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Herding Tigers through a Reorganization: Practical Applications of a Pandemic Reorganization

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational change generally and reorganization especially can inherently cause feelings of nervousness and tension. This chapter discusses the moving parts of an organizational transformation to an R1 library and how communication and consensus-building efforts at multiple levels of the library are vital to this kind of transition. Prior to their library's reorganization, the three authors worked on three different teams across two different units. After the reorganization, the authors were positioned in the same department within a new division in the library and faced the challenge of leading their teams in a new structural environment. Clemson University's mascot is the tiger; rather than herding cats, the authors found themselves shepherding tigers into a new organizational structure.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Clemson University, established in 1889, is a state land-grant institution located in northwest South Carolina. The university occupies the traditional and ancestral land of the Cherokee people. Enslaved African people worked the land for the Pickens, Clemson,

and Calhoun families, and African American convict laborers transformed the land into the campus of Clemson.

Currently, over 27,000 students are enrolled, and the university employs over 5,600 individuals in various staff and faculty positions. As of this writing, Clemson University Libraries employs 103 people based out of seven facilities throughout South Carolina. It owns over 800,000 print titles, licenses more than 700 databases, and holds over one million e-books.

In 2016 Clemson University received a Carnegie R1 designation and the Clemson Libraries started working to determine what steps needed to be taken to transform itself into a resource that would better support the institution. A task force examined the areas of resources, services, spaces, and collections; as a result, library administration determined that reorganizing the reporting structure from five units to three divisions would optimize personnel and resources in order to improve services. A reorganization would also help the libraries meet the need for better integrating the university press into the organizational structure, provide the flexibility to add more positions, increase synergy among different functional areas, and improve workflows.

This organizational change brought together faculty and staff who had not worked closely on a day-to-day basis prior. In the old structure (see figure 22.1), Vidas, as electronic resources librarian, and Colquitt, as continuing resources and government information management, were in the Technical Services and Collection Management Unit; Redd, as resource sharing librarian, was in the Information and Research Services Unit. Although the three positions regularly communicated with each other regarding issues like troubleshooting access to e-resources, adjusting holdings in the library catalog, or helping patrons access items not held by the libraries, daily communication regarding team projects, unit initiatives, or supervisory assignments was limited.
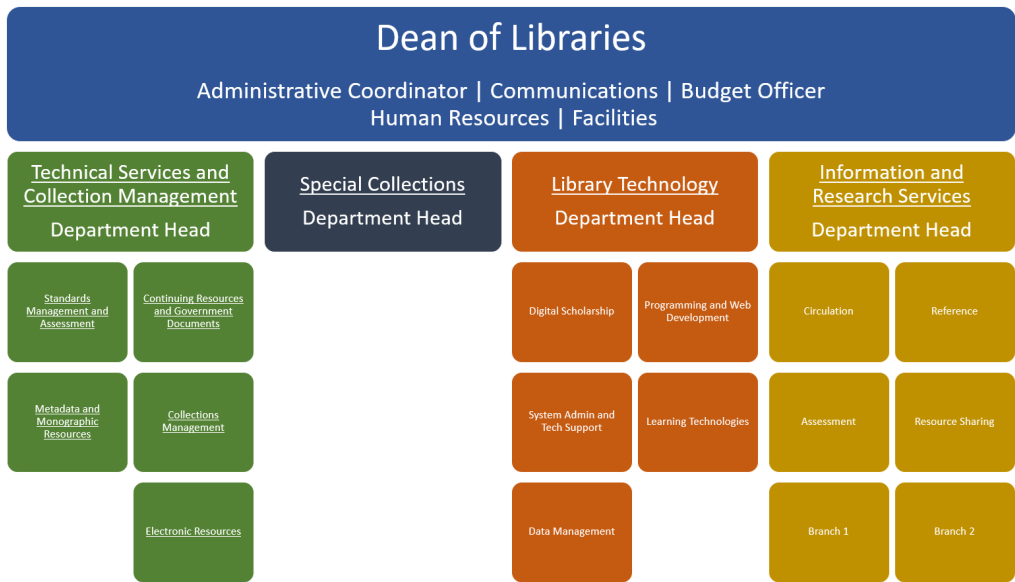

Figure 22.1. Prior organization

Dean of Libraries

University Historian & Historic Properties | Administrative Coordinator | Business Officer | Community Engagement Coordinator

Teaching and Learning
Associate Dean

Teaching and Learning	User Services
University Press	Open Scholarship

Collections and Discovery
Associate Dean

Acquisitions	Collections Sharing and Delivery
Metadata Services	Special Collections and Archives
Records Management	Digitization Services

Organizational Performance and Inclusion
Associate Dean

Learning Environments	Digital Strategies
Marketing and Communications	Assessment
Organizational Performance	Library Resident Program
EDI Project Facilitator*	Strategic Directions Facilitator*

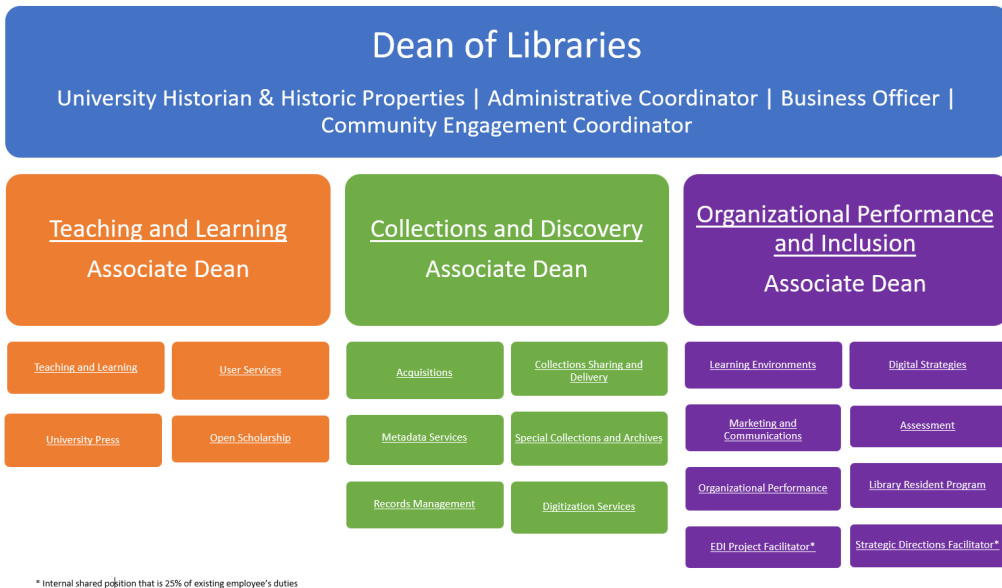* Internal shared position that is 25% of existing employee's duties

Figure 22.2. New organization

The new organizational structure (see figure 22.2) decided upon by administration created three divisions: Collections and Discovery (comprised of Archives and Special Collections, Cataloging and Metadata, Digitization, Acquisitions and Collection Management, Continuing Resources, E-Resources, and Resource Sharing), Organizational Performance and Inclusion (comprised of Marketing and Communication, Assessment, Digital Strategies, Learning Environments, and Organizational Performance), and Teaching and Learning (comprised of User Services, Teaching and Learning, Open Scholarship, and the University Press). A department within the new Collections and Discovery Division combined Acquisitions and Collection Management, Continuing Resources, E-Resources, and Resource Sharing, thus bringing the authors together as the three primary supervisors in this group. Immediately after learning about this change, the authors met to discuss the best way to guide staff under their supervision through this time of major change.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- During the lead-up to the reorganization, our goal was to alleviate change fatigue through open and transparent communication about the reorganization of Clemson Libraries. The outcome of this goal was to foster high staff morale within the newly formed Acquisitions Department in the Collections and Discovery Division during a period of intense organizational change.
- During this period of intense change, it was important to build new relationships between faculty and staff incorporated into our new unit and among those who remained in the unit. We did this both in a homegrown manner and with the assistance of the larger Organizational Development Committee. The outcome of this goal was to build positive relationships and increase

collaboration among members of the newly formed Collections and Discovery Division. It was important for everyone to build relationships and gain a scope of the work that each individual and team completed.

- During the lead-up to the reorganization, we sought input from everyone. Questions and concerns were actively encouraged during this period through in-person meetings and informal conversations with leaders. The outcome of encouraging questions was to promote clear communication and keep employee morale elevated. Questions and concerns prior to the reorganization were sought in a variety of ways. Examples include open forums and regular updates from the dean and other leaders.

CLEMSON LIBRARIES REORGANIZATION: THE LARGER PURPOSE

While library reorganizations can be extremely complex and overwhelming with many uncertainties throughout the process, it is important to remember that they are a common occurrence. The library literature provides numerous examples of academic libraries that have successfully engaged in partial to complete reorganizations. A typical library reorganization includes obstacles that are unique to the institution that initiated the process. For that reason, it is important to develop an individualized course of action, often informed and guided by a reorganization task force, to help lead a process that is customized to the needs of the institution being reorganized.

When developing a plan for a reorganization, it is beneficial to consult existing reports or overviews that were developed for other successful reorganizations. Doing so can help an institution to avoid pitfalls and adhere to best practices. Fortunately, case studies are available that outline reorganization processes for institutions of all types and sizes. Academic library websites can also serve as a source of information; for example, Clemson has a reorganization plan hosted on the libraries' website (Clemson Libraries, n.d.).

Engaging in and completing a reorganization is not the end of the story; in fact, it is critically important to evaluate the impact of change in the years following the reorganization. This evaluative process can be formal or informal; for example, library leaders can regularly consult with colleagues to monitor morale and productivity, or libraries can establish task forces to conduct more rigorous periodic assessments on progress and adherence to goals. Because it is less common to discover research on the long-term results of library reorganizations, participants in these processes can contribute to the library community as a whole by sharing their experiences.

Completing the reorganization process is not a matter of simply flipping a switch or declaring the reorganization effective. Not only are there ongoing ripple effects that can be monitored for months or years to come, but also some goals require funding that may not be immediately available or sequences of activities that may demand an extended period of time.

In the Clemson Libraries reorganization, one key milestone was the hiring of three new associate deans, but that was the beginning of the transformation, not the end. Numerous decisions were deliberately delayed until the associate deans had arrived and evaluated departmental situations to make informed decisions. Those decisions often involve lengthy processes such as developing and hiring new positions, identifying and initiating remodeling or construction projects, and developing new workflows that have yet to be tested. It also requires time to determine if new divisions are aligned effectively to streamline activities and eliminate silos. Ultimately, one reason the literature may lack examples of results is that reorganizations are continuous and lack a clearly defined end point.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING CHANGE

A range of tools and techniques are available to supervisors to help their teams approach and engage with change, such as building relationships, communicating, using coping strategies, leveraging information from previous employee satisfaction initiatives, and creating avenues of social engagement.

Relationship building is an effective way to show how people and positions relate to each other. The library owns a copy of Clifton *StrengthsFinder* (Rath, 2007), a tool that helps individuals identify their strengths and weaknesses as well as techniques for honing those skills. Each employee was provided with an updated version of this text so that they could take the quiz and learn more about themselves and how to collaborate more effectively. The library, and later the division, used these strengths designations as ways to eliminate silos between employees who might not typically work together: using tools like *StrengthsFinder* helps highlight similarities among individuals and positions.

Another relationship-building technique is creating ways for people to be together apart from work if they so choose. While there is no officially sanctioned library group devoted to social functions, there is an e-mail discussion list and a Microsoft Teams channel in which participants can share nonlibrary event information or invite others to join them for things like pottery classes or happy hours. Although socializing with coworkers outside of designated work time can sometimes blur the lines of personal and professional, thus leading to conflicts and tensions in the workplace, it must also be acknowledged that such socializing can help employees find commonalities. Finding ways to better introduce and integrate new colleagues into departments and the library as a whole gives both the new and existing employees the opportunity to start forming relationships with each other.

Creating open pathways of communication is vital in the instance of any change and essential to maintain the health of an organization. Frequent updates on library, division, departmental, and team happenings ensures that all employees are aware of current events and planned changes in order to provide timely feedback. Depending on the size of an organization as well as the structure, it can be easy for information about various initiatives to spread among employees before they are fully planned, which can lead to misunderstanding. It is a fine line between maintaining transparency and also allowing

initiatives time to bake and be developed before their rollout to the wider employee body. Checking in with teams and team members individually is something that a supervisor can do to make sure that everyone is on the same page and aware of changes but also feels as if they can share any concerns they have. Encouraging input and feedback over the course of the entire change process is incredibly important to demonstrate that each and every employee does indeed have a stake in the matter at hand.

Managers can promote various coping mechanisms to help team members dealing with change. It is essential that supervisors endorse, normalize, and model coping strategies and also empower those on their teams to feel that they can make use of them. Encouraging team members to take a moment to check in with themselves is a good first step; just a minute or two for self-reflection can help employees identify whether they feel stressed, overwhelmed, excited, or relieved (among many other emotions) at the prospect of change. Self-awareness in these instances is priceless, and it is important to remember that emotions, like change, are not bad—just a natural part of life.

A less commonly discussed coping mechanism that ties into this self-awareness is making spaces for team members *to* cope. Empowering team members to say no might seem antithetical to many people's definition of *team* in the sense of "all for one and one for all" or "there is no I in team," but recognizing one's own personal limits and feeling empowered to set healthy boundaries can go a long way in creating a healthier team in the long run. In times of great change, saying no can mean making space to fully digest and comprehend the change at hand, specifically how it relates to the individual and impacts their work. As mentioned previously, empowering team members to set boundaries can prevent individuals from taking on too much, prevent burnout, and promote accountability.

Along with this emotional space-making goes promoting empathy and kindness; reminding team members that colleagues are experiencing this change too and might be processing it in a different way helps lay the groundwork for all team members to be able to take the individual actions they need to take to embrace said change. Another way of expressing empathy as well as gratitude for the unique contributions that individual employees and teams make in the workplace is reminding employees of their unique contributions; their time and skills are valuable to the team and to the library.

Managers can take advantage of data previously uncovered in library-wide projects to help their teams adapt to change. Workplace culture reports, environmental assessments, and employee satisfaction surveys are all excellent sources for managers to see what historical issues a body of employees has experienced. Even if few of the current team members were around when this research was performed, it can give additional context to long-standing norms in work cultures. Formal training for various library skills takes place with each new employee and, along with it, the informal passing of organizational knowledge through anecdotes and stories. This information can be extremely valuable to learn what kind of events, attitudes, and circumstances have helped shape the library organization as it is today and provide insight into what events might be triggering to employees.

Division-wide events also work to the benefit of the team and the individual employee. While a library-wide organization can be daunting to consider, making it one degree smaller might be a step to help employees see how they fit into the bigger picture and draw connections between their team's work and that of others. In preparation for the reorganization, the Collections and Discovery Division held three events for this purpose, and below are descriptions of each.

- Event 1: Attendees were preassigned to groups of three or four so that no members of the same team were at the same table. Each group completed a Library Reorg MadLibs (see appendix) and shared the end result with the entire group. Then new groups were formed to play another game in which individuals described their jobs through the use of metaphors or pretended that they were telling someone completely unfamiliar with their work about what they did for a living.
- Event 2: In conjunction with the reorganization, library administration asked all employees to complete the *StrengthsFinder* assessment. Trainers from human resources attended this event and led division members in an exploration of their results. The event was also used as a way to welcome the division's new head administrator, an associate dean.
- Event 3: The library's annual professional development day was focused on strategic planning as the fruit of the reorganization. After some library-wide sessions, each division split apart to play the Library Mission Possible Game, as described in *College and Research Libraries News* (Hanshew & Alley, 2021). These questions were asked:
    1. Why does this division exist?
    2. What image do you want to convey?
    3. What is one belief that guides your professional behavior?
    4. How do we differ from competitors?
    5. What does outstanding customer service mean to you?
    6. What does our future look like?
    7. What is one value that drives your work?
    8. What do you like about your work? Why?
    9. What aspects of your work do you not like so much? Why?

APPLICATION FOR OTHERS EXPERIENCING SIMILAR ISSUES

Our experiences prove that a successful library reorganization is possible. Markers of a successful library reorganization include increased high employee morale, easier workflows, and overall good health of the organization. We recognize that periods of great organizational change are incredibly stressful. Therefore, it is critical for supervisors to check in with themselves and their teams frequently. However, one caveat is to remain as open to change as humanly possible. We understand that change and uncertainty are

fear-inducing but necessary parts of life. Remaining open to change has allowed our organization to continue growth at an astounding upward trajectory. Through the leadership of the three associate deans who formed a new middle management layer, the reorganization led to an increase in hiring both faculty and staff according to needs identified by the associate deans. The leaders in this layer are enabled to advocate for improvements to their areas (Collections and Discovery; Teaching, Learning, and Research; and Organizational Performance and Inclusion), all while freeing our dean up to focus on those tasks that are truly administrative-level tasks. Having a competent and capable leader in each area enables an increase in advocacy in all areas.

There are numerous things that can be done individually to make the reorganization more palatable for the personnel who will be impacted by the changes. Assume good intent during the organizational change process. Clemson University's human resources encourages supervisors to assume good intent in employee interactions. Library supervisors can take this a step further by encouraging open and transparent communication while informing employees clearly of organizational intent. Create documentation of multiple aspects of the change process. Be open to changes in workflows, reporting relationships, and responsibilities. Open and transparent communication was facilitated at our libraries through a reorganization task force, all-employee meetings that outlined the libraries reorganization, and various libraries- and division-wide events. The ultimate goals of these events were to foster goodwill and quickly build teams where employees might not have had any interactions or had limited interactions with each other before. We would encourage supervisors to convey goings-on in a clear and kind manner.

Communicate, communicate, communicate. Make sure to communicate as much as needed during this process. Understand that this process is time-consuming and can cause great fatigue and frustration. Assure your colleagues that change fatigue is a real thing. Ensure that you have space to listen to the fears and concerns of employees without having that space devolve into a gripe session. It is a fine line. Practice grace and kindness with everyone.

Whether you are a seasoned supervisor or a novice, it is important to strategically find a support system for you as a supervisor. One method of finding support as a supervisor is to seek mentorship opportunities, both internally and externally. Colquitt found support with mentoring opportunities through various professional organizations. Colquitt's mentors are mid-career librarians who have weathered reorganizations at various institutions. Having their support and guidance has proven to be invaluable because they have been able to report their experiences, especially things they might have addressed differently, as supervisors.

Finally, and most importantly, administrative buy-in and support are critically important to the successful library reorganization. Clemson Libraries administration was extremely consistent in communicating updates regarding the reorganization and the development of divisions as part of the process. As division leaders, we were given permission to plan our own division-wide events to help employees get to know colleagues and learn more about the reorganization efforts. Being given the leverage to plan something we felt our teams would value, rather than having something prescriptive handed down to

us, was validating. Once the associate deans were on board, we were able to share concerns and questions that had arisen during the process and have someone who could either answer them or advocate on our behalf in taking them to the dean. We are immensely grateful for a supportive dean and new division-level associate deans. Specifically within the sphere of Collections and Discovery, we are extremely grateful for our wonderful leadership, including advocacy for new positions, evaluation of workflows to eliminate inefficiencies, and a holistic focus on the well-being of our division. Our associate dean, Ariel Turner, focuses on leading with kindness and employs clear and efficient communication. We would encourage other administrators to be as supportive and transparent as possible during the reorganization process.

CAVEATS

Library reorganizations are lengthy processes, not only after they are initiated, but also leading up to the planned starting date. In the Clemson Libraries process, there were so many moving parts that various divisions coined the term *mini reorg* to define activities that were conducted to prepare for the larger official reorganization. These activities included things like redefining selected positions, moving individuals to new teams, assigning personnel to interim roles, and beginning new collaborative activities for teams that would need to work together following the reorganization. In summary, the mini reorg helped to ease the transition surrounding some of the more significant changes.

No amount of planning can predict all of the unexpected situations that might unfold throughout the course of a reorganization. Because the Clemson Libraries reorganization occurred in the midst of a pandemic, things like prolonged illnesses, virtual planning meetings, resignations from key positions, and other events that were unrelated to the pandemic but equally unpredictable disrupted the process. The impact of some of those events continued long after the reorganization began.

These tricky realities suggest that reorganization processes must be given ample time to develop, but also that library leaders must be flexible and open to shifting direction over time. If something is not working, it may be necessary to try something different. It is important to listen to the concerns of personnel who are directly impacted by the reorganization and to identify ways to address their needs. Some of these approaches are being utilized in the Clemson Libraries, although it may vary by division rather than implementing new changes across the organization.

REFLECTIONS

The reorganization provided an opportunity for each of us to challenge ourselves as managers in a variety of areas; however, the most challenging was in growing our capacity for uncertainty. Reorganization and uncertainty, especially for those newer to the organization, are not the most conducive circumstances to generate feelings of comfort in an employee and leader. Regardless of the feelings that this reorganization generated, we can reflect and see that this was a season of growth for us as leaders as we learned valuable lessons about our leadership styles and our teams' strengths and weaknesses.

For example, using the *StrengthsFinder* tool allowed us to learn more about each other to grow as a team, department, and division. We had to learn to not just listen closely, but to also look for nonverbal signs and read body language to see if members of our teams might be feeling discomfort. Mindfulness was and is another area of growth and learning; as managers, we feel as if every day we are multitasking and juggling many duties, but taking time to focus on one thing at a time—and breathe—is one step closer to being more effective as leaders. As a supervisor new to Clemson who arrived shortly before the reorganization was implemented, Colquitt found the *StrengthsFinder* tool to be incredibly helpful in getting to know her team. Further, division and departmental events assisted in building rapport and collegiality.

We approached this topic as an area of scholarship prior to the reorganization taking effect, with our first presentation showcasing a plan of how we wanted to work together in a new department within the new division. As the reorganization went into effect and new personnel were added, decisions and events outside of our scholarly crystal ball changed certain aspects of the work we did in terms of whose team did what, but we remain committed to maintaining open lines of communication with each other, with our common supervisor, and, most importantly, with the teams we supervise. It is kind and fair to our division and our teams to clearly communicate at all times for the good of the organization. The reorganization had the added benefit of creating an informal cohort of supervisor leaders where we are able to speak and ask questions about specific examples of supervisory concerns we encounter. Our work together as peers has shown us that a community of practice of middle managers adds value to our work, benefits our teams, and provides a form of support and mentoring. We would love to expand the group to add other managers who might need advice and someone cheering for them on the sidelines.

During a reorganization, it is important to understand that change is almost always nearly constant and inevitable. As leaders, we sought to remind our teams that the only aspect of change we can control is how we react to difficulties and setbacks in our given areas. It is okay to say "I don't know," and it is even more important to ask questions.

CONCLUSION

Reorganizations are important for libraries to undertake, and at some point, nearly all libraries will need to engage in this process. As in any other organizational body, change is vital to health, growth, and relevance—as in our case, we undertook a reorganization to situate ourselves among the ranks of larger R1 libraries and position ourselves for growth. Such high-level decisions and initiatives can bring about strong feelings of change and uncertainty among all and place middle managers in the role of therapist, parent, and shepherd. While these times are challenging, our leadership styles had the opportunity to grow and become stronger during this period of intense organizational change.

APPENDIX. LIBRARY REORG MADLIBS

Library reorganizations are _____, _____ and
$\qquad\qquad$ (adjective)   (adjective)

_____ in staff a fear of change _____ by the knowledge that
  (verb)   (verb – past tense)

the _____will not be an abstraction, but something that will directly affect
     (noun)

their _____, and _____. Existing _____ and _____,
   (plural noun)   (plural noun)   (plural noun)   (plural noun)

and perhaps even _____, are in question when the _____
                   (noun)   (noun)

embarks on a reorganization, and there are, inevitably, _____ and
                                                         (plural noun)

_____. After a _____ goes through a _____ reorganization,
 (plural noun)   (noun)   (adjective)

however _____ the process, however _____ it was, and however
          (adjective)   (adjective)

well staff understood it, once it has been implemented there is often the feeling of "Well,
that ís over and now we don't have to think about it anymore".

There is _____ and a return to the emphasis on _____ in the
           (noun)   (plural noun)

immediate_____ or _____. If we think _____ about the
            (noun)   (noun)   (adverb)

reasons we _____ in the first place: _____ change, the impact of
              (verb)   (adjective)

_____ on our _____ and _____, budget imperatives, or
  (noun)   (plural noun)   (plural noun)

other_____, we will _____ the need to put in place a
       (plural noun)   (verb)

_____ for _____ assessment, reality checks and review.
  (noun)   (adjective)

Implementation does not mean the end of a reorganization effort, merely round one.

Source: Channing, 1999.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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