

Book Review: *The Machiavellian Librarian: Winning Allies, Combating Budget Cuts and Influencing Stakeholders*

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With resources becoming more readily available online and budgets being tightened, librarians can find themselves increasingly under pressure from higher institutional powers to make significant changes in response to these trends. This has resulted in an abundance of literature that encourages librarians to play to their strengths and make the adaptations that are necessary to survive in the modern, digital world and encouraging them to take advantage of new roles within the information sector. *The Machiavellian Librarian* aims to do just this, offering case studies of librarians who have successfully combated such threats and step by step guidance for those in similar situations. The editors of this book aim to 'preserve' the library tradition, advocating that

librarians need to 'boost their abilities to influence decision makers, or else face professional extinction'.

What is most striking about this collection of essays is the centrality of Machiavellian ideas. Traditionally, Machiavellianism is associated with unscrupulous politics and the use of cunning and duplicity to achieve desired results. The editors of this collection, however, identify themes within Machiavelli's *Prince* that are concordant with those of the librarian desperate to safeguard their profession. The authors assert that Machiavelli's goal in writing *The Prince* was to prevent civilisation from disruption and define Machiavellianism as 'approaching information pragmatically, according to need or function'. Consequently, Aho and Bennett suggest librarians need to adopt a practical, Machiavellian manner in order to preserve library services within a changing society. The book addresses Machiavellian themes through four main areas of focus: character and behaviour for princes; new principalities; types of armies and political situation. In turn, these sections address networking, leadership and professional development; new areas librarians can infiltrate; building relationships and the organisation of political climates.

The book claims to provide 'advice and ideas for thriving in a Machiavellian manner' and it is largely successful in achieving these aims. Each chapter is introduced with an abstract and a selection of key words and typically concludes with a list of recommendations and advice from each author. This ensures that the book is user-friendly and a reader can access individual chapters with ease. The chapters offer an assorted range of case studies and guidance written by qualified librarians and information professionals working in a variety of roles within the information sector.

‘Character and Behaviour for Princes’ explores the best ways of networking and succeeding within educational hierarchies. In particular, Chapter three, ‘Weasels and Honey Badgers: Networking for Librarians’ by Andre Nault, includes a valuable breakdown of the essential steps to successful interaction. Furthermore, unlike other essays within the collection, Nault does not merely rely on ideas from Machiavelli’s *Prince* but draws additional inspiration from the words of Homer Simpson, Stephen Hawkins and Steve Jobs. Consequently, his essay is memorable and enjoyable – particularly when compared to other essays within the text that are often saturated with Machiavellian references.

‘New Principalities’ is a particularly interesting section for librarians wishing to explore new roles in the information sector. It includes chapters on one individual’s experience of developing an LGBT outreach centre, how the influence of the library can be used to aid student athletes and a discussion about how qualifications outside of librarianship can benefit professional development. ‘Types of Armies’ is the weakest section of the book as it largely repeats ideas on networking from the first section in chapters such as ‘A Machiavellian Metaphor for Communication’. However, chapter nineteen, ‘Breaking the Mould: Winning Allies Via Self-Discovery’ by Bern Mulligan and Benjamin Andrus is particularly insightful as a result of the images and diagrams the authors provide to enhance their case study outlining the changes they made to the layout of the library in Binghamton University. These aids provide visual evidence of the alterations the authors made within the library and compliment their justifications for these changes within the text. This successful mixture of text, image and statistical data thus provides the perfect combination for inspiring librarians to consider similar changes within their own environments. The final section,

‘Political Situations’, addresses the alterations librarians need to make in order to survive. The chapters within this section concentrate on the best ways for librarians to meet the needs of their users and their institutions without compromising the integrity of their libraries. The case studies within this section also provide an excellent tool for quelling the anxieties of librarians who are apprehensive about the negative consequences of change.

However, not all of the chapters within these sections are particularly useful and on some occasions the list of recommendations at the end of the essay offer a more succinct and accessible presentation of ideas than the main body of text. This is often due to excessive references to Machiavelli that are evidently used to meet editorial requirements rather than support the ideas within the essays. On numerous occasions, Machiavellian quotes interrupt the flow of the text and diminish the cohesive presentation of ideas within the chapter. Furthermore, when the chapters are read in succession, Machiavellian concepts become monotonous and repetitive as the same quotes are used tirelessly by the book’s contributors. This could have easily been remedied by editorial proof-reading, which would also have helped to rectify a number of spelling and grammar mistakes within the text as a whole. Furthermore, there was a distinctive absence of an overall editorial conclusion to the book that would have been useful for summarising the key points of the collection of essays and assessing whether the editors had achieved their original aims and what the future of librarianship will entail.

Overall, however, this is an accessible, informative collection of essays that covers a wide range of topics and offers succinct advice for librarian professionals. Despite its American bias, this book is a useful beginner's tool for any librarian wanting to know more about how to deal with general changes within librarianship and further their professional development within the information sector. The Machiavellian theme offers an interesting and innovative approach to addressing these challenges which is engaging and thought provoking – even if at times these thoughts are protestations at the comparisons made between librarians and Machiavelli!

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