

*Satellite Meeting: Recruiting and Managing the New Generation of Employees to Attract New Markets and Create new Services*

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## **Changing the way we work Library on Tour - a new method of working for Library staff**

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### **Abstract:**

*4000 words.*

*The staff at Mjölby Public Library is working on changing the traditional work methods for the library staff. We call our new method of working Library on Tour. Library on Tour is about building relationships between customers and library employees and between customers and other customers. The aim of the method is to encourage people who currently do not use the library to start using it. The implementation is simple – less planning, more action! The library staff meets people on location. The new approach has proven successful, increasing the number of library visits significantly. The new working method means the library has become the “talk of the town” resulting in several new cooperation projects within the local community as well as with other parts of the municipality.*

**Keywords:** Public libraries, Collaboration, Management, Building relationships, Changing traditional work methods

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## **Libraries: dialogue for change**

The world we live in is changing rapidly. Globalization, urbanization and digitalization are changing the way we work, the way we socialize and, of course, the way we seek information and consume media. To keep up with these changes and stay relevant, libraries need to change. Not only do we need to change our setups and formats as well as the events we offer, but – more importantly – we need to change the way we work.

## Library on Tour

Mjölby is a municipality in the southeast of Sweden with 27 000 inhabitants. The municipality has one main library and three branches. The staff consists of 15-20 co-workers, not all of them working full time. The idea of trying new working methods came from the co-workers at Mjölby Public Library. According to the Swedish Library Act [Bibliotekslag (SFS 1996:1596)], the public libraries must be available to everyone, emphasizing on the needs of children, people with functional disabilities, people speaking minority languages or a different mother tongue than the mayor population. Realizing that many of the prioritized groups didn't use the library or the library services to the extent that they could and looking into the issue the co-workers soon realized the most frequent reasons to why people weren't using the library were:

- They didn't know the location of the library.
- They didn't know that library services are free of charge.
- They felt unsure of how to use the library and found it hard to ask for help.

With this knowledge, the library staff decided to try a more proactive approach in reaching these often marginalized groups, using a new strategy. The new method was named *Bibblan på stan*, essentially *Library on Tour* in English.

The implementation of the working method is simple: less planning, more action! The library staff meet people on location and tell them about the services provided by the library. The "location" could be the town square, a shopping mall, a residential area, or even a special event arranged by the town or a local organization. The library staff uses an electric cargo bike with a storage box. Aforementioned box can of course be used for bringing books or other media, but usually carries flyers, brochures, or crafting material, as the actual aim of *Library on Tour* isn't mainly to get people to borrow more books, but to act as a platform or arena creating a positive link between customers and library employees and even, as an extension between customers and other customers. Concisely, the main purpose of *Library on Tour* is to encourage people who currently do not use the library to start using it, and to make people aware of the services libraries offer.

The method has proven successful. The number of library visits increased by more than 9000 during 2017, compared with an increase of 1000 during 2016. Moreover, the new working method means the library has become the "talk of the town" resulting in several new cooperation projects within the local community as well as with other parts of the municipality.

For example, the library started a book club for immigrant women who felt they wanted to learn Swedish. The project was a cooperation between the municipalities' social services and a local housing company. The library provided staff for the book club, the social services hired an interpreter and supplied the coffee and the housing company contributed with suitable premises.

Furthermore, the library has been contacted by several organizations that want library staff to come to their meetings and tell them about the services provided. Some of the organizations also wanted guided tours of the library. Depending on how unassure the members of these organization are, the library staff will sometimes be asked to meet up with them and walk together to the library.

## **What skills are required for co-workers (and their team leader) working with this method?**

Leaders don't always have to be in absolute control! To attain employee motivation, encourage individual, as well as team development and boosting job satisfaction, it is essential to allow and even inspire co-workers to take initiative and personal responsibility for the library's activities and goals. Furthermore, when adopting this approach, it is vital that leaders refrain from *servicing* solutions to problems, but instead focus on *coaching* as a method for encouraging ideas and solutions, enabling the co-worker to solve her or his problem of their own accord.

It is also of utmost importance that the leader is well-acquainted with their staff, providing a direct view of how everyone can contribute. For example, if someone isn't comfortable holding a presentation, why force them to do that? Maybe that person is great at making marketing material? Let them do that, instead! That said, leaders must also help the co-workers to keep pushing their limits and gradually become more confident than they were yesterday.

To succeed with this kind of working method, it is essential that the co-workers feel secure with their colleagues and with working on a trial and error-based method. The work environment needs to allow staff to fail and encourage knowledge-sharing between co-workers. Some of the methods used in Mjölby to improve the work environment are:

### **Fail competition**

The idea is simple: co-workers who fail at something tell the story to their colleagues and everyone gets a good laugh! At the end of the competition, everyone gets to vote on the best fail and the winners get a prize. It is vital, of course, that the sharing is voluntary. It is supposed to be fun for everyone – not making fun of people!

### **Humor leadership – or the art of making boring things fun**

Celebrate more, dress up more and get more “boring” stuff done! For example, when a lot of weeding must be done, one way of making the work more fun is to arrange a *weeding party*. The party could consist of gifts for different performances, *Swedish fika* (coffee and cake), balloons... Or whatever gets the staff in a good mood!

### **Collegial coaching**

Collegial coaching can be used as a way of building trust between co-workers and to share experiences and knowledge. It is easily implemented. Anyone in the staff who has experienced a problem or a situation explains the problem and gets help from their colleagues to find different approaches to the situation.

After hearing the story, it is up to the colleagues to discuss together what could have been done and what can be done next time to prevent this situation from repeating itself. It is important that the climate of the dialogue is positive. The aim is not to tell the colleague what they did wrong, but to help them to be prepared to next time they face a similar situation.

### **Recruit diverse skills**

Recruiting people with skills supplementing those of the existing staff is essential for creating new projects. We need competent librarians, but sometimes it is preferable to employ other

professionals, like teachers, social workers or engineers to create a dynamic team of co-workers. Other professionals bring new ideas to the group and might sometimes challenge the conventional structures.

### **Where do we start?**

Start small! Don't plan too much! A great way is to use *flexible planning*. At Mjölby Public Library, flexible planning means that we have an idea of what we will talk about and what activity we will offer - if we are offering an activity - but that we are open to changes depending on who we meet and what their needs are. Things never turn out as planned anyway! Also be prepared to fail and learn from your failures, and most importantly, be prepared to have fun!

### **What did we achieve with this?**

This new approach, has not only increased the number of visitors and put focus on the library, it has also helped co-workers to develop new skills. In addition, co-workers have had the opportunity to utilize their private skills or hobbies – like playing instruments, acting or crafting - in their work. This has proven beneficial to the library, but also gave the co-workers an increase in work satisfaction. Many of the co-workers also report a boost of confidence professionally and the working climate of the library has noticeably improved.