their lack of knowledge about fundraising doesn't inhibit some people who know little about it from speaking on the subject, or they are promulgated by those who wish to avoid the reality of what it takes to be successful.

To get money you have to ask for it. That activity has to be initiated by the right person in the right way for the right amount at the right time. There are many factors to take into consideration. The science of fundraising comprises research and information gathering. The art of it lies in judging if, when, and how to ask a person for money. In a society that measures everything in terms of money, it is particularly ironic that the very thought

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

of approaching individuals for financial contributions may be considered unseemly at best and insulting at worst.

Our discomfort with talking to people about money has caused several polite euphemisms to evolve for the practice of nonprofit fundraising. These include development, institutional advancement, external affairs, philanthropic giving, and donor relations. Whatever it is called, the office, person, or department responsible is probably the least understood of a museum's operations (or any nonprofit's for that matter). Few people grasp what is involved in gaining contributions of any size from any source. It is perhaps the most difficult work in the charity world as it is endless. Failure is a constant. The pressure to succeed is unrelenting. Being a skilled and experienced fundraiser (or even a mediocre one) almost guarantees employment possibilities for life. Sleepless nights too.

The misconceptions about fundraising stem from assumptions that one can simply call a rich person, arrange a lunch meeting, write a letter, or submit a grant application and magically the bucks will flow in. I am hardly exaggerating. To be clear, successful fundraising happens after a long process that requires great patience, well-directed research, intellectual and personal savvy, luck, connections, and emotional sensitivity, not to mention an understanding and acceptance of how and if potential donors might or might not actually be interested in and connected to your charity. The magnitude of this research and awareness must be especially true when seeking contributions from individuals. The lion's share of fundraising efforts should be focused in this direction. There is no quick and easy way to garner such donations. I like to say that 99 percent of fundraising involves research, information gathering and imparting, being responsive to actual and potential input and inquiries, chance, and positioning. These are all part of an overt and covert "cultivation process" necessary before the 1 percent of fundraising happens which is "making an ask." The more completely, honestly, and comprehensively the background work is done the better the possible results, though even the best cultivation process does not guarantee success.

I should mention the place of gossip in seeking major financial support. This was brought to my attention by an excellent fundraising consultant many years ago. He explained the very obvious impact changes in people's lives can have on their monetary status. Divorces, inheritances, deaths, new jobs, upwardly mobile marriages, the sale of a company, and so on can alter, positively or negatively, someone's net worth. It is important to be on the alert for these adjustments and plan and act accordingly when cultivating prospects. In personal matters sometimes having the "inside track" puts you at a distinct advantage. With more public changes in people's circumstances, being mindful of how to react and proceed is wise. Knowledge of some windfall should not immediately prompt a quick approach to a prospect for a big donation. Be subtle and sensitive. Timing is everything.

Luck, chance, and good fortune do play roles in fundraising, and there are occasional stories of money coming to museums that was totally unanticipated.

This certainly happens with some bequests. On several occasions I have been taken aback by a notice from a lawyer's office that a financial contribution was on its way because someone who had just died had the museum in his or her will. Once in a while I knew the deceased but sometimes I did not. These are exceptions when it comes to fundraising, but planned giving, which is the polite term for getting your organization into people's wills, should be on every museum's fundraising agenda.

The nature of individual giving can be as complex and convoluted as the nature of people. Simply keeping one's fingers crossed that contributions will be given because you are a good cause doing good deeds is foolish. Nonprofits have to hustle for bucks.

There are more than a few books about fundraising, and every one I've seen has value. However much we read, though, there is no magic or easy way to get money. And, as with most active pursuits in life, there is no substitute for savvy experience. Like it or not, ultimately *people have to ask people* for contributions and *trustees must play a leading role* in this pursuit. As a museum employee I can request money from a person of means, but I will get less, if anything, than a trustee asking that same person. I am asking for my salary. A trustee is asking for a worthy cause in which he or she has no financial interest.

In the museum workplace there can be a constant, sometimes subtle sometimes not-so-subtle, game of deflection when it comes to fundraising. Who is supposed to ask for money? There is a strangulation triangle as trustees expect directors to raise the lion's share of needed money and directors expect trustees to do so and both want development professionals to bring in the cash. This is a foolish game of responsibility avoidance caused by circular finger pointing that excuses everyone involved from seriously engaging in getting money.

An individual is usually motivated to give to a museum for any one or more of several reasons, but basic motivations stem from an interest in something a museum does, good feelings about it generally, or a long-term association with a particular institution and community. Over the years, the nonprofit sector in the United States has invented various options for giving to which people can respond. In museums these include different levels of support and the opportunity for membership. Special events are popular. Museums often have designated projects, departments, or programs that certain individuals may want to assist financially. And, there are always building programs underway or contemplated. Indeed, museums are becoming as bad as universities and hospitals in this regard.

The majority of individual contributions to museums will be obtained at a grassroots level with income being received for membership, annual appeals, and special events. These have the most participants but not the highest financial return. Large donations are brought in through sophisticated connectivity resulting from extensive planning, study, and a willingness to actually "make a large ask" of a prospective donor. Such contributions are almost always for targeted projects and purposes that the donor is actually interested in underwriting. I say "actually" because all too often museums think such-and-such a project is so compelling that a person of means should automatically be delighted to support it generously. Nothing could be further from reality.

On the positive side, when museums do their homework and cultivate associations productively, fundraising will eventually fall into place as hoped for. It is a constant job and one that must be embraced with enthusiasm or discouragement will set in. Moreover, there are times when museums are approached by people of means who want to give to or create a particular project, program, or operation. Such inquiries need to be treated with delicacy. Most offers are usually welcome and cause great joy, especially if they are for things a museum wants or has been struggling to achieve.

So much museum good happens through major gifts. We see this in new buildings, collection donations, education initiatives, and the underwriting of positions, to name a few examples. For the most part these gifts are graciously received, are implemented as the donor wishes, and the results are appropriately beneficial. Well-meaning offers of significance need to be managed. The late Joan Mondale, wife of US vice president Walter Mondale and a major supporter of the arts in the United States, once noted that "wealthy men without good taste have to be handled carefully" (Gates 2014). It is critical to know that not everything someone wants to pay for is worth it. I have seen museums stuck with collections of minimal or no relevance because a donor forced their acceptance. There are examples of burdensome new buildings, expansion, and institutional relocations caused by wealthy donors. Declining or diverting gifts requires aplomb and grace. Honesty is important too.

People of substantial means have a lot of charitable options when it comes to giving away their wealth. There is tremendous competition for discretionary payments and getting money out of the rich is a fierce race. I learned at a development workshop I attended once that the larger the contribution a person makes the less it is based on logic and the more it is based on emotion. Given the defensive mechanisms most wealthy people have to protect their money, one would think just the opposite is true, but I have found this rule of thumb to be the case.

In my opinion, the cultivation of potential donors starts when a person first hears about a museum. This introduction can happen in many ways. Museums are fairly prominent in their social profile, public posture, and physical presence. They do a lot of things that can be in the media and touch people who are, or hang out with, the rich. The challenge is moving from notoriety to knowledge insofar as the wealthy are concerned. Perhaps the most obvious indication of how this is done on a powerful if sometimes superficial level plays out in high-profile special events. These are the galas that clog the social calendars of those who seek to see and be seen by and with desired kindred spirits. They are always fundraisers, and museums are masters of them. From Des Moines to Denver, Manhattan to Minneapolis, Saratoga to San Francisco, few museums eschew this way of garnering attention, and, hopefully, money.

There are two schools of thought about gala events. Some people think they are not worth the work required to make them happen. Others disagree. I tend to fall in the second category but understand the first opinion. If staff salaries were factored into expenses for events, the actual net might be shockingly low, or even absent. However, I think the notoriety and buzz these gatherings create can be beneficial. Of course, they must be well run too.

Galas hope to raise or sustain museum profiles by attracting people who are donors already or might be lead in that direction. If the media covers them, there can be a sense that people of means and importance are associated with a particular museum and therefore it has value and deserves to be considered for support. Guests who attend these events, at the invitation of others, can be newcomers to a museum and possibly developed into supporters later on. For some organizations galas are important contributors to the bottom line, for others not so much.

The usual way in which museums publicize themselves and establish an image in the general perception is through exhibitions. These remain the most obvious and regular single communication device. It is one reason they have become so central to a museum's public relations priorities. A consistent menu of dull exhibitions can be the kiss of death for a curator or director. Museum boards like bling these days, but understand it must be disguised as being in the best interests of a worthy cause.

Asking for money must not be feared by museum directors and trustees. It can be done in ways that are logical, understandable, and polite. I like raising money but I need to be prepared and positioned before doing it, and I need a partner or partners who will participate in a well-engineered approach. Several fundraising books and courses have practice scenarios for how to meet with potential donors, especially those you hope will make major contributions. These exercises are also done by consultants. They are worth doing. An important part of the advice is how to handle negative responses. People have many ways of saying no, especially when it comes to giving away money. In my experience, if a trustee is willing to listen, providing training about how to ask individuals for money is time well spent. If a trustee is not willing to listen, it is time wasted.

Campaigns

Realistic museum campaigns for capital improvements such as new buildings, expansions, and renovations are exciting. When they make sense for an institution, are lead with verve and commitment, and have a satisfactory outcome, the wisdom of them is immediately apparent and the long-term positive impact proves the value of the effort over time. When well-structured they can be quite exhilarating and the results enormously rewarding. When the opposite happens the opposite happens. Two capital campaigns I designed and helped lead were for the Bennington Museum, Bennington, Vermont, and the Morris Museum, Morristown, New Jersey. Though they were initiated for different reasons, the outcomes were similar. The museums needed to renovate and expand. Accordingly, each project was planned to enable the museum to serve the public better, enhance earned-income opportunities, improve collection storage, and fix long-deferred destructive maintenance problems. While the overall scope of the projects differed in size, the outcome was the same and all goals were achieved. The Bennington project raised about $2.6 million, exceeding the target by about $600 000. The Morris Museum project secured $10 million. The major difference between the two projects centered on the source of funding. For the Bennington project, money came completely from individuals and was all raised by the conclusion of the work. The Morris Museum project was largely paid for by the board of trustees borrowing $10 million. I had received a cash gift of $14 million with a collection donated to the museum, but that could only be used for the collection care, exhibition, and an endowment. It could not be used for a raft of other architectural changes the board decided to do at the time. Based on my experience and stories about other museums that have borrowed large sums of money to pay for capital programs, I prefer raising money from foundations, governments, and individuals – though this can be nerve-wracking at times, especially when architecture and construction contracts have been signed and work is underway but not all the money has been committed.

In my experience capital campaigns focus a museum and become great rallying points for institutional promotion. If done well, everyone involved with the organization feels a certain enthusiasm and participation as a project is planned and comes to fruition. Those who have reservations or are opposed to it tend to leave or keep quiet. It is one of the few times when a singular goal galvanizes everyone and keeps them all on track. People in museums usually have varying agendas depending on their interests and needs. With a campaign in full swing, those agendas are at least temporarily set aside. This is not to say that all the needs of the staff and trustees are met satisfactorily during and because of a campaign, it is simply that a campaign requires total concentration.

Museums always want more space, an improved building, and enhanced material and mechanical capabilities. To decide on a major fundraising campaign to achieve these things is no small matter. Not only must trustees be unanimously supportive of the idea, they need to be willing to give and raise the money for it. As exciting as capital campaigns are for most museums, there are two warnings that must be heeded. The cost of running a renovated and larger museum will be more than the cost of running a smaller albeit less well-functioning museum, and capital changes should not be predicated on an assumption that upon completion earned income will escalate to cover additional operating costs or put a museum in a money-making position. The old adage "Build it and they will come" rarely accrues to the long-term financial benefit of museums. Regardless of size, philanthropic dollars will always be needed to help these institutions survive let alone prosper.

An essential ingredient that can be woefully absent in capital campaigns or placed at the end of the list of needs and is sometimes lost entirely is endowment. As someone who believes endowments are critical to a healthy museum, they must be a serious part of a capital campaign. I have been told over the years that endowment money is the second hardest money to get (the first being operating money). I think this depends on how it is sought and the need for it explained. It has always struck me that campaigns offer ideal opportunities to strengthen endowments as every donation can, if carefully cultivated, have an endowment component.

Earned Income

Since the end of the Second World War, museums have become more than willing to offer goods and services for a price and, it is to be hoped, a profit. To this end they have vastly increased their commercial capabilities. Initially such income primarily came from admission fees. A small gift shop might sell postcards, books, and a few tchotchkes related to whatever the museum was about. Today, regardless of size, potential revenue sources have expanded widely, though expectations often far exceed possibilities. What was once thought crass, never considered, or pursued in a small way might now be seen as an alluring income opportunity.

Few museums sidestep operating gift shops. Renting space for events is normal practice. Charging admission for special exhibitions is common. Selling photo reproductions of items in collections can be helpful, especially for museums that have large picture collections. Obviously a museum's ability to attempt these commercial activities will vary greatly and depend on resources. Gift shops are especially prone to misunderstandings as it is assumed they automatically make money and lots of it. Nothing could be further from the truth.

While earned income realized from admissions, gift shop sales, space rentals, program tickets, and so on, is an important and growing source of funds, museums are not simply profit centers and cannot operate as such. There are valid reasons museums are in a not-for-profit tax category. Most people know and understand this but some trustees don't and it is almost impossible to tell them otherwise. I hope no one reading this book has to suffer such governance ignorance with a board of trustees.

Grants

Grants are or should be valued components of any museum's financial resources. To be certain, for the most part, income so derived will be small overall and meagre on an annual basis. There are exceptions, such as annual grants museums customarily apply for and receive from certain state or local funding agencies and private foundations. To a degree, grants can almost be divided into two categories: those nominally expected with some regularity for operating costs or recurring projects and one-time, uncertain awards for special projects. When I was the executive director of the Morris Museum in Morristown, New Jersey, we would apply for and always receive an annual grant from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. The amount of such support might fluctuate, but if we were dutiful, stuck to our mission, and submitted our grant requests in a proper and timely manner, we were always successful.

Finding, applying for, and receiving grants for museums is a difficult and never-ending task. Registering on a foundation's radar and being a successful applicant are two different things, and both can be tough. Though it is time-consuming, researching grant sources is not quantum physics. Deciding whether it is worth the effort, given all the other methods of raising money, is important to weigh in the balance. Is there a better chance of getting support from individuals or foundations? Does one have greater potential to be lucrative one than the other? Depending on the source, will the financing be better applied to something a museum wants or needs and does that factor into deciding how to allocate development time? There are all sorts of agencies and entities that give grants. Some are obvious and easy to find and learn about. Others are more secretive and hidden.

There are several myths about obtaining grants. Because so many nonprofit organizations publicly list the sources of their income and those lists include places that award grants, we may think there is a lot of money out there and it is easy to secure. This perception is incorrect. There are very few places that give grants specifically for what museums want, and the competition for such money is fierce. This is true of private or public foundations as well as government agencies. With certain exceptions, grant money covers a small portion of any museum's budget year in and year out. Most museums cannot count on a bunch of foundations to generously support them with any regularity. To make matters more difficult, few grants are ever made for general operating costs. These are the most pressing needs of any nonprofit organization but especially of museums.

Researching, writing, and submitting grants takes an enormous amount of time. The return is not always worth the investment, but that does not absolve a museum from being attentive and alert to possibilities or even jiggering a plan to meet a foundation's criteria and grant application deadline.

I am not a fan of deviating from a museum's mission to chase money that may or may not be forthcoming, but there are often situations where, with a little adjusting, an existing or contemplated museum program can align with a foundation's guidelines and a museum's purpose.

Successfully applying for grants is a skill. It requires the ability to conduct foundation research, adhere to application requirements, and, write very well and in a compelling way for recipients who may know little about your organization. I cannot overemphasize knowing a foundation's statement of purpose and guidelines and adhering to them rigorously. Do not waste the time of museum or foundation staff members in submitting an application that does not abide by what a granting entity or agency says it gives money for. Once in a while this can be tolerated if a personal connection to, on, or with a private foundation is willing to support a nonprofit simply because of some individual association. But, be careful and understand when this is possible and when it is not.

There are tens of thousands of foundations, corporations, government agencies, and the like that award grants. A teeny, tiny fraction of those bodies offer potential financial possibilities for museums. Experienced museum leaders will know of the "usual suspects" to approach when it comes to seeking grants, but they will also have their fundraising antennae sensitized for new options. This can unfold as we look at competitors' media materials. The nonprofit sector does a lot of sharing when it comes to fundraising ideas, contacts, procedures, people, and so forth. Sometimes this sharing is overt and collegial and sometimes it is covert and secret. Who cares? If it's for a worthy cause, which is to say my cause, all's fair. This includes the poaching of donors, be they individuals or foundations. When it comes to sourcing money, it is always open season amongst charities. Diplomacy is a valued skill. The ability to exercise strategic stealth and confidentiality is an asset.

In addition to grants from private foundations, government agencies, and corporations there is money that can sometimes be obtained through political channels from elected officials. Such finance tends to come in the form of appropriations or budget allocations set aside or given for specific purposes. Obvious examples would be the annual operating funds museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of the City of New York, and the Brooklyn Museum receive from the City of New York through the Department of Cultural Affairs. Less apparent would be one-time allocations for special projects, particularly those that involve construction. I am not talking about nefarious payoffs or payouts that occur in some sleazy under-the-table manner at a roadside diner in Secaucus. The sort of funding I refer to is open and above-board, though perhaps hidden in a legislative bill designed for other purposes. Recognizing that special-interest appropriations have been more difficult to acquire on a federal level since around the mid-2000s especially, it remains advisable to develop and maintain good relationships with elected officials at all levels of government. This means making sure politicians are on snail-mail and e-mail lists, are invited to events, and receive regular visits and updates by and from museum officials. And, never be shy when it comes to asking for money for a reasonable reason.

Investments

Museum endowment money is usually held in an investment portfolio or portfolios. These can range from small to quite substantial, from singular to multiple. I am an adamant and firm fan of endowments as it is money that should help secure a museum over the long term, either for a portion of general operating costs or special projects, but more importantly it can help cushion or avoid disasters caused through no fault of an institution. (Catastrophic, self-destructive decisions on the part of a museum all too often lead to the evisceration of endowments.)

There are usually three sorts of endowments: restricted, temporarily restricted, and unrestricted. Trustees love the last kind. I prefer the first kind. Restricted endowments are funds given or designated for a specific use and/or for which the investment and income structure is specified. There are often requirements about how the money can be invested and what percentage return is allowed for museum use and how. Temporarily restricted endowments are usually funds set aside for a particular use at a particular time or times and, again, these may have investment requirements. Unrestricted investments are just that, money a museum holds free and clear and with which it can do pretty much as it wishes, whenever. These funds will typically be invested, managed, and used according to a formal museum-generated investment policy. Wise and good museum boards adhere to this while also making appropriate adjustment as they think best for the security of the funds and the benefit of the museum.

I have obtained endowment funds in all three categories – restricted, temporarily restricted, or unrestricted – and restricted donations are my favorite as it is harder for boards of trustees to tap into them to do with as they wish. On the other hand, investment and use restrictions make it more difficult to allocate endowments to general operating costs, unless the endowment is for that purpose or there is an agreement allowing a percentage of the income to be used for such applications. This was the case for the $14 million cash donation I secured for the Morris Museum that came along with the Murtogh D. Guinness collection of mechanical musical instruments and automata in the mid-2000s. My philosophy is, if a director, board, fundraiser, or whoever, can structure such donations regularly, in amplitude, and for the right reasons, in time a museum's annual budget will be easier to sustain. On the other hand, there is the danger of having a bunch of restricted accounts that are of little assistance paying the light bill or employee benefits.

Sometimes museum boards raid unrestricted funds to pay for foolish projects or cover losses or overly ambitious operating costs. Unfortunately unless laws have been broken there are few if any effective legal restrictions or watchdogs to guard against board failure when it comes to the wise handling of endowment funds. I do not mean malfeasance. I mean the poor and irresponsible uses of such money. Inevitably as this kind of scenario unravels, trustee conversations, recorded in meeting minutes, note that each assault is an exceptional action and the funds will be repaid, returned, replenished, strengthened (fill in the escapist word) when circumstances allow. Basically this behavior simply exonerates trustees and gets them off the personal financial hook for the moment.

When the Great Recession of 2008 hit, boards of trustees of museums with invested endowments were closely examining those vehicles for two reasons: to figure out what income would be available as portfolios precipitously shrank and to see if principal could be used to carry a museum through the difficult times. In the case of the museum I was directing at the time, when possible the board contacted people who had contributed to the restricted endowments to request that their restrictions be lifted. Often they were current or past trustees and readily agreed. That money is now gone and it will take a long time to replenish it. Whatever the reason for depleting endowments, building them up again is difficult. Institutional subtraction is often easier for trustees than institutional addition.

Regardless of how museum investments are designated they usually have to be managed, and this tends to fall under the oversight of a trustee committee or committees and an outside money manager. The trustee committees might include the executive committee, a finance committee, or a specially designated investment committee. Whoever is responsible for monitoring investments for a museum, and it should always be more than one trustee, they will ideally have some knowledge of this arena. In my experience these people are not hard to find, and they have always been of enormous value.

Selecting a company to manage a museum's endowments is not difficult but it requires expertise about the subject. I have been involved in several searches for managers, and the process and results were always beneficial. Though I have no background in finance, I thoroughly grasp the conversations and thinking that takes place when diligent and qualified trustees and managers are meeting to discuss investment policies and procedures. The results of these deliberations are always worthwhile but I know things can go awry. For example, some trustees may think they know more about investing than the money managers hired to do that very job. Sometimes this is the case and sometimes it is not. One thing to be watchful for is a museum employing a money management firm for which there is an obvious conflict of interest. This occurred at a museum I worked with that used a company owned and operated by a trustee. The board never acknowledged this conflicting arrangement.

Because the trustee in question was a generous donor, his business was reputable, and the returns healthy the subject was avoided.

Setting a sound conservative investment policy is critical to endowment security. Taking risks is unwise and will inevitably cause a downturn in a museum's portfolio. One of the ways to avoid this is to designate what the manager will invest in, determine a reasonable if small return, set investment percentages accordingly – then monitor regularly. Returns on investments are reflected in annual budgets. Conservative investing provides for more realistic budget projecting over the long term and presumably helps assure the health, growth, and survival of an institution's portfolio.

Class Questions

1 Museums often have annual fundraising events, usually referred to as galas. How should the profit from these be calculated? In other words, to determine net income, what direct costs must be known, should indirect costs also be considered, and, what would those be?

2 What are the pros and cons of having a membership program?

3 Cultivating prospective donors is an important part of fund raising. What are some of the things that cultivation entails?

4 When a board of trustees seeks a museum director, what are the pros and cons of it hiring a search firm or doing the search itself?

5 What are the pros and cons of setting an annual minimum cash donation requirement for a trustee to give to the museum on whose board he or she serves?

6 You are the director of a museum that is in the midst of a $15 million dollar renovation and expansion campaign. The chair and another member of the campaign committee, both museum trustees, have talked about cultivating a potential donor for a six-figure contribution. The potential donor is the wife of a former board member. When he was approached for a gift, he said his wife would be more financially capable of making a significant donation. The two trustees know the former trustee very well as a poker buddy but are not that familiar with his wife.

The museum trustees arrange an introduction to the former board member and his wife. You are then on your own to cultivate a prospect. You meet with the wife a couple of times and learn that she has a collection of family heirlooms consisting of high-style personal clothing items such as jewelry, elegant evening purses, cigarette cases, hat pins, cuff links, cigarette lighters, and so forth dating from *c.*1900 – *c.*1920. There are about 150 of these things. The lady wants to support your campaign at the magnitude of \$500 000, through \$50 000 payments for 10 years. She requires, however, that her collection of heirlooms be part of the gift and that they be displayed in their entirety in the museum at all times.

You have diplomatically explained to the lady the difficulty and undesirability of showing her collection as she would like. You have explained that the collection would be well-suited for the museum's costume collection, which is small but excellent and the bulk of which dates from the period of her collection. Pieces could be shown in temporary exhibitions in conjunction with dresses, coats, shoes, hats, and the like that the museum already owns and displays in a rotating fashion. The donor absolutely insists on her gift requirements and in fact walks through the museum with you to point out ways and places in which her collection might be exhibited.

The museum trustee campaign committee is increasingly anxious to secure the \$500 000 donation but no trustee has talked with the donor or her husband since the director was introduced to them. This scenario has been unfolding over six months.

What can or should the director do?

Reference

Gates, Anita (2014) Joan Mondale, Who Merged Politics With Art, Dies at 83 *The New York Times* (4 February) p. A14.

8

Collection Management

> *And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.*
>
> God, via King James Bible, Genesis 2: 19–20

Collection management is the current term describing the protocols, functions, and procedures by and with which museums organize and systematically deal with collections. It is often in this area where the nomenclature for collections is either assigned or confirmed. If Genesis is correct (who am I to argue?) Adam not only was the first human on earth but can be credited with having the first collection management assignment, being responsible for a living collection such as would be found in a zoo, arboretum, or botanical garden. (He also needed help with his tasks, a reality that continues to plague museums.) Given his experience, in today's museum world his skills would probably be best applied in a natural history museum.

Museum duties assumed under the category of collection management begin when a museum acquires or lends an item. They do not cease until the unlikely event that the item permanently leaves the museum, when only residual catalog records remain. Collections should not usually reside unattended in museums bereft of monitoring and documentation. They must be subject to paperwork that affirms their ownership and whereabouts inside or outside a museum (such as when they are on loan). A record of their physical condition should be generated and retained. They must be cataloged in some manner. And physically checking up on them according to a scheduled procedure is warranted. This work is usually done by a registrar or collection manager or under his or her supervision. Often a curator is involved, particularly when it comes to providing information for an item.

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

Creating and keeping accession records for museum collections requires assigning accession numbers to items when they enter the permanent collection. As with a person's social security number, these are unique for each item or associated integrated groups of items. For uniformity of input and outcome the job rests with the registrar. This also holds true for incoming and outgoing loans. These too are given unique assigned numbers, though they do not hold the same format as accession numbers. Over the years the museum profession in the United States has agreed to an accessioning numbering system that is simple and has been in place for a long time. Typically, the year an item was acquired by a museum, be it by gift or purchase or some combination thereof, is reflected in the first set of digits of an accession number. The second digit or digits, separated from the first ones by a dot, indicate the order in which the item came into the collection. A final digit or digits, again separated by a dot, indicate how many pieces were within a particular accession. Thus if a museum was given a painting in 1925 and it was the twenty-third thing to come into the museum collection that year, and it was only one object in that gift or purchase, the accession number would be 25.23.1 (it can also read 1925.23.1). Readers who are not intimately familiar with museum accessioning systems can now decipher the numbers with knowledge. They often appear in exhibition labels. But, a caveat is in order. While commonly used by history and art museums this system does not necessarily apply for archaeology or science museum collections. These will often have their own alpha-numeric identities determined by a particular academic discipline. Be that as it may, accessioning collections, no matter how it is done, is of critical importance for very many reasons.

For my purposes in describing collection management I am using the job titles "registrar" and "collection manager" somewhat interchangeably. I define these absolutely essential employees as the accountants for a museum collection. They need to be fussy, detail-oriented, persnickety, and assure that all the i's are dotted and the t's crossed when it comes to collection records. A devil-may-care approach to this work is undesirable. Museum employees in these positions need to know precisely what forms are required to assure that museums have accurate, timely, and appropriate documentation to prove ownership or track the loan of an object. They must keep such records well, safely, and ensure ease of accessibility. Registrars must monitor the whereabouts of collections and be capable of locating items at all times. Thus an important part of their job is keeping track of items when they are moved around. When something is loaned or borrowed, collection managers record that activity and assure that the proper documentation is generated and retained. These collection police are often the ones in charge of actually moving collections, though they may need specialist help in this regard. As most museums cannot afford full-time conservators, registrars are also the ones who are responsible for monitoring collection condition in a general way and calling in specialists if necessary and possible.

Most museums own most of their collections without encumbrances, restrictions, or suspicion. Questionable acquisition practices are increasingly rare. Documentation of ownership is held in collection management files. There are usually instruments of transfer. There are gift or purchase receipts, which are generated by the registrar and signed by the legitimate donor or donors. There may be letters of gift, and there should be letters of acknowledgment for the gift. In addition there may be information on provenance as well as notes on reproduction rights (this is especially important for work acquired by living artists, designers, cabinetmakers, authors, and the like or their heirs). When an acquisition is the result of a bequest, pertinent legal estate instruments are generated with relevant copies being retained by the museum. Though it does happen, museums tend to avoid agreeing to restrictions on how items can be used once acquired. In such cases documents describing these restrictions are usually held in collection management office files.

Loans of items to and from museums require certain forms and written agreements. These are also generated and kept by registrars. Each item receives a loan number. It should not be permanently affixed to the object because the museum does not own it. Again, the number must be unique to the item or items. The files organized by these numbers are kept after the loan is completed as it is part of the object's not to mention the museum's history. Occasionally we run into a designation called a "permanent loan." This may sound oxymoronic but it describes a situation which usually occurs when something is deposited in a museum by an entity or agency that has no legal standing or authority to make an outright ownership transfer. Things owned by governments but placed in museums for safe-keeping are good examples. However, occasionally permanent loans are arranged in the hope that the items will become gifts someday. Maybe this happens and maybe not.

The vast majority of museum loans are made for temporary exhibition purposes. Occasionally long-term loans happen as items are placed in museums by individuals (usually) for mutually advantageous reasons. Objects in this capacity are primarily held by a museum for exhibition purposes. Depending on the motivation for such arrangements I am a bit anxious about them. My trepidation stems from a fear that the borrowing museum hopes the item will become a gift or that the lender is taking advantage of a museum so that he or she can enjoy free storage, insurance, status, and a possible increase in the monetary value of the item in question.

There have been more than a few examples of long-term loans to museums that ended up being given to other museums or sold by owners. An excellent example is the Edward C. Arnold Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. A stellar holding of prints and paintings of New York City, it was for many years on loan to the Museum of the City of New York. The museum dedicated two galleries to Mr. Arnold and rotated his collection on view. It was assumed by all that when he died the collection would be willed to the museum.

One day Mr. Arnold was visiting "his" galleries when a group of overly demonstrative school students came through on a tour. The elderly gentleman was so disturbed by the hubbub that he wet his pants on the spot. The embarrassment and resulting anger caused him to rewrite his will and give the collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This bequest alteration was not known of by either museum until his death. Both museums decided the collection was more appropriate for the City museum and most of it continued there but as a loan from the Met. In time the paintings were removed to the owner. The prints and drawings continued on loan for many years. In the 1970s, the late Thomas Hoving, then the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, decided to retrieve these too. The late Joe Noble, the director of the City museum, was furious and attempted to stop what was a perfectly legal action. Previously Noble had been a chief administrator at the Met when Hoving was a curator and during his first couple of years as director. He and Hoving did not get along, which was one of the reasons Noble took the job directing the City museum. It was also the reason Hoving decided to finally take on the Arnold collection in its entirety. If the appropriate museum people had been alert early on, I believe the collection could have been given to the City museum by the Met long before Hoving and Noble were feuding.

When it comes to museum loans, unless there are binding legal agreements, there are no guarantees that they will become part of a permanent collection. Personalities, family interests, circumstances, and a host of other considerations can be deciding factors, no matter how unanticipated or unexpected they may seem.

Cataloging collections in a logical, accurate, consistent, inclusive, and professionally up-to-date manner is of immense importance for museums. To a degree, uncataloged collections are lost collections. Staff may know about objects but that is often a haphazard approach to identity knowledge as employees change, collections move, new research discoveries unfold, and information evolves. This is not to deny the incredible role staff familiarity plays in collection awareness but basic documentation is advisable.

Because we cannot have constant physical access to collections whenever we wish, we connect to them through pictures of and words about them. Establishing non-hands-on forms of access can allow collections to reach users around the world. Of course, museums have to be open to this idea and fortunately more and more are. I hope this transparency escalates. Certainly, it requires resources in the form of people to do the work, collections worth promoting, and the necessary technology for anything to be accomplished. But first it requires a willingness on the part of museum leaders to recognize the value of such democratic sharing.

The importance of cataloging collections may seem obvious, but sometimes it is marginally understood, if at all, in museums themselves. Employees who are not directly responsible for collections may assume that everything is both cataloged and well cataloged. Or, they may not care. The vast majority are unfamiliar with the nature or impact of the task. It is a job requiring patience, perseverance, attention, and care if every item (or related groups) is to receive proper attention. In addition to the aforementioned accession number, a database of at least skeletal information has to be established. Photographs need to be taken of the accessioned item. Both digital and hard copy (the latter at the very least) files must be created. And the object has to be properly placed in a museum's storage or exhibition areas. All of these steps take time and require trained specialists. Unless they have real experience in cataloging collections or qualified and constant supervision, volunteers, interns, and non-collection museum staff are to be excused from collection management. Do-it-yourself seat-of-the-pants amateur cataloging is untenable.

It is absolutely essential to accept that cataloging is no substitute for more extensive knowledge about museum collections. Documentation systems put in place by collection managers and registrars hold a simple matrix of information. While in-depth records can be included in files and online they are usually the purview of curators, academics, and other specialists in particular fields. I have encountered museum directors who assumed that these rudimentary catalogs held sufficient information for the public and thus everything that could be known about a collection item actually was. These same people assumed that if curators came and went that would be fine as long as the museum had its things cataloged by the collection manager.

Having started my career before the digital age, I can personally applaud the age of improved museum technology. Given the ease and minimal expense with which collections especially can be recorded there is no excuse for not having them accessible in some capacity online. Actually, there *are* excuses for not doing this and they are the same as they were when cataloging was done on clay tablets, stone stele, or paper with pens and ink or manual or electric typewriters. In order to achieve maximum (or even minimal) levels of cataloging, museums need trained staff, pertinent information, appropriate technology, suitable workspace, and time.

Museum leaders must be watchful for collection cataloging reticence or failure. Many people don't understand the task, and that sometimes includes those who are supposed to do it. I once worked in a museum where the person responsible for collection cataloging almost delighted in avoiding it. Eventually this person was assigned another area of museum duties and new employees tackled the task. The change was miraculous. Because the museum's director and assistant director were fully aware of how cataloging happens, how long it can take, and what is entailed in the work, we were not swayed by lame, vapid, and frankly laughable excuses for what was an unconscionable hold-up in collection record-keeping (see Rivard and Miller 1991).

Cataloging is a job that needs to be done carefully and with diligence, but it is often slow work and there can be enormous backlogs. Museums bring in lots of stuff, and if that stuff is not accorded the appropriate documentation upon arrival, in time the chore can become overwhelming. Cataloging backlogs can also develop as museums change recording systems and programs. How often have institutions decided to employ such-and-such a computer program to catalog its collection then opted to use other systems and brands before everything has been documented? Also, how many times has an employee departed in the middle of a cataloging project and a museum has lost their knowledge and expertise? And, what happens when a museum simply has incompetent staff doing the cataloging? Unless museum leadership appreciates, understands, and is paying attention to cataloging realities, these things happen with more frequency than we might wish.

At the start, one has to define cataloging in a museum context. I have used it to mean the creation of a bare-bones information base that, once established, can act as a shared platform for additional research and discovery. The information contained in a museum catalog must be generated by qualified staff. By qualified I mean people who have or can obtain accurate information about what they are cataloging. Incorrect or absent pieces of information reduce the value of a catalog entry.

In addition to the various documents and records generated by and through collection management offices, as noted, employees in this area are usually the ones directly responsible for the safe movement of objects owned by, lent by, or borrowed from a museum. These personnel handle or oversee the physical transit of things. They must know how to properly touch and move the incredible range of items museums have in their galleries and storage areas. From a small and fragile piece of ceramic to a hefty cast bronze statue, delicate fabrics, a car or a stuffed bird, registrars and their compatriots need to appreciate all manner of manual and mechanical ways to transport art, artifacts, and specimens. They may be aided by conservators, curators, exhibition technicians, maintenance employees, and the like, but the heavy lifting, often literally, tends to reside in their museum domain.

With the rise of temporary exhibitions has come a rise in requests for museums to lend and borrow things. Approving loans should first require assessing the importance and value of the proposed reason for the loan. Once it has been decided that the request has merit, then a focus on the object to be lent or borrowed commences and conservation considerations (for both the items requested and the destinations), curatorial concurrence, costs, and the professional capabilities of all involved must be agreed upon. Following these negotiations the actual packing and shipping of items commences. Collection management staff may be helped by maintenance people, exhibition staff, or outside assistants.

Packing museum collections for transit, regardless of distance, is no simple matter. The containers in which items are held ideally protect them and must be sturdy and easy to move even if forklift trucks, cranes, wheeled dollies, or handcarts are required. The containers cannot be prone to falling apart. Of utmost importance, the materials of which the containers are made should not pose a threat to the contents, as might be the case when off-gassing occurs from chemicals in packing products.

A workspace necessity often overlooked by museum staff whose focus is not collections is the processing areas required for physically handling incoming and outgoing collections and storing packing materials. Small items coming from and going to museums use minimal space for manipulation, but the same is not true for larger items, regardless of how they are packed for transit. I have dealt with several incoming exhibition loans that needed substantial room, for storing large wooden crates especially. While the loan agreements required these to be protected from the elements, fortunately that directive did not include holding them in totally climate-controlled facilities.

A collections manager who has been with a museum for years often knows the totality of the institution's collections better than any other member of staff. Curators tend to specialize in certain types and areas of collections but registrars come in contact with just about everything a museum owns or has borrowed. These employees may not have an academic depth of knowledge about all collections but they can help explain where things are, the reason they are in the museum, what their condition is, and in time they can often tell you about what these things mean to the museum and why.

Class Questions

1 A collection of ceramics by a well-known deceased potter who lived in the area where your museum is located is on loan to your museum. The collection numbers about 400 pieces and is owned by the potter's widow. The collection is stored beautifully in its own storeroom and each piece has an accession number on it. It is the sort of customary number museums only assign things in the permanent collection. Ownership of the ceramic collection rests with the widow. There is no loan paperwork or other documentary evidence regarding this situation. The museum and the widow are on very good terms. Is this an acceptable collection management situation?

2 For many years whenever your museum accepted the gift of a piece of art from an artist, the museum encouraged the artist to retain full copyright and promised never to reproduce it in any form without the artist's written permission. Increasingly, when the museum wants to reproduce a work of art (in hard or cyber copy) the artists cannot be found to give permission. What can be done to address this issue?

3 Two medium-sized wood crates are delivered for your attention at the museum where you work. You are not expecting anything but you open them with other staff present. You find seven paintings (in good condition) by an artist for whom your museum is famous. There is a cryptic and inexplicable note in one of the crates. The only return address is a mailing house in a small city in Pennsylvania. Your registrar has a vague recollection about the paintings and quickly checks her records. Apparently, the paintings were supposed to have come to the museum 14 years earlier, having been willed to it by a woman in Pennsylvania. At that time, before the executors of the estate could ship the paintings to the museum, they were stolen from the deceased woman's house. What should the museum do?

4 In standard museum cataloging systems what would this alpha-numerical accession number indicate: 29.100.14 a – h?

5 A museum has totally transferred its catalog information from original 3 × 5 index cards to a computerized system. The index cards hold typed information and penciled notes. Should it keep the cards? If so, why? If not, why not?

6 Who should have access to a museum collection master catalog and who should be able to make changes to it?

Reference

Rivard, Paul and Steven Miller (1991) Cataloguing Collections – Erratic Starts and Eventual Success: A Case Study. *Curator*, 34 (2): 119–124.

9

Museum Education

The stature of museums as places of learning is both obvious and obscure. It is obvious by the very existence of such institutions. Learning is declared through the formal programs, activities, and events museums provide as they promulgate object-based information transference. The obscure aspect of museum learning happens on a personal level as people absorb what museums do through their collecting, research, and exhibit practices. Whether overt, quantifiable, unmeasurable, or mysterious, the pedagogical impacts of these core museological functions are what mostly engage and stay with the people.

Education in museums is the act, action, and activity of communicating ideas, information, meanings, opinions, and knowledge about subjects museums think are of value. Education happens largely through the medium of the exhibition. To apply a school analogy: for museums the classrooms are the galleries, the curriculum is the collection, and the faculty is the staff. These three components form a triangulated methodology for formal and informal learning that is unique. Museums are in the show and tell business.

For museums to be educationally meaningful depends on many elements, but all should flow from the purpose of an institution. To be effective as educators, regardless of how they achieve this, museums need to clearly and constantly explain themselves. The message must be in everything museums do as conduits of information. The quality of a museum's educational cant rests on the quality of its collections, the quality of its interpretive content, and the quality of its employees. This notion grows out of old-fashioned approaches to classroom teaching but is adjusted to reflect the updated sometimes outsized position museums now hold in the shared learning environments we can enjoy on a local, regional, national, and international level.

The word "education" is prevalent in the actual and intellectual performance scripts generated by museums. On a governance level it is often in official mission statements and founding documents. However, the place of education in museums must not be assumed, it must be recognized and consciously embraced to reduce wasteful passive and sometime quizzical visitor responses. In the United States, especially in this century, to randomly put things on

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

exhibition and assume visitors will know what they are observing is anathema, not to mention insulting. Items must be carefully selected and explained with labels or other interpretive materials.

How education of substance is accomplished in a museum will depend on the museum type, its purpose, didactic commitment, and staff. Science museums always seem to be in the lead as places of relentless public learning. Their galleries are awash with a teaching buzz. Gizmos, gadgets, and graphics abound, all designed to convey content. Some in the museum field think visitors only interact with these "toys" for purposes of amusement. I feel this criticism is unwarranted. Science museums deal in theories, and these are often hard to explain through collections alone, thus cognitive assistance is appreciated. Art museums, on the other hand, tend to avoid what they consider distracting or overpowering educationally ancillary intrusions. Self-activated audio tours are the exception, though these are seen either as perfectly permissible or divergent and out of place. History museums fall somewhere between art and science institutions when it comes to the presence of educational materials in galleries. All museums, of course, are happy to teach through education-based programming in the form of lectures, tours, videos, an Internet presence, and so forth.

The easiest way to see if a museum is really an educational venture is to look at staff titles and duties. Any museum of any size has a department that, usually, has the word "education" in its name. Positions carry this word too. We have curators of education, education coordinators, or directors of education. Synonyms for education include learning, engagement, outreach, and teaching. Naturally, education is happening elsewhere in museums and in places not given titles defining the subject. Curators are totally involved in education, of themselves and eventually others. Exhibition employees are involved in education because most museum visitor learning takes place in museum galleries. Publication and fundraising staff are educators as they make persuasive arguments in seeking money and promoting what their museum does. Directors, as the most prominent of a museum's many explainers, clearly must embrace an educational bent.

As a professor of museum studies I can identify with the fact that the teacher often learns more than the student, especially in the classroom. This may or may not be true for museum staff who can tend to see education as the process of imparting content information from the knowing to the unknowing. Such a condescending approach presumably causes the ivory tower concept those outside the museum world might hold about it. In the past this was made worse by the segregated divide in museums between staff who were given the assignment to be directly and only responsible for teaching and those who were not. Designated education staff tended to first focus heavily on grade school children. Adult programming came in the form of occasional lectures. Curators, exhibition staff, fundraisers, security people, and others were not asked or expected to deal directly with the public in any teaching capacity whatsoever, at least not to an immediate degree.

When I started my career, at the Museum of the City of New York in the early 1970s, the separation between the education department and the rest of the institution was as clear as night and day. This had nothing to do with staff preferences. It was simply the way things were done. The museum had a fine reputation for its school programs in particular, and tens of thousands of grade school students toured the permanent exhibitions annually. The temporary exhibitions that I and the other curators organized were not included in regular education department tours. In essence, there were parallel informational worlds that never intersected.

The sort of dual education arrangement that existed for many decades in US museums has, to a degree, subsided, and for good reason. Museum leaders recognize that teaching, however that might be defined in a museum context, must be an integrated responsibility. But the real reason for the change, I think, came about through the cultural turmoil of the 1960s, combined with the heightened impact of museum educators as a group and potential funding.

Museums were not exempt from the social upheaval of the 1960s. A host of assaults were directed at them, often massed around the word "relevant." Critics claimed that museums only served the rich, a small gaggle of privileged cognoscenti, or a tiny minority of dilettantes interested in art, history, or science. Because their boards of trustees, at least for large museums, were dominated by the people associated with major corporations, either by job, marriage, or inheritance, museums were accused of being reflective of the military–industrial complex that was so frightening to social activists of the time. Museums slowly responded to criticisms and their measures were often silly or ineffectual, except perhaps in one area: education. New museum leaders, who increasingly came from the ranks of the "liberal" political spectrum, saw the fact of their institutional learning programs as something that could, with relative ease, be brought to the fore in operational emphasis to counter complaints about elitism and, more importantly, irrelevance. In addition to pumping up the role of a museum as a place of learning for all, but especially children and especially those from "under-served audiences," people in charge of museums realized that there were financial benefits to such a stance. For instance, grants could be sought more easily for school programs than collection research.

Raising money in the nonprofit sector is always a challenge, and this is as true for museums as it is for hospitals, universities, animal shelters, the YMCA, and so on. But, if there is an area of interest that can perhaps attract more grass-roots involvement than other areas of museums activities, it is education – and again, especially if it focuses on children. The recognition of education as something that could make a museum relevant, and attract possible increased funding, was not lost on museum educators. It should have come as no surprise, especially in the 1970s, when they voiced their annoyance (to put it mildly) that they were not treated with the same respect or job parity as curators, for instance. It was during this time of outside and inside confrontation that the term "curator of education" became popular.

Ultimately museums are places that attempt directed instruction yet accept that cerebral engagement happens in myriad uncontrolled ways. Recently, investigation into understanding why and how people learn in museums has become a field of study. This is a most welcome development. In a nation that thinks it likes to base actions on logic and prizes practicality, not to mention accountability, deciphering the reasons for doing things can have impact. Education practitioners in the museum field have long known by cognition, instinct, and experience what was happening insofar as teaching was concerned and they could make statements in defense of their work, but because nothing was quantified, their opinions lacked a verifiable credence. As with so many other arguments put forth in this country, an inability to measure something statistically suggests a pursuit might be ineffectual, frivolous, or a waste of time. Fortunately a growing body of research complete with measurable results is emerging that understands learning can happen through and with objects. This is good news for those of us who have intuitively understood and fervently believed in museums as meaning-filled learning wonderlands.

If we accept that museums can and should be places of education, how do we assess that education? On the job there are a few customary practices. The most common of these employ user surveys, reviews, and critiques. When well-structured, applied, studied, and responded to, these are valuable tools. But the best post-visit surveys cannot measure or know the long-term residual impact or retention of a museum encounter.

A way of judging how a museum meets education mandates is to count the numbers of participants in programs, activities, and other endeavors that have an education content (I am thus eliminating parties, most rental events, meetings, and certain wasteful collaborations). But numbers do not always convey true meanings. A museum may have minimal attendance for an educationally based program but the substance of that program could be excellent. Conversely, high attendance numbers for a weak education event might suggest attendance motivations unrelated to visitor learning. Beware of being hijacked by those who only measure success by visitation figures.

I suggest that for museums to optimize their educational value they must focus on the fundamentals that caused them to exist in the first place. If a museum has a logical reason for being and pursues its core mission with conviction, relentlessly, obviously, honestly, with passion and meaning through collections, it can teach effectively over the long term. If, on the other hand, a museum is a frivolous pursuit devoid of intellectual substance and is thus destined to be temporary, any sustained educational hopes will fail in the long run because there won't be a long run.

I believe that museums are not simply and exclusively outcome-justified, education-only endeavors. They are more than that. They can be places of personal reflection, intuitive discovery, wasted time, mesmerizing engagement, distraction, or varying combinations thereof. People can have encounters that astonish, reassure, repulse, or bore. Museums offer zones and times and opportunities for emotional exploration, and as such they embrace a wide range of reasons for existing.

Some describe our present era as the Knowledge Age. I don't know if that is a pretentious description generated by precocious self-aggrandizing sociologists or not. Regardless, museums can and do play a critical role in developing components for whatever might be described as knowledge. I suspect museums have been contributors to both the fact and the idea of a Knowledge Age all along. But they have also prospered as a result of other influences that now make knowledge-seeking ever more possible and permissible. The development results from democracy, the rise of public education, the invention of technology that allows instantaneous mental engagements, secularization that reduces blind allegiance to singular creeds, and reductions in violence, poverty, and ill health that block and reduce options for seeking, gaining, or enjoying knowledge, however it is defined.

In the context of a museum visit, most people are autodidacts. Even during structured tours, they follow their personal whims and interests and absorb accordingly. To be sure, because few people visit museums alone there is always the group influence on paths taken, where time is spent, and viewing attentiveness. Ultimately, though, it is the individual response to what is encountered, heard, seen, and digested that is museum education.

Class Questions

1 The education office of a museum has a long history of very successful programs for schools. Local school districts rely on the museum to assist classroom teaching. The programs are completely independent of museum curators and exhibitions and use education office classrooms, props, and information. Permanent or temporary exhibitions have never been integrated into the work of the education office. Schools have never asked to use exhibitions. Classes arrive at the museum, walk through exhibition galleries to classrooms, participate in scheduled offerings, and depart through the same or other galleries, without commentary. School groups are otherwise never seen in galleries. Is this practice acceptable? If so, why? If not, why not, and how might it be changed?

2 A museum educator feels his work does not receive the respect it deserves. He points to publications that segregate education programs, which are usually for school groups, from curatorial programs, which are always for the general public or specialists in a particular academic field. Even headings for these are different. One is Education Programs and the other is Public Programs. Is this a problem?

3 Comment on these terms insofar as they might be used in museum education applications: American Indian, Redskin, Original Peoples, Tribal American, Native American, Heathens, Indigenous population, Savages.

4 Who should have the final authority for what is written in exhibition labels?

5 What role might education staff play in exhibition planning?

6 How can an education program be evaluated?

10

Numbers

Not everything that counts can be measured. Not everything that can be measured counts.

Reynold Levy, 2015

Museums are no different from most human endeavors that can use numbers to help define what they are and how they operate. Calculations tell us the number of things in collections, staff size, how many volunteers are available, the square footage of buildings, property acreage, annual attendance, budget scope, and, endowment size. For some, the most important operating information comes out of accounting offices. For others this is joined with statistics about exhibitions, education programs, audiences, and collections. Practically speaking, some of the most relevant numbers pertain to individuals and are found in fundraising files as these explain who supports or supported a museum and at what magnitude, when, and maybe why.

Of course, numbers alone are rarely sufficient to explain aspects of a museum. They require a narrative. Attendance figures may tell me how many people came to a museum and when but we also like to know why. Sometimes this is easy to know as there may be seasonal variations to the numbers or they fluctuated as a result of exhibition selection and scheduling as well as the effects of special programs.

In a society that likes to justify, explain, measure, and determine the value of everything in some numerical fashion, numbers play an increasingly major role in museums. In my opinion this development has had mostly negative repercussions. I do not believe the value of museums can best be determined in digits. Saying a place is important because lots of people visit it, or it owns a gazillion things, or it has a healthy bank account are not the only ways to determine a museum's meaning. Certainly large, rich museums with an abundance of interesting collections are worthwhile but there are thousands of small, simple, meagerly funded museums that have considerable value. Their impact can be quite effective for a people, subject, or community but that value should not be judged simply by mathematics.

Regardless of my wish to avoid perceiving a museum solely by numerical indicators, operationally numbers are of importance and cannot be ignored or avoided on the job. Their role in museum work depends on their accuracy, source, and timing. Their meaning rests with why they exist, who is presenting them, how, and when, and who is receiving this information and in what context. For example, deciding the numerical size of a museum's collection usually rests with registrars and collection managers. It is not easy to calculate. Is a ceramic tea service one item or several? Does a box of art materials once used by a local artist of note constitute a slew of individual pieces? Does an old railroad train make up one object or many? Over the years the museum field has generally agreed upon various acceptable ways to quantify what an institution owns. If all or at least most of a museum's collection is properly accessioned, a reasonable number can be stated for what it owns. But, given collection variables, such as the examples I cited above, certain words are applied when reporting collection size. We might hear that such-and-such a museum has x number of "accessioned pieces" or the collection is in the "magnitude" of x, or the museum has x items in its "holdings."

Presumably museums are not being coy when they quantify their collection pronouncements and have done their best to calculate and assume a certain scope that gives both them and the public an idea of how much they own. I am of a mind that while most museums strive to set an honest number regarding their collections it is always a good faith estimate as well as an accommodation of convenience settled upon to meet expectations for numerical explanations. How competent is a museum if it has no idea how much stuff it has? Fortunately for museums, regardless of how they arrive at a collection figure, unless the information is so obviously questionable, no one will contest it.

Attendance statistics are the most misunderstood, irrelevant, and even damaging of all statistical evidence brought into debate when people discuss the value of museums. To begin with, I never entirely trust some of these stats. I have seen too many instances in which the figures are either inflated for political or economic reasons (or for job security in the case of one director I know) or the numbers are poorly assembled. Weak numbers sometimes result from incompetent counting procedures or the failure to include visitors who might be at a museum for something unrelated to its core mission, such attending a rental event. I count these people as museum users.

Regardless of the accuracy of attendance figures, these numbers are the most draconian in their effect on justifying why museums exist. To me they are false measures of overall institutional success or failure. I know my perspective is unrealistic. The subject is all-consuming in the conversations of museum trustees, community leaders, politicians, businessmen (businesswomen tend to be less stupid in this regard in my experience), and increasingly some funding entities, not to mention self-appointed and totally, in my opinion, off the mark companies that purport to judge the value of a nonprofit entity through whatever metrics can be concocted. Attendance numbers are too, too easy to cite as single indicators of sustained impact or failure. They are the lazy and ignorant man's way to judge a museum's value. Attendance weakly determines the outcome impact of a museum's *raison d'être*. Alas, like it or not, museum admission figures reign supreme these days. Constant demands to bring more people through the door have put staggering and unrealistic pressure on museum directors, institutional budgets, and staffing decisions and priorities.

During my career I never learned accounting or bookkeeping but it is absolutely critical to the smooth and informed functioning of a museum. This is true for every museum regardless of size. From simple QuickBooks programs to complex accounting operations, the timely, accurate, and complete handling of all financial information and requirements is essential. Museum leaders cannot make decisions or proceed without knowing what money is where and what money is not. My own lack of training in this area means I rely on people who are excellent accountants or bookkeepers or financial officers or all three. Yet I must understand and be able to decipher the whys and wherefores of a balance sheet, spread sheet, monthly report, year-end report, annual budget, investment report, audit, and so on. Over the years I have become very adept at this and understand them when they reflect the functioning reality of the museum I am working with. I generally know what the numbers say and I can read the facts they hold. Of course, a local guide who can explain the details of the numbers is helpful. That is especially true for murky, quirky, highly complicated reports or for institutions with which one is unfamiliar on a daily basis but might be involved with in another capacity. This would include museums encountered during an accreditation visit for the American Alliance of Museums or ones on whose board a person serves, or a museum where a person wants to work. There are many reasons for many numbers, and while on the surface things might look copacetic, in digging deeper, ambiguities and anomalies not to mention problems, can be revealed.

There are quite a few books about accounting but I recommend ones that emphasize accounting for nonprofit entities. Naturally, on-the-job training is critical to gaining a firm foundation of financial knowledge. That approach has worked wonders for me. I always welcome (though the numbers news may be bad) being walked through a fiscal report by a museum's finance person. I have had this same experience with trustees who relish the exercise at meetings. These individuals often have financial backgrounds as accountants, money managers, investment advisors, and suchlike, and they seem to love nothing more than ruminating over a balance sheet.

Budgets

One of the best ways to become comfortable with accounting is to be responsible for an annual budget – from setting it to implementing it. Budget management is one of the most, if not *the* most important financial exercises for daily museum operations.

There are various ways of setting an annual budget. Naturally the complexity and scope will depend on the size and type of a particular museum. The larger the museum the more formal and complex the budgeting process is and the more staff engaged. As museums become smaller, budgeting becomes simpler and fewer staff may be involved.

Simply put, an annual budget shows anticipated income and expenditures for a fiscal year. Fiscal years may be calendar years or not, but they are usually twelve months long. The process of setting a budget is as important as the outcome. With the right people involved the outcome should be well worth the effort and the future year can usually unfold in some logical financial fashion. One strives for a balanced budget but sometimes that is not possible, such as when a museum is struggling with enormous debt or an unplanned costly disaster hits.

A museum budget is a road map for the year ahead. If finely and realistically crafted, it can be followed responsibly. If handled otherwise, a disorderly trajectory can descend into mayhem. This is not to say projections are always pinpoint accurate. There will be variables. Usually these are about lower than anticipated income or increased costs or both. But sometimes the opposite happens and expenses are less than anticipated or more money comes in than was expected. Major unforeseen positive as well as negative phenomena, such as a surprise large bequest or the Great Recession of 2008, will be shocking exceptional events. Museum directors and boards of trustees must respond quickly to either kind of occurrence.

Because I have had the good fortune of working with excellent accounting staff and wise, financially savvy trustees I have never had to live with a deficit budget. I am a firm believer in trying to calculate as accurately as possible both expenses and revenues. It is essential to avoid situations in budget planning where someone will purposely project incorrectly low income or high expenses so they look good at the end of the year when the real numbers appear in the balance sheet. Beware of boards of trustees that unrealistically (dishonestly?) set higher earned income projections to avoid a deficit budget on paper until it is too late. (Note that some also rely on this nonsense to reduce the "trustee giving" line of a budget.) Fortunately, in my experience these obvious manipulations have either not happened or have been corrected by the time a budget was set and approved. However, directors need to be watchful when budgets are being prepared. Not that they can always do anything to curtail bad practices but it might be an indicator for a director to seek work elsewhere.

The lion's share of museum expenses are eaten up by salaries, and these can be controlled in various ways. Unfortunately the easiest thing to do is not have as many positions as needed, keep salaries low, and limit benefits. This is the nature of the nonprofit sector at large (not to mention the profit sector), which is why most organizations have too few staff and those they have are insufficiently qualified. Curiously, directors are exempt from this as they tend to be paid far better than anyone else in a museum.

Mature museums have customary times each year when the staff and board start to think about the annual budgeting process. Three months ahead of the final decision (a vote by the board of trustees) is not unusual. In a sense, one is always thinking about next year's budget. I regularly make notes about things to be discussed when budget time comes around.

The budget process should be pretty straightforward, the director asks staff members for income and expense projections. Some offices or departments, such as those responsible for fundraising, will have higher income numbers than expense numbers. Other offices, such as collection management will have the opposite. In the initial stages of budget development it is not unusual for everyone to request as much as he or she hopes for. As the process unfolds these wishes are usually rejected or reduced substantially. Exceptions are for projects, initiatives and capital expenses that have been agreed to well in advance (often by several years) and whose funding time has come. Exceptions are also granted for influential trustees who may have pet projects they support.

As museum personnel make their requests and budgets crystallize, more trustees will become involved in the process. These people are usually drawn from the executive, finance, and/or investment committees. Sometimes an *ad hoc* budget committee will be created. I have found that trustees can be rigorous or passive when analyzing budget proposals but they want a balanced budget, or they should. My experience in determining budgets has always been positive with trustees and staff. I have been fortunate in this regard. The last thing I want is a trustee telling staff what programs to put on at a museum because they like certain programs or think they might make more money than other programs. Nor do I want trustees meddling in personnel matters and insisting that certain employees enjoy certain raises or other benefits or that positions be eliminated or added on a whim. That has happened twice in my experience, and the results were predictably acrimonious.

In the budgeting process usually a schedule of meetings is arranged when drafts are officially discussed, defended, approved, or denied and otherwise massaged by staff and trustees. There tends to be a back-and-forth process as staff present numbers and trustees respond. This concludes when the final budget is officially approved by the board of trustees. Once it is in place, the process of adhering to it begins. Sometimes it takes longer than usual for a board to set a budget and museums find themselves operating in the next fiscal year without an approved budget. There are various reasons for this.

Most have to do with scheduling meetings that involve trustees. Trustees are busy people. In those cases a museum tends to coast on the previous year's practices while avoiding any major expenses or programmatic changes. When the new budget is approved it is retroactive.

Balanced budgets are important for message reasons as well as obvious practical applications. Occasionally museums are required or called upon to present their budgets in some public fashion. They need to provide them to granting entities, government agencies, or individual donors. Abbreviated versions appear in annual reports. The public, but more to the point people giving money to museums, should know how these places are doing financially. Honest and well-explained financial reports can be wonderfully satisfying mechanisms for communicating the status of an organization's mission health. It would be nice if monetary transparency were to become a trend. How great if all museums were, someday, forced to have their budgets available 24/7 along the lines of local, state, or federal governments, including salaries.

While deficit budgets are to be avoided, and usually are, occasionally this is difficult. The cause is most often the result of significant unforeseen events overpowering a museum's ability to sustain the fiscal status quo or improve it. Natural disasters including floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, or fires involving museums can place huge burdens on budgets. The worst economic disaster to befall US museums overall since the Great Depression was the Great Recession of 2008. The after effects of this financial tsunami are still being felt. It will take years for museums in the United States to get back to where they once were fiscally.

I was directing the Morris Museum in Morristown, New Jersey, when the recession hit. Drastic action was required. I immediately reduced our $4.2 million annual budget by $1million. We closed two days a week to save on infrastructure costs, four furlough weeks without pay went into effect, and salaries were cut across the board, but incrementally based on income and starting at the top. I voluntarily took a 20 percent ($40 000) cut in my salary. Other savings were initiated through programming reductions, stalled debt payments, and a reduced exhibition program that relied more on the permanent collection than loan shows. The only things that could not be controlled were loan payments for a debt the board has incurred. The quick-response measures were taken unilaterally by me, working closely with a brilliant chief financial officer. The board was happy to let me deal with the fiscal duress. My proudest outcome was keeping all staff gainfully employed albeit with reduced salaries and benefits. It was an emotionally exhausting time. The museum stayed open to the public. We continued to receive accolades for our programming. Nothing untoward was evident to the outside world.

The subject of debt, referenced several times in this book, must be discussed in the context of a budget. I hate it when museums become embroiled in serious debt. Once it was anathema for charities to take on such financial burdens but since the late 1990s it has become more acceptable, sometimes with predictable failure. Debt is usually taken on to expand museums, though sometimes it is used to purchase a collection or help an institution through cyclical periods of reduced income when bridge loans are customary. All too often, for large and unique loans repayment schedules and projections are optimistically calculated on assumptions of growth in earned and philanthropic income. When these, predictably, prove unrealistic, museums have to correct errors in often dramatic ways. Closure is rare but museums suffering under loan burdens are faced with monthly payments that reduce funds for operations and curtail the ability to grow and prosper in healthy ways. An irritating aspect of these unfortunate scenarios is that the trustees who engaged the museum in unreasonable debt have no legal obligation for their actions and are never held accountable should things fall apart.

Once a museum budget has been approved by a board of trustees it needs to be put into effect. That is the responsibility of the director, accounting staff, department heads, and any other employee who has some direct role in managing aspects of a budget. Monthly or quarterly financial reports should keep everyone informed about how matters are unfolding on the money front. These spreadsheets usually include comparisons with the previous year's numbers to provide a little perspective. One needs to understand that strictly reflecting a budget plan month by month will not always go as anticipated. There will be variations. These should be understood in whatever context is relevant. If, after a few months, numbers seem to really differ, presumably those in charge will have valid explanations. For instance, unseasonably rainy weather might have an adverse impact on popular outdoor programming, and therefore the income line for that part of a budget will be lower than projected. Conversely, a successful annual fundraising campaign could raise the income line for that initiative. Sometimes, when it is clear the approved budget is actually skewed, it can be adjusted in midstream. That happens rarely and usually only under exceptional circumstances. Again, it must be formally approved by the board of trustees.

Creating, managing, sustaining, and growing an endowment is not necessarily a direct part of museum budgeting, but it has an obvious impact. I am a huge fan of endowments and only wish more museums had healthy ones and concentrated on expanding them. It is money well held as it can cushion a museum's general operations, defend an institution in times of financial distress, and, it is hoped, help attract additional contributions.

As discussed in greater depth in Chapter 7, there are several types of endowments: restricted, unrestricted, and temporarily restricted. Restricted endowments are established for specific applications and in most cases can only be used for those. Such endowments are either created by museums or donors seeking to support a special cause or interest. Restricted endowments are usually structured with very clear contractual requirements for how they are invested and managed and what the money can be used for, even spelling-out how much interest it is permissible to spend and on what. The advantage of restricted endowments is that they can help a museum secure certain parts of its programs or operations. Personally I like them because usually such funding is protected from irresponsible loss caused by museum executives or board members robbing Peter to pay Paul. This is not to say restricted endowments cannot be unrestricted or dismantled. This can and does happen but it is a process museums either avoid or adopt when they are in dire straits. Unrestricted endowments can be more freely used by museums, and thus such funding is preferred by boards. Temporarily restricted endowments are just that, funding that was given or obtained to be used for a specific purpose. Again, there may be limits on how the money can be invested and tapped. With the three sorts of endowments it is incumbent on museums to have clear and responsible investment policies and adhere to them rigorously.

Earned Income

Earned income as defined for a museum is, as discussed in Chapter 7, money realized by providing services and goods. It is, quite simply, the revenue pursued with profit in mind. It does not include income from investments or funds gained philanthropically by donations, grants, bequests, or suchlike. Sources of earned income can include admission and program fees, property and spaces rented for special events or long-term use, the making and selling of copies of items in a collection, the sale of donated items not worthy of being accessioned, and, of course, sales gained in a retail establishment. Aside from entry ticket sales, the most obvious capitalist venture in a museum is a gift shop. These are now seen in museums of every size, shape, and subject. From small all-volunteer local historical societies to sizable art museums to sprawling science centers, there must be something for visitors to buy and take away. And the selection is not restricted to a few postcards or books. On the contrary, all sorts of goodies can be purchased.

The growth of earned-income activities in museums has been significant in the past few decades. This is apparent with gift shops. Once, a small area might have sufficed to sell visitors a handful of items reflecting a particular exhibition, collection, or subject. Today expectations are higher and thus more can be purchased. During the rise and evolution of museums as popular social destinations, they embraced a habit of commerce that is now assumed by both visitors and those running museums. Again, retail operations offer the best illustrations of what happened. Museums have them for three reasons: to provide things for people that are considered of value about their museum visit; to make money; and because museums are expected to have them. Other ways museums can hope to realize a profit is by renting space for special events, meetings or other uses. Selling pictures of or reproducing articles in collections sometimes garners money.

Unfortunately, the actual or desired profit made through a museum's earned-income potential has altered certain thinking about what these institutions are and how they can survive and prosper. "The charitable world has become obsessed with 'metrics,' as the jargon has it. Everything must be measured. One reason is that the super-wealthy increasingly come from the investment world, and not the industrial realm as in past eras, and elevate measurements over accomplishments" (Eisinger 2014).

"A museum is a business and should operate as such." "The museum business model needs to be changed." "Show me the metrics." "What's the return on investment?" How many times have I heard these or similar ignorant pronouncements from certain trustees or those outside the museum field? Try as one might with these sorts of people, when you explain the nature of museums you are rebuffed, considered a dreamer, an egghead academic, someone out of touch with the real world of business, a person ignorant of corporate-think. Well, in my case, the accusations are true. I am a dreamer, egghead, non-business type, and unfamiliar with the jargon of the corporate sector. So what? Given the length of time most museums exist and the length of time most businesses exist, I am happy to have deflected the short-sighted stupidity of mainstream capitalists.

There is a reason museums are nonprofit entities. They do not make profits and cannot with their existing business model. But! What museums operate by is not a business model. They operate by a philanthropy model. If museums, as generally defined today, could turn a profit with any annual regularity via income from the services and goods they provide, there would be profit-making museums galore. Occasionally someone who thinks this can be done tries. It doesn't take too long for the venture to fail miserably. Privately owned and operated automobile museums tend to be common examples. The reason museums do not make profits, at least not for long, is because there is no profit margin in collecting, storing, preserving, studying, and exhibiting things.

Class Questions

1 Do museums need to charge tax in gift shops?

2 Must a museum have an annual audit?

3 Who has the authority to sign museum checks, and are additional signatures required or is one sufficient?

4 Does a museum include the number of people who attend rental events such as weddings, business meetings, or graduation parties on the premises in attendance annual figures?

5 Must museum gift shops make a profit?

6 When preparing an annual budget, what is preferable – bonuses or raises, and why?

7 What statistics might you need in order to understand a museum's size?

References

Eisinger, Jesse (2014) A Shake-Up as the Financial World Infiltrates Philanthropy. *The New York Times* (11 December), p. B10.

Levy, Reynold (2015) *They Told Me Not To Take This Job*. PublicAffairs.

11

Conservation

The Preservation Imperative

> *Art conservation is as multifaceted as Art itself. To conserve art it must be understood and respected in all its vibrant complexity, and any intervention – whether preventive or remedial – requires an informed and sympathetic mind, an infallible eye, and the finest manual skill.*
>
> Antoine Wilmering, Senior Program Officer, Getty Foundation, e-mail to the author, 2015

We hear the word "conservation" a lot these days in relation to preserving the natural environment. For museums, the word's meaning is similar, but it embraces preserving collections. A fundamental purpose of any museum is to keep art, artifacts, and scientific specimens, in good condition. Being custodians of valued cultural materials for public benefit denotes responsibilities of care if these things are to reasonably survive not just for the moment but for generations to come. It is through the professional practices of museum conservation that this is accomplished. As a distinct discipline, and as currently configured, it is rather new as an academic pursuit and specialty.

A museum's first and perhaps most radical act of conservation is acquiring and keeping things. After all, objects have two destinies: they can find their way into the care of those who will preserve them or, in time, disappear forever. Because a museum's function is to collect and save things in perpetuity, once something has entered a collection all sorts of protocols and protections kick in, or should. These are increasingly restrictive insofar as collection housing, care, and access are concerned. Safeguards are structured to be protective and are based on an evolving academic discipline of professional study and application.

The field of museum conservation as practiced today blossomed in the second half of the twentieth century when it shifted from craft engagements or simple exercises in repair to a more defined science-based skill and field of study. Prior to the Second World War the word "conservation" was not used as frequently or in the same way as it is now in museums. Repairing, restoring, cleaning, and fixing was a more common language employed when objects

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

needed physical attention. These words are, of course, still applied, but what they describe falls under the rubric of conservation rather than simple maintenance.

If the general public thinks of conservation in a museum, what probably comes to mind are images of geeky science types in white lab coats, holding delicate instruments with which they deftly prod and poke at old paintings, broken sculpture, torn paper, damaged vases, or desiccated mummies. For those more familiar with museums, the lab denizens can be seen at work on the precious things using scientific instruments and a sparkling array of hand tools and elixirs while they examine, sample, and prepare treasures to be saved and appreciated for who knows how many years to come.

As with many stereotypical images, those about conservation hold some veracity yet are woefully incomplete. Conservation in a museum context is a fascinating combination of knowledge and experience that requires an incongruous mix of philosophy, manual dexterity, science, art history, history, and studio art practice. Because conservation takes place in off-limits areas, it may seem the private domain of a secret society of alchemists who magically make the old new again. Actually what they do is attempt to soften and slow the inevitable ravages of time that cause things to deteriorate.

In my opinion, conservation as understood today is the physical care applied in some official capacity to cultural materials to help them survive over the long term while attempting to assure the honesty of their original documentary, aesthetic, scientific, and associative value. In this capacity the practice as currently carried out alludes to the museum hubris of longevity. The intellectual and actual existence of conservation as a professional pursuit suggests the idea of things being held in perpetuity. Conservators know otherwise. The future is uncertain yet … the conservation field might actually uncover the fountain of youth for museum collections!

Museum conservation includes at least four areas of collection impact: the objects, the settings in which they live, trained staff, and specified protocols. Most conservation involves direct action to objects. For me, this is exciting, rewarding, and endlessly fascinating to observe. Yet, before anything touches an object philosophical decisions have to be made: what should be preserved and why? After that, the "how" kicks in. The "how" involves what to do to an object. Much of that decision-making is based on studying an item's material composition and condition combined with information about such materials and how they interact with other materials.

Matter seems to be in a constant state of flux, sometimes contradictory, especially after it is manipulated by humans into something it might not want to be. This is why the first focus of investigation for conservators requires them to ask lots of questions: What is the object made of? How is that material or those materials holding up? If an item is composed of multiple materials how are they interacting with each other? What impact is the environment in which an object is contained having? Where has the object been during its existence? Has anything happened to it, if so, what, why, and how? The answers to these and related questions will suggest actions to be taken or avoided regarding any object.

Because the physical composition of an object is central to its existence and survival, museum conservation rests on the science of the materials. But that science of materials does not rest with objects alone; it extends to materials with which an item might come into contact or be in the vicinity of. Considerable research has already been done on the nature of materials but more is needed with the specifics of museum conservation in mind.

Though a focus of conservation involves understanding the physical character of collections and actions suggested as a result of that understanding, an important part of conservation is establishing safe environments. There are micro- and macroenvironments. The microenvironment is the housing that contains an object, such as a box, frame, drawer, cabinet, folder, or so forth. Much has been learned lately about ways to protect objects from the negative effects of poor storage and handling. Highly acidic paper-based thin boards once used in the framing of prints, drawings, photographs, and the like are now avoided by museums. Wood drawers, cabinets, boxes, and similar containers that off-gas harmful pollutants are rejected. The ubiquitous commercially produced and highly convenient pressure-sensitive tape found on every office desk no longer comes in direct contact with collections.

As conservation measures evolved that avoided the use or proximity of damaging materials, new materials were selected, developed, or discovered that could establish inert settings to assure safe spaces for objects. Much work needs to be done to redress past, if well-meaning, collection care faults, but going forward, the creation of neutral atmospheres for museum collections is promising.

The macroenvironment is the larger space things inhabit, such as rooms, buildings, and geographic locales. Understanding these and protecting collections within them is an essential conservation pursuit. Macroenvironmental concerns tend to focus on issues of museum location, construction, and use. Being situated in a floodplain can have its drawbacks. Shoddy construction will cause operating problems. Housing a maintenance garage in the midst of galleries is to be avoided. Macro challenges are understandable for existing museums but it is surprising how often the most rudimentary cautions are ignored when creating new museums.

Because most museums are small and minimally funded, having conservation staff is usually out of the question. However, there is no reason certain employees cannot be sensitized to conservation and designated point-people when it comes to these considerations. I found myself in that position when learning to be a curator. No one at the museum I worked in had any training in conservation and most were quite ignorant of it. This was especially alarming in the curatorial areas. Fortunately the costume curators were on the ball, but the others were not, including me. I tried to change things by taking courses in the care of the sorts of collections for which I was responsible. It was difficult to learn about conservation if you were not planning to be a conservator. I tried to audit courses and attend lectures or workshops for conservators, but my requests to do so were denied. You were either in the profession or you were not. Fortunately I was able to travel abroad for an intensive introduction to conservation science in a five-month program at The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) in Rome. This opened my eyes to the world of conservation, and I have enjoyed an affinity for it ever since, though hands-off to be sure. I was also able to take a few workshops offered by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, and at the New York Historical Association in Cooperstown, New York, but these were rare at the time.

The best advice I can give someone who wants to learn about conservation but not be a conservator is to join the American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC). Read its publications, attend meetings, and familiarize yourself with the area of your interest in the field. A heightened awareness of conservation on the job will be enormously beneficial for museum collections – provided the bosses are willing to accept advice! At the same time, guard against the syndrome that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. People who purport to know about conservation can be especially harmful. These often self-appointed designated-hitters for collection care should be avoided when professional advice is really needed.

The AIC's web site is an excellent initial portal to the subject of conservation. The page "How to Choose a Conservator" is especially helpful. It lists five topics: What to Know; What to Ask; What to Consider; What to Expect; and Find a Conservator. The category "What to Consider" summarizes conservation for the most inexperienced and unknowing:

1) Conservation treatments are frequently time consuming and expensive. Be wary of those who propose to perform a quick and inexpensive restoration job, are reluctant to discuss in detail the materials and methods to be used, or will not permit you to see the work in progress. For time-consuming projects or collection surveys, you can advertise for a short-term contract conservator in AIC news.
2) Many conservators are willing to travel. It may not be appropriate to restrict your search geographically, especially if the object presents unique problems.
3) You can try a conservator out. If you have a large collection requiring treatment, you may wish to have one object treated initially before entering into a major contract.

4) There are risks involved with certain treatment options. The added time or expense of finding the right professional will be small comparted to the loss or future costs that could result from inadequate conservation treatment.
5) Conservators do not always agree about treatments. The quality of conservation work is most accurately evaluated based on the technical and structural aspects of the treatment in addition to the cosmetic appearance; another conservation professional may be able to help you make the evaluation. Speak to a number of conservators before making a decision you are comfortable with. (AIC 2016)

Proper protective protocols are of immense importance when it comes to collection care. Mostly these are set before any direct conservation involvement is required, but they are essential to specify and adhere to. They generally apply to how collections are stored, moved, handled, exhibited, and what sort of climate they live in. Given the information now available for collection care there is no reason for ignorance about this. Poverty or lack of knowledge may be an excuse regarding a very particular way of dealing with a very particular kind of collection item in a very particular kind of circumstance. Otherwise, ignorance is not bliss, it is destruction. And remember, one klutz can cause disaster.

For the most part, professionally aware museums seek to achieve a high level of internal control for the conditions in which their collections exist, or as high a level as budgets allow. On the macro level this requires structures that can accommodate and hold stable environments different from the outdoor environments in which a particular museum exists. Inside, the first line of defense is establishing relatively consistent benign levels of temperature and humidity. Their rapid fluctuation can have the most deleterious impact on collections. Temperature has long been more easily controlled and understood than humidity. I have often heard inexperienced people say that such-and-such a place has humidity control because it is air conditioned during periods of hot weather. This is true to a degree (pun intended) but does not address what happens when colder weather prevails and heat is provided alone that simply lowers relative humidity causing extremely dry interior conditions. Thankfully in decline is the practice of using air conditioning in collection areas and galleries only during a customary eight-hour workday. This caused significant humidity fluctuations, as did opening windows for “fresh air” in galleries and other settings. Providing humidification in museums that were never designed for such controls can be challenging. Actually, it is difficult even in museums that are designed with such controls.

Controlling light is of similar importance in dealing with museum collections. There are two concerns in this regard: how much and what kind of light should objects be exposed to? It is essential to remember that all light can be damaging.

I mention this because too often we hear the uninformed assume that if the ultraviolet spectrum of light is shielded somehow museum collections are protected against light damage. Nothing could be further from reality. Certainly ultraviolet light should be controlled as it tends to be the most damaging part of the normal light spectrum but eventually all illumination can have an adverse impact on light-sensitive materials. Lighting is also a creator of heat. Though vast improvements have been made to guard against this, it must be considered. Few museums can afford to have conservators on staff or on hand to advise about lighting but it is money well spent as I prefer to seek the input of this museum discipline before approaching any other professionals including, by the way, commercial lighting experts.

Establishing a neutral environment for collections is both a budget and application challenge. Museum budgets are lean, to say the least. Handling, storing, and exhibiting collections pose preservation risks. Staff awareness and training regarding conservation measures is expected but hard to come by. Museums should aspire to be made or retrofitted, and, operated with certain interior climate conditions in mind. Reaching this goal is no small challenge. Because so many museums were originally built to serve functions other than preserving objects and because so many purpose-built museums were created before current environmental controls were understood and possible, a lot of catching-up has to happen.

The historic circumstances that led to the creation of a particular museum cannot be used as a constant excuse for poor conservation practices, especially when it comes to what might be called simple housekeeping. By this I mean pests can be guarded against, damaging dirt kept out, light controlled, and materials that have negative effects on collections can be avoided. Even matters over which a museum may have no control can be mitigated. Outside air pollution can be kept outside, the effect of traffic vibrations can be ameliorated, and the behavior of individuals using galleries can be controlled. The effects of corrupt governments or absent official protections are impossible to correct from inside a museum, though there are more than a few stories of brave staff members who have literally put their lives on the line during violent times in attempts to save cultural materials for which they feel personally responsible.

Conservation as a profession is divided, logically perhaps, by materials. There are conservators who specialize in paper, paintings, wood (dry and waterlogged), metal, ceramics, stone, archaeological discoveries in the field, textiles, leather, and new technologies such as electronic media. When objects contain a combination of these materials they tend to land in the care of "object conservators" who, in turn, often call upon the services of material specialists or use information made available by them.

It takes years of training to become a conservator. Academic requirements include art history, science (primarily chemistry), and studio art. Practical requirements call for what might best be described as a series of apprenticeships with museums or private conservators or independent conservation centers.

Conservation professionals cannot always be full-time museum employees. In fact, if one includes the thousands of historic house and other small museums in existence, few such places can afford to avail themselves of conservation assistance in any sustained and constant manner. Most must deal with conservation on their own. We can only hope at least one or two employees have a modicum of awareness about conservation procedures, expectations, and hopes.

Deciding who is responsible for conservation in a museum must be handled judiciously. The sensitive care demanded for objects cannot be left to chance. No matter how well-meaning their intentions, an unqualified trustee, inadequately trained director, curator, or handy janitor should probably not be assigned or arbitrarily assume responsibility for the physical integrity of a museum's collections. Given the reach and recognition of the museum field as a profession, the availability of conservation practitioners, and information about the subject, there is no excuse for museum leaders to be unaware that there are preferred ways to preserve collections.

It is essential that collection preservation be seen as more than simple housekeeping. Once it is established that being stewards of things for public appreciation requires certain ways of dealing with them, protocols and procedures can be established that provide starting points for conservation best-practices. It is much less difficult than it used to be for museum people to learn how to care for collections in a protective way while avoiding direct manipulations by the ignorant and unqualified.

When a decision is made to conserve a museum object, four options generally present themselves: leave it alone; stabilize it in some minimal way; lightly treat it; heavily treat it. In discussing these approaches two outcomes unfold: the conservation measures will be obvious or they will be minimally or totally unseen by the average viewer. There can be combinations and variants depending on circumstances such as the physical condition of an object, the funding available to do any work, the quality and nature of conservation information, expertise, schedules, and what a museum wishes to accomplish with a conservation plan. In the best of circumstances deliberations are well-made and documented and the results are appropriate. In the worst of circumstances the opposite can happen.

Whatever approaches are decided upon for conserving a museum object, most qualified professional conservators are mindful of two considerations. One is immediately factual and one is desirable. The factual consideration recognizes that things probably have something called "inherent vice." (Akin to original sin?) This means the material (or materials) of which they are composed naturally changes but in ways that alter the original look or structure of something and thus compromise or threaten the physical viability or documentary integrity of the object. An excellent example of this would be nitrate cellulous film negatives or movie reels from the early twentieth century. These have a variable tendency not only to deteriorate in time but under certain atmospheric conditions to self-immolate. A first conservation measure might be to isolate them in a cold, dry environment, which tends to slow the offending molecules, or at least put them to sleep. Few materials which make up museum collections stay static. Wood, paint, textiles, plastic, glass, metal, and so forth change as time goes by. While "inherent vice" may not be immediately apparent it is quite natural and normal.

Most reputable conservators strive to achieve reversibility for their work. This means anything a conservator does to an object should be capable of being undone, and with no adverse impact on an object. Thus if a painting receives a new coat of varnish, that varnish should be removable. Similarly, in-painting applied to a picture should be done with paints that are easily taken off if no longer wanted. The theory of reversibility sets a very lofty target for conservators and there are situations in which it cannot be achieved. Impregnating some woods so they maintain their cell structure and thus the original shape of whatever was made out of them comes to mind.

There are few quick and easy ways to assure the long-term preservation of the myriad materials found in museum collections. Conservation considerations are broad, variable, and complex. Even creating suitable environments for collections can be challenging as some materials survive better in some climates while others do better in different ones. Keeping a constant temperature and humidity level in museums is often a matter of compromise, especially when we consider the vast number of things composed of multiple materials all reacting in various ways to their setting. In addition to establishing ambient conditions favorable for collections, we must think of the people in those places not only insofar as to how they respond to preferred museum climates but also what impact they have on them. This is especially true when a popular exhibition causes humidity levels to rise in galleries because so many visitors are breathing in one space.

Museum conservation as a practice can initially seem picayune and unrealistic, not to mention ridiculous. Take dusting, for instance. One would think customary approaches to this housekeeping practice would be obvious and easy to put in place. Not so fast. Dust can be a complicated matter. Is the dust embedded in and/or materially dangerous to the object it is on? Can it be removed without causing damage to the object, such as might occur to certain painted or other decorated surfaces into which the dust has settled and perhaps become adhered? How is the dust defined? What tools and methods of dust removal can be used that will result in no damage to the object? What precautions might be required to assure the safety of the person doing the dusting or those nearby? What will happen to the dust as it is removed? These sorts of deliberations take place in the arena of conservation.

Because of the complexity of conservation, which will only increase over time, I think the chasm in the museum world between interrelated professions and that of conservation will widen. There are reasons for this, and most have to do with the separation of science-based careers and humanities-based careers. If my personal experience is any indication, most of us who go into museum work are not comfortable with science and in fact may have a strong aversion to it as an academic study. This is unfortunate and I hope it will be (or is!) changing. It is possible to close the gap, and I encourage museum employees to do so – in ways that respect professional sensitivities, training, and protocols. It is essential that nonconservators spend more time listening to conservators and becoming acquainted with conservation.

> For thoughtful people restoration poses many difficult questions that do not allow for glib answers: Who should undertake the work and who should bear the ultimate responsibility? What materials and procedures should be used? How far is too far? Who are the just judges? Criticism of restorations is not a new phenomenon. Scholars, historians, artists, collectors, and other interested parties have always had plenty to say on the topic. Published critical assessments and expert opinion flourished from the sixteenth century onward. With the nineteenth century and the emergence of the public museum, however, a much wider audience was engaged. Today, the sheer rapidity and volume of modern communications result in instant analysis of restoration projects before they are completed, and sometimes before they are even begun. When a restoration is condemned as being irresponsible and even damaging to a work of art, little time is given to an informed public discourse. Laypeople hear only, "Yes, it's bad; no, it's good," leaving them unable to evaluate complicated issues such as those raised by the cleaning of the Sistine Chapel. Attempts at meaningful dialogue are often frustrated by participants who muddy troubled waters with innuendo and mendacity.
>
> … When art historians more fully understand historical materials and techniques, and the damages and changes caused by time, materials, faulty techniques, or poor restorations, they will be able to make meaningful contributions to the serious and complicated issues involved in restoration. Philip Hendy, who was Director of the National Gallery, London, during the third cleaning controversy of 1946–47, believed that "on these subjects there has been too long a silence." There still is. Misunderstandings have led to polarized and vitriolic controversies. Should this situation improve, as all serious people in the conservation profession hope it will, there will undoubtedly remain those for whom

restoration will forever remain an evil. As Giovanni Pietro Bellori observed in 1695, there are "superstitious" people "who would rather consent to the entire destruction of an excellent painting, than allow it to be touched by the hand of another person, however skillful and excellent he may be; it is a popular error, to believe that nothing can be done, but to try to preserve, as well as possible, the relics of antiquity, and the venerable remains of such wonderful labours." In the meantime, the conservators might be well advised to pay more attention to communication skills. Knowing you are right is one thing; proving it in a convincing manner is another. Reluctance to speak compounds misunderstandings. This said, we must acknowledge that some people will never be convinced, no matter how compelling the evidence. (Mansfield Kirby Talley, Jr., *An Old Fiddle on a Green Lawn: The Perverse Infatuation with Dirty Pictures*, in **Essays in Memory of John M. Brealey** (New York: Metropolitan Museum Journal, 40, 2005), p. 37 (first paragraph) and p. 48 (last paragraph).)

Yet, when it comes to museum collections especially, evidence is what they are all about and increasingly so. Conservation now plays a critical role in supporting or denying the evidentiary value of the things museums own for us. Knowing about the physical character, history and changes made to an object are as important as documentary information of it and its contextual place in time. Discovering an acrylic paint that was not invented when a particular was said to have been done, is informative. Discovering with scientific tools another painting under an existing one is of great value. Analyzing the wood a piece of furniture is made of tells us about that piece in ways simple visual observations might not. This is why Emile Gordenker, Director of the Royal Picture Gallery of the Mauritshuis can say: 'restoration is the cutting edge of art history.' " [New York Times, 11-9-14, "Recreating Adam, From Hundreds of Fragments, After the Fall.'" P. 23]

As previously noted, the study and discipline of museum conservation has come a long way since the Second World War. It is just getting started. The next few decades will see quantum leaps as new information and techniques develop about the nature of our material world and how it can be saved. What was once considered restoration at best and repair or maintenance at worst is now a recognized field of scientific study requiring extensive training, approval processes, peer reviews and replications, a language, measurable outcome expectations, and, perhaps most importantly, acceptance by the museum profession, in all its iterations, that conservation is indeed a recognized necessity for the responsible care of the collections held in public trust.

Class Questions

1 The museum where you work is about 100 miles north of New York City, near the Hudson River. It has an 1800 sq. ft. gallery that is used for one changing exhibition annually. The exhibit usually opens at the beginning of August and closes at the end of November. The space is climate controlled for both temperature and humidity (using heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems – HVAC). Two weeks before an exhibition of early nineteenth-century hand-colored prints is to open, the HVAC breaks down. The museum has a part-time curator, several full-time maintenance staff, and a full-time director somewhat familiar with conservation management. It does not have a conservator on staff or on-call. All the art is on loan and has been delivered to the gallery, where it is in packing crates which have been opened in anticipation of installation. The exhibition dates have been published, the opening reception scheduled, and the catalog printed. To secure the loan the museum agreed to maintain a certain temperature and humidity range. What would you do?

2 You are the curator of a large print collection in a regional history museum. The collection is stored in wood cabinets and much of it is matted in highly acidic materials. You have done research on appropriate new storage cabinets and received estimates for replacing the ones in use. A print collector approaches the museum to make a financial contribution to benefit the print collection. The amount of money he offers will pay for the new cabinets. Do you use it for that or to buy new acquisitions for the collection, an area he is especially interested in?

3 Your museum has a temporary exhibition of contemporary furniture. One day a visitor inadvertently knocks a piece of wood off the corner of a chair. The wood has come off intact and was in fact originally glued in place by the maker. You call the maker and she says "Oh, just glue it back on." What do you do?

4 You are a young entry-level aspiring assistant to a curator at a major urban history museum. The museum has no conservator and no one on staff has any familiarity with the discipline, especially as it is developing at the time of your arrival. You have a keen interest in conservation. Though you do not want to be a conservator you have been learning about the field. One day the senior curator decides that a painting needs cleaning and he contacts the painting conservator the museum has used for years. The conservator arrives and takes the painting to his studio. In time you learn there is no loan paperwork, no treatment proposal, no progress report, or any of the conservation protocols and procedures you are learning about. In a month the painting is returned to the museum looking fresh and new. The only document is an invoice for "Cleaning a portrait of ..." and the cost. In the meantime you have checked to see if the conservator is a member of the American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works of Art (AIC). He is listed as highly qualified. You later learn he was "Grandfathered" into the list because he was in business when the AIC was founded. Should the museum continue to use this conservator? If so why, and if not why not?

5. What sorts of materials in museum collections are extremely sensitive to degradation if exposed to light? What kind of light and at what levels?

6. What sorts of materials in a museum collection might be physically unaffected by light of any kind?

References

American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (2016) *Find a Conservator*. Available online at www.conservation-us.org/membership/find-a-conservator/guide-to-finding-a-conservator (accessed 22 February 2017).

Talley, Mansfield Kirby, Jr. (2005) An Old Fiddle on a Green Lawn: The Perverse Infatuation with Dirty Pictures. *Essays in Memory of John M. Brealey* [Special Issue]. *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 40.

12

Exhibitions

Show and Tell

Exhibits are the most apparent public reason for a museum. Of all the pursuits museums engage in, be they constructing new buildings, conducting research, acquiring collections, presenting lectures, operating gift shops, having parties, and so on, none are as regularly central to a museum's perceived *raison d'être* as exhibits. More people come to museums to see exhibits than for any other ongoing reason.

Given the prominent role of exhibits at a museum, this institutional duty must not be done foolishly, capriciously, or without forethought. The role of the exhibit as the fundamental museum communication medium must be appreciated and held in great esteem and respect. When this is paramount, the public benefits. When it is not, the public loses.

So what is a museum exhibition? Quite simply it is a thing or things put on view for people to see in a place calling itself a museum, or the equivalent thereof. The act of exhibiting can be as simple as pounding a nail in a wall and hanging a painting on it or as complex as building a space to accommodate all sorts of things in a climate-controlled environment full of expensive display furnishings and equipment augmented with an array of gadgets offering opportunities for people to obtain information and have a meaningful visual experience.

After the word "Dad," my favorite word in the English language is "Why." It is a word that absolutely must be applied when contemplating a museum exhibition. There need to be valid reasons for a particular presentation, and these reasons must be readily and obviously embraced by exhibition creators and comprehended by the public. An exhibit should be mission appropriate and reflect the subject of a museum and the objects it owns or uses or both. Presumably an exhibition is of interest to audiences and not an esoteric conversation offered by a small circle of cognoscenti to each other.

The *Why* of an exhibition can include matters of timeliness and relevance. Being practical places, museums need to ask themselves if it is possible to put on an exhibition. Beware of specious answers to the Why question, such as those which may be conjured to explain away the fact that an exhibition is

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

being forced on a museum by an influential donor or one whose relationship to the museum would pose a clear conflict of interest, such as might be the case when a museum exhibits a collection owned by a trustee. Given the pressure to attract visitors, presenting an exhibition only because it will be popular jars the Why question. Because museums can feel pressured to engage in an over-active exhibition schedule, mounting lots of them can be a troublesome, not to mention exhausting, response to the Why inquiry.

Once the Why of an exhibition is accepted, questions regarding the *Who* of it need to be answered. The Who of museum exhibitions can include a range of individuals and groups. First and foremost is Who decides on what exhibitions a museum will present. Some museums have rigid structures and approaches in this regard, others are more fluid. All seem to require a final sign-off by the director. I am somewhat old-school and like to have curators generate most exhibition ideas or at least be the primary forces behind them. This is assuming a museum has the requisite curatorial staff, even if it is a staff of one. Having trained and practiced as a curator I enjoy retaining that authority for exhibition decision-making as a director. Some museums have exhibition committees. These often comprise staff, trustees, and perhaps individuals outside a museum's immediate personnel and governance orbit. The role of such committees ranges from initiating and approving exhibition ideas to simply reviewing and supporting them. Deciding Who will be responsible for exhibitions must include considerations of competency. Presumably everyone assigned to some aspect of exhibition development is capable of doing their assignments, and we hope, well.

After deciding Who will be the exhibition decision makers, the Who regarding how an exhibit happens kicks in. Who will physically make the exhibit? Who will select the content? Who will do the writing? Who will promote the exhibit? Who will raise the money to pay for it? And Who will be in charge of everything? Most museums have certain hierarchies when it comes to exhibition development and implementation. While the director is in the final position of authority in some capacity, depending on the size of the museum he or she will usually have minimal involvement in the day-to-day affairs of putting an exhibition together. However, processes of approval, oversight, and monitoring are important and no director should ignore or avoid these responsibilities. I have always enjoyed exhibition development from start to finish and spent a lot of time gauging work performances and outcomes as things come to fruition in galleries. Trustees should never be involved in making exhibitions unless they have some welcome expertise and can clearly be helpful. They should, though, be kept in the loop and encouraged to enjoy the results of what the staff accomplish.

Exhibitions are how museums communicate through objects. Over the years different ways for presenting exhibitions have been contemplated and implemented but ultimately a core formula has evolved: original objects reflecting a museum's mission are arranged in a (usually) static manner to be looked at by people; explanatory materials may or may not appear in the immediate vicinity of the objects on view. When first applied, support materials are handwritten notes. Called labels, they are neatly printed. Depending on the philosophy and budget of the museum, written and illustrated graphics remain a constant but they may be added to with visit-enhancing audiovisual and IT technology. A profession called exhibit design has evolved and it strives to make exhibits more visually pleasing and impactful.

During the past few decades, especially in the United States, people have come to expect museum exhibitions to be sophisticated in content, meaning, appearance, and ease of access. This has happened because museums, again especially in United States, have raised their own exhibition capabilities. At least this is true of mainstream museums with sufficient budgets and a professional willingness to accept the value exhibitions have as an educational, expressionistic, and informational conduit requiring certain ways of achieving desirable outcomes. Museum visitors now expect exhibitions to be logical in content, scope, and purpose. They are used to having appropriate, comprehendible, and complete information readily available. People looking at a museum exhibit want it to be clean and tidy and easy to navigate. Audiences appreciate high quality collections that are also clean and tidy. We in the museum field, or those of us in museums of consequence, have caused this situation to exist as we have raised audience's expectations regarding their museum visits. What might have been perfectly acceptable 50 years ago, or even 10, is met with disappointment now. Exhibitions that are dirty, poorly lit, confusing, and full of irrelevant or perplexing collections and other content are deemed woefully inadequate by our public.

Essentially there are seven ingredients to a museum exhibition. They are: subject, collection, personnel, time, money, space, and knowledge.

Meaningful museum exhibitions are about clear and obvious subjects. Usually, but not always, those subjects reflect an institution's mission. In their application as unique communication devices, exhibitions can and should be places of intellectual and emotional connectivity and discovery. These novel visual vehicles explain the intangible through the tangible. Exhibitions build on our primal intuitive feelings for and about the world of things.

Good museums devote a lot of thought to what they put on view for people to optically digest. Considerations include both short-term and long-term exhibits. Depending on the kind of museum there is usually a mix of changing displays and so-called permanent ones. The changing presentations are drawn from the permanent collection or borrowed for special installations or are produced through a combination of both possibilities. Exhibits of longer duration, years usually, tend to be made up of objects a museum owns. Increasingly museums now periodically alter or adjust their permanent installations. This is an attempt to appear less static and stalled but also allows for freshening gallery appearances, introducing recent acquisitions, and providing new or different information. To the simple-minded this practice is expected to attract new or repeat visitors. Unless the changes are truly momentous, experienced museum professionals know that such changes alone will not do that.

Almost regardless of the museum, subjects for exhibitions seem limitless. This makes the process of deciding what to select challenging. Those responsible for these determinations feel enormous pressure, or should, to satisfy institutional desires while meeting what are presumed to be visitors' interests. The ease or difficulty with which museums decide upon subjects for exhibitions depends on the nature and size of the museum; the depth or shallowness of its collections; the presumed or known interests of the public; and practical matters such as budget, staff, and space.

Selecting an exhibition subject often involves deciding if a museum should explain the obscure or the obvious. Is it better for museums to present something with which audiences are familiar or should what is on view be about the unfamiliar? There is no right or wrong answer to this question but I suggest a balance between both. Museums have the wonderful capacity to show something quite recognizable to people while also delving into new, obscure, even puzzling subjects. Exhibition planning discussions are often about whether a museum should reassure or reveal.

Most museums are quite conservative, especially when it comes to exhibitions. Radical, revolutionary, disturbing, and otherwise disruptive exhibitions are rare even in museums that purport to be radical, revolutionary, disturbing, or disruptive. Museum trustees are shy when it comes to purposely advocating heated debates in the galleries of the museums they govern. The realm of exhibitions is a sensitive one and proposed ideas are closely watched for their incendiary potential. A museum celebrating a particular ethnic group will avoid an exhibition about famous criminals from that group, even if such an exhibit would be relevant and of interest. A natural history museum will not offer an exhibition taking issue with the fact of climate change. And an art museum will avoid an exhibition of portraits of Mohammad. To be sure some exhibitions museums logically engage in may be considered controversial but they are the exception. When complaints about exhibitions do occur they come from a minority of aggrieved parties which in turn are frequently contradicted by a majority of supportive parties, or at least supportive parties that are of value and importance to the assaulted museum.

Generally speaking there can be a vast number of museum exhibition subjects that safely reflect the mission of a particular institution. Presumably this should not be a surprise but it must be credited to those museum professionals who understand, advocate for, and adhere to strict controls over the exhibition idea process. The procedure is quite deliberative if a museum wants to be competent, instructive, relevant, and timely in its exhibition program.

Because museums are often under severe pressure to increase attendance, the process of selecting an exhibition can be thrown off course by the desire simply to attract visitors. When this happens, critical questions about meaning and content get lost in the shuffle. The only question of importance is: How many people will a "show" bring in? Such a poor reason for selecting an exhibit is hard for staff to combat when trustees insist on adhering to misguided visitation metrics. And, oddly, it seems that trustees, usually only one or two, are the prime advocates of determining exhibition subjects solely on anticipated attendance growth. My answer to the question of how to raise audience levels is simple: regardless of a museum's mission if you want more visitors show mummies, dinosaurs, Impressionist art, or nudes (especially live ones as the performance artist Maria Abramović did in 2010 at the Museum of Modern art in her exhibition The Artist is Present).

The subject of a museum exhibit can be broad or narrow, simple or complex, familiar or foreign. Understanding an exhibit subject is enhanced and made more secure when it is refined to its simplest common denominator, pared down to a clear and logical flow or a basic storyline with a beginning, middle, and end. Museums are in the "show and tell" business. Exhibits are stories. Narrative, both self-generated and provided to us by museums, is how we make sense of galleries and displays in art, science, or history museums.

I used to think, and was told by mentors, that some subjects just don't lend themselves to museum exhibitions. I now reject this idea. A good example of an exhibit subject that was presented to me as difficult was the history of finance. Sure, there would be pieces of money, stock certificates, pictures of famous financiers, and explanations of equity and collateral, but those are souvenirs of an arithmetic world that now charts profit and loss in cyberspace but for which there is little physical evidence to readily explain how it all works and why. Today, given the array of technologies available, how exhibitions can be made, and the vastly heightened knowledge about exhibition effectiveness, I think just about anything can be explained in a museum gallery. The role, number, and nature of original collection materials will vary, however.

Though collections are absolutely and singularly part of an exhibit, and tend to still be critically obvious, a host of interjectory methods and display contrivances can now serve to meet informational ends. Haven't science museums been doing this all along? How on earth do they explain what are essentially theories, be these of gravity or the universe or $E = mc^2$? Perhaps not with the sort of original materials available to an art museum to tell us about Cezanne or a history museum to tell us about Franklin D. Roosevelt, but science museum exhibitioners do a pretty enviable job with what they have at the ready. This deviates from my strict definition of a museum but only in the amount of original relevant evidentiary materials used to make a point. Exhibitions can avoid presenting a majority of pertinent original collections. We see this when over time, the display props become the original artifact. This is certainly true of the large model of a heart one can walk through at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia. I remember it well from when I was a kid and it remains one of the museum's preeminent attractions.

Regardless of such ancillary experiences as walking through a gigantic beating heart, museum collections remain at the core of exhibition considerations. It is their connective value that imbues them with meaning. Using collections to explain subjects puts museums in the position of a shaman or soothsayer or griot or priest or matchmaker. Museums are intermediaries providing intellectual, emotional, and physical content touchstones between objects, subjects, and people. After all, museums are heirs to the reliquaries of old (see Figure 5). They hold pieces of the true cross, the bones of the saints, the remains of martyrs. It is the Shroud of Turin syndrome. This is why compelling exhibitions have compelling collections. (Remember, given the stature of museums, just about anything on exhibition will be assumed to be of importance by visitors even if they have no idea why.) The central emphasis museums place on the veracity of their collections and the truths told with them have given museums

Figure 5 Reliquary in the Shape of an Arm. North France. Made around 1200–1250. Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Source*: Photograph by Steven Miller.

an astonishing level of public trust. We in the field are thus obligated to understand, accept, honor, and vow to assure the justification of this phenomenon as through the tangible we explain the intangible.

To be sure, there are variants when it comes to the use of original collections in exhibition contexts that, while hardly misleading in application, have results that certainly verge on make believe and perhaps even the bogus. As discussed elsewhere in this book, I am referring to my idea of collections as props rather than proof. The practice is especially prevalent in historic houses that were preserved with few or no original furnishings. Inevitably the rooms of these houses become filled with "antiques of the period" reflecting the appearance museum personnel decide each space should have. These are stage sets, hence my use of the word "prop." The furniture alludes to, but is not specific evidence of, the actual room. Oddly, over time, when such settings remain unchanged, proof and prop are conflated as realities merge in visitors' minds. People accept the stage set as the historical fact.

Two examples of the difference between museum collections as proof and props can be found along the Hudson River, at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt home in Hyde Park, New York, and Boscobel House and Gardens, downriver in Garrison, New York. Both operate as museums open to the general public. The contents of both are accessioned and constitute the permanent collection. However, the contents of the former are totally original to the house. The contents of the latter are almost totally not. In both cases the originality or non-originality of the contents is explained and nothing is hidden or purported to be something it is not. Visitors understand this.

A helpful, if somewhat simplistic, exercise for assessing a potential exhibition idea is to define a title and draft a media release. If this proves difficult, perhaps the exhibit is too. In deciding what exhibitions to organize, if I can succinctly and cogently explain them to myself and others, especially people unfamiliar with a subject, I may be reassured that the exhibit is worth doing. The subject might just have exhibition validity.

The aforementioned Who people for exhibitions are not only museum employees. It is common to have consultants, contractors, and even volunteers involved in helping a museum realize an exhibit. Be careful. Who are these additional assistants? What are their qualifications? And, perhaps most importantly, Who is in charge of them? Having been responsible for scores of exhibitions during my career, I have enormous respect and admiration for the hands-on people making them happen well, whether they are employees or not. Fortunately I have never had problems with these temporary assistants, but I can imagine what messes could unfold.

I always want to be certain that everyone on a job works well with everyone else. Once, upon being hired to direct a particular museum, I discovered its curator was a ridiculous prima donna. The person drove the staff mad and was especially insufferable when orchestrating a large temporary exhibition.

I knew things were askew when the curator absolutely refused to accept even a tiny bit of editorial input for the catalog, let alone the exhibition plan or object content. It was a relief to the whole institution when the person departed after the exhibit opened. I relay this story because in the context of the staging of an exhibition it poses the question relevant to all aspects of a museum's work: Who is responsible for assuring the "museum voice"? By that I mean the overall museum mission message that should infuse everything an institution does whether it is with exhibitions or education, social activities, research, collecting, and so on.

Exhibitions, even small ones, take time to mount. The reality of time is not always understood by people, and museums can be especially guilty of this. The peculiar characteristics of museum time quickly become apparent when you are planning and implementing exhibitions. It is essential to have a firm idea of how long it will take to realize an exhibition from conception to completion. Because exhibition development and implementation can be complex, it is important to truthfully calculate how much time it can take to select objects, manage their movement, write labels and other support materials, prepare galleries, install both objects and display furnishings, and handle all media and event productions, not to mention create various educational components. People with lots of exhibition experience are usually pretty good at plotting an exhibition plan. Curators can be lax in this regard but highly experienced designers tend to be quite accurate. If an exhibition budget is weak, vague or inaccurate, the time it takes to put on an exhibition can be totally thrown off course as funding is either nonexistent, late, or less than anticipated. (Rarely is it more than anticipated.)

I learned a long time ago that the more realistic, detail-oriented, and farsighted an exhibition plan is, the better one can schedule and bring final productions in on time. I hate last minute pressure or unnecessary stress. Some people seem to thrive on this but not I, especially when it comes to museum exhibitions. In my mind, if adequate thought has gone into planning gallery displays, there are few reasons for delays or major problems. These happen, but I prefer they be caused by outside influences rather than anything over which I should have control

The successful timing of an exhibition reflects not only on what is required to make a particular one happen but also on peripheral influences. These include everything a museum is doing in addition to producing an exhibition. Rarely can or does a museum focus all its attention and resources only on an exhibition at the expense of anything else, such as special events, education programming, renovations, collection activities, or research. Moreover, staff availability depends on an institution's overall work program as well as public holidays and personal vacations, when personnel may be unavailable.

Conceptualizing an exhibition is fun because the sky's the limit, or should be. People can dream and ponder about what to say and how to say it through objects.

I have listened to, and hope I have made, compelling presentations. Eventually though, wishes have to be realized in some physical manifestation. Things need to be selected, and with the assurance that they not only are available and appropriate for the story being told but also are in a condition to show safely (a consideration for both the object and the viewer). Words need to be written for everything from label copy to informational support materials, media releases, and formal spoken applications, including those for recorded audio technologies. Exhibition furniture such as cases, bases, platforms, stanchions, and barriers, mannequins, walls, and so forth need to be designated, designed, or made. Painting needs to be done. Graphics can occupy large and important focal parts of exhibitions, and these need to be appropriately made. And, all of the above must be melded into an exhibition. Who decides on these things and how long they take to come to fruition is an essential part of exhibition timing.

Exhibits cost money. This is an obvious statement but its magnitude and scope is not readily understood by some in the museum field and many outside it, including trustees. Again, there is often an assumption that simply hammering a nail in the wall and hanging a picture constitutes an acceptable exhibition and therefore this is an inexpensive aspect of museum operations and anyone can do it. If the wall behind the picture has to be painted and a label affixed nearby, these requirements are similarly cheap. Labels can be simple, they can be printed out on a computer and no research is really needed for them since the words already exist, somewhere, and can easily be cribbed. Presumably the picture did not need a new frame or the museum has a batch of these, in good condition and ready to be used when needed. Lighting is easy, just use what is available. The cost of the person or persons doing all this is in the annual budget, right? After all, aren't salaries and the electric bill part of a museum's overall costs?

My rudimentary illustration in exhibit cost awareness points out the importance of exhibition budgeting especially in the annual budget process. Setting and adhering to a budget for a particular exhibition is, in my mind, an essential management tool. The more museum employees know about what an exhibit can actually cost the better an institution can plan and move forward. While placing a picture on a wall in a gallery does constitute exhibiting, rarely is it a single event. Usually several or many pictures are put on display at one time. There is a cost to this. When exhibits include free-standing objects or items which cannot simply be hung, expenses escalate. Everything involving exhibition development and implementation has a price tag, even if it is indirect or assumed in an annual budget.

Museum exhibitions are paid for in three ways: through in-house budgets, special fundraising, or a combination thereof. Museums with regular yearly exhibition programs tend to understand what they can allocate from general operating funds when forming their annual budgets. They also have a sense of what the public's response will be to an exhibition and thus calculate earned income accordingly. If a museum has any fundraising savvy it will also have a reasonable sense of what additional money it might raise for a particular exhibition. Fundraising is always somewhat unpredictable but certain foundations may be called upon regularly for support with good reason. In spite of government budget reductions, state arts councils come to mind as do community foundations and certain well-established private personal and family foundations with which a museum might have a long-term special relationship. Remember that outside funders want clear, honest, budget plans from museums applying for money. Increasingly, once a grant or donation is given, subsequent reports need to accurately reflect previously submitted budgets. Some wiggle room is always given but only within reason.

While it should go without saying that an essential element of long-range exhibition planning is assessing and seeking financial support for particular shows, it must still be said. The more time a museum has to investigate and approach potential sources, the more time it has to clarify an exhibition budget based on reasonable income possibilities. Sometimes a really good exhibition idea has to be scuttled because there is no foreseeable chance of paying for it.

One thing that is essential to avoid when plotting an exhibition budget is any assumption that an exhibit will pay for itself and even realize a profit. This is one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest of fallacies about museums. There are several reasons for this foolishness. One has been created by museums themselves with the invention of what is now called “the blockbuster exhibition.” These expensive productions are put on by large museums and attract tens of thousands of visitors. Is it any wonder people inside and outside museum circles see them as lucrative money-makers? This incorrect thinking is, unfortunately, sometimes voiced by boards of trustees who can’t understand why museums fail to balance budgets by not mounting more popular exhibitions.

Museum exhibitions need space. Once again, this is one of those “Duh” statements in its obviousness. Too often I have seen those who know little about exhibitions completely fail to grasp how much room they really need. Even under the best of circumstances it is not unusual for museum employees to struggle with restricted or completely unsuitable areas. Remember, planning exhibition space is not just about where to put the things on view but also where to put visitors. To the untrained, exhibition space is only about galleries. That indeed is the lion’s share of what is needed, but other spaces are required.

Along with galleries, exhibitions require space through which the public must navigate getting to and from an exhibition, space for collections to travel to and from an exhibition, work space to prepare collections and fixtures for an exhibition, and storage areas for crates and other packing materials for things that have been shipped to a museum. There is also the social space needed for receptions and events related to an exhibition. Because these involve food and drink they rarely take place in an exhibition. And there are considerations that accrue when galleries are closed to prepare an exhibition.

The deft and felicitous use of exhibition space in museums is something of an intricate dance orchestrated by people who know the building well and have learned how to accommodate public programs and work requirements in old and new spaces. The challenge can be especially demanding in buildings that are an amalgam of retrofitted and repurposed structures, the layout of which is peculiar and has long failed to meet original architectural applications.

In addition to the configuration and size of exhibition spaces, is their suitability for displays. What sort of climate control is available or possible? Are there overhead utilities to worry about? Are skylights a problem? How about windows? Are there too many, not enough, and are they filtered from damaging light, if necessary? What about the walls? Are they suitable for attaching fixtures and exhibition props not to mention collections? Are the floors uniform and safe without being slippery and uneven? Are ceilings high enough or too high, and are they in good repair and appearance? Are the galleries insulated from the weather or adjacent to potentially harmful activities such as kitchens or mechanical rooms or carpenter shops? Is the space capable of being secured properly? Is vibration a potential problem and what about noise levels? Museums in urban areas or next to major highways and railroads can suffer from vibration. A small object displayed on a shelf in an unsecured manner can slowly and sometimes imperceptibly "walk" off the shelf. The museum building itself can suffer from vibration over time. Noise from outside a gallery can be distracting to visitors.

Finally, can the spaces under consideration for exhibitions support the necessary utilities, especially anticipated electrical loads? With the increase in audiovisual content, galleries must be outfitted to handle a host of technical facilities. Wi-Fi is now almost a requirement in museums. Few electrical concerns are greater than those required for lighting an exhibition. Lighting is not well understood by many. There is an art to illuminating what is placed on view in galleries. It has a subtle and not-so-subtle impact on how well people understand an exhibition. Constant attention is required to install, maintain, and occasionally improve exhibition lighting. It is a mechanical and creative endeavor.

Several museum staff can be responsible for exhibition lighting. I prefer to have it fall to those in charge of exhibits. When qualified, these people can include designers, installers, curators, and conservators, but also maintenance personnel. Most exhibits I have encountered have been well or at least adequately lit, but more than a few times I have observed burned-out light bulbs, misdirected fixtures, and splotchy illumination. These are insulting affronts to visitors.

Regarding the conservation of collections on exhibit, the greatest challenge for museums is to show things while also preserving them from light damage. Depending on the objects, this is no small matter. The profession understands that fabric and art on paper is subject to serious destruction when exposed to too much light over time. But I often wonder about other things, including oil paintings and mixed-media art. We embrace an unwritten agreement in the museum field that we will strive to shield the most fragile things in our collections while accepting alterations that light will cause if those alterations are barely perceptible. This approach is based on the idea that for some, the only reason museums exist is to show what they own. Of course, keeping collections in a climate-controlled black box is unrealistic. Museums have enough difficulty explaining storage as it is. Closing off all collections to viewers would really make our institutions peculiar time capsules.

Certain caveats are in order regarding lighting. One is that curators know how to do it. This is not always the case. Exhibit designers may claim to be lighting experts but their expertise in this area can simply be based on drama and dazzle. Maintenance staff may be able to change a light bulb, but will they use the right one? Conservators actually might be more qualified to advise on lighting but, again, their experience may err on the side of dimming rather than illuminating. Regardless of this, when possible I would prefer to have them closely involved in planning exhibit lighting.

Because so many museums are often in structures that were not intended to be museums, lighting public spaces poses particular challenges (see Figure 6). We see this in European castles, grand mansions, places of worship, forts, palaces, and so on. Anyone who has ventured through Castle St. Angelo in Rome has experienced a range of lighting circumstances, some adequate and some not so.

Fortunately, new technology allows for excellent lighting options for museums. The problem, as with everything else in this field, is usually the lack of money. Good lighting can be expensive to design, purchase, install, and implement. Most museums succeed incrementally when it comes to lighting, and they are constantly playing catch-up. In any exhibition, lighting is usually the last thing to be done, simply because it is the part of an exhibition that cannot be completed before everything is in place. And by everything I mean not only the collections but also the display furnishings, graphics, decorative elements, and so on.

I am as guilty as the next museum professional of an exhibition sin that drives me crazy. It seems that once an exhibition has been installed, we walk away from it and move on to the next. Things are improving in this regard, but we still see label errors, broken lighting fixtures, or wear and tear in galleries go unaddressed. Corrective follow-up, not to mention simple housekeeping matters, is a common visitor courtesy.

A word about words is in order when discussing exhibitions. How often do we see a wall of words, or as some people describe them, books on a wall, in exhibitions? Art museums are not as guilty of this as some science and many history museums. A sea of type repels rather than attracts interest. History museums succumb to this error when they are showing publications,

Figure 6 Exhibit in the Royal Palace, Brussels, Belgium. *Source*: Photo by Steven Miller.

old advertising signs, and other evidence that is itself full of words. We can think our labels are short and to the point, but if they are stuck in a mass of other writing, it makes no difference to the viewer. Reading is reading.

The word "interpretation" is often applied to what museums do in exhibitions. In their capacity as places that explain subjects through objects they are indeed interpreters. There are many ways to explain art, scientific specimens, or artifacts. It is an assignment museums have created for themselves. They do this through publications, educational programs, and exhibitions.

Deciding how to best achieve interpretive goals in a meaningful way for as many people as possible in an exhibition is a big challenge. Art museums probably have the easiest time of it as the original art is the interpretive focus. Science museums long ago learned to rely on a battery of support materials to assist with abstract learning. History museums hope the original object supplemented with labels and perhaps some audio accompaniment will do the trick. Ultimately a museum object and a museum visitor are one-on-one, and the experience will vary according to the visitor, the object, and a specific context.

Without question the most effective exhibition technique I have seen for history museum exhibitions is what was called "object theatre." It was "Show and Tell" in the old-fashioned, almost grade school context of the practice. Joe Noble, the late director of the Museum of the City of New York, pioneered this approach in two enormously successful temporary exhibitions. Both gave a quick history of the city of New York using objects from the museum's vast collection.

A gallery was set up in traditional fashion. Things were displayed on pedestals, on the walls, and in vitrines. In the center of the gallery were about 50 chairs for visitors. Every hour an announcement was made regarding the "show" that was to be presented in the space. People were invited to have a seat. They did. A large movie screen came down from the ceiling on one side of the gallery and a bank of slide projectors commenced an animated presentation that lasted about 20 minutes. A sound and light program flashed images on the screen. All were drawn from the museum's collections and conveyed a narrative history of New York City. Periodically, to make a point, something in the gallery was briefly spotlighted and explained. For instance, when the astonishing cultural growth of the city in the third quarter of the nineteenth century was discussed, an actual opera box from the then new Metropolitan Opera was illuminated. It held mannequins dressed in formal clothes of the period, again drawn from the collections. After the presentation was over, the screen disappeared into the ceiling, the gallery was lit as usual, and people could view the contents in customary ways but with far more knowledge. I have yet to see original museum objects interpreted so relevantly.

Class Questions

1 An artist whose photographs are in the collection of the museum where you work learns that one of her pictures is on temporary exhibit. She visits the museum to see how it is shown and is furious about the way it is displayed. The photographs she took that are in the museum's collections were part of a documentary project and exhibit the museum hired her to do about eight years before. The project included a narrative element for which a writer was hired and his words were on view too. The photographer is upset

because she wanted all the photographs she did for the project to be shown together and in a certain order, never alone. In addition, she wanted the writing for the project to accompany her pictures. The museum has no written information about the photographer's recollections or requirements. She demands that her photograph be taken off exhibit immediately. How should the museum respond?

2 Your museum has just opened a temporary exhibition of the work of a deceased regional artist. The exhibition has been borrowed from another museum, in another state, and the official loan arrangements are with that institution. The exhibition was guest curated by an artist who lives in your area. When you contracted for the exhibit, it was to have 44 paintings and your curator reserved two galleries to comfortably accommodate them. When the exhibit arrived and the packing crates were opened, there were 63 paintings. These were listed in lists in the crates. The curator brought this discrepancy to the attention of the director. The loan agreement made no requirement about how many paintings had to be exhibited and there was no communication with the lending museum regarding this situation. The director gave the curator permission to exhibit the paintings as she thought best in the designated galleries. Fifteen were left out. The lending museum was notified and had no complaints. One morning, a few days after the exhibit opens, the guest curator arrives at your museum. He has had no contact with your museum or staff. He enters the galleries carrying various tools such as a hammer, drill, tape measure, picture hooks, and level, and proceeds to dismantle the exhibition. He plans to reinstall it. How might museum officials respond to this?

3 How does a museum know if a particular exhibition is successful? Define success?

4 When a guest curator is hired by a museum to curate an exhibition, who has the final say about content, be it physical (collections, technology, design materials, and fabrications) and words (written in printed form or spoken in recordings or tours)? Who sets and controls the budget and how?

5 You are the curator of a museum that has a wing holding a large collection of automobiles. One year you celebrate the fortieth anniversary of a famous model of sports car. You have or are able to borrow a car made in each year. These are shown in your car galleries and some are in the entrance of the museum. As the display is being completed another arrives to go on view. It is not necessary. It is owned by a trustee, who is an important automobile collector. He has directed come of his employees to deliver it to the museum and place it on exhibit, which they do and then depart. What should be done?

6 You are the director of a museum presenting an exhibition showing the art of a nineteenth-century American painter who was part of the Hudson River School of artists. (The school was a movement not a place.) The exhibit is entirely made up of loans from other museums and individuals. The husband of one of the lenders, who is a descendant of the artist, has taken up sculpture as a hobby during his retirement. He has made a portrait of the artist who is the subject of the exhibit. It is a poorly rendered life-size representation. He and his wife want you to feature the sculpture in the exhibition. You do not. How do you deal with this?

13

Maintenance and Security

A stitch in time saves nine.

Maintenance and security can be somewhat mundane and even boring subjects when compared to the more lofty things people associate with museums such as impressive collections, popular exhibitions, revealing research, and the sense of prestige these treasure houses can exude. Given the enviable reputation museums enjoy I suspect another reason maintenance and security matters are given short shrift by the public is that, on the surface at least – which means when we visit – there is a feeling of well-being, tidiness, and even safety about a museum. Visitors also probably assume that matters of maintenance and security are so important for museums that these responsibilities are under control. A lot goes into causing both this perception and reality.

Depending on the size of the museum, maintenance and security functions tend to be lumped together into one personnel arena. Large museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art might divide these responsibilities but less grandiose ones will usually have them under the supervision of one department or office or person. While perhaps operationally close, the two responsibilities are different.

Maintenance

Museum maintenance is about the safe and correct care and functioning of physical structures and mechanical and technological systems and operations. Museum security is the department responsible for the safety of collections, staff, public, and non-collection property, such as buildings, machinery, equipment, vehicles, facilities, and land. Maintaining a museum can seem overwhelming. Museums are structures that require their interior and exterior workings to mesh in the service of the whole. While some of us in the profession may focus specifically on collections, programming, fundraising, governance issues, earned income, or research, all of these happen in an actual place.

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

That place should be structurally sound, appropriately designed for specific museum purposes, and maintained in good order. This is not always the case but it is a goal to strive for.

Maintenance can be divided into four areas of concern: components, procedures, people, and planning. Components are machines, equipment, tools, buildings, and land. Procedures involve how maintenance is managed and accomplished, including housekeeping. People are the individuals largely responsible for maintenance, be they employees or contractors. And planning is that all-important and often too neglected assignment to think ahead and prepare for maintenance requirements in the immediate or distant future.

The components of a museum that require maintenance are not unique to these institutions. They are found in other places such as universities, office buildings, factories, houses of worship, and homes. Common denominators include structures and what they are made of and how, as well as grounds and landscapes. Thus, depending on the museum, designated maintenance staff should have at least a nodding acquaintance with masonry, wood, steel, iron, stone, glass, and other building materials and their interconnectedness when it comes to construction. Landscapes require similar familiarities but for terrain, driveways, walls, fences, water features, plants, and all the other physical stuff found around museums.

What tends to set the maintenance requirements of museums apart from the maintenance matters faced by other places is the preservation imperative that accrues when the conservation of original structures, landscapes, interiors, materials, and settings is called for. Two different approaches to this challenge can be seen in a New England town that hosts both an esteemed preparatory school and a museum. The organizations both own historic structures but differ in how they maintain them. The museum has rigorous guidelines concerning preserving historic buildings to assure original physical integrities. The school has no interest in this. The consequences of these two divergent perspectives is visually obvious, often appallingly so.

It is not unusual for a museum's largest "collection" artifact to be a building. This is particularly true for many local historical societies housed in a landmark structure but it is also evident in several large purpose-built art museums that are expected to preserve certain original structures and to do so in a certain way. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the former Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art all come to mind in this regard.

When museums have unique requirements for maintaining the materials of which they are made in a particular way, knowing how to care for, repair, and, replace such materials is of obvious importance. Slate roofs are a good example. Few roofing companies are qualified to work with the material in any historically appropriate manner. There is no substitute for this sort of roof.

Trustees may insist on using a less expensive material (often with arguments that it “looks just as good”) but appearance and longevity are severely compromised. And, because museums are about authenticity that quality is severely eroded.

It is helpful to understand that building trades common when a particular museum was built but greatly diminished today can still be found. Architectural ornamental plaster companies were abundant in the early twentieth century. The popularity of the International Style in architecture, which eschewed any sort of ornament on buildings, caused this craft to almost vanish by the early 1970s. Between finishing college and ramping up my museum career I worked in such a shop in Pennsylvania (Figure 7). The owner had been in the business since the 1920s. From crews numbering dozens my boss had been reduced to five employees working out of a four-car garage. A rising interest in historic preservation, especially for homes, has brought renewal of the sector, and there are now more architectural plaster firms. This is true for a host of specialties and museums need to be aware of them.

Because many museums are made of concrete, stone, brick, or some combination of them, masonry needs to be understood when it comes to maintenance. Power-washing painted brick to return it to its rusty-red “original” color can be disastrous as it might destroy the glazed surface of individual bricks thus causing intrusive erosion over time. Replacing damaged stonework requires expertise.

Figure 7 Author installing an ornamental plaster ceiling, Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, while employed at Felber Studios, Horsham, Pennsylvania. 1970. *Source*: Photograph courtesy of author’s archives.

Concrete paving can be severely damaged by salt used in winter climates to clear ice and snow. Usually the masonry of stone and brick structures is held together with some sort of mortar, and that requires watchful attention. The loss of this bonding agent leads to the loss of a wall.

Glass requires particular maintenance attention, especially skylights. Obviously the most damaging thing about glass is that it breaks. But leaks can occur around windows. An architect once told me all skylights leak, and I think he is correct. Over the years, fortunately, building codes and common sense have introduced requirements for a certain kind of safety glass to be used in doors, glass walls, and big partitions. It is important to know what sort of glass is in place at older museums. I saw the bloody results of a carpenter walking into a non-safety glass wall of the Maine State cultural complex when I was assistant director of the museum there. Fortunately the victim was not seriously injured, but it was a lesson. Glass also has thermal challenges that can add to heating costs while at the same time requiring expensive shielding to mitigate the passage of too much light. And then there is the matter of keeping glass clean. New museum architecture can be ablaze with lofty expanses of glass. There is a care cost to this that goes beyond an initial product and installation expense.

Wooden buildings need constant attention, and perhaps this reality is no more apparent than with historic structures that are museums. Degradations caused by rot, insects, fire, vandalism, poor management decisions, neglect, accidents, and suchlike individually and cumulatively undermine mission-driven desires to keep museums meaningful in their “original” condition and appearance.

My short list of material and construction components characteristically encountered in museum buildings simply points out the importance of understanding what museums are made of and why assuring their safety and longevity is essential and summarizes what this requires. A lot is known about building materials. Depending on their job requirements, those responsible for museum maintenance must be familiar with current and accurate information in the context of the institution they serve. Staff need not be experts – that is what qualified consultants and building trades are for, but it is helpful if they have a sense of what is appropriate for any given situation so as to avoid mistakes, especially if these will lead to disasters.

Equipment, machines, and tools that can be maintenance responsibilities are somewhat predictable. Vehicles; floor-buffers; snow-blowers; lawnmowers; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems (HVAC); radial-arm saws; vacuum cleaners; IT equipment; ladders of all sorts and sizes; mops; brooms; paint sprayers; and an assortment of hand tools are just some of the things that can be on such a list. It is absolutely essential to designate clearly which of these things is the responsibility of which staff. It is important to be certain that those employees are capable of using the things properly.

For the most part, most museums do a diligent job of keeping maintenance materials in good order. I am sure there are instances of things "disappearing" or being needlessly broken or improperly used but those tend to be exceptions. Actually, I suspect many museums are too good at keeping maintenance materials on hand and working. When I was the executive director of the Morris Museum in Morristown, New Jersey, I was able to obtain a newly refurbished forklift as a gift from the giant shipping company Maersk. These things are expensive. We needed it as the one we had was on its last legs, or perhaps I should say last wheels. When the new lift arrived I thought the old one had been carted off. Wrong again. Not two months later I saw both lifts being put to work together in a novel but well-implemented maneuver on the property. Apparently the old lift was retained, in hiding, for just such unanticipated applications.

Assigning personnel responsibility for maintenance equipment is an attempt to assure its safekeeping and proper use. Naturally, those given such responsibility have to be capable of it and accept and understand the duties. Putting a klutz in charge of a forklift would be unwise. It is also important to be aware of a tendency in some to become proprietorial over the equipment and tools given into their care. I learned this lesson all too well. I hired an exhibit designer, the first one the society of which I was then director had ever had. He was excellent and knew how to use tools to build things such as cases, bases, frames, and other fixtures needed in exhibitions. My assumption was that he and the maintenance department would share the woodworking shop and associated equipment in a congenial and collaborative manner according to a mutually agreed-upon museum project schedule. I was dreadfully naive. The backlash from the head of maintenance in particular was so strong and my negotiating skills so fruitless that unless I fired someone there would be no sharing of anything. Both men were too good to lose, so in the interest of peace and productivity I opted to let the designer set up his own shop. Because space was at a premium, he could not totally replicate the woodworking shop and eventually, on occasion, he was "allowed" to use it but it took a while to reach that accommodation.

Because environments in museums are so critical to the preservation of collections, not to mention staff comfort, regularly functioning and properly calibrated HVAC are of immense importance. These are mechanical in nature and are therefore usually under the supervision of maintenance staff. Sometimes conservators are also involved, which is welcome.

When it comes to interior climates of museums, temperature is the most readily noticed and responded to. We know when it's cold and we know when it's not, and we know when it's neither too hot nor too cold. Expecting to be able to control indoor temperature is fairly customary in most buildings in modern societies. We can heat them and we can cool them. For museums the challenge arises when that heating and cooling needs to be for collections as well as people. People may only require such creature comforts between the customary working hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Collections require stable atmospheric conditions day and night, notably for temperature and humidity. Furthermore, what may be preferable for some collections may not be preferable for people. In such cases, temperature zones can be established, but this arrangement often depends on finances and the budgets of individual museums.

The real HVAC challenges museums face relate to humidity control. We know that air conditioning keeps humidity levels low, but what happens in museums in climates where there are cold, dry winters and humidity levels drop as the air becomes quite dry? Humidification is necessary. Only museums with ample budgets can afford this, but they also require maintenance staff as well as contractors who understand the how and why of humidifiers. Moreover, the museum building asked to hold a particular humidity level must be able to sustain that level without damaging itself. And there must be an understanding of what humidity ranges are best for what collections.

When setting museum temperature and humidity goals usually a compromise is agreed upon, especially for humidity. It is hoped that there will neither be so much humidity as to cause rust on metal objects nor so little as to cause wood to dry and fall apart. Since changes in temperature, especially radical fluctuations, can have an adverse impact on humidity, keeping a certain temperature and humidity year-round is critical. These simple but all-important directives need to be monitored by qualified maintenance staff, and the museum must have the correct equipment to meet desired specifications.

Other equipment systems of obvious importance in museums (as elsewhere) include electrical, plumbing, and information technology. Museums can be mammoth consumers of electricity. This is a consequence of 24-hour HVAC requirements and exhibition needs. Trying to reduce these loads is difficult but there are measures that can be effective. These include the obvious ones of lighting exhibitions with new lamps that require less power and building museums that can sustain specified interior climates more naturally than artificially. Because many museums are aging or were put in old buildings that were originally designed to serve other purposes, museums play a constant game of catch-up when it comes to electrical systems. Old wiring always needs to be replaced and upgraded. In addition to the obvious safety concerns old electrical systems pose, they are inadequate for current applications.

Maintenance staff must be aware of the character and capabilities of the electrical systems under their supervision. It is especially important that they be aware of local building codes and avoid violating them. Sometimes these codes are not as well written as they might be, but the need for them, and the need for the rationale behind them to be understood and their stipulations enforced, is quite simply safety. Maintenance personnel must vigilantly guard against staff doing stupid things with electrical equipment, such as thoughtlessly using space heaters, power tools, unauthorized window air conditioners, personal refrigerators, coffee machines, and lots of extension cords. The often variable history of museum buildings means electrical systems also vary. New wings may be more than adequate for the range of power uses a museum might require there. Older parts of a museum may not. This is why renovations, expansions, and upgrades are usually beneficial to museums in more than the initially anticipated ways.

Plumbing is either a simple or highly complex matter depending on the nature of a building and its uses. When the pipes, valves, fittings, pumps, faucets, hydrants, drains, and so forth function correctly, all is well. When mechanisms fail, the results can be quite messy – especially with bathroom malfunctions or damage in water supply lines and equipment. Because so much plumbing is behind the scenes, in walls, floors, and underground, diagnosing and correcting problems is particularly difficult.

The source and character of a museum water supply needs to be known as it can have an impact on the longevity of plumbing equipment. Water with a lot of minerals in it causes corrosion. It may be beneficial to install filtering systems, but as with all such equipment, maintenance is essential. Clogged or corroded filters fail to accomplish what they are supposed to accomplish.

Protecting collections against potential plumbing disasters requires constant vigilance. It is of utmost importance that collections be placed away from potential plumbing threats, which is why those deciding upon the location of object storage and exhibition should be mindful of overhead water lines, roof drains, air-handling machinery, water tanks, and bad roofs potentially prone to leaks (or worse, collapse). Avoiding potential disasters is not as easy as it may seem. Though the practice is declining, much museum storage seems to be in basements and attics, again often in historic house museums, and these are areas which can be particularly susceptible to mishaps. Rising damp, which is the "wicking" or soaking up of water from the ground into walls and floors, can be a problem in museum foundations. Often this is somewhat remedied with dehumidifiers or an air-handling system that accomplishes this goal. Aside from determining how appropriate these are for a particular building's long-term structural integrity, as with all machinery and systems, these require constant attention to assure they are working correctly. Small portable dehumidifiers must be emptied or drained regularly, these and larger more stationary ones can have a drainage mechanism built in, but make sure it isn't simply draining the water into adjacent areas where it still poses a threat.

When considering plumbing and water pipes in a museum context, the subject of fire suppressing sprinkler systems always arises. There are several schools of thought about them. Most museums do not have sprinklers. This is as much for reasons of finance as fear. Sprinkler systems are costly to install and must be monitored, as with all other museum building systems. I favor sprinklers, but it depends on the architectural character of a particular museum, its collections and exhibitions, and the capabilities of staff. There are several kinds of sprinkler systems. Some have water in the pipes all the time. Some draw water into the pipes when it is called for. Some have gases in the pipes or the possibility thereof. Whatever kinds of sprinklers are in place, there are two myths about these systems that need to be dispelled. One is that they go off for no reason. The other is that when one sprinkler head opens and water starts gushing out, all the other sprinkler heads in the system do the same. Again, for the most part, these fears are unfounded. Sprinkler heads can open accidentally, but this is usually the result of human error, such as someone accidentally banging into one with a ladder. Because each sprinkler head is designed to function independently of all others, rarely (if ever?) do they all activate at once for no valid reason.

Drains seem to be a plumbing sub-category requiring special attention. How often do museums suffer when these things are clogged? I suspect more often than not. I know of at least three times exterior drains have failed because they were blocked with pine tree needles. In all cases rainwater backed up and caused damage, fortunately not to collections or exhibitions (but to my office in one instance!). As obvious as it may seem, drains, be they on roofs, in driveways, basements, or bathrooms, need to be kept open and clear and all the time.

Pest control is of immense importance for museums. Damage to collections, buildings, and facilities as well as threats to people can be devastating. A regular program of pest monitoring that includes the ability to respond immediately and safely to adverse situations must be in effect. The range of pests to be concerned about is wide and varies with climate, the material characteristics of a museum and its location, the content and programming of a museum and its operational nature. Insects often top the list of critters to be wary of. But, of course, mice and rats are verboten, raccoons and squirrels can raise havoc, birds are messy and destructive (woodpeckers can and do actually attack areas of historic wooden buildings, for instance), no one likes snakes. Deer can decimate plants and collide with vehicles.

A pest control and abatement program is essential, but care must be taken that while doing away with or keeping critters out of museums, humans and collections are not threatened. Responsible pest eradication companies will say their measures are safe and comply with local, state, or national strictures and their people are trained in the application of whatever chemicals are called for when exterminating a living creature, but I want to be sure those creatures are not museum staff or the public.

The regular monitoring and inspection of eradication measures is required to avoid applications being made at the wrong time in the wrong place and in the wrong way. God forbid the contractor shows up to spray an area about to be traversed by a school group. The small open-ended boxes with sticky stuff spread on the inside bottom surface to snag errant bugs may be helpful but they do need to be thrown out once in a while. And if they must be used in a public area of a museum, please keep them out of sight. Of course, having insects and other invasive pests can be a consequence of bad environments, and this is another reason for climate control and attentive monitoring of it. Basements and subbasement are especially attractive to insects. I know of two major Manhattan museums with collections in these areas, and it is not unusual to encounter the occasional cockroach, centipede, or scary spider.

Influencing the normal maintenance requirements of a museum will be its operational schedule. Is it open seasonally, and if so does that require particular watchfulness during times the museum is closed? What happens when a museum is closed at night or for holidays? Who is keeping an eye on things and do these people know what to keep an eye on? Because of the ages, meagre budgets, architectural peculiarities, often odd configurations, and locations of many museums and the treasures they hold, pest control must be a constant concern. Fortunately I have avoided being called upon to have much experience with pests (animals not people) in my museum career. This has either been a result of good institutional pest control programs or my ignorance of these matters. I hope it has not been because of the latter.

What are commonly referred to as housekeeping or janitorial services in museums are usually under the jurisdiction of maintenance people. It is hard to overemphasize the importance of this aspect of a museum's operations. Perhaps, indeed, cleanliness is next to godliness when it comes to museums. People appreciate institutional neatness and a spotless appearance when visiting. Attending to this must be a top and regular priority insisted upon by management and carried out by appropriate employees, which can include management as needed. As big a fan as I am about tidiness in museum spaces, there must be implementation and material guidelines when making it happen. Shutting down all bathrooms during peak visiting hours for routine cleaning that could be done at another time is disruptive. Leaving a floor polishing machine in a gallery is unsightly, not to mention potentially dangerous. Trash cans overflowing with debris give a bad impression. High on my list of deplored public slights is the sight of tables and chairs stacked in corners, hallways, and balconies before or after a special event.

Maintenance staff qualifications, authority, and assignments will vary from museum to museum. A range of individuals will be responsible in some manner for the work cited above. However, the job descriptions are rarely so specific that they include everything a person is required to do, with whom or how. Most job descriptions are specific enough to explain the main facets of a position while also allowing freedom to do it as a person thinks best. These documents need regular review and updating, and this should be done with the person the position describes.

I am a firm believer in doing everything possible to retain valued employees, especially when it comes to maintenance. The more time these people spend with a museum, frequently the better they know its physical and mechanical nature.

A similar situation can apply to outside tradespeople hired to do specific tasks. Finding trustworthy companies and individuals in this regard is not always easy but once the task is accomplished their help is critical. Obviously workers not on a museum's payroll require additional supervision and guidance for reasons of both competency and security.

Of course, longevity can breed lethargy or a way of working that results in counterproductive stasis. It is incumbent on managers to see that such situations and habits are avoided. This requires regular monitoring and watchfulness. I should also add that maintenance staff may not be the people to involve when making certain institutional decisions, especially those requiring expertise in conservation, exhibition design, architecture, space usage, programming, and public access. I remember when I was heading up a major renovation project at a museum and the lead maintenance person suggested a suspended acoustical tile ceiling be put in the refurbished historic entry hall. I politely deflected the proposal.

I have relied on and had excellent and productive relationships with every employee responsible for maintenance in every museum I have worked in. These people do the heavy lifting, often literally, and they make sure the museum functions mechanically and structurally to the best of their ability and experience. They are the ones who must be consulted about projects, programs, and events that require physical activity in galleries, storage facilities, public activity spaces, outside on a property, and so on. On the job not a day goes by that I am not in contact with a maintenance person or persons for some very practical reason.

Sometimes maintenance staff can be treated poorly by other museum employees or trustees who put them in a servant category and act accordingly. This is insulting and counterproductive. Maintenance personnel are not your personal handmaidens waiting to do your bidding whenever you demand it. I always tell my students, "Be nice to the people who clean the toilets." In addition to such behavior being appropriate and appreciative regardless of with whom one is dealing, cleaning is one of the most important jobs insofar as a museum's public reputation is concerned. Crappy bathrooms (pun intended), messy entrances and admission areas, dirty galleries, unhealthy eating places, trashy grounds, and suchlike do not convey an image of competency or care. A museum can have all the Rembrandts in the world, but if it is filthy, messy, and obviously unkempt, that is what visitors will remember. They have been insulted by the institution.

I always like to hire maintenance staff capable of working with building materials and mechanical systems, especially in a variety of existing construction contexts. Sometimes it simply takes years of being in the same place for a person to familiarize himself or herself with the physical and technical nature of it. Having staff members who can actually do plumbing, electrical, and carpentry work is helpful. I well remember the two carpenters the Museum of the

City of New York had when I was there. They were quite capable of repairing anything made of wood in the building, with the possible exception of decorative elements such as column capitals. They could remove and replace walls in keeping with the original Georgian design of the building's interiors and were more than comfortable erecting exhibition furnishings. I quickly learned never to contemplate a construction or reconstruction project without first talking with John and Henry about the building.

Whatever skills museum employees have, all of us can benefit from continued training, and this should not be forgotten when it comes to maintenance staff. I might go to the annual meeting of the American Alliance of Museums and a curator might attend a symposium on a subject of interest but someone with electrician capabilities would do well to keep up with developments in that area, especially when it comes to licensing and new regulation requirements.

There is often a board of trustees committee devoted to monitoring and overseeing maintenance matters. It might be called the Buildings and Grounds Committee. As with all such bodies they can be enormously helpful, totally innocuous, or quite damaging. Generally speaking I have found them helpful, but it depends on who is on them and how they are handled. Because ultimately, and especially with buildings, most decisions, ideas, advice, and directives all depend on the availability of money, I have gradually learned to respond to the less helpful suggestions with promises to estimate the cost in time and money. As anticipated, when this information is delivered, obfuscation, delay, postponement, and amnesia set in. But never lose sight of ideas and suggestions if you think they have value, regardless of the source. And I am always happy to give credit to those who have made suggestions, even if it really wasn't their idea.

Given the rarified world of some museums, it is interesting to see how relationships play out between what were once referred to as blue-collar and white-collar employees. The variations can sometimes be striking. There really is an "Upstairs Downstairs" mentality. Usually this is characterized by differences when it comes to education, income, race, ethnicity, social exposures, political persuasions, and cultural expectations and assumptions. It can play out in urban, small town, and rural museums regardless of geography, institutional size, or purpose. The divides are evident in so-called holiday parties when staff (and trustees sometimes) gather together to break bread and celebrate their camaraderie. Look at who sits with whom. Or, look at the cars staff and trustees drive. There is a difference. We may want to think we live in an egalitarian society, but we do not. Social norms are learned so we can get through the day as smoothly as possible, but in fact, there are strong pecking-order differences and these are very apparent in museums. Social standing is fluid in the United States but it exists nevertheless.

In the olden days of museums it was not unusual to have white-collar employees who came from the "moneyed class" and grew up with servants. They had an odd ability to work well with maintenance employees who understood the behavior of those habituated to wealth as it played out on the job. It was actually respectful and polite. White-collar employees inexperienced with having people to boss were often the annoying staff members.

Procedures

As important as knowing about a museum's component operative parts, is assuring procedures for sustaining and maintaining them. For instance, being aware of the need to keep drains functional is no substitute for doing so. There should be a long list of maintenance procedures, protocols, and systems, especially for museums that experience seasonal variation. The list itself must be checked regularly and kept current. It should not only include the aforementioned drain monitoring but all machinery, materials that deteriorate on a regular basis, electrical, IT, and plumbing systems, landscapes (trees need regular attention), and water features such as ponds, streams, fountains, and so forth. Much has been written about building maintenance, and I will not dwell on minutiae. You can look it up, as they say. It is essential to remember that museums have a particular responsibility to be in charge of the envelope (buildings) that protects contents (collections) on behalf of the public now and in the future (there's that "perpetuity" thing again). Moreover, "maintenance is not only necessary to identify problems and prevent problems escalating, it is also important in maintaining a pleasant and safe environment for staff and visitors" (Ambrose and Paine 2006: 227–228).

Deciding who sets, monitors, and updates procedures is as critical as the procedures themselves. Preferably you want people with experience in this arena. For staff the obvious persons would be those responsible for maintenance and security with oversight by supervisory staff. Trustees can provide assistance in this regard and presumably those folks will be on a designated board committee. Keeping abreast of new developments in maintenance and security procedures is important. Outside assistance can be called upon as necessary. Local emergency response services might be able to provide such information on a regular basis. Whatever procedures are in place it is essential that directed staff be aware of them and new employees informed. How often are emergency procedures posted and forgotten?

Security

The first thing visitors encounter as they enter the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City is a security presence. Uniformed guards are obvious. Large bags and purses are given a cursory inspection. You are asked to hand over backpacks and other containers to a coat room attendant. In the galleries are more guards. You may notice surveillance cameras, motion detectors, smoke and fire alarms, and other devices facilitating the safe survival of the collection, the building, and the people in it.

Security is and must always be a top priority for museums. It is an obvious responsibility as far as the public is concerned. After all, if we accept the premise that the things museums hold in trust for present and future generations are of value, we must do everything within our power to secure them against loss by theft, natural or manmade disasters, vandalism, and potential inherent deterioration.

Museum security is designed to protect property and people. In addition to collections, the property includes buildings, equipment, materials, facilities, and land. The people include staff, volunteers, visitors, contractors, researchers; in short, anyone in or on museum property. Methods for assuring the safety of them all range from obvious to obscure and depend on a museum's capabilities and interests. A museum with a lot of natural property spread across many acres may not devote as much attention to monitoring all its land as a museum on a quarter acre lot.

There are passive and active forms of security coverage. Passive forms include locks, spaces of restricted use, lighting, and building materials that are fireproof or difficult to break through. Active ones include technical devices such as alarms, regularly reviewed and practiced personnel procedures, and a security-specific human presence.

To a degree, everyone who works in a museum is responsible for security regardless of specific job responsibilities. Protecting property and people cannot simply be left to designated staff or security devices. The new adage "If you see something say something" is as true for museums as any other area of life in today's precarious world. The questions are What should one be looking for? What should be said and to whom? and What responses are required? There are several books about museum security and I recommend reading them.

The concerns for the longevity and safety of collections, be they borrowed or owned, encompass how they are housed, handled, and made available for use, be that use research, exhibition, or some form of reproduction. In practice, the direct security of collections is best left to the experts. Usually these include curators, collection managers, exhibition technicians, and conservators. Security personnel, exhibition designers, education and maintenance staff can be instructed on optimum collection security standards and practices, but they may not be the people one wants physically interacting with collections.

Collection theft is a popular topic when it comes to museum security, but theft of equipment, materials, and information should also be guarded against. How many office computers have wandered from museums? Tools can be popular targets of loss. And obviously gift shops have to worry about merchandise "shrinkage." Having honest people working in and for a museum is an obvious front line of defense to guard against theft, and for the most part, in my experience, this has largely been the case. On the very rare occasions when it has not, transgressions have usually involved money purloined in obvious or nefarious ways. Years ago an accountant at the Museum of the City of New York was alleged to have juggled the books to the tune of about $25 000 over a period of a few years. At the Bennington Museum I was alerted by a member of the public to an admission staff person pocketing cash as visitors paid the entrance fee. I'm not sure an annual audit would be considered a security measure but it is, and if done well and indeed independently, it is both reassuring and helpful.

Major thefts of major collections are what come to mind when we think of museum security. Certainly these grab the headlines. Perhaps the most upsetting in recent memory occurred in 1990 when two men disguised as policemen were inexplicably allowed into the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston one night and made off with 13 works of art. These remain unrecovered (and no one at the museum was held accountable). Collection theft occurs in museums large and small. Fortunately such losses are exceptions. It is especially reassuring that museum staff who could easily remove items from collections virtually undetected, don't. Registrars and collection managers who have direct access to collections and collection records are to be commended in this regard.

Guarding against collection theft requires specific physical, personnel, and operational measures. Physical measures include designating secure storage and collection handling areas only accessible to certain personnel. These spaces need to be monitored. Procedures must be in place to assure safe access. Record-keeping is essential to meeting security needs. Personnel responsible for museum security range from individuals specifically assigned and trained in this duty to staff, and even volunteers, marginally aware of security necessities. Having paid and trained security staff is advisable but not always feasible. Hiring outside security firms to assist with this has its pros and cons as one is never certain of the capabilities of the individuals assigned to the task.

Oddly, collection theft often occurs during "off hours," such as when museums are closed or under renovation. There are instances of thieves stealing items during the day when the public is around but these are exceptions. The Gardner Museum theft is a perfect example. Collection security must be heightened when museums are under construction or during special events when non-museum workers may be on the premises. Two examples will suffice to make the point.

For a number of years the Museum of the City of New York had a 10-foot-long ship model in its original elaborate wood-framed display case on extended loan to the South Street Seaport Museum, at the tip of Manhattan. One December the borrowing museum was renovating a building that contained its ship model gallery. On Christmas Eve day construction workers left early, and rather than replace a removed exterior door that lead onto a back alley, they simply put up a piece of plywood which was held in place with two nails.

Sometime between the attachment of the plywood and the workers' return two or three days later, the gallery was broken into (hardly difficult) and the City museum's ship model was removed. The ship was the *Majestic*, and it has never been seen since.

In 1984 Arista Records rented the Museum of the City of New York for a party to celebrate the company's tenth anniversary. One of its foremost artists, Dionne Warwick, agreed to sing that night. The crowd exceeded expectations and numbered at least 800. The next day it was clear that some soda had been sprayed on several important portraits hanging on the museum's grand spiral staircase. Historic furniture on display had been moved and even used by guests to hold drinks and plates of food. The person in charge of special events was fired and long-overdue protocols were finally put in place regarding rental events.

Securing collections on exhibit requires constant attention. In addition to mounting items safely and in ways that do not encourage meddling, vandalism, or theft galleries must be free of potential hazards such as excess light, wild fluctuations in temperature and humidity, or pollution. Most museums cannot afford gallery guards, and therefore exhibitions must be "self-guarding and self-guiding." Clothing on display requires special care as it is human nature to want to touch fabric (Figure 8). Do not rely on "please do not touch" signs or labels that explain why museums ask people not to touch.

The three most popular things to steal from museum collections are precious metals, firearms, and jewelry. Therefore be especially careful when displaying silverware, guns, bracelets, rings, necklaces, and so on. Historic house museums need to be especially mindful in this regard as some of these items will be on view for visitors to see in the context of period rooms. Random pilfering or vandalism occurs in museums but fortunately it is not as common as it could be.

Museum storage is an essential element of collection security, but guidelines must be in place to insure effectiveness. Again, the space itself must be conducive to storing particular museum collections. In the past, basements and attics were popular to use, but that has changed markedly. While not all museums can have precise climate controls in place around the clock, neutral environments are nevertheless somewhat achievable. Locks and other access devices must be sound and not vulnerable to tinkering. Collection storage cannot be open to all. The fewer people allowed in such spaces the better. Locks, passwords, and similar security devices must only be available to a preselected few. Records of access and space usage can and should be kept. Records of collection locations are essential, as are records of collection movements. Photographic records are of equal value and importance.

Obviously an entire museum building needs to meet certain security requirements. This is especially the case when such structures constitute the largest artifact in a museum's collection, albeit one not accessioned. An excellent example of this would be the idiosyncratic Mercer Museum of the Bucks County

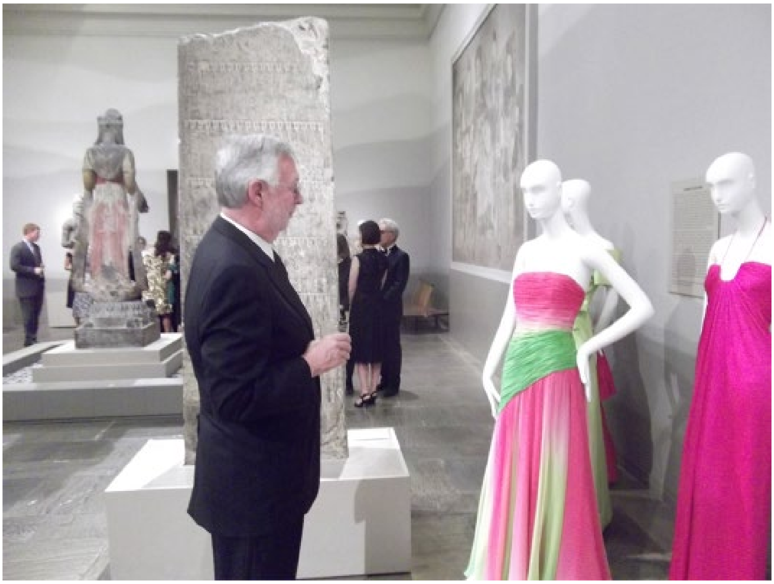

Figure 8 The author shown with drink in hand and dangerously close to the unprotected dresses of fashion designer Arnold Scassi during the opening of an exhibition of his clothing at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, 2010. Oddly, drinks were permitted in the galleries throughout the evening – something unprecedented for most museums most of the time. *Source*: Photograph by Jane Miller.

Historical Society in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. A wonderful, totally concrete historic structure, its preservation is a top priority for the organization. To a degree the Mercer Museum reflects concerns for buildings that provide maximum security for both the people and the things contained in them. Will they be safe? Can they be accessed properly? How will they function during emergencies? And, can they be updated as new use requirements change over time?

Assuring a safe environment for people in museums is a security measure of obvious necessity. A top priority is having emergency procedures in place for fire and other alerts. There must be written procedures, updated regularly, but practice makes perfect and drills are required. I recall a museum I worked in once where the fire alarm was inadvertently activated and staff, including gallery guards, remained at work totally perplexed about what was happening as fire trucks arrived and visitors exited the building of their own volition.

I recommend meetings at least once a year with local emergency response organizations. These include police departments, ambulance services, and especially fire fighters. If an annual tour of the facilities can be arranged, that is beneficial. This is particularly helpful in communities with volunteer fire departments, where personnel can change and familiarities ebb.

Museums may appear tranquil places of good behavior but they can be targets for violence, protest, and civic disturbance. Occasionally someone will attack a piece of art on exhibit. A social protest demonstration might take place in front of a museum. Or a bomb threat could be received. Security procedures must be in place to respond to a full range of disturbances, regardless of how unlikely or unanticipated. Remember, you need not deal with these things alone. That is why partnerships with local emergency response organizations are so important. Wars of any kind or size are especially damaging for museums, which are hard to protect under such circumstances.

Museum security for people extends to those who are not members of staff but are working at museums in a temporary or periodically regular basis. Outside contractors are a good example. Whether it is a landscaping service, a plumbing company, IT contract service, or roofer, anyone and everyone is a potential saboteur when it comes to museum security and safety. Even a museum's contracted security firm's employees need to be monitored.

Class Questions

1 For several years your museum has contracted with an independent security company for gallery guards. The guards are employees of the company, which is responsible for obtaining guards, training them, and providing uniforms as well as monitoring their performance, paying them, handling benefits, and so forth. The guards come from your community. You never see company monitors at your museum and are in fact only contacted by the company with monthly invoices. You have had no security problems and the guards are well-mannered and do their jobs according to agreed-upon written job descriptions and your requests and instructions. Their hourly pay is a dollar over minimum wage but you are billed twice that amount per hour. Whenever a new guard is needed it seems the museum suggests a person from the area who is then hired by the security firm. You inquire about their benefits and find they are minimal. You want to change this system. What and how do you do it?

2 You are the director of a small museum in New England. Your office overlooks the entrance lobby and you often leave your door open. One day a visitors comes in and says one of your admission desk employees is stealing money. The visitor explains how the person is doing this. Apparently, when a person pays the $10.00 admission fee with a $10 bill, the individual will simply slip that bill into his front pocket. The admission is rung in on the cash register. For some months, at the end of the day, when reconciling the receipts, there has been a discrepancy between registered visitors and income. What do you do?

3 A leading, active, long-standing, and generous member of your board of trustees, who is often at your museum for meetings, programs, and visits, requests an entrance key so he can avoid having to call in advance to get in or wait outside the main entrance knocking on doors and windows to gain access. Do you give him a key?

4 You have just arrived at a new job at the XYZ museum. About a month after you start there is a fire alarm. It is a false alarm but the fire department arrives on the scene. You notice that the staff exits the building in orderly and timely fashion but the guards and public remain in the galleries. What does this scenario suggest?

5 Some years ago your museum agreed to a long-term loan of a 13-foot ship model, and the 15-foot original mahogany display case in which it was housed. The model was of the *Majestic*, an early twentieth-century steamship. The loan was to a maritime museum in your city. One December, the maritime museum was renovating the gallery containing the ship model and many other maritime artifacts. On the day of Christmas Eve, the renovation crew left the building site early, simply nailing, with two nails, an 8 × 10 foot piece of plywood over a back door to the gallery. The door opens onto an alley. The actual door had been removed during the renovations and not yet replaced. The gallery is broken into and the *Majestic* stolen, but because the museum is closed the loss is not discovered until the museum reopens two days after Christmas. What do you do?

6 You are the head of security at a prestigious small museum on Fifth Avenue in New York City. One morning you get a phone call from an admission desk employee. She says a visitor wants to take her turtle with her into the museum. She asserts that it is not a pet but a service animal. She is holding the turtle but explains that the animal is on a leash and can walk with her as she tours the museum. What do you do?

7 You are the director of a historic house museum located on the outskirts of a small town. You invite the volunteer fire department to visit for a familiarization walk through of the property. During this visit one of the firefighters notes that the hose couplings on your fire hydrants are the wrong sizes for their hoses. What do you do?

Reference

Ambrose, Timothy and Crispin Paine (2006) *Museum Basics*. Routledge.

14

Museums and the Media

Museums are media mavens, or so it may seem. Hardly a day goes by that a prominent story about a museum isn't found online or in the hard copy press. Mostly such coverage is perfunctory and customary, being an exhibition review; announcement of a recently hired employee; something about a program; or celebratory news of a recent acquisition, new building, renovation, or expansion project. Museums offer appealing fodder for journalists, bloggers, columnists, and pontificators of all stripes (including yours truly). Given the public profile museums have, or aspire to, the days of lurking diffidently in the cultural shadows are long gone. For the most part this is a welcome development as museums have learned how to productively work with every media outlet imaginable.

Most museums of any size have individuals devoted to public relations, though that may not be their only job. These are the people who should nurture and sustain media contacts, issue press releases, handle inquiries, and generally provide information about what's happening with or at a museum. Presumably the voice of that person *vis-à-vis* the press is consistent, honest, approved in advance by the director, and makes the museum look good even when dealing with controversy. I always want whatever museum I am associated with to be the "good news museum" even if the news is bad. But more about that later.

Though a museum may have one or more members of staff whose job it is to handle public relations, they will not always be the only individual in contact with the media. Often directors and curators and educators engage with the press because these leaders and knowledge-based employees are information-centric and have a standing that causes museum media people to defer to them. They are also sought out by journalists who feel they are dealing with primary rather than secondary employees.

Museum speakers are advised to speak with one voice that reflects upon the institution accurately and well. Most directors I know are excellent media representatives but not all curators, educators, conservators, accountants, or maintenance staff are. Whoever is responsible for assigning public relations

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

work must be mindful of the persona an employee or employees will have in the public eye. Is a person presentable, articulate, responsive, and clear when it comes to imparting information and communicating about a museum and some particular aspect of its operations and accomplishments? Such a demeanor can come naturally to some but often it is developed over time with practice.

Personally I love working with the media. I credit this to three things: practice; experience being a performer on stage; and the calculated ability over the years to learn how to be succinct and to-the-point regarding whatever is under discussion in a press situation. It is hard to learn to listen to oneself while speaking or presenting topics to others but it can be done. It is a lesson well-applied in all aspects of life but especially when working with museums and the media. How often have I heard myself speaking and observed a reporter writing down or recording my words knowing they would soon be quoted. Keeping this in mind, it is advisable to structure your talk as if you are quoting yourself. In other words, as the subject of a story, you have influence to frame that story the way you would like it told. Of course, you never know how your words will come out until it is too late and you hear them in third party oral presentations or see them in written applications.

There are two kinds of media involvements for museums: active and reactive. Active involvements reflect all the work a museum does to put information out to the public, or *a* public, about something of value and interest. This is news generated by a museum. On the job I am constantly on the lookout for museum stories I think might be worth conveying through whatever suitable information outlets I know of, be these online or hard copy. Of course, what I think is newsworthy may be of no interest to anyone else but over time you develop your own museum nose for news. Much of that rests not just with your institution and its programs but with the nature and character of the media where you are.

I have worked in large cities and small towns and have always enjoyed a good rapport with the press. This is easier in smaller communities where the media centers on a local newspaper, a regional magazine or two, and television and radio links, as well as Internet web sites. Prominent press coverage in a large city can be tough to develop, nurture, and sustain because individual contacts can change and the competition to be noticed is intense. It is especially difficult to gain coverage by mainstream broadcast giants in major markets. Fortunately there are a zillion non-mainstream alternative outlets these days, but unfortunately the diversity is both distracting and tends to codify who watches or looks for what where. In other words, there are so many specialty outlets and for so many specialty users that reaching the so-called general public remains a challenge.

Because museums are about stories, usually told via collections and exhibitions, and the media is about stories, there should be a natural affinity between the fourth estate and museums. For the most part there is but the symbiotic relationship usually starts with the museum. In other words, a museum has to decide what story it wants to get out for public dissemination, script that story, then hustle to place it wherever possible and desirable. The customary approach is to write a traditional press release which is sent to preexisting, and one hopes current and vetted, lists of media recipients. The age of the hardcopy printed press release is pretty much over, though they do appear in press packets given out at special events and for a few other applications. In addition to the usual e-mail or targeted media blast, depending on the nature of the museum story, personal contacts are critical to coverage. Once in a while I have had topics I thought so riveting that I have called the press to personally pitch a story. Sometimes my approach was successful and sometimes it was not. One of my favorite successes was when I made a cold call to art critics at *The New York Times* about a story. They were responsive. However, not wanting to irritate our small town local newspaper, I gave it the same "scoop." The local newspaper covered it on a Monday and the *Times* ran their story on a Wednesday.

Getting media coverage is important, but ensuring it remains accurate is sometimes tricky. Once the facts are out of your hands, keep your fingers crossed. I have often said the only reason *The New York Times* is such a respected newspaper is that it makes fewer mistakes than other papers. When an error is in print or online, there is little you can do to correct it. Oh sure, corrections can be requested and even appear, but few people see them. I should note that every once in a while errors are the fault of the museum and thus it is of immense importance that facts be checked, double checked and triple checked before information is disseminated.

A good relationship between a museum and the media, or parts thereof, requires constant tending. Keeping press people informed in an accurate, timely, and convenient way, usually well ahead of schedule, is critical. However, don't overwhelm them with negligible or unimportant stories or bombard them constantly with e-mails, snail mails, phone calls, text, tweets, and so forth about stuff of little consequence. Don't hound them.

Be prepared to be rejected or ignored by the media. My idea of an exciting story may not be a journalist's. There are so few of them now that they are even more overwhelmed by supplicants clamoring for attention. With the advent of social media, what was once background information chatter is now a loud and cacophonous confusion of noisy opinions, statements, and indecipherable constant intrusions interrupted by an occasional provision of helpful and interesting information.

Speaking of social media, museums have embraced it with glee, and rightly so. I am totally in favor of providing as much interesting, accurate, timely, and helpful information to as many people as possible. But, the speed and volume of today's communication mechanisms must be carefully used and manipulated. How many tweets must be sent in a day? How many Facebook alerts need to happen? What is the right number of e-mail blasts?

How should web sites be constructed, used, linked, updated, totally changed, and so on? This is an age that allows unprecedented direct contact with individuals. How do museums handle this? Who at museums does this work? Who signs-off on the timing of communications and the wording?

As always, when it comes to media communications not only must the technology of the medium be understood and appropriately used but *the writing must be right for it.* For museums (and any other ventures obviously) this means having people who can provide the verbal horsepower to explain, extol, and celebrate whatever news an institution lays before them. The skill and work is no different whether writing an exhibition catalog, press release, speech, tweets, web site, Facebook page, you name it. Therefore, a museum needs to know who its best word people are and proceed accordingly. Who knows when to use "compliment" and "complement"? Naturally, those in positions that interact with the press must be highly articulate and understand both media and museum languages. Again, museum size need not be a problem when it comes to the institutional voice. When I was director of the Bennington Museum in Vermont I was extremely fortunate to be able to hire, part-time, a librarian who also acted as our editor. He had an impressive ivy-league education, had been the editor of a newspaper for quite some time, and wrote extremely well. No writing that left the museum did so without his editing, which was final. Not even I gave myself the privilege of disagreeing with what he decreed.

Reactive museum media involvements simply mean responding to inquiries from the press. These are received for three reasons: a journalist is looking for something interesting to broadcast or write about; some event or issue has erupted elsewhere in life that a museum might be able to shed light on; or a matter has developed that involves a museum and questions are being asked of it. In my experience most incoming unanticipated inquiries are noncontroversial and simply relate to aspects of a museum's operations, be they exhibits, programs, new-hires, a recent acquisition, scholarly announcements, and so on. These should be easy to respond to and I always welcome and enjoy them. It shows the museum is in the media's mind, at least locally, and the outcome of such inquires is usually good. Sometimes they come from previously unknown press contacts, and thus the museum's base of influence is updated or expanded. Given the flux the media is in today, keeping tabs on who is doing what and where, is a constant duty.

The other, and less pleasant, sort of reactive museum–media involvements are caused by controversies embroiling an institution. Usually these relate to personnel matters, such as the dismissal of a director or financial failures, thefts (of money, goods, or collections), unpopular relocations or mergers, a radical change of mission that is not greeted with glee by all, and, misunderstood deaccessions. Responding to these is a dicey proposition and requires great sensitivity and awareness. As noted, I always want "my" museum to be the "good news museum." There are times when not-so-good news happens.

There are always wise protocols to follow when dealing with the media, and these are especially critical when the cause for contact is an unpleasant subject. To begin with, I recommend having a cohesive, honest, timely, and logical response that is spoken with one voice and usually by one person. If the issue under investigation is of a legal nature, or might head in that direction, obviously extreme caution is advised. While I hate to hear someone say "Our lawyers have advised us not to respond about this subject," such a statement is valid.

When a museum is embroiled in controversy that can be discussed publicly it is advisable to avoid obfuscating, being dishonest, or dodging the press. If the issue has caught the fancy of a reporter, this behavior only increases his or her fascination with a story and may enhance its telling in ways that are counterproductive to a museum's best interests. While the media constructs a tale, you want to have as much influence on the narrative as possible. Understanding the facts and details of an unpleasant story is essential for the person conveying information from the museum being interrogated. Explanations that are clear, honest, and not diversionary can be helpful for the museum. Keeping communications minimal is fine.

Whether you are being active or reactive in your engagements with the media, remember that the people you encounter probably know as much about your organization as the average person in your community – which is to say they do not know very much. This gives you the home-court advantage to explain a story as you would like it to be told. Your job is to deal with reporters in a helpful and informative manner and without condescension. This is one reason, almost regardless of why a journalist is contacting a museum, that I want to respond immediately. Never keep the press waiting. It is why I instruct employees to forward all media inquiries to me directly even if we have a designated press liaison on staff (I will alert that person to any contacts made). The museums I have directed were small enough to allow this easily and logically. Such an arrangement may be impractical for large institutions. Regardless of who a museum's "press point person" is, the ability to be flexible and responsive is essential. Keeping the media waiting will result in one of two outcomes. If the reporter is simply looking for an interesting story and the museum seems a convenient place to accomplish that, he or she will go elsewhere for another story should the museum respond slowly. Or, if a story focuses on some aspect of a museum's operations, especially a controversial matter, that story may take on an even more uncomfortable tone than it might have.

Museum interactions with the press need to be articulate, polite, simple, and direct. This extends not only to the information content imparted by museum staff but also to the manner in which it is imparted. Speaking clearly and in complete sentences that unfold in some logical fashion may be insultingly obvious advice, but how often people stumble around saying "um," "yeah," "kinda," "you know," "like," "sorta" when being videoed. Also, please look neat and tidy (put a hold on too many striped clothes clashing), stand up straight, look the camera in the eye, don't make faces or scratch your ear or anything else.

Class Questions

1. Why might a museum use hard copy press materials today?

2. What are specific ways a museum can "get the word out" about what it is doing?

3. A local news organization accuses your museum of having a stolen work of art. How might the museum respond?

4. What protocols should a museum set and follow regarding its use of social media?

5. A reporter wants an "exclusive" on a story a museum is preparing for a media alert. How might the museum respond?

6. The major New York City history museum where you work has an eighteenth-century portrait of a member of a prominent minority "colonial" family. The discovery is made by a reporter that the family's wealth at the time the portrait was painted was made though the slave trade. This was known to the museum but never referred to in exhibition labels or published research. What should the museum do, if anything?

15

Architecture

A museum is really just a piece of architecture, nothing more.
Ulirch Maximillian Schumann, 2001

When we think of certain museums, their collections or a particular object may come to mind, such as with the Louvre and the *Mona Lisa*, The British Museum and the Elgin Marbles, or the Museum of Modern Art and van Gogh's *Starry Night*. But the first thing we encounter when visiting a museum is its architecture. A building is what we engage with as we enter. It is what we deal with throughout a visit. Part of the memories we take away from a museum visit are about its architecture.

The variety of museum architecture in the world is staggering. From the tiny to the grand, the simple to the complex, the obvious to the obscure, an astonishing array of structures are assigned the job of being a museum. While many museums exist in buildings not originally intended for such purposes, the museum as a distinct architectural type started to appear in the nineteenth century. It advanced to dazzling prominence in the second half of the twentieth century and continues apace. Today the idea of the museum as a recognized structure of civic stature is a given. Museums aspire to stand out, or at least to stand apart. As signature edifices they can have a societal profile akin to sports stadiums, colleges and universities, performing arts centers, or grand old railroad stations. But those places do not cherish and hold the same aura of gravitas as museums, even distinguished centers of learning with their hallowed ivy-covered walls fall short. (Remember, these are not open to all, as is the case with museums.)

The peculiar nature of museums prompted and still prompts those in charge to want them to be architecturally different. If this is not feasible, they certainly want to signal in an obvious manner that they are hardly run-of-the-mill buildings camouflaged amongst their surroundings on an ordinary city street or lost in a bucolic landscape. Few want hidden or disguised museums, even if a certain blending-in might be aesthetically desirable or required by planning authorities, neighborhood busybodies, and zoning regulations.

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

That is one of several reasons exterior banners and bold or innovative signs are all the rage these days on museum facades and properties wherever they may be found.

Why do museums have this need to be physically prominent? They are places of pride and meaning with no basis in the practical. I am convinced that the more impractical something is, the more it is explained and extolled for purely altruistic intellectual, emotional, or spiritual purposes. This has certainly been true for religions, which cannot actually quantify their value by the number of believers they get into an afterlife, which is, of course, their highest purpose. Museums face a similar pose. Therefore they need to look the part. Indeed many have claimed that the museum is our new cathedral, at least when it comes to architecture. Where once places of worship might have been seen as examples of architectural high-thinking, especially in their customary role as centers of life (not to mention death), they now play second fiddle to museums, especially in rampantly secular societies. At the risk of over-emphasizing the analogy, museums are places of worship with their own beliefs, clergy, catechism, scripture, rites, ecclesiastical conundrums, faithful congregants, heretics, and relics. “Art is the religion of our times, and museums are its churches” (Fernández-Galiano 2001: 68).

There are several reasons museums are so architecturally important these days. They safeguard cherished and valued things. They purport to be exclusively for the public good. They are about knowledge, learning, and taste. In these capacities museums must look the part. Moreover, in the United States they are governed by rich people, and the wealthy are averse to having their good deeds enshrined in unattractive surroundings. In other countries museums are usually owned and operated by governments, thus civic pride is a dominant influence. Remember, the public is not interested in visiting sleazy places with any regularity, Walmart being an obvious exception. Donors to charities that are not feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, or saving souls want to know their contributions will be used in some obviously upbeat and prestigious manner. Museums offer that opportunity. Finally, for whatever reason, museums are considered community assets of such resonance that they require good looks and a fancy setting. Their purpose and meaning in society has, over the years, placed them metaphorically at least (some would say literally) on a lofty social pedestal.

Because my professional life has been spent working in and around museums I think about their architecture a lot, be it from the inside out or the outside in. Planning exhibitions, dealing with collection facility issues, understanding the requirements of mechanical and work spaces, responding to public service needs, figuring out how people will access and move around buildings, and generally considering the look and uses of museums has caused an ever-present curiosity in me about what museum architecture is and does and how and why.

I am not an architect but I have a deep appreciation for the profession. It requires considerable training. My hands-on involvement with causing museum architecture happened with several museum renovation and expansion projects. I enjoyed them immensely. Two were of minimal impact and two were substantial, resulting in major changes to the museums. Seeing one's ideas become reality and then watching them function well and as planned is enormously rewarding. I think I had a small taste of the exhilaration and pleasure that can result from successfully planning and implementing architectural ideas for the greater long-term public good.

When it comes to architecture there are four kinds of museums: those that were originally built and furnished as something else and were later designated to be preserved intact as museums; those put into repurposed buildings designed for another function; museums that combine repurposed and purpose-built structures; and, museums designed and built as such.

The most common examples of museums that were originally built and furnished as something else are historic houses, mansions, palaces, houses of worship, forts, and suchlike. Examples include the Franklin Delano Roosevelt House in Hyde Park, the Breakers in Newport, Rhode Island, and Graceland, Elvis Presley's house in Memphis, Tennessee. The architecture of these is of a piece with its contents. Building envelopes and interiors are a package. They constitute a collective collection. It just happens to be made up of furniture, walls, rugs, clothing, ceilings, ceramics, floors, draperies, windows, and so on. These buildings were never intended to be museums. This exempts the architecture from acting like a premeditated museum. The museum-ness of these places happens with signage; alterations that can protect or offend the original structural fabric or appearance but help staff and visitors as they go about their daily activities; the addition of ancillary buildings such as visitor centers; or landscape displays that might include distracting intrusions such as bad sculpture.

The architectural challenges faced by museums that were not originally museums but have been designated as such are largely ones of preservation and public access, as well as how to use back rooms, attics, and basements to function as offices, meeting spaces, classrooms, and so forth. The preservation of original architecture in an appropriate manner can be costly and requires considerable commitment to conservation knowledge about buildings.

Moving people into, around, through, and out of museums while preserving original interiors and architecture often requires creative thinking, not to mention unexpected personnel and other costs. For instance, most of these buildings were never designed to accommodate people whose mobility is compromised. Some of these museums accept this reality and decline to alter the original fabric to meet modern needs. Local codes usually permit these exceptions, to a degree, especially if some semblance of access might be provided through audiovisual or other technologies. Public safety precautions and building code requirements can cause obnoxious, if well-meaning, architectural affronts, including glaring exit signs, intrusive sprinkler systems, and the wrong-headed placement of fire protection devices. But museum operations themselves often detract from the appreciation of original historic architecture. We see this when a grand entry hall of a historic mansion holds a messy museum admission desk, sales area, and coatroom (see Figure 9).

Museums housed in buildings that were originally designed for other functions have proliferated around the world. Their origins have a common denominator. A person or persons decide a particular structure is worth saving and that can best (or only) be done by using it as a museum. How well this works is immaterial at first. Over time it becomes apparent as operating frustrations kick in and accommodations are attempted to meet a wish list of practical needs and museological desires.

Commenting on the reopening of Musée Picasso Paris in 2014, *The New York Times*' art critic, Holland Carter, noted the deficiencies of the reused building: "Architecture is part of the problem. The museum's 17^{th}-century home,

Figure 9 An entrance to an historic house in Florida with a mess of visitor accommodations that could be placed elsewhere with a less jarring intrusive visual effect. *Source*: Photograph by Steven Miller.

the Hôtel Salé, in the historic Marais district, with its garden, courtyard and two-story, sculpture-encrusted entrance hall, has never been ideal for showing art. The interior is choppy, with smallish spaces, dead ends, and illogical connections" (2014).

There really is such a thing as museum architecture. Museums have various unique spatial and infrastructure requirements and characteristics. That is why the profession (though not necessarily architects) has evolved a desirable sort of building. Trying to meet the architectural needs of such a structure in an old house, factory, bank building, masonic temple, railroad station, or suchlike is fraught with difficulties. Museum professionals are extremely flexible and creative but their talents can be strained to the limit when forced to operate in the architectural contradiction that is a repurposed structure.

My favorite examples of museums housed in buildings originally designed to be something else are local historical societies. Many of these are in houses once inhabited by a family of some renown in the community. The original contents of the house are either partially present or entirely absent. How such houses are used tends to be the same wherever they are encountered. A few rooms are furnished to reflect their original uses. Parlors look like parlors of a particular period. Dining rooms are presented in similar fashion, as are bedrooms and kitchen. A room or two might be used as an exhibition gallery. Offices are stuck wherever. Non-exhibited collections are stored in the attic, the basement, a barn, or a garage. Over time, these houses might acquire additions to accommodate a gallery, library, meeting room, collection storage, restrooms, and offices. Architecturally the organization will usually strive to keep the exterior of the house in some form of its original appearance. Any additions may or may not be compatible with the historic structure. Because these museums are often in residential neighborhoods, exterior signage might have to be quite low-key and parking is a perennial problem. The architectural vicissitudes with which small historical societies must contend do not suggest they are poorly or unprofessionally run. Some are, some are not.

The use of factories and other industrial buildings for museums has become commonplace in the past few decades. Partially it is a direct outgrowth of artists occupying industrial spaces in New York and other cities. This loft development started in the 1950s and gained calamitous momentum in the 1970s. (Having lived in and created two such spaces from scratch, I can personally attest to the phenomenon.) This application may be an easier repurposing of a building into a museum because, when all is said and done, the transformations are usually made by stripping a building down to its basic walls, floors, and ceilings then rebuilding in an attempt to meet museum standards and desires. Great examples of repurposed industrial buildings include DIA Beacon, New York; the Tate Modern, London; Mass MOCA in North Adams, Massachussetts; and Monti Martini in Rome.

Museums that are a blend of a repurposed building and additions made expressly for museum use are easily found. Inevitably they result from starting a museum in an existing non-museum structure which is then added to with special-use spaces. Three museums I have directed evolved in this fashion: the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio; the Bennington Museum, Bennington, Vermont; and the Morris Museum, Morristown, New Jersey. The Historical Society's headquarters on University Circle boasts a contiguous string of sequentially built structures connecting and expanding upon two historic mansions. The Bennington Museum started in a closed church, which now anchors one end of several subsequent expansions. In the 1960s the Morris Museum moved from a school in town to a mansion on the outskirts and has added new wings four times in the past 50 years. Each museum handles its old repurposed buildings in similar ways. All have galleries, offices, and storage. Visitors experience them as they move through the museums. The old structures offer a mixture of architectural challenges which have their pluses and minuses, mostly the latter. Had the individual museums been totally purpose-built, requirements for exhibitions, public programming, behind-the-scenes facilities, amenities, and so forth would be easier to meet.

This is not to say the idea of starting a museum in a repurposed structure and expanding more appropriately later is to be rejected. There are successful examples. Of the three I cite above, the Bennington Museum is the most architecturally satisfying as the church has, over the years, become an incidental wing of the larger institution. The Michener Museum of Art, in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, is housed in the old county jail, or at least its front is, along with a high wall on one side of its sculpture garden. This makes for an interesting facade with negligible adverse effects in the rest of the museum, which is purpose-built.

Many older museums originally designed as such have become a blend of architectural components over time as they have expanded and renovated. The American Museum of Natural History in New York City quickly comes to mind. On the other side of Central Park the Metropolitan Museum of Art also melds a mix of different wings and structures. Many parts of the old buildings can be glimpsed in galleries, halls, and stairways as a visitor moves around inside.

Just because a building has been specifically created to be a museum does not mean it always functions well in that capacity. The most obvious example is the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, in Manhattan (Figure 10). Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and completed in 1959, this iconic concrete "spaceship" on Fifth Avenue is without question one of the most famous historic museum buildings, if not *the* most famous, in the world. The structure is perhaps the museum's most important and experienced collection artifact. As a place for exhibiting most traditional art, which it does often, the interior spiral ramp, huge open center, and tilted walls make for an uncomfortable viewing experience. One is hiking up or running down the ramp. Art in right-angled frames appears

Figure 10 The slanted floor and tilted walls of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York. *Source*: Photograph by Steven Miller.

crooked. Viewers are either close to art or far away from it. There is no middle ground. I feel sorry for those who suffer from acrophobia. To be fair, though, perhaps Wright was ahead of his time when he created a novel art-viewing space. We see this in new art specifically made to hang down from the ceiling, fall off the walls, or pile up from the floor, for instance.

If you are ever involved in planning a new museum you will enjoy the attention lavished on you by architects once a possible project is announced. I asked an architect why museum clients were so alluring, other than the obvious fact that they represented potential jobs. Ego is at the top of the list. Museums enjoy enormous status as architecture. My colleague further explained that museum clients have high public aspirations and architects can be more creative than might otherwise be the case. Museums expect to spend a lot of money on buildings, more per square foot than is envisaged with most other structures. Museum clients are generally well-educated, intelligent, and nice to work with. The outcome of designing a museum is more impressive than an office building, warehouse, or parking garage.

The idea of the museum as indicator – be it of a place, individual, group, or a civilization's self-worth – exploded with a vengeance in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Cities in particular succumbed to the allure of the museum as cultural signifier. This institutional apotheosis was evidenced as scores of new museum buildings cropped up across the United States and around the world. Architecture played a central, if not *the* central, role in heralding a community's aggrandizement, which was done, altruistically of course, through the lens of culture, condescendingly offering a locus of refinement for a public that better be grateful.

The museum as architectural type has evolved in the past 200 years. Once it was considered sufficient to simply provide a temple (some might say tomb) for exhibits, storage, and workspace. Public amenities consisted of inaccessible restrooms and perhaps a multiuse meeting space. Maybe an auditorium or classroom could be found. Climate control was typical for the period. When it was hot you opened the windows. When it was cold you turned on the heat (remembering to close the windows). The building envelope kept the elements out. Locks deterred burglars. Today, new museums are or should be more complex in their physical and operating characteristics. As the museum profession has advanced and actually become a profession, more is required of buildings designed to preserve and present material culture and scientific collections for the long term. In becoming popular destinations, museums are required to provide more non-collection based functions.

There are two ways of studying new museums to assess their architectural viability: from the outside in or from the inside out. Either approach should lead to the same conclusions about how well or poorly a particular museum works as a public-service preservation and interpretation machine.

Approaching a museum from the outside in means just that: start from the front door and take the public's path into and through the institution. Is the entrance to the museum obvious and easy to find and use? Once inside how well are things arranged and how readily do people move about? Cut the museum some slack though. I am convinced that if a museum only had two galleries, side by side with a big opening between them, people would complain about getting lost. Also remember that about half the population cannot read floor plans, thus the little maps for visitors prove worthless in the wrong hands. By the way, speaking of visitor accommodations, the phenomenon of museum fatigue is not architecture's fault. It is the fault of institutions that refuse to provide plentiful and well-placed seating, not to mention visitors who feel they have to see everything in a condensed period of time and at warp speed.

After observing the public areas of a museum, you have to get behind the scenes to further appreciate its architecture. How does the rest of the museum support the needs of offices, workrooms, mechanical spaces, collection storage and processing, parking, and so forth? What security and climate controls are in place? How does staff seem to be using the museum?

In studying a museum from the inside out to determine the effectiveness of its architecture, follow a collection object's trail starting from when it enters a museum, is processed, stored, and then used for research and exhibition. Reverse the outside-in approach but with both objects and staff in mind first. Once you have emerged from behind the scenes of a museum and followed an object to its place in an exhibition, you will be back to observing the general public's use of a museum's spaces.

Regarding new museum buildings, what decisions go into deciding what they are? I have referred to aesthetics and space usage, which are both obvious and necessary considerations. There are more. What sort of a budget does an organization have? What collections does it hold, and what additional ones might it reasonably anticipate acquiring over time? Architectural needs will be different for an automobile museum than for a stamp museum. What kind of exhibition requirements does a museum want or anticipate? What about public programming needs? What is the nature of the site the museum is going to be on and in? What is the size of the current or anticipated staff, and what are their functions? How many visitors does a museum expect or hope for? (Please be realistic. Too many new museums have been built with absurdly optimistic attendance and earned-income projections in mind.) How will the public use the building? What about parking? Will there be a restaurant, sales shop(s), or rental spaces for events?

Architects can and should ask a lot of questions of a museum client, but first a client needs to ask a lot of questions of itself. Those assuming or being given responsibility for a building project must think about and agree upon what is to be accomplished and why. Simply deciding to make a museum is a pleasant exercise in the abstract – but why? After answering the why question to full satisfaction a client needs to deeply understand what, where, how, when, and for whom. These are not frivolous conversations to engage in. The more that is understood and agreed upon in advance by a client, *before* an architect is sought, a contract is signed, ground is broken, or concrete poured, the better the outcome.

A question that will arise when planning museum architecture is who should be involved in the decision-making process. I recommend lots of people be consulted and listened to at the start. If these folks are familiar with or experts in any aspect of building design, construction, or even museum work, all the better. Engaging ideas can have positive results, but eventually one has to thank and dismiss the multitudes and move along to accomplish something. This is when fewer and fewer people should be making decisions and those people should be well-versed in architecture, design, museum operations, construction, and so on.

Because museums are such public institutions, I have always felt it important to provide as much information to the public as possible regarding an architectural project as it unfolds. Today that can readily be done on the Internet, through social media, with hard copy information on-site and in newsletters, meetings and mailings.

Constructing a sizable iconic building such as a museum is complicated, especially in cities. Few, if any of us, in the museum world are prepared to handle a major building project. Once construction begins, it has a life of its own, and we the client become spectators rather than participants. When all goes well, it is exciting and the outcome definitely worth celebrating. But, getting there is not always half the fun. Frankly, given all that can go wrong I am amazed that so much goes right. Having sat through many weekly museum construction meetings I have nothing but admiration for those who make things happen correctly on the job site. They include the construction company in charge of building the museum and the various subcontractors involved. Architects are important players in the mix but they are not always as attentive as one would expect.

For large museum building projects, hiring an excellent construction manager is essential. This person should represent you to the architect, construction company, subcontractors, and so on. He or she is the go-between and point person who reports to the client directly and regularly. If you can find a manager who has had museum experience, great, but they are rare. The manager should be with you for the duration of the project, translating what's happening with the project and conveying your messages as a client. If well chosen, ideally this person will be your construction consigliere of immense importance.

A note to museum directors: When it comes to museum construction projects be careful about trustee involvement. Some board members express great knowledge of construction and architecture. They may be full of hot air or spot on. If they really do have expertise in the building business they can be enormously helpful. This happened with a trustee I worked with once who was in the structural steel business. The museum was in the midst of a building project when he visited the job site and noted the two-story steel frame was slightly out of plumb. His timing could not have been better because he was correct and the error was righted. On another museum project we had a board member who had a national construction management company. His leadership was central in walking us through the steps of a major expansion and renovation project. On the flip side I have had trustees who thought they knew all about architecture and construction and loved to so inform everyone. Fortunately no one paid them any attention, but it was bothersome to say the least.

One question that existing museums face when expanding or renovating is whether to stay open during the process. There is no right or wrong answer to this question. I have kept museums open and for several reasons. Given the nature of the building projects and the configuration of the museums it was relatively easy to do so. Exhibitions, education programs, offices, and so forth could all be sustained while demolition, renovation, and construction was underway. I did not want valued staff to leave or be subject to layoffs, furloughs, or dismissals while the museums were undergoing a year or two of construction.

And, perhaps most importantly, I did not want to lose public visitation momentum and have to start building audiences all over again after construction was finished.

Staying open during big construction projects is disruptive for staff. They are responsible for maintaining constancy during what may appear to be job-site chaos. Managers, and directors in particular, have a special duty to show enormous support and appreciation for staff patience and fortitude under sometimes very trying conditions. During a major project with which I was involved staff had to rotate offices through construction trailers while renovations were underway. I was the first to move my office into a trailer and the last to leave.

Being deeply involved in and responsible for museum architecture, both in matters of appearance and function, should provide a person with a certain sensitivity to this branch of design. I say "should" because many people seem to have no capacity for truly comprehending the grand scheme of architecture in all its ramifications, appearances, and impacts. Oddly I think this is sometimes true of architects. In every museum building and renovation project with which I was involved, the architects had no real idea about how a museum actually functioned and why. This was a surprise with which I had no problem. I was very clear about my intentions for a particular museum and always prevailed. When an architect did not listen to or comprehend explanations, difficulties ensued. In one case it resulted in the assignment of a new architect by the large architectural firm we had engaged. The replacement was, thankfully, terrific.

Based on my observations and experiences I have come to the conclusion that most people are not very good at visual and spatial planning. On the job we regularly struggle with the consequences of faulty space design and allocation. Sometimes galleries are awkwardly located or arranged, museum entrances are hard to find and confusing, collection storage is a travesty, offices and staff workspaces are scattered about higgledy-piggledy, and maintenance facilities are off in left field or obnoxiously front and center.

The reasons for these functional stumbles are easy to find. Museums are always fiddling around with space and how it is used. This is because no matter the architectural layout, museums increasingly want to do something that was not planned for in an original design and application of the building(s) they occupy. It is also because much is decided by fundraising pressures and outcomes and whatever trustee or director agenda reigns at a given time. The drive to appear fresh and current, even avant-garde, often means doing things that will inevitably disrupt spaces. In the hands of smart forward-thinking staff, consultants, and boards, the outcomes can be advantageous and even brilliant. In the wrong hands the opposite happens.

Museums that have been in the same place for a long time often have severe architectural challenges. Even the few museums founded to remain static, with no change in collections or displays, struggle with space issues and physical integrity. There is never enough room to do everything desirable in the best way possible. With finances a constant challenge, much cannot be addressed regarding building use and capabilities. This is why new wings, renovations, and alterations are always topics of museum conversation.

When discussing museum architecture we need to mention the all too common practice of letting problems languish, especially when it comes to the so-called deferred maintenance syndrome. This negligent stance is irresponsible. Usually it is attributed to a lack of funding – there is not enough money to correct various issues in a building. To a degree this is an understandable argument. However, mostly it lets trustees off the monetary hook. In addition, "avoidance thinking" is a matter of fear, ignorance, and a disinclination to plan well, and it shows a staff and board willingness to passively accept the status quo. This is why new museum wings, renovations, and alterations should always be contemplated and acted upon in a logical, realistic, but also visionary manner

> Over the past century and a half, the external "skin" of our leading museums has changed dramatically; we used to pass through massive columns into an imposing temple of art, whereas now, we are often swept up into a space both open and dramatic. For better or worse, though, the general purpose of the building still seems to be to impress us with the special nature of the museum experience.
>
> *(Robinson 2006: 2).*

There are scads of new museums around the world, and more are being contemplated every day. I always love visiting them. Credit must be given to the energetic people who made and make them happen. A fear is they will not be able to sustain themselves, but who knows. I can't predict the future of museums, but it will be healthy if generations continue to accept their value for society and show their commitment emotionally, culturally, and, financially.

Class Questions

1. Regardless of type, be they about art, history, science, or some combination thereof, all museums have certain common architectural needs. What might these be?

2. Your museum is planning a $10 million renovation and expansion project. A member of your board of trustees energetically advocates hiring a particular architecture firm. The owner of the firm is a close friend of the trustee. How should this be handled?

3 Your museum has started a $2.5 million renovation and expansion project. A design/build architectural firm has been hired. There is some criticism of this decision, especially amongst architects. Why?

4 What is value engineering?

5 A large urban museum is considering relocating from its purpose-built original (1930) structure to an older (1870) building not designed as a museum. The museum is currently located in a poor residential neighborhood. The alternate site is in a commercial district of the city. What architectural considerations need to be assessed while discussing location options?

6 Does museum architecture effect visitor behavior, and if so, how?

7 What considerations should go into determining the location of a museum's gift shop?

References

Carter, Holland (2014) With Self-Portrait of a Lifetime, Picasso Returns to Paris Pedestal. *The New York Times* (28 October), pp. 1, 6.

Fernández-Galiano, Luis (2001) Álvaro Siza Vieira CGAC, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporáneo, in Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Angeli Sachs, eds, *Museums for a New Millennium*. Prestel.

Robinson, Frank (2006) From the Director. Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art Newsletter (Fall).

Schumann, Ulirch Maximillian (2001) Oswald Matthias Ungers Gallery of Modern Art, in Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Angeli Sachs, eds, *Museums for a New Millennium*. Prestel.

16

Volunteers

Volunteers power the nonprofit sector of the United States. Indeed, many organizations would not exist without these involved citizens, or, if they did exist, they would be much diminished in their scope and effectiveness. Religious groups use volunteers daily. Community food pantries put them to work. Parent–teacher associations are made up entirely of volunteers. Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops depend on volunteers galore. Museums are no exception to this fact of operational dependence.

Museum volunteers can be of great value in providing project, program, fundraising, and ancillary support of all kinds. Establishing a well-structured volunteer program at a museum is, in my opinion, entirely worth the effort. With minimal resources and maximal desires, limited numbers of staff, consultants, specialists, and contractors reduces a museum's ability to meet its aspirations. Volunteers, when carefully screened and managed, will enhance an institution's mission. However, sometimes volunteers can be more trouble than they are worth,

Simply accepting outside requests from people to volunteer in an *ad hoc* manner is a sloppy way to approach enlisting non-paid help. An organized program for such assistance is recommended. Guidelines, procedures, goals, and outcomes should be formally established and implemented if a museum volunteer program is to be beneficial for both staff and volunteers, not to mention the public. A good example to cite was in place at the Morris Museum, Morristown, New Jersey, when I was director there. It had two productive volunteer positions and two volunteer groups. There was a highly competent curator of costumes and a curator for the geology collection. The two volunteer groups were the Friends of the Morris Museum, and the Bickford Theatre Guild, both of which were fundraising-focused and at their peak made terrific contributions to the institution. This approach to museum volunteerism is common.

Meaningful volunteer involvement in museums requires clear leadership and management. People who wish to give of their time without recompense must know what is expected of them, when, where, why, and how and what protocols and guidelines or restrictions they need to abide by. Such expectations are no different for paid staff. Large museums often have paid volunteer coordinators who screen and place people in various parts of an institution. There are predetermined sectors that rely more heavily on volunteers than others. These might include information desks or special event monitors or program greeters and ushers. As one delves deeper into the inner reaches of a large museum volunteers may be less of a presence, but not always. Sometimes there is a quite robust officially sanctioned and organized volunteer corps. One rarely finds them in conservation labs or carpenter shops or security offices, however.

Obviously the first consideration when it comes to volunteers is, are they wanted? If so, a museum must define why, where, and how they will do whatever they do and under whose watchful, and qualified, eye they will work. It is especially important that certain security measures be set and adhered to. Will volunteers have keys or access codes to parts of a museum generally considered off limits to most people? What about their use of IT equipment, including passwords? If they have identity cards, how may those be used? Who inspects personal belongings as volunteers leave a museum? What about security background checks, especially for volunteers working with collections and children?

Managerially, I have found staff to be of two minds about volunteers, some like them and some don't. There never seems to be a middle ground. Therefore I try to avoid forcing employees who dislike working with volunteers to use them. On the other hand, I am fully supportive of employees who enjoy and appreciate volunteers, *and who are willing to manage them effectively.*

Many museums have well-established internship programs designed to nurture students interested in pursuing careers in the field. Financial compensation is rarely included, thus the participants are volunteers. I was fortunate to always get paid part-time jobs at museums when I was a student, and in fact I never really thought about non-paying internships as such. Times have changed. Though being paid for such work is preferable, the kind of experience gained through a structured pro bono internship can be enormously worthwhile. Museum studies graduate programs are to be applauded for insisting students participate in internships.

Museums need to be watchful regarding several aspects of counterproductive volunteer behavior. It is not uncommon for small museums to be dominated by deeply entrenched volunteers. Some have the best interests of the organization at heart while some only purport to. New museums that start to grow in both size and professionalism can experience conflicts between founding volunteers and new appropriately trained paid staff. There is also the syndrome of volunteers who use their museum affiliation for personal advantage. Often this plays out in local social scenes but sometimes there are business elements to it. Volunteers need to know the parameters of how they can use their association with a particular museum. A museum's code of ethics should be as applicable for volunteers as it is for employees.

In addition to individuals who provide volunteer services to, for, and in a museum, there are often structured volunteer groups. These are usually formally organized, recognized, and ensconced to support an aspect of a museum's operations or activities. The most common name for such groups has tended to be the Friends of such-and-such a museum or component thereof. I have worked with several of these and they can range from fabulous to disastrous. This is why their purposes, how they are organized, what authority they have *vis-à-vis* the museum, and who is involved with them must be established by the museum first then monitored constantly. Finances can be a critical issue. Should a Friends group have its own bank account? (The answer is no, in my experience.) Who decides how any money they raise is to be used on behalf of the museum? Who decides what fundraising they should do, when, and how? What museum resources (staff, space, schedules) can or should a Friends group be able to use or have access to? Controlling potential and actual conflicts is essential.

There is so much potential for debate and dispute with volunteer groups it is a wonder that most work as well as they do in a museum context. An example of an excellent volunteer group was in place at the Western Reserve Historical Society when I was directing its museums in the early 1990s. It supported the costume collection, which is fabulous. Members were mostly women who understood the importance and cultural value of the collection. Amongst other events, the group organized an annual fashion show featuring the work of an acclaimed contemporary designer including the likes of Carolina Herrera, Arnold Scassi, and Pauline Trigère. These luminaries would be brought in to present a talk as well as a "trunk show" of their latest designs. The funding raised from these events paid for an extensive upgrade of the costume gallery.

A less successful example of a volunteer support group was in effect when I arrived as executive director of the Morris Museum in 2001. The Friends of the Morris Museum and the museum administration were at odds regarding authority, finances, and the assignment and use of the facilities. The museum and the Friends had independent boards, and this was fraught with predictable difficulties. Only the museum board had any legal authority. It took some years to reconcile the relationship but gradually a more harmonious rapport was achieved. The Friends was a terrific organization that not only organized excellent monthly programs but was responsible for the museum's annual fundraising gala.

Finally, we must remember that the most important group of volunteers museums enlist is its body of trustees. We tend to forget this, but when I calculate the hours volunteers devote to a museum I include trustee time. And, speaking of hours of service, two museums where I have worked had such strong volunteer corps there was an annual "volunteer appreciation lunch." These were devoted to expressing appreciation for the support so many individuals had given a museum during the past year. It was the perfect time to honor especially devoted volunteers. In these cases I recommend not including trustees as it would seem quite self-serving. Sometimes volunteers "retire," and their service can be recognized at these events.

If even vaguely accurate records are kept of volunteer hours given to a museum it is relatively easy to estimate the time people donate in a year. At some point it occurred to me that I could translate that into dollars based on standard hourly wages. Starting with the minimum wage I would announce to those attending a volunteer appreciation luncheon that their work for the year represented *x* dollars. I would then escalate the amount based on what my local auto mechanic charged per hour or the law offices down the street. The numbers can be quite impressive. This exercise may seem rather silly but it always made a valued point about people's valued time.

Class Questions

1 The XYZ Historical Society has a good costume collection. Most of it was worn by prominent women in the community and some pieces date back to the early nineteenth century. The Friends of the XYZ Historical Society decide their annual fundraising gala will be a fashion show with members of their organization wearing clothes from the museum collection. Is this a good idea? If so, why? If not, why not? Depending on your perspective, how would you make it happen or not happen?

2 Your museum has a highly competent, museum-trained volunteer costume curator. The museum has no staff knowledgeable about that aspect of its collections. Acquisitions are determined based on the curator's expertise and advice. Is this arrangement appropriate? If so, why? If not, why not?

3 A Midwest regional history museum has a large collection of cars numbering well over one hundred. Every year there is a national car show in the convention center of the city where the Society is headquartered. A volunteer group that supports the museum's car collection always selects a handful of vehicles to take to the show for a display about this aspect of the museum. There are no loan forms, the cars are transported by the volunteers, no employees are involved whatsoever. You are the new director of this department of the museum and only learn about the practice when you arrive at work one morning and find the cars missing in the gallery exhibits. There is no signage or any other indicator explaining the obvious gaps in the displays. What do you do?

4 What museum security measures should be in effect for volunteers when it comes to keys, codes, passwords, identity badges, business cards, background checks, and so forth?

5 Volunteers, in the form of interns, are used by a museum's collection manager for cataloging collections. How can the museum assure the quality of their work?

6 Some museum staff love volunteers, some feel the opposite. How are these employees accommodated when a museum institutes an internship program comprised of volunteers?

17

Behavior

A skeleton walks into a bar and orders a beer and a mop.

Most people who work in museums do so in a relatively well-behaved manner. At least that has been my experience over the years. This does not mean such emotions as rancor, jealousy, discontent, and backbiting are absent. As in any workplace, feelings bubble up in museums, positive and negative, but I have generally found them to be nice places to be employed.

When I started in the museum field and was at the bottom of any pecking order, common courtesies were the norm. These existed for several reasons, not the least of which reflected the waning era of a socioeconomic power elite that once ran the United States. I had a farewell glimpse of a time when history museums in the United States in particular were enclaves for the progeny, history, and objects of the power elites. From a personnel perspective, at least as far as museum directors and curators were concerned, this phenomenon aligned with old ways of primogeniture when the first born son inherited the family estate, the second went into the military or business, and the third would go into the priesthood, education, or, starting in the nineteenth century, a museum. In keeping with demographics and social orders, most museum white-collar employees (to use an old but relevant term) in the United States were from the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant world of wealth, aspired to it, or were comfortable in it. Boards of trustees reflected the cultural reality of the time as such institutions were the responsibility of the rich. Wealth is still a common denominator of cultural and charitable board membership, but the rich are now more diversified in color, ethnicity, race, religion, and so on. And, while there is still work to be done, progress has been made in diversifying museum personnel demographics.

Certain institutionalized behavior expectations remain of the old order. Most employees don't act up or out on the job. They dress conservatively and say please and thank you, even to excess. They hold doors for each other. They tend to be deferential to the point of obsequiousness, to directors and trustees. Some even talk strangely, affecting snooty speech patterns and tones

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

as they affect something of an English accent. This is not to say there is no bad behavior behind the scenes. Museums aren't *that* different from other places of work.

As a boss, my good feelings about museum atmospheres may be skewed, not to mention that they are a reflection of the fact that I love being in them. I will be the first to recognize that no matter how nice a museum is, there may always be one or two staff who love to whine and complain. These sorts are found in all walks of life, but please leave mine. Change your attitude. Stop belly-aching. No judge sentenced you to work in a museum. Be grateful you do work of value for society that you should enjoy, otherwise … go away.

I encourage good behavior and basic manners in museum life for several reasons. Most obviously it is preferable to work in a respectful atmosphere. No matter how fusty certain mores may be, understanding and practicing them can be a career advantage. I recognize that people have advanced quite far in the museum world by ignoring basic precepts of etiquette but I have no interest in hanging out with them, nor do others. In the long run, those who are most respected, admired, and loved in my field are – not surprisingly – pleasant to be with. I have also found that respectful camaraderie engenders higher productivity, loyalty, and creativity.

The tone for a mannerly workplace starts at the top, in the director's office. Poor museum leaders set a bad example for employees and create a work atmosphere that limits quality and quantity outcomes. Complaining, pointing fingers, being dishonest, constantly finding fault, relying on excuses, blaming others and criticizing staff and trustees is bad leadership. Showing this sort of management suggests a lack of control and competence. No one is reassured. I can voice gossip and deprecating remarks as much as the next person, but when I became a director I needed to avoid this sort of behavior.

Often the little things a person does reveal character traits, especially when it comes to manners. The new director of a museum I once worked in, brought his wife to the office one day but declined to introduce her to staff members as they walked around the building. The staff, of course, were perfectly happy to greet them. Had a trustee been in the place, effusive spousal introductions by the director would have flowed. This condescending foolishness simply supported our quickly growing consensus that the guy was a fool. Alas, it took more than a few years for the board to realize this, and by then the museum was quite literally a shambles. Under a different director, who knew the rules of etiquette inside out, the place made a remarkable recovery. Another director I reported to at a different museum was super at acknowledging both trustees and staff regardless of social rank or employment pecking order. This individual made a point of not only chatting with whomever he came into contact with during the day but of remembering information gained along the way. This endeared him to everyone and made for a warmer and respectful working environment.

We may like codes of conduct to be listed in personnel manuals or other official documents but how they happen on the job and to what extent will vary according to personalities. It's hard to codify being nice, respectful, thoughtful, supportive, professional, or mindful. I have noticed increasingly boorish behavior in two groups of museum employees: directors and curators. These are the positions I have held and loved. Perhaps I am too sensitive, or maybe I am an anomaly and should embrace a snooty attitude. Because museums now enjoy a prominent status in our society, there is enormous competition for these kinds of positions. Sometimes the heads of people who hold them swell. I find that highly offensive. Oddly, it is more evident in smaller art museums than in larger institutions. I don't encounter it as much at the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Smithsonian Institution, or the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for instance.

There are many recommendations regarding manners and customs that should be expected of museum employees. What a person wears at work is important. Most museum employees dress appropriately for their jobs. There are usually directives about clothing in personnel manuals. I learned a tough lesson early in my career that changed how I planned my daily attire ever after. A few years after starting curatorial work at the Museum of the City of New York, I was there one Monday in fairly casual attire. I did not have a tie and was wearing jeans, corduroy sports coat, and a work shirt. The museum was closed on Mondays, I had no appointments or meetings scheduled, and I was planning on some manual labor moving collections around. A call came through from the director's office. He was away. The call was from the New York Stock Exchange and the person wanted to know if the museum might be interested in acquiring one of the trading posts from the floor of the Exchange that were being removed to be replaced and updated by new technology. The posts dated back to the 1920s and though modernized, they clearly needed to go. I said I would love to visit and discuss the idea, when could we make an appointment. "Now." was the answer. Tomorrow all posts would be in the trash. Only that day did someone even think a museum might be interested. I said I was on my way. Figuring I'd be walking around a construction project I thought my clothing was perfect. I ran over to the No. 6 subway at Lexington and 103rd Street and headed to the financial district. I was met at the entrance to the Exchange by the president of the New York Stock Exchange. He, naturally, wore a bespoke suit, starched shirt, tie, and shoes that were clearly custom made. As I was profusely thanking him for thinking of the museum I said how much I looked forward to seeing the posts in the construction mess. Nothing was happening on the floor, and in fact no one was there but the two of us. The posts stood awaiting their fate. I selected one and was ready to depart when he invited me to lunch in the Exchange restaurant. Thinking this was a staff cafeteria I assumed I would fit right in with the maintenance folks present. Wrong. It was as elegant a dining room as one can imagine. From that day on I have always been prepared for the unexpected when it comes to my clothing on the job. It is easier for men to dress down than dress up. When I became a director I made sure I had an extra tie, jacket, or suit and appropriate shoes and socks in an office closet. This provisioning extends to toiletries.

Interviewing for a job provides an ideal start to thinking about clothing on the job. Unless you are applying to work at the Hooters Museum, avoid uncovered cleavage, male or female. No short skirts or shorts. If applying for a management position, a suit is customary for both sexes. If the job is in maintenance or behind the scenes, a sports coat and conservative slacks are permissible for both men and women. I always recommend men wear ties to interviews for most museum jobs. I had a student take my advice when he went to interview for an unpaid internship. He was the successful candidate. I later heard from the museum that in addition to his personality and resume he impressed them by his dress. Men should avoid red socks, as a job applicant I interviewed did not (and did not get the job). Unless you are applying for a position at an avant-garde contemporary art museum, you may want to keep tattoos and body piercings to a minimum and out of sight. Be prepared to walk around during an interview or a call-back so wear suitable shoes. And be prepared to dine in some way. This is where table manners come into play.

When I was a kid I heard stories about a long dead great-great-aunt who, in the late nineteenth century, taught children of immigrant families in a Philadelphia industrial neighborhood. (She never married and teaching was one of the only respectable jobs in her social circle. She loved it though.) One of the things she taught was table manners. Apparently she would bring to class sterling silver cutlery, china, linens, glassware, and so forth and explain how to use it all while sitting appropriately at the table and conducting polite conversation.

The more executive a position you might interview for, the better the chances are you will have at least one meal during your interview. That meal could be in a restaurant, a private home, or at the museum itself. It might involve a cocktail reception. Your spouse, partner, or significant other (not all three please) might be invited. In these situations the rubber hits the road insofar as manners are concerned. You will be expected to know what piece of silverware to use and both how and when. If you are meeting in a restaurant, order simple food that can be delivered to your mouth with a fork or spoon rather than your fingers. As much as I love French onion soup, it is messy. Especially for a guy with a beard. Sit up straight and look everyone in the eye. Alcohol can be a challenge. Consume very little or avoid it entirely if you can do so without appearing impolite.

I once was being considered for a museum director's job in California. The board chair's family had a winery. On my second round of interviews we went to a restaurant serving that wine. Naturally, I had not only to drink some but comment on it. I have wine at dinner every night but don't know the oenophile's language. During the course of the evening I had a little more wine than usual and, though terribly well-behaved, I remember answering some interview questions more effusively than I would normally have done. I did not get the job. Whether my excited evening conversation had any influence on that decision is unknown, but it was not the best part of my interview process. (The person who was hired was let go a year later. Shoulda hired me!)

Respectful interpersonal relations are helpful in all aspects of life, but especially in museums. I suggest devoting considerable thought and energy to getting along well with colleagues whatever their positions or your opinions of them. From maintenance staff to office workers to curators, educators, and directors, not to mention trustees, strive to interface with everyone in a profitable and pleasant way. This workplace approach may seem obvious but how many times do we see situations where a focus on personality undermines a focus on productivity? Being polite also gives you a shield when dealing with stressful, difficult, and annoying circumstances and people. One may come off as ineffectual, aloof, uninterested, or disengaged, and that needs to be counterbalanced with obvious commitment, but I have never regretted mannerly conduct on the job during times of discomfort. There are a lot of people in and around the museum world who think they know about it but don't. Their ignorance is their bliss and the rest of us have to deal accordingly. I don't suffer fools gladly but I try not to disrespect them directly as I don't want to put myself on their low behavioral level. Manners can guard against that possibility.

An interesting generational aside about behavior was apparent when I started my career. It related to men who were combat veterans of the Second World War. They never suffered from personal hubris in dealing with fellow staff, regardless of the job a person held. Matters some of us felt were of earth-shattering importance meant little to people who had been in the midst of horrible warfare. I worked with several such men. Their balanced daily demeanor and calm perspective on issues I felt were catastrophic clearly suggested matters were not dire. As with most combat veterans, they did not talk about their bad experiences often. Once in a while a short story would come out but that was rare.

Today we are aware of the Second World War veterans associated with museums through the books and films about those who were assigned by the Allied armies to safeguard and retrieve cultural materials stolen by the Nazis or endangered by combat. Known as the Monuments Men, many could be found working in museums long after the war. One, James Rorimer, became director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City. Apparently he kept a loaded revolver in a desk drawer fearing a reprisal from a threat received during his military service.

I always answer e-mails, letters, phone calls, and personal inquiries in short order and regardless of the source. Unfortunately this is increasingly untrue of my esteemed peers. One assignment I give my graduate students requires them to interview, face-to-face, a museum professional of interest whom they do not know. When I started giving this assignment 20 years ago, every student made a successful contact at first try. Now, there are instances of no response from prospective interviewees. I find this impolite, haughty, unprofessional, and insulting. We in the museum field work for the public and should be accountable to it, whoever “it” is. Amongst other things, that means responding politely when approached personally through the various technological communications used these days. I know we are all busy, but that is no excuse for ignoring inquiries. A simple response is often sufficient, even if it is along the lines of “Thanks but no thanks.” If an e-mail, letter, phone message, or other communication, is ignored by someone in my field, I am offended.

We should be especially mindful of requests that come to us from prospective future professionals. I was extremely fortunate in always receiving responses to inquiries I made as I was a student exploring the museum field. Perhaps my debt of gratitude can be partially paid by doing the same for others now.

I also notice a decrease in “thank you” acknowledgements after I have taken a museum colleague to lunch or dinner. Such courtesy is easily extended via a hand-written note, e-mail, text, or with a phone call. As far as I’m concerned, this lack of thoughtfulness suggests two things: the person was not brought up to learn, respect, and use manners and has declined to play catch-up in this regard: they won’t have a free meal from me again. I feel like sending these people an annotated book on professional etiquette and manners.

Cautions and caveats about social relations on the job extend to the written word. This includes not only hard copy communications but electronic communications. Anything done with pencil and pen on paper, a computer, Smart Phone, tablet, whatever, is subject to retention in some manner. Whenever I write or put pictures or graphics on or into a device I do so with others in mind. How will what I say be perceived by those for whom it was not intended? I am not by nature paranoid and I rarely entangle myself in dicey situations online. I might do so on paper but only if I can engineer anonymity, or, documentation is required, as will happen with personnel matters. Foul humor, nasty criticism, unfounded accusations, confidentialities, reflections of violence, sex, and racial, ethnic, religious, and gender intolerance need to be avoided. I well remember the advice of a boss who warned me to write as if whatever I penned would appear on the front page of *The New York Times*. His observation holds today in spite of communication technology advances. Remember, the *Times* is available online.

Recognizing how important manners are for museum professionals, I don’t want to leave trustees out of the mix. One would expect these movers and shakers to be sterling examples when it comes to behavior. Most of the time that is the case, but once in a while it is not. Dealing with etiquette transgressions is difficult for staff, especially directors.

At one museum I directed we had a trustee who was a loud eater. This came to our attention at the small buffet meals provided during board meetings. He would pile on the grub and chomp away. Another trustee found his behavior so offensive I had to make sure the two did not sit side by side. Another trustee (an accountant, naturally) thought we were wasting money with our buffets even though everyone else liked them. I put a contribution jar on the buffet table. Another issue was whether or not to serve wine. We did; nothing untoward ever happened. There was a trustee at one museum at which I worked who would arrive on the property reeking of alcohol. The person was not a pleasant drunk and always proceeded to boss around the staff while making deprecating comments regarding their performance. Fortunately this trustee eventually resigned from the board, spurred on I hope by pressure from other trustees.

A stickier trustee etiquette transgression occurred when I decided a museum should have a trustee sales shop committee headed by a woman I thought ideal for the assignment. She had been on the board for a number of years, was well thought of, and had been totally polite in her dealings with everyone. My assessment turned out to be wildly wrong. Almost from the start her vision for the shop and that of the professionals involved (both employees and consultants) clashed. It seems that she was always right and everyone else was wrong. Should anyone fail to do her bidding instantaneously and totally she responded with unpleasant accusations which escalated to a point where I almost had a personnel action on my hands. Fortunately, I was able, with much behind-the-scenes finagling with the board chairperson, not only to get the trustee to resign as committee chair but also as a trustee. Trustees rarely police themselves, thus I was especially fortunate in these two situations.

While kvetching about bad behavior, I cannot leave out executive search firms. Sometimes they are extraordinarily impolite. Various colleagues and I privately grumble about how poorly these firms can treat candidates. I have been on both sides of executive searches, as an employer and as someone seeking employment. Poets sing of inquiries that were not responded to, providing recycled candidates totally unsuited for a job, failing to follow-up the interview process, and paying little attention to resumes. The problem is, one can't complain! Alienate a search firm and you're on its excrement list forever.

The subject of "toxic museums" rarely surfaces in our field but they exist and the phenomenon should at least be commented upon. Toxic museums are characterized by bad governance and management. This is evident by the presence of – take your pick – incompetent, selfish, nasty, dishonest, backbiting people at the top of the operational pyramid. The damage that occurs in a toxic museum is considerable. It can be obvious and odious or so subtle that it unfolds slowly and secretly and few outside an organization are aware of it. Sadly, fixing a toxic museum is difficult, especially if few care about it or have any corrective authority. At worse the adverse impacts are irreversible, though museums may bump along in a cocooned survival mode cannibalizing resources for years. A positive course can only unfold with a change of trustees, directors, and some staff.

The New-York Historical Society is an excellent case study of a museum that fell on toxic times (and almost closed). Following years of failed leadership that caused growing financial distress, its survival was so precarious that the New York State Attorney General's office had to be called in to help rescue the institution (see Guthrie 1996). An astonishing renaissance occurred as a result of an infusion of new leadership and money.

What is especially sad about toxic museums is how collections, staff, and programs suffer. Collection care and attention tends to plummet. Good staff leave. Programs deteriorate. The governing body and management responsible for the mess either don't or won't recognize it. Usually they establish selfish survival modes of operating. If things become really untenable they point fingers and scatter. Regardless, I am always amazed at the longevity of some toxic situations and how museums muddle through. It is as if the institution has a life of its own.

On a happier note, let's deal with humor on the job. I use it often. But, I long ago learned that humor must be wielded with skill and grace, particularly at work. It can relax people, make for pleasant social and business exchanges, ease trauma, smooth ruffled feathers, calm nerves, quiet rancor, and help make the day enjoyable. It can also be harmful, uncomfortable, out of place, disrespectful, and foul. Humor needs to be taken seriously, especially on the job, and woe to we who think we are always good at it in the workplace. Museums are very funny places. The trick for those of us employed in them is to recognize that and ponder how to best address or apply it. Start by joking about yourself.

Every once in a while I think of a practical joke. Most of the time I resist the temptation but my museum career has allowed me to indulge in a few. For example, when the founder of *MAD* magazine, Bill Gaines, died I was working at the Western Reserve Historical Society. American men of my generation came of age with *MAD*. Bill was a national icon as far as I was concerned. At its headquarters, on Cleveland's University Circle, the Society had two flag poles in front of its long line of interconnected buildings. I lowered one to half-mast in honor of Bill (whom I had actually met once). During the day a security guard asked who had died. I said Bill Gaines. The guard had no idea who I was talking about. He pondered the name and decided the guy was a long-retired guard. I said nothing. By the end of the day all the security and maintenance staff were quietly voicing condolences at the loss of a guard-who-never-was. Bill would have loved it.

On another occasion I was able to have NASA deliver a sixty-foot rocket and place it on the front lawn of the Historical Society during an exhibition about early rocket research in Cleveland (Figure 11). This opportunity happened

Figure 11 Entrance to the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.
Source: Photograph by Steven Miller.

quite by accident when I was visiting a NASA facility just west of the city. I noticed some rockets parked on trailers on the property and was told they were used in parades. I asked if we could borrow one to promote our exhibition, and the answer was yes. I did not seek permission of anyone at the Historical Society and only tangentially mentioned the idea to my boss. One day a truck delivered the rocket and parked it where I requested. The truck went away and we had an instant exhibition "billboard." I awaited flack. My boss did not care, none of the people assigned to monitor how the area appeared to the general public expressed dismay, the neighbors were quiet.

An employee of the Morris Museum, Morristown, New Jersey, is adept at writing funny poems in honor of departing staff. He is renowned for this and his work is harmless and hilarious. When I became director of the museum I was a little nervous about the practice but, after seeing how enthusiastically the poetry was received by all staff and especially the intended target, I made sure it continued. I hoped the employee would still be around when I departed. He was and my poem is a cherished memento.

Speaking of farewell occasions for staff, when the director of a museum where I worked retired the employees had a party for him. He was famous for wearing a certain type of hat. It is alleged that one time his secretary stomped on it in a fit of pique (he was a widower, she was single, and a romantic relationship was rumored but never confirmed). A maintenance person who inadvertently chanced upon the quarrel gingerly picked the hat off the floor, straightened it out, and gently placed it on a table before quickly exiting the office scene. For the director's retirement party our exhibition designer did a display featuring the hat, which had been temporarily "borrowed" for the occasion from the director's coat closet. I think only staff-in-the-know were privy to the humor.

On the non-humorous front: We hear a lot about generational differences in the United States these days. We have the Greatest Generation, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials. All have different codes of behavior. How these unfold in the workplace varies. I remember a high school student who volunteered in a museum's administration offices a few days a week during one summer. He wore a baseball cap all the time. The bookkeeper, who was old enough to be his grandmother, found this offensive. The kid thought nothing of it as it was the norm in his circle.

The workplace has grown more informal over the years, and people are apt to use first names rather than Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Miss (is Miss still used at all?). I had a boss who was deeply offended when sales people called him and used his first name. The fact that he was never known by that first name but by a nickname didn't endear him to the caller. Dress can cause generational kerfuffles. Today it is not unusual for young women to show some cleavage. At one museum I knew of this was the case with a maintenance person. A much older female director of development found it offensive and told the head of maintenance to disallow it, which they did. I have already alluded to piercings and tattoos, and I will note the advice I gave my children: Don't do anything to your body that might cost you a job.

My comments on employee behavior would be remiss if I did not mention sex on the job. Even if hopeless love is the cause – *no* is my suggestion. The old saying "the walls have ears" especially applies to sex in the workplace. If anyone thinks he or she is getting away with amorous encounters at work undetected, they should think again. Certain conditions of privacy and anonymity may allow a fun quickie (I plead the fifth) but repeated or prolonged encounters are eventually known to all. I am talking about consensual sex rather than sexual harassment or assault. The latter are ethical, social, personal, and legal violations that must not be condoned and must be prosecuted.

Consensual sex at work can result in all sorts of complications. If caught in the act it can be embarrassing. It is not what you were hired to do, even if you are on your lunch hour. It may have grave consequences if consensual participants become not-so-consensual. Beyond personal considerations the whole tenor, structure, and arrangement of a work environment can be adversely altered. Collegiality, reporting structures, and communication are compromised if not entirely damaged. Trusts are violated.

People know when colleagues are attending to amorous physical encounters unrelated to work. A brief dalliance might go unremarked upon. A relationship outside the boundaries of a museum can be of minimal interest at the office. However, entanglements can cause serious inefficiency. For example, if a supervisor and a supervisee are having sex, conditions of hierarchical equity are skewed. I know of directors who "fooled around" with staff. This simply lowered their reputations and other employees had to navigate around an uncomfortable situation. At a museum where I once worked a curator was having a torrid affair with a married member of the maintenance staff. The same sort of arrangement happened at another museum between a married staff person and an unmarried colleague. The former was a short-term fling while the latter went on for years. In both cases assignations took place off-site, so far as I know, but inter-staff collegiality was compromised. The people were snickered about and employee rapport was altered. On the rare occasions when I have worked with members of staff who were in a committed relationship with each other, gay and straight, I never encountered problems with sex or collegial disrespect on the job. Perhaps the accepted stable status of such an arrangement made things permissible. Presumably potentially disruptive libidinal energies were abated off-campus out of work hours. Sex between an employee and trustee is yet another variant of staff relationship conduct that can complicate things. Enough said.

Class Questions

1 A major art museum in New York City has an annual awards luncheon named in honor of a major philanthropic family. You are the director of the Morris Museum, Morristown, New Jersey. One year you receive an invitation to the luncheon. You go. Upon arrival at the private club where the event is being held, you are greeted and given your table assignment. You sit. To your left is Eli Broad and to your right is a member of the philanthropic family. You introduce yourself to both. Mr. Broad says he is familiar with the museum you direct. This is odd because he is a major art collector and art museum leader and while your museum has art it is by local artists. While you are settling into the salad you notice that the people in charge of the event keep looking at you and your table in a somewhat alarmed manner. You quickly realize you are at the head table and perhaps a seating assignment mistake has been made. At the end of the luncheon as you are leaving you inquire and learn that is indeed what happened. At the beginning, when you were beginning to sense a problem, what, if anything, should you have done?

2 A man contacts your museum and has an unusual request. He would like to propose to his girlfriend in your museum. But he has more than a simple proposal in mind: He would like to do it with a small display in one of your galleries. He would put his engagement ring on exhibit in an exhibition case. The label for the ring would be a written marriage proposal. Once the ring was placed on display, he would visit the museum with his girlfriend and as they toured the galleries, they would "accidentally" come across the exhibit and read the label. How would you respond to this request?

3 The Museum of the City of New York's theatre collection contains a few costumes worn by Grace Kelly during her acting career. These are on display in a temporary exhibition featuring a great variety of items from the collection. Arrangements have been made for Princess Grace to visit the museum and see her old costumes and the exhibit. Her two daughters, Princess Caroline and Princess Stéphanie, will be joining her. The afternoon visit will be for about an hour or two at the most. Upon their arrival it is clear the press has wind of it and reporters and photographers are arriving. It is during regular museum open hours. What should the museum do?

4 Louis Auchincloss, a renowned author who featured the manners and customs of American high society in his novels, has written a book about his wife's maternal grandmother, who was a Vanderbilt. The book is being published by Viking Press, where Jackie Onassis is an editor. She is a distant relative of Mr. Auchincloss and agreed to edit the book, which is titled *Maverick in Mauve*. Mr. Auchincloss lives in New York City, and amongst his various activities he is chairman of the board of trustees of the Museum of the City of New York. Because the book takes place mostly in New York at the turn of the last century, the museum is approached to do an exhibition in conjunction with the publication of the book. The museum agrees. Jackie O will attend the late afternoon opening of the exhibit. She does not want publicity about her presence and requires that she be met and escorted to the gallery by a side door. However, she does want the press to see her from a distance. How does the museum meet her demands?

5 The famous women's fashion designer Arnold Scassi comes to your museum to see a small display of his clothes. The costumes were owned by wealthy ladies in your region and have been given to the museum over the past 20 years. On looking at the just-opened exhibition, Mr. Scassi asks if he can make some adjustments to how the pieces are shown. The curator and registrar readily agree. Four hours later they are still inside the very large display area behind a floor-to-ceiling glass wall, as they move mannequins, adjust the clothes, and, scurry up and down ladders to alter the lighting, all in response to the designer's steady burst of abrupt and curt orders barked as he stands on the other side of the glass. What should, could, or might be done by and for the museum staff in such a situation?

6 You and a co-worker occasionally meet for consensual sex at her apartment during lunch hour. You are both single. You work in completely different areas of the museum and have neither a reporting nor supervisory relationship on the job. Is this behavior something for the museum to be concerned about?

Reference

Guthrie, Kevin M. (1996) *The New-York Historical Society: Lessons from One Nonprofit's Long Struggle for Survival*. Josse-Bass.

18

Museum Ethics

Ethics is a matter of individualism – my ethics may not be someone else's ethics.

Jimmy Hoffa, 1963

When it comes to ethics in museums there are four core questions: What are they? Who has to abide by them? How can they be enforced? and Who must be held accountable?

What some might demand as matters for ethics directives others might shrug off. The most difficult thing to accept when the subject is discussed is the fact that ethics are hard to define, fluid, often subjective, and not always well and consistently agreed upon by all. They are not necessarily law. What I might consider totally unethical behavior is not illegal, such as a trustee overtly having an exhibition of a collection he owns in the museum on whose board he serves. Ethics vary from person to person, case to case, and situation to situation. This is especially true in the museum world. To be sure, there are shared areas of common acknowledgement, but, be careful – ethics is a relentlessly evolving subject.

The idea that ethics is and could be a subject for discourse in museums is a welcome development. For instance, there are now great discussions about the ways museum treat collections representing people once considered exotic, primitive, or less civilized than certain groups. Those certain groups were always the ones forming museums, hence their derogatory or denigrating attitude towards those outside their "tribe."

For the most part, people in museums generally act in mainstream ethical ways, or at least according to the generally accepted ethical precepts of a particular time and place. They comport themselves in an appropriate manner with their colleagues and the institutions they serve. Occasionally there are lapses but they are just that. Collections are acquired in good faith and for good reason, exhibitions are mounted truthfully, programs are offered honestly, and the public is accommodated for meaningful benefit. When obvious and specific ethical breaches are discovered or pointed out, museums respond,

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

though perhaps not as quickly or agreeably as some might wish. We inside the field see this unfold with personnel matters such an insider theft or misrepresenting of credentials, obvious conflicts of staff interest, or questionable and damaging employee behaviors.

When new ethics issues arise, museums will, albeit sometimes at a snail's pace, address them. The outcome might fail to align with others' definitions of ethics in the particular case but differences of opinion abound in such debates. It is the public nature of museums that, to a degree, causes most of their ethical posturing. This does not mean unethical activities are absent or hidden in museums, but these tend to be about specific and even small matters rather than big-picture imbroglios. They also center on how one defines museum ethics. I am a strict-constructionist in this regard, and thus my idea of ethical deviations, which usually unfold on the governance level, may be considered hopelessly unrealistic. On the contrary, I simply would like us to improve our self-critical awareness and deal with obviously errant behavior.

A dominant museum ethics conversation these days is about collections ownership and use. In the coming years the debates in this regard will continue and even escalate. Ownership controversies tend to center on repatriation claims made by governments around the world as well as cultural groups such as Native Americans; art looted by the Nazis during the Second World War; and, the deaccessioning of collections and especially how funds gained through the sale of things should be allocated by a museum. Ethical debates about the acquisition and use of museum collections depicting the "other" will increase as minorities assert their opinions and demand a voice equal to the established power structure in museums. Defining minority will be at the crux of the conversation and it will go well beyond matters of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation.

From the 1990s onwards, repatriation claims have grown exponentially. They will expand in number and scope. When the West invented museums, they needed to be filled with things. The great age of exploration and colonization caused all sorts of objects to be sent to Europe to be studied, gawked at, played with, and otherwise contained in private and public collections. Owners would often keep things in large cabinets, which are generally referred to these days as Cabinets of Curiosities and cited as the first form of the modern museum. The cabinets could be a cupboard, a room, or more. Wars in Europe resulted in additional movements of art and valued artifacts. The various places to which these things finally made their way may then have become museums though that was not their original function: think palaces, castles, forts and mansions. The content of these museums reflected a Eurocentric view of the world that codified a particular historical, art history, natural history, and social perspective. Today debates rage over who had the authority to give, get, take, or receive various museum collections, much less how those things are presented to the general public, not to mention how or why relocations and particular public interpretations happened. Regardless of who weighs in on what side of an argument, the crux of their perspective is expressed through a strong ethical cant.

On the surface, ethics discussions about the legitimacy of museum ownership would seem to be pretty simple. Either a museum is the rightful owner of something or it is not, and this can be easily proved. Maybe. It is not always possible to confirm without a shadow of a doubt where and exactly how something found its way into a museum. For instance, "Many antiquities in museums do not have unbroken chains of custody stretching back to the moment they left a source-country"; also "until recently many ancient items changed hands without copious documentation" (Mashberg 2013: 1, 5).

When museums have collections some think they should not, that does not necessarily mean a repatriation will take place. Museums may be sympathetic to claims of ownership by a country or a people or a person but they can't automatically take such statements at face value. Relevant proof is necessary. That is often lacking, especially when it comes to the sort of evidence museums desire when assessing provenances.

Ultimately ownership debates are turf wars: whose turf did an object come from and whose turf will or should an object be on? Those arguments are couched in ethical terms. This is one reason why we often do see some museums agree to return an object. "'Evidence is only one component of the analysis,' Mr. Ulrice [Stephen K. Ulrice] said. 'Of equal, if not greater, significance are the ethical issues presented. A museum has a duty to consider more than just evidence'" (Mashberg 2013).

How to define nations and the ruling bodies who had or claim the authority to give or sell items to museums, collectors, or other nations only makes repatriation issues more complex. For example, what single nation has the right today to claim jurisdiction of the old Benin kingdom in sub-Saharan Africa from which so many highly sought-after stunning bronze cast figural sculptures originated? Many of the best of these are in museums and private collections. If they are to be returned to their place of origin, what is that, precisely? The Benin of their origin does not exist as the same single geopolitical place.

Why are all these repatriation issues emerging now? It is partially a reaction to a growing commercial market in art and antiquities. Money talks. It is also an evolutionary consequence of the invention of museums. Now that there are places internationally recognized for the assembly of objects of meaning, peoples around the globe want them for their museums to reflect the best of their cultural achievements. Defining "their" can be at the core of many repatriation debates.

For some parts of the world, such as locales that were subject to European colonialism, much indigenous cultural material of value that could be physically removed was hauled off by the ruling colonial power to its own native territory, where it was eventually housed in museums. This is why Belgium has stunning artifacts from The Belgian Congo, a former colony which is now the independent Democratic Republic of the Congo. Who can blame former colonies for wanting their creative patrimony back – to put in their own cultural institutions?

Museums are center stage when it comes to the restitution of art illicitly taken by the Nazis. This is understandable given the public profiles of museums. Over the years sometimes an object stolen during the Second World War has found its way into a museum – sometimes innocently, sometimes not. Since the turn of the century in particular, people have become more sensitized to the idea that art once thought gone forever might actually exist and perhaps might even be found in public repositories. The possibility has therefore arisen for the original owners of stolen art, or their heirs, to reclaim objects.

Because museums collect art, they have become the logical places to look for stolen art. And, there have been more than a few instances in which museums have indeed been owners of objects purloined or otherwise illicitly acquired by the Nazis. When someone hits pay dirt in this regard, the media attention is often severe. Museums respond to this in several ways. Over time their reactions have become quite careful and deliberate. Though there are monumental ethical factors surrounding a suspicious acquisition or collection piece, museums still have to avoid automatically assuming any complaint is valid. This cautionary response may not be understood outside the confines of a museum (or within them for that matter). The simplistic assessment of such foot-dragging is that the museum is harboring a dark secret and has colluded with thieves. The ownership issues surrounding art stolen by the Nazis can be complex. While they were known for keeping records of their ill-gotten gains, this was not always the case and such records did not necessarily include art obtained by forced sales at unfairly set low prices. Furthermore, records are often so generic in nature as to make it hard to identify individual contents with precision.

Increasingly, as those who were alive during the Second World War and could personally attest to thefts and other depredations die, later generations are hard-pressed to make restitution claims. Museums attacked for illicitly owning suspect art can be put in the awkward position of having to referee heirs' claims, or, decline to respond because the legal status and numbers of heirs cannot be verified. In the meantime, while a debate unfolds, whatever museum is caught in the mix is accused of being unethical.

As a museum curator and director I never wanted any of the collections for which I was responsible to have been obtained under questionable circumstances. Fortunately, with a couple of peculiar exceptions, I have not encountered problems. (But then again, aside from a few American Indian items, which were subject to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, I was working with regional history art and artifacts rather than things garnered internationally in possibly foggy ways.) I think my experience is true of that of many museums. What has changed is that there are new categories of collections that are suspect, at least from the ethical perspectives of certain individuals or groups. This phenomenon will escalate.

Selling collections to address fiscal problems is a consistent controversy. Brouhahas over these actions flare up in the media with regularity. The ruckus never seems entirely to go away and it must be put in perspective. Museums have been deaccessioning things for almost as long as there have been things to deaccession. The practice continues today and is mostly carried out without debate as irrelevant or redundant collection items, as well as those in bad condition and of questionable authenticity, depart museums after a qualified vetting process carried out by curatorial and leadership staff and trustees. For the most part, deaccessioning makes up a tiny part of any museum's collection management work. Most of the things museums own are staying put.

Disruptions about deaccessioning happen when people outside museums think objects of merit are being lost or the action is being taken for crass financial gain and the money will be a temporary fiscal fix for a more fundamental problem. Either reason for debate is based on public feelings about museums as secure repositories for presumably community-shared cultural evidence. Those feelings reflect what museums are at their core and what we in the field constantly say is our mission. We should be thrilled that our explanation about the sanctity of collections is so entrenched in the public mind. Why should we be surprised when what is thought to be flawed deaccessioning is considered an ethical breach?

The ethical conundrum enveloping deaccessioning exists in and out of museums. For some, museums should never get rid of anything. For others, removed objects should go to another museum. This conforms to a narrow and strict construction of the core notion of why museums exist. Abstractly it seems appropriate. In practice it is impractical. Hardly everything in a museum deserves to be there, or perhaps in any museum. Such decisions must rest with qualified staff. Unfortunately the genesis of some deaccessioning does not start with staff and even when it does, it is sometimes the wrong staff. I have known museum directors who could not care less about an institution's collections and were happy to sell things to free-up space, to generate money, or because they had no idea why something was in their museums to begin with.

The codes of ethics of various museum profession organizations include instructions regarding the practice and outcome of deaccessioning. What is not included is any measure of redress for clear, overt, and premeditated deviations. When speaking of controversial deaccessioning, the media always refers to the offending "museum" taking the action and no individual or individuals are named. Deaccessioning is not done by a "museum" it is done by a person or persons associated in some official capacity with a museum. When a debate happens, I think if the people who made the deaccession decision are identified in public we might, just might, see a change in the worst ways the practice is conducted. This will require training the press who need to know that in most museums it is ultimately the director and board of trustees who make, or should make, decisions that result in the removal of a collection item or items. Name names. Provide direct contact information.

Because most museums can do with most collections pretty much what they want, there is almost no redress for perceived ethical collection violations. Continuing with the deaccessioning example, I will refer to the National Academy of Design's director and board of trustees' decision in 2008 to sell two paintings from its permanent collection to raise operating money. This venerable entity on New York City's Museum Mile, along Fifth Avenue, was castigated for the action. The Academy realized almost $15 million from the sale. It was rebuked by the Association of Art Museum Directors and pilloried in the media, yet no individuals were boldly named as being accountable for the deaccession decisions. No one lost a job. The money did not secure the finances of the institution as six years later it remained in severe financial straits, laying off 25 employees. The fate of the paintings is unknown.

Fundamental to a core museum belief system is the requirement to have collections that are what museums say they are. Thus, when I am in a science museum looking at a piece of rock and the exhibition label states it is from the moon, I believe it is from the moon. When I view a drawing in an exhibition and am told it is by van Gogh, I believe it is. When I encounter a desk used by Thomas Jefferson, I have no reason to believe otherwise. The intrinsic truth of collections is an ethical matter.

The truth business of museums is evident when fakes, forgeries, or reproductions are discovered to be in collections. Past museum practices might have been to hide, destroy, or otherwise jettison these objects. Today other actions are recommended and these evolved from a heightened acceptance of ethical considerations regarding collection veracity. This is a most welcome development. The practice of announcing the discovery of phonies in museum collections is desirable and will presumably continue as a best practice … would that it included people.

Discussions about the ethics of deaccessioning, repatriation, and exhibition honesty can and will go on, but there are other areas worth investigating, especially at the board level. I have seen more than a few instances that I would define as unethical trustee involvements with a museum. A director cannot bring onto the board a member of their family or a person with whom they are involved in a personal relationship without compromising trustee objectivity about the director. To do so is unethical. Likewise, trustees should not be in a position to benefit from their position on the board by providing business services. Nor should a trustee abuse their position by making forced loans of their own property and should never loan any item without discussion with and approval from the museum staff. These loans may be well meant – or they may be self-aggrandizing – but they must only be made with the voluntary agreement of the director and relevant staff.

In the 1970s it became popular to assault museums about the ethics of their funding sources and the institutional complicity inherent in accepting money from them. Protests were principally directed towards tobacco firms with Phillip Morris being a prime target. I welcomed this conversation but found it had minimal impact. Taken to its logical conclusion, museums would have to know the ethical mores and perspectives of all sources of money they sought and received, be those funds given by corporations, government agencies, foundations, religious groups, or individuals. The lofty motivation to seek "pure" dollars untainted by social negatives was and remains a fruitless a pursuit. Like Diogenes of Sinope seeking an honest man amongst the ancients, museums are hard put to find truly "honest money" to support the operations.

When we talk about accessibility in US museums we seem to be only focused on the ethics of access for the physically and mentally disabled. What about the economically disadvantaged? How fabulous would it be if all museums were free? Like public libraries? Given the way museums finance themselves, except for government museums such as those owned and operated by federal, state, or local agencies that eschew such fees, admission income is a contributor to annual operating revenue. A radical new exception to having admission fees happened on 1 January 2013 when the Dallas Museum of Art boldly started a free admission policy. Few private museums have the nerve or interest to do the same. Museums pay lip service to the idea that an entry cost might be a barrier by scheduling minimal free admission times and offering various discounts, but, for the most part, I seriously doubt charging admission will become a real subject of discourse or action when it comes to museum ethics.

A topic that I think has ethical ramifications but seems to be totally absent in the museum profession's collective chatter, at least on the record, is the matter of executive compensation. Personally I think it is far, far too high and generous sometimes. Museums are nonprofit entities and should adhere to fiscal restraints in accomplishing their work. This must be especially true when it comes to salaries and benefits, which always constitute the lion's share of an institution's costs. Think of the positions that could be funded with money going to the CEO, or salary increases and improved benefits that could be given to deserving staff.

My irritation regarding CEO compensation is hypocritical. As a director, I have been paid significantly more than other staff. At one time in my career I was paid what I considered too much. I unilaterally reduced my salary by 20 percent ($40 000) when the economy went south in 2008. I was scrambling to keep the museum open and avoid staff attrition. I succeeded. The board was totally disengaged and left the matter completely up to me, which was telling.

I use the term "CEO" purposely in this brief aside because it reflects a business attitude that inevitably leads to what I consider exorbitant compensation.

The salaries of museum honchos are approved by boards of trustees, usually based on the recommendations of trustee committees such as executive, finance, or personnel. Because businessmen sit on so many of these decision-making committees, the results of their deliberations reflect their corporate approach to life. They see museums as businesses operating in a commercial manner. To a degree this is fine but museums are not businesses. Their missions are not proved by the bottom-line. The CEO of the XYZ Widget Company who is brought in to corporatize a museum will fail. I have already noted in Chapter 3 the example of what happened when the Smithsonian Institution hired Lawrence Small to run it. With absolutely zero experience in the fields the Smithsonian embraces, be they in the arts, history, or sciences, predictably, to my mind, his tenure was an abject failure.

Whether or not museum executive compensation is an ethical issue remains to be explored. I think it should be. I use the word "compensation" rather than "salary" because it covers the broader spectrum of what museums provide directors. I know of several who not only enjoy obscenely high salaries but are given impressive residences, lavish offices, generous expense accounts, lucrative retirement packages, and other niceties. These benefits are especially grating when staff reductions occur or other cutbacks happen and the director suffers nothing.

As noted, perhaps the most egregious ethical complaints embroiling museums happen when they are "caught" selling collections for non-collecting or non-conservation reasons. These actions can result in a media fury. In the end, however, minimal adverse impact seems to accrue to the offending museum's trustees. I am hard-pressed to name one board that changed course because of irresponsible deaccessioning.

Since the late 1990s, however, another odd, ethically questionable museum activity has caused uproars – inexplicably destroying historically significant museum buildings to create another museum. The two most obvious examples of this happened in New York City.

In 2002 the Museum of Art and Design (MAD) bought and destroyed a quixotic building at 2 Columbus Circle, which was originally the Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art. Built in 1964 it was designed by Edward Durrell Stone. In time the gallery went out of business and the structure took on different uses. It eventually became the home of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. The building had its critics and admirers and a furious uproar ensued when MAD announced its plans to gut the structure to its steel core and create a completely new edifice. I submitted testimony at hearings to protect the original building and was amongst those who had letters-to-the-editor in *The New York Times* stating my opinion. MAD had all its political ducks in a row and prevailed. I'm not sure what is more outrageous, the disingenuous approach MAD took to acquire the building (it did not publicly reveal the extent of its wrecking plans until the structure was essentially theirs) or the fact that the new building is dreadfully dull and far, far less interesting than the first art institution on the site. For a museum devoted to design to so horribly attack design preservation is astonishing to say the least. The whole saga reeked of ethical foibles.

A similar catastrophe unfolded when the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) bought the former Museum of American Folk Art, next door on West 53rd Street (Figure 12). The latter had borrowed money for a new building which was designed by Tod Williams and Billie Tsien and opened in 2001.

The structure was generally held in high esteem for its architecture. Unfortunately (predictably?) the Folk Art Museum could not make payments on the building loan and was able to sell it to MoMA. That museum decided to destroy it for an expansion project. A huge ruckus ensued. As with MAD, the board of trustees of MoMA did what it wanted. The only consolation saw the museum preserve the signature metal facade of the Folk Art Museum as the pieces were placed in storage for future reassembly. The ethical conundrum in this destructive act is especially ironic given MoMA's leadership as the first major museum in the United States to recognize architecture as a discipline and art worth extolling in its galleries and collections. In fact, the first new Museum of Modern Art was famous for its architecture. That has not been the case since as subsequent additions and renovations have proved progressively blander. The New York Port Authority bus terminal 10 blocks away has more architectural merit.

For many, there was something highly unethical about the destructive museum examples cited above. But again, boards of trustees are totally independent and, short of obviously breaking laws, they can do what they want regardless of what others think is right. The usual way such behavior is changed is with money, and lots of it. The folksinger Dave Van Ronk's lyrics "Nobody bad mouths the man with the bread" could not be truer in the museum world as elsewhere in life. Individuals with dollars call the shots when it comes to museum projects. Probably the only way the destruction of No. 2 Columbus Circle could have been avoided was by the intercession of a wealthy person with connections who would put up the money to save the original building. After all, a rich guy caused it to be built in the first place. (Huntington Hartford was heir to the A&P grocery store fortune.)

Museum profession membership organizations find it difficult to hold members accountable for unethical behavior. Because these groups rely on dues for their financial existence, they will rarely castigate institutions or people. In the 1990s Robert R. Macdonald (emeritus director of the Museum of the City of New York) drafted a code of museum ethics which was distributed for review to the field through the American Association (now Alliance) of Museums (AAM). It involved and required abiding by certain guidelines. Deviations were to be met with various levels of sanctions or codified responses that would be administered by the AAM. The uproar was foreseeable, and Macdonald's

Figure 12 Museum of American Folk Art, New York, New York. *Source*: Photograph by Steven Miller.

laudable hard work was for naught. The resulting AAM Code of Ethics remained tepid. It sidestepped consequences for violations. To be fair, recently the AAM has used its most powerful vehicle for reprimanding errant museum behavior, revoking AAM accreditation. It did this to the Delaware Art Museum when that institution's board of trustees decided to sell art to pay for debt it had incurred to expand (*Antiques and the Arts Weekly* 2014).

Love of money may be the root of all evil but in museums it is often the lack of money that is the root of all evil. Fiscal duress when combined with unrealistic pie-in-the-sky ego projects or stupid ventures of negligible feasibility, cause catastrophe. Examples include the ever-present practice of selling collections to make ends meet; going into debt for building projects that cause crushing financial burdens; concocting fiscal projections on impressive but (at least to anyone who knows anything about museums) clearly unrealistic numbers; assuming assignments best done by museum professionals can be done by volunteers.

I am convinced there is a hierarchy of adherence regarding those associated with a museum who have to comply with ethical codes. The lower you are on the professional totem pole of an organization the more a person has to abide by prescribed ways of employment behavior. These are usually spelled out in personnel manuals and occasional edicts from bosses. As one climbs higher up the organizational totem pole, the more ethical wiggle room there is. Directors enjoy special liberties. At the trustee level, freedom reigns. These people can collect the same thing the museum they serve collects. They can enjoy advantageous personal and lucrative business associations because of their board status and connections. They can make devastating decisions for a museum and face no adverse repercussions. Socially they can advance themselves in blatantly self-serving ways via their museum board connections. Most avoid this kind of behavior and are dedicated to the best interests of whatever museum they govern.

What trustees might do that is suspicious or obviously contradicts their fiduciary obligations or devotion to the well-being of a museum can be absolved these days by the annual signing of a conflict-of-interest form. As far as I'm concerned, in application it is the confessional that condones sinning. All too often it is willfully or ignorantly ignored. Rarely does anyone monitor actual or potential specific ethical violations at the top of the museum heap. Job security and social self-interest cause staff and board members to avoid even hinting that a trustee might be in some ethical breech *vis-à-vis* a particular museum. This reality will not change.

In the museum field we hear references to museum law. In my experience and opinion, for the most part, there is no such thing as museum law by itself. Museums are subject to the same laws as everyone else, especially in the United States. For instance, they must adhere to local, state, and federal employment laws. Such regulations apply equally to museums and other places, be they theatre companies, universities, corporations, real estate developments, or fire departments. Museums need to have their vehicles inspected as required. They must meet applicable building codes. Environmental regulations have to be adhered to. Employees are prosecuted for breaking the law. Museums need to file tax forms. Food services are required to meet certain health department standards. Contractual agreements hold legal content. Fire protection requirements must be met, such as the number of people allowed to occupy interior spaces at any given time or having fire extinguishers inspected and tested regularly. These and a host of other laws and legal regulations are in effect regardless of a museum's mission, location, activities, or governance. For whatever reason, when museums are in the limelight about some legal issue it is often related to collection ownership or personnel laws.

Unfortunately the chatter about ethics in the museum world seems to resist assigning responsibility and demanding consequences for bad actions. This, in my opinion, makes for toothless ethics discussions. I suppose the reasons for such cowardice have to do with the ambiguity of defining ethics, a reluctance to assign individual blame in museums, fear of being sued, and a lack of nerve to insist on even remedial actions against offenders. Until ethics discussions become results-oriented, museums will pretty much continue to do as they wish.

As the hit man for Boston mobsters said, "I always felt like I was doing the right thing. Even if it was wrong, I always tried to do the right thing" (Martorano 2008).

Class Questions

1 A member of the board of trustees of the museum where you work has a distinguished collection of early furniture (*c.*1810–*c.*1850) made in the state that is the subject of your museum. Your institution is planning an exhibition on the kind of furniture the trustee collects. It will be the first of its kind and it will include a lavishly illustrated catalog. At no expense to the museum, the trustee is willing to lend items from his collection for the exhibition and have them illustrated in the catalog. The lender will be indicated as "an anonymous collector" in the exhibit and catalog. Do you include examples of the trustee's collection in the exhibit?

2 A generous, long-serving, influential, strong-willed, and highly esteemed trustee (a Second World War veteran, Marine, who fought at Iwo Jima) at the museum where you work has, with his wife, bought an early nineteenth-century paint-decorated chest of drawers attributed to an important cabinetmaker who worked in the area your museum serves and reflects. The piece is very close in style, date, materials, and so forth to one in the museum's permanent collection that is currently on exhibition, but the trustee's is better. One day the trustee arrives at your museum with the chest of drawers and brings it in to be placed on exhibition next to the museum's. He asks one of the maintenance people to help him carry it to the gallery. This is done. The museum's chest is on a long display base with other pieces of furniture. The trustee simply moves everything over to fit his chest of drawers. No other staff are aware of his arrival or departure, including the director, who does not discover the change until touring the galleries later that day. The trustee's wife is an antiques dealer who occasionally sells things like the furniture currently under discussion. How should this be handled?

3 A museum presents an exhibition of a collection of antique "toy" banks of the sort families would have had and used in their homes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The exhibit consists of about a hundred banks. They are owned by a trustee of the museum who collects them. This fact is noted in the exhibition title. The museum could collect such things but has not. Is this a conflict of interest?

4 You are the curator of paintings at a large urban history museum. A woman calls your office and claims the museum has a painting that her father mistakenly gave it 45 years ago. She says her father was not in his right mind at the time he made the donation and the painting is hers. She asks to see the painting and you make an appointment for her to do so. You check your records and all seems to be in order as far as the original gift documentation is concerned. The painting is a portrait of a Hudson River steamboat executed in the mid-nineteenth century by a member of the Bard family known for such pictures. The painting is about 24" × 36" and has a huge L-shaped rip ruining the canvas both horizontally and vertically. It is old damage. There is no record of the painting having been exhibited at, or otherwise used by, the museum since its arrival in 1931. The museum has quite a few Bard paintings. The lady visits the museum and presses her argument with the director. What should the museum do?

5 An employee at a US history museum collects antique American guns. He is an expert on an early gunmaker who worked and lived in the region that is the focus of the museum. The employee owns guns made by the gunmaker, and he occasionally deals in these. An antique gun is this employee's work area. It is not a museum item. In a few weeks it is gone and another is in its place. It is also not a museum item. This goes on for many months. None of the guns are being considered for acquisition and they are never brought before any research or collections committee meetings for discussion. No museum collection management paperwork is generated about the guns. The employee never discusses them with any staff. When asked, the employee says he has them for research purposes. The employee has no assignments requiring such research. Is there any cause for concern regarding this behavior?

6 You are a museum curator and a person contacts you with an offer to donate something for the collection. It is totally outside the mission and thus the collecting scope of the institution. You explain this to the prospective donor but mention you would like to buy it for yourself. Is this appropriate? If so, how should it be done? if not, why not?

References

Antiques and the Arts Weekly (2014) Delaware Museum Loses Accreditation Over Art Sale (4 July), p. 11.

Hoffa, Jimmy (1963) David Brinkley's Journal: Inside Jimmy Hoffa. NBC (1 April). The Paley Center for Media, NYC, Catalog i.d. T84:0203.

Martorano, John (2008) John Martorano: The Executioner. Interview with Steve Kroft, *60 Minutes*, CBS (6 January).

Mashberg, Tom (2013). No Quick Answers in Fights Over Art. *The New York Times* The Arts (2 July).

19

What's Next for Museums?

The future ain't what it used to be.

Yogi Berra, 2001

Because I continue to wonder about museums and because these places are future focused, I wonder what lies ahead for them. Will they be here in a hundred, two hundred … heck … five hundred years? And, if so, will they be the same sorts of creatures they are now? Given the rapid growth of museums over the past century and their presumptive devotion to longevity, barring global war, convulsive social tumult, catastrophic natural disasters, or a belief museums are unnecessary or even a menace to society, I suspect they will be around for a while and pretty much as we know them. This will be especially true if they continue to attract the interests of the rich and powerful.

In a hundred years some museums will have declined, merged, or closed but there will be many more new ones, especially outside the United States. This might continue for two hundred years – but five hundred? Who knows where the world will be by then, or, indeed, if it will be. I would love to return and find out but alas I think that is not in the cards. (Should such a possibility unfold and museums exist as they are now, I would like to see how many of the things I so carefully acquired for various permanent collections, are still in the museums for which I obtained them.)

The major escalating issues facing museums in the coming century will focus on collections; heightened professionalism in the museum field; the museum as attraction conflated with the notion that museums are businesses; and the survival of individual museums. I do not include money or violence (natural or human) as escalating issues. Museums have always struggled when it comes to funding. They repeatedly suffer from physical assaults. These two realities won't change and are therefore not major escalating issues. They are constants.

In suggesting and commenting on the future challenges museums will face that might not have been overwhelming previously, we can start with collections. Without question the magnitude of actual and potential permanent

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

collections will be *a*, if not *the*, dominate major operational conundrum museums will encounter going forward. To a degree, museums are already grappling with collection growth. Mostly the problems play out in storage areas. Regardless of the type of museum, its location, or budget, storage is at a premium. When you include the physical and staff requirements for good collection care, such as security, properly monitored access, and climate control, institutional pressures are even more acute. It is always a principal reason cited for museum expansion. It is also why deaccessioning is so alluring.

To be effective, museums presumably need to continue collecting, which usually means they need to continue growing physically. Who knows how this will end – but who knows how long it can go on. As previously noted, I am not one to wax nostalgic about the good old days in museums. I had a glimpse of those when I started my career. At that time, collection storage was more along the lines of warehousing things in whatever space was available. Certainly there were museums that did a more than adequate job considering the guidelines of the time, but with the rise of conservation as a study and practice, storage has become – thankfully – a more properly executed museum duty. It now has parameters to adhere to. It also means storage is more costly.

Considering the breathtaking amount of stuff museums could potentially acquire, or should, the future of acquisition activity presumably ranges from overwhelming at worst to highly refined and disciplined at best. Yet a cautionary note is necessary as even the most rigorously focused collecting program can and does occasionally go awry when non-collection-engaged staff in positions of power make stupid acquisition or deaccessioning decisions.

Museums will deal with collection growth in several ways. Many will expand in size. Some will dramatically narrow their collecting mission. A few will raise the desired quality levels of what they seek to save. Others will put a freeze on collecting altogether, though the pressure to change that posture will be enormous and the approach will fail. A few museums will merge with other museums and thus transfer or postpone collecting angst. While space grows and fills, or missions constrict or mergers take place or collecting ceases altogether for a while, deaccessioning will play a prominent role in managing what a museum owns. Getting rid of things will be a cost-containment measure.

The topic of mergers and acquisitions is usually reserved for conversations about businesses. But, since 1990, we have seen a few take place in the museum world of the United States, and with very positive results thus far. When well done, the practice has merit. Several laudable examples include the Higgins Armory Museum in Worcester, Massachusetts, which closed, with a majority of its collections going to the Worcester Art Museum; the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, combines at least two legacy museums; a partnership affiliation between the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, has resulted in the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University. While some might bemoan the loss of a museum or its independence, in the cases cited above the outcome is positive for both the core meaning of a museum – its collection – and the public those collections serve.

Recognizing that there are optimal ways for museums to operate has seen a refined evolution in levels of professionalism, be it for management, curation, fundraising, security, conservation, education, registration, or other such. The museum field has established preferred ways of doing things. Once it was common to encounter poor collection management, absent or bad conservation, slipshod exhibitions, marginally trained staff, or employees completely unsuited for their positions. These sorts of conditions have hardly disappeared but the field has improved enormously and this will continue. The development is to be embraced, applauded, and insisted upon. Being a museum studies autodidact (as I am) provides a lopsided, idiosyncratic approach to learning. For museums to continue to advance, prosper, and grow they must not only have professionally trained and capable staff, and adhere to industry "best practices," they must be governed and supported by people who *accept that there is such a thing as a profession(s) when it comes to museums*. Moreover, this fact should keep the ignorant from meddling in what is best left to those who actually know what they are doing. The day of the do-it-yourself-museum phenomenon must draw to a close even though it will mean museums cost more to run. I have no interest in being treated by a do-it-yourself physician so why is it acceptable to be served by a do-it-yourself museum? Yet, having a cadre of museum professionals does not mean all will be rosy. Unfortunately there will, on occasion, be people who appear well qualified on paper yet are ill-suited to whatever museum jobs they hold. Acquiring degrees, publishing, being an expert in some arcane field of study are not accomplishments that always translate to working well and productively or in a timely and collegial fashion with other employees, the public, or trustees. This is true in any field, however, and the phenomenon need not stop the advance of museum professionalism overall.

As the future of museums unfolds, increased academic and supervised hands-on learning for aspiring professionals must continue to be regarded as essential, and expand in quality. I have seen the positive effects of good academic training in my teaching at the Seton Hall University MA Program in Museum Professions. Graduates seek and find excellent jobs in museums across the country as a result of their studies. The students are held in high esteem. Such a reputation is true for other graduate programs including the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture, the Museum Studies Program at George Washington University, the Cooperstown Graduate Program, and the Program in Museum Studies at New York University. Sadly, there are museum studies graduate programs of negligible merit, organized and taught by faculty who are neither based in museums nor experienced in working in them; I hope these might be a passing scholastic fad and diminish in time. The content may look good on paper but in practice the there is scant academic or practical substance. The students will learn little about the reality of museum work and be surprised at how much time and money they've wasted when, once in the marketplace, their credentials are spurned.

Speaking of training and staffing issues, an expanded understanding that there are professional and acknowledged ways of doing things will cause museums to sustain and even improve upon how they find and keep qualified employees. As someone who has worked in six museums, I can say that longevity is often preferable as long as it does not translate into untenable staffing circumstances or keeping unproductive "dead wood." Encouraging retention in a couple of areas is especially beneficial over the long term. Two that come to mind are curating and collection management. Directors can come and go, though the best ones I know tend to stay in one place for a while. Sustaining good employees means museums will need to increase salaries and benefits, support job learning opportunities, curtail nonprofessionals (especially trustees) from interfering with staff, show appreciation, and present options for in-house growth and advancement.

The notion that museums are attractions infuriates me because it is always linked to an assumption that they can make money just like commercial businesses. It also emphasizes the often aforementioned horrible idea of measuring success by attendance figures. If the museum as we know it continues to exist, it will never survive simply as an earned-income venture. Should the concept of museums as we know them change, however, perhaps a new operating "rubric" will see them prosper commercially. Presently I find it hard to image museums turning a profit simply because they collect, study, display, and keep all manner of things for the long term for high-minded intellectual and emotional reasons.

In the United States there is a reason museums are in the so-called nonprofit sector. Much of the money they need to accomplish their missions must be raised philanthropically. Most of the rest of the world places museums in the government sector where they are underwritten by tax income. Either scenario is the result of the economic impossibility of running a professional museum independently, funded by money received for goods or services provided. Collection storage does not generate income. Research does not churn out a regular positive return on investment. Conservation costs cannot be predicated on profit. And, exhibits do not consistently make money.

Why do some people see museums as profit centers? A core reason is the way the places exude the aura of money. Because museum trustees are often wealthier than most of us and museum collections can have a high market value and the appearance of museums is impressive, the thinking is – there must be money in museums. Add to that, the sense that exhibitions and such retail operations as gift shops, rental operations, and restaurants attract scads of paying customers and it's no wonder the average Joe or Jane assumes museums are well-off. Explaining the reality of museum finances is always a duty, but it tends to be a boring, dismissive, irrelevant, and even suspicious exercise as far as some listeners are concerned.

Going forward, museums must continue to make the case for profit not being their purpose. They need to constantly guard against situations that would substitute mission-driven operating principals with pie-in-the sky commercial initiatives that will cause inevitable duress. The Museum of American Folk Art offered a good example of this when it borrowed $32 million to build a new home at its site on West 53rd Street in New York City, next to the Museum of Modern Art, on the assumption that the location and structure would result in amplified public attention, attendance, and therefore income. Predictably, in my mind, this failed to materialize and the museum was eventually fortunate enough to survive by selling the building to the Museum of Modern Art and paying off the debt. The museum moved to a location elsewhere in Manhattan that was much smaller but which could be managed far more reasonably.

The effect the monetary value of museum collections has on the perceptions is considerable. The market for art, antiquities, and rare scientific specimens (gemstones, for example) suggests to people that museums hold treasure troves of valued content and are thus immune to the fiscal vicissitudes of life. The idea that for museums collections are priceless, they literally have no price, is understood though subject to interpretation. The stewardship sanctity of collections has been eroded of late as deaccessioning has been carried out for nefarious reasons unrelated to the object-centric mission museums hold dear. When a museum is in financial difficulty, the idea of selling collections to make ends meet is proffered, and sometimes it happens, ethical guidelines fostered within the profession notwithstanding. I hope that in the future this practice will abate. That will only happen if appropriate collection-protection laws are enacted, the museum profession itself actually raises a stink, and the public objects vociferously to museums selling collections to pay the electricity bill.

Having acknowledged that limited financial resources are a recurring challenge for museums and that this will continue, I will make a plea to those responsible for museums in the future – please place more of an emphasis on endowments! By endowments I mean money acquired and held in some secure manner to help assure the productive and professional daily operations of a particular museum. No funds do more good immediately and in the long run than those assigned in this way. Financial support is always difficult for museums to obtain, no matter the source or purpose. Endowment money is particularly tough to accumulate because so much is needed if it is to be effective, and, when conservatively invested, the cash return is small. Most museums that are fiscally better off than others have an appreciable endowment supporting operations.

I suppose it has always been true, but now that museums are more expensive to run, the pressure to bring in money for immediate needs always seems to take priority over fundraising that could be dedicated to fostering long-range stability. A mad and constant scramble for ready cash consumes development efforts. Implementing an emphasis on endowments must start at the trustee and staff leadership level, but pressure regarding best practices from the "museum field" will also be important.

In spite of the invention of museums as the societal endeavors we know them to be and the absence of cohesive, comprehensive, scientific evidence absolutely proving a fundamental, unequivocal, and defining reason for their necessity, I enthusiastically hope they continue – and do so on a loftier and more meaningful level than the one we now accept. How nice would it be if museums actually became places of instigated and accepted democratic encounter, investigation, and acknowledgement – intellectually safe forums for exposure to and a gradual understanding of "the other" as well as "the known" in all sorts of ramifications? Because such an idea may lead to catastrophic assaults, museums will continue to be very conservative and predictable in what they do and how they do it.

Museums can be what those responsible for them wish. In time, though, we in the field – and this is a call to the future – may want to actually and really inculcate a more inclusive and holistic approach to how we deal with the subjects our museums were founded to discuss. This will only happen when museums devoted to a particular people, idea, place, event, subject, or group are willing to show varying aspects of that people, idea, place, event, subject, or group regardless of how attractive or unattractive the content. Such a museological evolution will entirely depend on who is in charge, and thus I doubt very seriously that it will happen. Museums will, I suspect, continue to be places of celebration regarding a particular people, idea, place, event, subject, or group. The celebrating will be one-sided. Demands will be made for inclusivity, equality, and other notions of democratic balance from those outside a museum's decision-making ranks, but results will only happen where and when the relevant power brokers are either shamed into it or an understanding of it. Even then, a museum devoted to a particular ethnic, social, racial, or other group will not have exhibitions about famous criminals identified with that group. Science museums will avoid explaining why the Genesis story of creation has little scientific merit. Art museums will be disinclined to show art that might be seen by some to denigrate certain people(s), ideas, or beliefs.

The museums discussed above will all be in democracies. This is a wrongheaded perspective because as we know, museums exist in places governed in other ways. Totalitarian political regimes understand museums as instruments of propaganda. Theocracies often have strict directives about what can be shown and seen by people when it comes to art especially. A revealing disagreement with the sorts of museums that exist in dictatorships relates to their often totally bogus collection truths. It all started with reliquaries holding pieces of the "true" cross upon which Jesus Christ was crucified, a bone of a saint, or clothes a sacred person wore. Too often what we see in museums that do not adhere to rigorous scholarship is specious in so many ways. Because the world is often in a precarious balance between fear and freedom, dictatorship and democracy, progressive and regressive forces, museums must and will constantly dodge the crosshairs of obviously oppositional opinions.

I wonder if in the future, be it soon or far off, the central roles of both the original object and the obligation for truth regarding the assembly, study, and explication of objects will be regarded as the first purpose of museums in meeting their missions. Currently museums are places of corporeal culture. Those who visit them voluntarily may do so as if on a pilgrimage. Museums and the things in them can evaporate time and distance, be that distance intellectual, informational, geographic, experiential, emotional, social, economic, cultural … whatever. Museums provide connectivity as they link us to people, ideas, places, events, subjects, and groups in the present or past. When I see the blood-stained chair Abraham Lincoln was sitting in when he was assassinated, I am momentarily transported back to that tragedy. When I see a moon rock, I am on the moon. When I stand in awe of a Bernini sculpture, I know genius. This is why deciding what a museum should collect is the most important job these institutions have. It is not easily done.

Museum collections must be more than an assemblage of random stuff or academic illustrations providing convenient, if immaterial, interchangeable backdrops for inconsequential theories or boring doctoral dissertations. Collections need to be the starting point for public discourse. A museum director I know and respect once said, "Objects don't tell stories." She is completely wrong. Objects *do* tell stories. Museums have the job of deciding what stories they tell and if those stories are worth telling. Objects can hold considerable narrative capabilities. Museums say they are the ideal places to assess and configure object-stories for the greater good. Today accepts this notion. Will tomorrow? Who knows.

"It ain't over 'til it's over" (Berra 2001: 88–134 passim)

Reference

Berra, Yogi with Dave Kaplan (2001) *When You Come to a Fork in the Road, Take It!* MFJ Books.

Appendix I

A Course Final

An Exhibition Analysis

Exhibitions usually involve all aspects of museum functions. Exhibitions thus offer ideal introductory opportunities to learn about an institution's component operating parts in application if not necessarily in depth. That can take a lifetime. To understand the scope of what makes museums tick I devised the following final exam for my course The Anatomy of a Museum*, which I teach at the Seton Hall University MA Program in Museum Professions. This assignment is distributed when the class first meets. Students thus have the semester to work on it.*

Minimum 15 pages, double space, 1" margin, 12 pt. hard copy only (no online submissions). The paper's minimum of 15 pages must be your writing only and not include ancillary things such as the cover, a table of contents or index, wordy filler, extensive quotes (unless they are from the people you interviewed), extraneous footnotes. You may put no illustrations in the written body of the analysis. This must be a unique paper and not something already written for a past or current assignment.

Select a current museum exhibition and *meeting face to face* (Skype is permissible) with at least two staff, volunteers, trustees, and/or others *directly* involved with the exhibition at the presenting museum, write an essay examining the component parts of deciding upon the concept; organization; design; installation; opening; promotion; security; funding; conservation; programming (education); and evaluation of/for the exhibit (see list below). The exhibit may be temporary or long-term. If the latter, be sure it was done recently enough to *meet face to face* with people responsible for it. List the people you interviewed, along with their titles, and when and where you conducted the first interviews. After the first interview, e-mail, phone, text, and other forms of communication between you and the interviewed individuals are all permissible.

For the purposes of this paper, a museum must be a nonprofit entity (or part thereof) that collects and exhibits art, historic artifacts, and/or scientific specimens for public benefit and has a permanent collection. This can therefore include institutions with the name gallery, historical society, collection, etc. in the title rather than museum. It also includes university and government run museums as long as they can be similarly defined (the National Park Service is a good example as are state museums). The museum does not need to be accredited by the American Association of Museums. It does not have to be a large museum but it must have a current web site. Please note the site in your paper.

The professor will be happy to help with your selection of an exhibition.

Your exhibition choice must have the professor's advance approval, by *...date...* Approval must include your having contacted the museum featuring the exhibition to assure its cooperation.

The paper is due *...date...* An incomplete paper will not be read and will be considered a failed assignment. Quality of writing will be considered in the grade.

Content

Briefly (no more than two pages max.) describe the exhibition. This is your opportunity to present an idea of how the exhibition appears, where it is in the museum, and what is in it (no checklists please).

In other parts of the paper explain why and how the exhibit happened and who was responsible for what aspects of it. You can structure your inquiries as you think best to meet the assignment. Do include the following:

Curation: Who curated the exhibition? What did that person or persons do? Who did he, she, or they work with throughout or at various points in the process? Remember, the curator(s) might not have been on the staff of the museum presenting the exhibition. It is not unusual to use guest curators or for a museum to present a pre-curated exhibition that is traveling.

Management: What was required in managing the exhibition from start to finish and how would management be defined?

Cost: If the museum will tell you, what did the exhibit cost? It is not required that you get this information but ask anyway – you never know, and this aspect of exhibition planning is of obvious importance.

If the museum will tell you, how was the exhibition paid for? Again, this is not a requirement as the museum may not want to say but ask anyway. Also, if fundraising was required,

	who was responsible for it, what was done, and how? How was the budget created and who tracked it? Who was authorized to set and approve expenditures? Was the exhibit on budget? If not, was it under or over and did that matter? Again, this information may not be forthcoming but ask.
Donors/Lenders:	Were donors or lenders of objects in the exhibit sought? Who did that? Was it successful? and How was it done?
Media/Marketing:	What marketing plans did the museum have? How did staff or consultants try to attract media attention for the exhibition? What was done? Who did it? and How successful were the public relations initiatives?
Collection Management:	What collection management issues needed to be addressed regarding the exhibit and who was responsible for these?
Programming:	What programming was done for the exhibit and who was responsible? This would presumably include most educational offerings.
Maintenance:	What maintenance concerns were required for or of the exhibition?
Security:	What security matters needed to be addressed?
Conservation:	What conservation aspects required attention and how was this accomplished?
Exhibit Design and Installation:	Who designed the exhibit? Who approved the design? and Who installed the exhibit?
Assessment:	Did the museum think the exhibit was successful and if so, how was success defined?
Audience:	For whom is the museum intended and who was the principal audience for the exhibition?
Improvement:	If the exhibition had any deficiencies how did the museum define these and what were, or might have been, the consequences of those deficiencies?

Feel free to include other aspects of the exhibit you think are important or of interest.

What was your opinion of the exhibit?

It is not required that the exhibit you choose be big or in a large institution but it must be more than a simple display of a few objects or artworks and it must be consequential enough to satisfy the requirements of this assignment.

You may include ancillary documents relating to the exhibit such as brochures, gallery hand-outs, press materials, and so forth, but these may not be considered part of the 15-page written content.

Remember, this is an exhibition analysis not simply a description or review.

Index

The Anatomy of a Museum: An Insider's Text, First Edition. Steven Miller.

W