

Introduction

Melissa K. Aho and Erika Bennett

Although I recognize this book is unworthy to be given to Yourself, yet I trust that out of kindness you will accept it, taking account of the fact that there is no greater gift I can present to you than the opportunity to understand, after a few hours of reading, everything I have learned over the course of so many years, and have undergone so many discomforts and dangers to discover.

—Machiavelli, 1995, p. 5

Those words by civil servant Niccolò Machiavelli are at the beginning of the most famous political works in Western history, *The Prince*, written in 1513 in Florence, Italy (Machiavelli, 1995, p. 5). While the book that you are currently holding in your hands did not come from dangers or discomforts (well, not too many, at least), it is filled with ideas and suggestions that Machiavellian librarians have learned over the course of their professional years.

Five hundred years ago, aka 1513, started out to be a very bad year for Machiavelli, as months earlier he had been wrongly found guilty, along with some of his acquaintances, of plotting against the new Medici government of Florence. So at the age of 44, Machiavelli spent his jail time being tortured, fined, and writing letters to powerful friends like Giuliano Medici, whose brother had just been elected Pope Leo X. Pope Leo would soon release Machiavelli and others in jail so that they could join in the public festivities which were underway to celebrate the new pope (Machiavelli, 1995, p. xii).

Born in 1469 to Bartolomea de' Nelli and Bernardo Machiavelli, Niccolò was truly a product of the Renaissance culture going on around him (Viroli, 2000). His father was a poor lawyer who could not join

the legal guild due to his family's debts, but he wanted his son to have a good education in the humanities (Machiavelli, 1995, p. xiii; Viroli, 2000). But Niccolò, due to his family, was destined always to be the civil servant and never the politician. Machiavelli first appears in the public records in 1498 as a second chancellor of the Florentine republic and later that year he was elected to the position of secretary of the Ten of War committee (Machiavelli, 1995, p. xiii). Other high-ranking positions soon followed, such as organizing the Florentine militia, and later he would travel to France, Austria, and all over Italy on diplomatic missions (Machiavelli, 1995, p. xiv). By 1501 he had married Marietta Corsini and with her had six children (Skinner, 2000).

While considered the ideal book for anyone going into politics, written to convey the art of influence and leadership for a young prince just coming into power, *The Prince* was penned by Machiavelli as a plea for a job. Talk about a cover letter! *The Prince*, writes Skinner, has two themes: war and arms, and that “in addition to having a sound army, a prince who aims to scale the heights of glory must cultivate the right qualities of princely leadership” (2000, p. 38). Virtue and goodness are apparently not characteristics we need in princes, Machiavelli tells readers. What is needed is deception, cruelty, unfaithfulness, and whatever it takes to be a successful prince and stay in power and to keep the principality safe and secure (Rubery, 2009). After writing *The Prince* in jail, Machiavelli did not get back his diplomatic and civil service career; that part of his life was over. Instead, he changed his focus and increasingly became “a man of letters” (Skinner, 2000, p. 55) and soon other works—fiction and non-fiction—followed, including *The Discourses*, *The Art of War*, and *The History of Florence*. However, *The Prince*, which was not published until after his death in 1527, would be his claim to immortality.

What does a 500-year-old Italian book on war, arms, and cruelty have to teach modern-day librarians? Librarianship may seem much more in tuned to Servant Leadership than Machiavellianism. Librarians are typically called to their profession by principles of public benevolence: tolerance, equality, and civic empowerment. We root the arguments for our continued existence in lofty principles and touching patron anecdotes. When we do use data, it is often rife with caveats: “Well, there is a correlation here with student success, but you know that the only true measure of causation is a longitudinal focus group...” We bury the lead headline behind pages of interjected pre-analysis.

Why read this book? In sum total, librarians need to boost their abilities to influence decision-makers, or else face professional extinction. Machiavelli wrestled with dualities through his writing: private life vs.

public life, Christianity vs. paganism, individual knowledge vs. common pursuits (Donskis, 2011). Librarians live in a similarly dichotomous world. On one hand, we are seen as fuddy-duddy relics of a print-based world. In reality, we are recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency for our digital information prowess (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007). On the one hand, we avoid using our professional terms like “metadata,” “Boolean,” “databases,” or “fields,” but on the other hand, our students of all backgrounds and preparation levels get hired as data-entry professionals in the entry information economy, and an understanding of Boolean logic could boost their efficiency with every search box they ever face. Fictional police and crime shows talk about databases with glee, glamour, and awe, as an all-powerful research tool that only the most crafty hackers on their team can wrangle. They don’t search “Google Terrorist;” they consult *a crime database*. Yet these hacker-turned-criminal-investigators are never former librarians. Librarians in fiction still dwell in caves of paper books. How do we shift impressions of what we do? How do we craft a message with greater impact? How do we show stakeholders the import and value of our information skills? Each author in this book has offered practical examples and insights into the professional dilemma of bringing visibility to our value.

At the surface, the misanthropic stereotype of Machiavellianism seems like an ill fit, professionally. However, librarians who deeply read Machiavelli’s work may be surprised at certain synergies. While Machiavellianism in the pejorative sense means deceit, manipulation, cynicism, and ruthlessness, his works were much more complex, motivationally. He never actually stated, “The end justifies the means.” In fact, deep reading reveals certain shared values with the library profession. For one, he wanted a value-neutral evaluation approach. In his view, politicians should have values and ethics independent from other value sets, such as religion, and reject the biasing influences of utopian fantasies. In essence, he believed in approaching information pragmatically, according to need or function. Secondly, a review of *The Discourses* reveals that personal gains are not the end goal for Machiavelli. They are simply a vehicle for civil prosperity. His goal was not the whims of the Prince, but civic virtue, preserving civilization from disruption. He sought a place where rules were followed and civility ultimately reigned. Librarians can appreciate this mindset. Sometimes, in the interest of fairness and the common good, individual patrons cannot get what they want.

The first section in this book covers the character and behavior for princes. Christopher Shaffer and Megan Hodge show how to capitalize

on leadership opportunities that present themselves and thrive as a supervisor in a Machiavellian climate. André Nault dissects the skill of networking in a playful manner. He describes techniques for building warm connections with stakeholders and allies, in a strategically planned manner. Kacy Allgood looks at the same issue of networking, but with surprising patrons in unusual locations. Maggie Farrell tackles strategic planning and Kristen Mastel tells librarians to focus on their strengths.

New principalities are addressed in the second section. These are areas of influence that might normally be ignored under the umbrella of traditional librarianship. Laura Francabandera posits that student-athletes are an ignored, but significant support opportunity. Donna Braquet follows a new LGBT Center from conception to construction, including the tactics that paved the way for its unlikely success. Ken Bolton shows how a stand-alone Information Literacy course is not only possible, but a strategically sound pursuit. Visualization techniques are covered by Bradford Eden. Joanne Percy looks at methods for combining services that are normally geographically separate in a visible, beneficial way. Kim Glover offers the perspective that certifications in influential areas can push alliances with important stakeholders. Leslie Morgan reflects on her trajectory as a First Year of Studies Librarian.

In the third section, we look at types of armies, or the tools that are at the disposal of the Machiavellian librarian. Scott Sheidlower demonstrates how to maximize access opportunities with those in power. Anne C. Barnhart outlines her success in adding to staff during severe recession times, through careful reclassification of hires. Accreditation tactics are covered by Carolyn S. Burrell and Scott W. Lee. Tia Esposito and Anna Martinez similarly look at state regulation requirements in bolstering school library value. Bern Mulligan and Benjamin Andrus address user-centered planning for physical building improvements. Jesse Leraas introduces the manner in which the Social Style Model can improve organizational communications. Jorge Brown notes the importance of proximity in relationship building.

In the final section, political situation, we give organizational climates their due scrutiny. Todd Fenton offers process mapping and needs assessment as means for positively changing political environments, speaking from the perspective of his corporate past. Cara Bradley shows that strategic alignment with a Teaching Center can raise the profile of a library. Amy Pajewski offers up student advisory boards as a significant avenue for outreach. Cynthia Graham approaches accreditation from a political climate standpoint. Finally, Eric Owen approaches political positioning head-on.

Use this book for advice and ideas for thriving in a Machiavellian manner. If librarians are not at war, we are at the very least in a fiercely competitive resource environment. Outsiders perhaps diagnose our environment better when they write books with titles such as *Information Warfare and Organizational Decision-Making* (2006). As information professionals, we should be well equipped for this type of knowledge battleground. Yet today's library leaders face agonizing choices among options that are not always compatible. Machiavellians can exhibit ethical behavior to all appearances, even if they do not believe these values privately (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012). This means that Machiavellianism is not inherently incompatible with our professional belief structure. Only inactiveness can protect leaders from seeming hypocrisy.

At the end of the day, libraries are a huge cost center. Any library is simply a gleaming, shining city just waiting to be plundered by desperate administrators or jealous adversaries. Leaders need to have defenses at the ready. If our goal is to preserve our profession—if we truly believe in deep reading, scholarship, critical analysis, and inspiring innovation and career skills for an information economy—then we need to be willing to subsist, if not at any cost, then at the risk of some very difficult choices.

The lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves. One must therefore be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten wolves.

—Machiavelli

References

- Central Intelligence Agency (April 21, 2007). *Career opportunities: Librarian*. Retrieved from www.cia.gov/careers/opportunities/support-professional/librarian.html.
- Den Hartog, D.N. & Belschak, F.D. (2012). "Work engagement and Machiavellianism in the ethical leadership process", *Journal of Business Ethics*, 107(1), 35–47. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1296-4>.
- Donskis, L. (2011). *Niccolo Machiavelli: History, Power, and Virtue*. New York: Editions Rodopi.
- Kott, A. (2006). *Information Warfare and Organizational Decision-making*. Norwood, MA: Artech House.

- Machiavelli, N. (1995). *The Prince*. Edited and translated by David Wootton. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Rubery, A. (2009). "Machiavelli" in *An Invitation to Political Thought*, edited by K.L. Deutsch and J.R. Fornieri. Belmont, CA: Thomas Higher Education, 183–223.
- Skinner, Q. (2000). *Machiavelli: A Very Short History*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Viroli, M. (2000). *Niccolo's Smile: A Bibliography of Machiavelli*. New York: Hill and Wang.