

# Alki



## Overdue for Optimism: Creating a Positive Work Environment

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## Overdue for Optimism

By Brian Soneda

For many of us, the corner is still being turned, four and in some cases five years into a debilitating recession. It has been hard to keep chins up and hang on to that friend optimism in this environment. But optimistic we must be, because optimism is a crucial part of a positive work environment. The ability to see a better day coming and to be ready and willing to work continuously toward that better day is core. You have to want to be there and want to be part of the solution and the change and the rebirth.

I appreciate those in the Washington library community who value WLA as a force for optimism, as a player in the creation of positive work environments in libraries. To the library directors and library trustees who have made the decision in these hard times to bring their libraries into WLA as institutional members, or to renew their institutional memberships, I say thank you on behalf of WLA. You have made the choice to be optimistic. (And no, it is not a no-brainer; you can make the other choice. But you made the right one.)

You will read many articles in this issue that touch on optimism. We are overdue. I hope many of you attended the WALE Conference on October 29–31 and had your optimism punched up by your experience there. I hope many of you attend the OLA/WLA Joint Conference next April in Vancouver, WA, and get another jolt of optimism there. Optimistic prediction for Vancouver? By then we will all be looking at a better environment, economic and otherwise, at the local, statewide and national levels.

The story will have been told by the time you read this, but I am writing this column just after the University of Washington football team won a historic victory over the heavily favored Stanford team. It wasn't a fluke; it was the result of a team (in the best sense of that word) believing it could be done, working their hind ends off for four quarters, not letting adversity (Stanford touchdown off of an interception) affect that belief, and being tough, tough, tough. In short, it was a victory for optimism. It was a statement about the power of optimism.



Brian Soneda

Photo by: Kate Skinner

**“When one path is blocked, an optimist finds another path and works hard, is undeterred by adversity, and is tough, tough, tough.”**

Yes, I am reading too much into a game. Yes, by now you (Oregon or USC fans) may have powerful counterarguments about the limits of optimism. But in this moment, I am a Husky, this is my column, and this is my interpretation.

Optimism makes things happen.

Optimism is also about seeing multiple paths toward excellence. When one path is blocked, an optimist finds another path and works hard, is undeterred by adversity, and is tough, tough, tough. I want to

tip the hat to Diane Cowles and the *Alki* Editorial Committee, and *Alki* Editor Bo Kinney, for being optimists. You are reading the November *Alki* as an online journal, this new format being the result of an admittedly abrupt decision by the WLA Board in response to the challenging revenue environment referenced in the opening paragraph of this column.

After Bo and Diane expressed surprise to me about this decision, they quickly transitioned to transforming *Alki* into an online journal, and maintaining its role as a beacon shining light on what the Washington Library Association has to offer its members; the format has changed but the mission has not. Having served as a member of the *Alki* Editorial Committee, I am happy and proud to see that the committee maintains itself as a positive work environment, where optimism and is close kin, creativity, reign. Good work, Diane, Bo, and committee. Thank you. 📖

Brian Soneda is Mount Vernon City Library director and president of WLA.

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"Alki," a Chinook Jargon word meaning "by and by," was suggested by Nancy Pryor, Special Collections at Washington State Library, as the title for the Washington Library Association's journal. "Alki" is also the state motto, signifying a focus on the future.

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*Alki's* purpose is to communicate philosophical and substantive analyses of current and enduring issues for and about Washington libraries, personnel, and advocates, and to facilitate the exchange of research, opinion, and information.

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Cover photo: Whatcom County Library System and Bellingham Public Library's combined all staff day. See articles on pages 5 and 28.



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# From the Editor

by Bo Kinney

It is with mixed feelings that I present the first purely electronic issue of *Alki*. *Alki* has been WLA's printed journal since 1983, and receiving a copy in the mail three times a year has long been a benefit of WLA membership.

A number of readers have expressed their disappointment about the end of *Alki*'s print run, noting that electronic publication doesn't lend itself as well to sustained reading, or that it can't be bookmarked and passed around a library as easily.

I feel the same way. But at the same time, I'm enthusiastic about the new opportunities electronic publication has to offer. Most important, access will no longer be restricted to members. Each issue will be published online immediately, and will have the potential to reach a much wider audience. Online publication may also allow us to add more interactive content. And we will save on printing and mailing costs, allowing WLA to stretch its limited resources.

The *Alki* editorial committee has been working hard to ensure that *Alki* maintains its high publication standards and that it continues to be a valuable professional journal, bringing its unique blend of the scholarly, the practical, and the humorous into the digital environment.

We've decided to keep the format very similar to the printed journal. We like the look that *Alki* has developed over the years, and the committee felt that it was important to make sure *Alki* still looks like a journal, as opposed to a website or blog. Maintaining a limited page count also helps ensure a level of selectivity for the publication.

It's appropriate that this issue—our test run at electronic publishing—should be devoted to the theme of optimism. We've all labored to stay upbeat through the past few years of shrinking budgets and changing user expectations. The contributors to this issue share their stories of making work fun, of finding the positive in difficult situations, from Whatcom County Library System's efforts to become a learning organization ("Monkeys in the Library," p. 5) to the egalitarian unconference-planning approach of InfoCamp ("Creating a Positive Volunteer Environment," p. 8)

Anna Shelton shares tips for dealing with stress ("Take Action," p. 18), and (in a guest Solinus column) Susan Madden shares tips for dealing with retired library employees ("When Your Library Is a Pasture," p. 25).

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*Bo Kinney is a librarian in the Special Collections department of the Seattle Public Library.*



Speaking of columns, Kate Laughlin is passing the "Learning Curve" torch to the WALT interest group; WALT members, beginning with Jeanne Fondrie ("Better Together," p. 29), will take turns writing about continuing education.

This issue represents a work in progress. Everything about it is up for discussion, from our use of aXmag page turning software (which is used by WLA's management company, MCA, for its other online publications) to our tentative use of hyperlinks, to our presentation and organization on the WLA website. Please [let me know](#) what you think about this issue, and if you have suggestions for improvement. 📖

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A large graphic with a light green background and a vertical green bar on the left. The text is in bold, dark green font. The vertical bar contains the text "Join WLA" in a large, white, sans-serif font.

### Monkeys in the Library: Whatcom County Library System's Approach to Changing the Workplace

by Diane Cowles

Astonishing as the concept of having monkeys in the library is, even more awesome is what can come from such chaos. Whatcom County Library System's process for ensuring a positive work environment started with monkeys, which Joan Airoidi, Director, and Lizz Roberts, Community Relations Coordinator, explained at the PNLA 2012 Conference in Anchorage, Alaska. WCLS formed a "Learning Organization Committee," which asked the question of staff, "What if we had monkeys in the library?" This began a series of "what ifs" to begin to shape their workplace culture. The bottom-up approach was the catalyst for the bubble and fizz as ideas and juices began to flow. Encouragement came in the form of the development of four cornerstones: Be Curious, Communicate, Be the Change, and Connect. An all staff day was turned into a mini-conference, based on these precepts. Staff were challenged by such questions as: Be Curious—if you had the library and all its resources to yourself for a day, what would you want to explore? Communicate—what can you personally do to build trust in the workplace? Be the Change—what would you like to change about your job and what's stopping you? Connect—do you have ideas about communication tools and strategies we could use to feel more connected to each other?

WCLS's ultimate goal was to re-energize staff by becoming a learning organization that allows mistakes, while also supporting research and development and turning "training" into "learning." It was important that staff become as interested in their jobs as possible, keenly aware of public service and outreach impacts, and with the freedom to question the unquestionable. Airoidi's vision stems from the knowledge that only with everyone on board for this changing paradigm could the library survive and thrive for the pace of change.

Another major step was to undertake a new partnership with the library's union. Dianne Smith, WCLS staff and union representative, explained WCLS and the union's negotiating tool, called interest-based bargaining. Smith's strong union background was challenged when faced with changing from traditional bargaining, which emphasized strong positions at the forefront, to interest-based bargaining, which depended upon trust and brainstorming. An ordinary orange was used to demonstrate. Two groups were face-to-face with a whole orange and were told, "You all want the whole orange; you all need the whole orange; you cannot live without the whole orange. There is only one orange for both groups! Now brainstorm without judging and come up with winning solutions for both sides." Challenging, yes, traditional, no, but successful, you bet!

An institution willing to engage all ideas must also deal with the conflict that can arise from vigorous dissent. A remarkable document guides WCLS



Attendee discussion at PNLA presentation




Dianne Smith presents at PNLA

to help create and maintain a productive and positive work environment—"Workplace Behavior Standards." In plain, everyday language resolution procedures are provided. Here is an example from the Behavior Expectations bullet:

Differing points of view are welcome; to whom they are presented and how they are presented require thought, care and consideration of all. The challenge is to take the time and risk carrying out conflict and disagreement in a way that is constructive for the individual and for the library. When in doubt about communication, consider your intent. Is what is being said helping to make WCLS a better library and/or promote better working relationships?"

One way of learning how best to serve the public beyond one's job title is the "Be Curious Card," in which each staff member has at least one hour per quarter of "protected" time to learn something related to libraries. Supervisors work with each person to schedule this time. The hour is part of a person's regular hours. It is an opportunity for supervisors to discuss library-related interests as well as skill-building, thus strengthening relationships and common goals.

Only by trusting each other can any group move forward. Airoidi says that trust grows slowly and that giving trust leads to getting trust. Swinging on vines is what monkeys do naturally. Making a workplace environment that inviting for humans takes hard work from everyone. In that, all of WCLS has truly succeeded.

For more information, contact Joan Airoidi or Lizz Roberts at 360-384-3150. 

*Diane Cowles is a children's librarian at the Beacon Hill Branch of The Seattle Public Library.*

# Overdue for Optimism: Creating a Positive Work Environment

## Shared Values: Building a Culture of Collaboration at The Seattle Public Library

by *Lin Schnell and Anne Cisney*

At the Seattle Public Library, creating and maintaining a healthy and positive work environment is critically important to our organization's success. Hallmarks of such an environment include approaching challenges with humor, encouraging collaboration and respectful discussion, and recognizing the full range of our diverse staff for their important contributions to the library. It takes effort and commitment to build this kind of culture, and it is always a work in progress, but the benefits are manifold. Not only do employees bring greater energy and enthusiasm to their work when they feel valued and supported, but by working together in a cohesive and collaborative way across the organization, we believe we can much more effectively meet the evolving needs of our patrons.

The commitment to a positive work environment is shared by library administration and our labor union. We began working jointly toward this goal just over a decade ago, when we signed our first Labor-Management Partnership Agreement. This document took us beyond the set of negotiated, factual legal rights and responsibilities codified in any labor agreement and committed both sides to a more positive and intentional way of interacting and working together. This included approaching workplace concerns collaboratively, considering all sides to issues that arise before taking action, and communicating early and often about matters that affect library employees, whether codified in our labor agreement or not.

Changing the way we relate to one another, as required by the partnership agreement when it was adopted several years ago, was challenging at first. Expectedly, some members of both the library's administration and the union were accustomed to the traditional, more adversarial way for labor and management to interact. Sharing information transparently and jointly seeking solutions that meet the goals and interests of both sides, with the potential for neither side to truly "win," felt a bit risky to some. However, the more experience we gained at this new way of approaching issues, the more clearly participants felt the benefit of trust and collaboration, and the more effectively union and library leadership have modeled the workplace environment we are striving for. Now, as new staff and supervisors join our organization, introducing them to the labor-management partnership philosophy is an important, early priority.

Under the leadership of current City Librarian Marcellus Turner, library administration and the union recently reaffirmed our dedication to this effort by developing an addendum to our Labor-Management Partnership Agreement that further strengthens our joint commitment to create and maintain a healthy and positive work environment. This addendum contains the guiding principles that reflect our future organizational culture:

- We actively promote the Labor-Management Partnership Agreement which outlines the principles of the partnership and characteristics of the relationship.

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*Lin Schnell is the Seattle Public Library's Human Resources director. Anne Cisney is a librarian and is president of AFSCME Local 2083. They are co-chairs of the Seattle Public Library's Workplace Environment Committee.*

- We support the Internal Organizational Values Statements (Respect, Transparency, Partnership, Diversity, Engagement and Recognition) and are mutually committed to ensuring that they are present in our organizational culture.
- We work toward the success of the organization.
- We model and promote employee engagement focused on moving our organization forward in strategic ways consistent with our mission.
- We foster and develop structures that support employees being fully engaged in their work and the work of the organization.
- We value collaboration as a means to do our work together.
- We recognize the importance of personal connections between people.
- We model and promote inclusive problem solving at all levels of the organization.
- We recognize and work within the decision-making structure reflective of authorities and roles.
- We value different expertise and acknowledge different points of view and are willing to be influenced by each other.
- We build and promote an open work environment where employees are comfortable sharing their views and opinions with their co-workers and with management.
- We promote the achievement of the vision of the organization through an organizational culture of innovation.
- We promote enjoyment in the work we do and encourage humor as a clear sign of a healthy workplace.

Our labor-management partnership has achieved success in many ways, the most significant being the successful resolution of the challenges we faced from numerous budget reductions. In keeping with our workplace values, as part of the budget reduction process the library engaged all staff in brainstorming creative ways to save money and mitigate the impact of reduced funding. To the extent possible, information on budget developments was shared with employees, and questions from staff were addressed in a timely and transparent manner. Following the implementation of cuts, the library worked closely with the union and our Joint Labor-Management Committee to solicit feedback and insights from staff across the system regarding what was working well and where additional resources and support could be most effective. This information is now being used to inform decisions about the future course of our library system.

Other benefits of the partnership have included: an opportunity to work collaboratively with the union on internal organizational issues; a more structured way to gain the union's support of new directions that the library is taking and to address the needs of employees in responding to new directions; the potential use of creative approaches to everyday problems and sharing of new perspectives; and more up-front communication on strategic, emerging issues. We also use our Joint Labor-Management Committee to collaboratively address operational and other workplace issues affecting library employees, which reduces the need for formal grievances. While labor-management cooperation does not come without its

*Continued on next page*



## Overdue for Optimism: Creating a Positive Work Environment

challenges, we believe that it is in our mutual interest to continue to solve our problems in this manner in order to effectively respond to the changes facing our library.

Some time ago the library also established a Workplace Environment Committee, comprised of a cross-section of staff from different parts of the organization and union representatives. The committee has a broad charge: to recommend ways in which the library could enhance our internal organizational culture. One of the goals of the committee was to solicit input from library staff about their preferred workplace: what would be put in place in order for staff to feel that the organization supported them and recognized their contributions. We received an overwhelming response. This collective imagery of our preferred culture set the stage for the development of shared organizational values. A couple of years ago our Workplace Environment Committee, using feedback from library staff as a whole, led the organization in establishing new, shared values to create the foundation of our organization and our service:

- **Respect:** We respect the rights of others and the Library as an organization.
- **Transparency:** We are transparent.
- **Partnership:** Working together, we are stronger.
- **Diversity:** We are relevant as an organization and thrive through diversity.
- **Engagement:** We are engaged at every level with the goals of the organization.
- **Recognition:** We recognize achievement.

To ensure that these shared values are fully integrated into our culture, the library established descriptors that inform staff of expected behaviors while on the job that include both task-specific and interpersonal behaviors. These behavioral descriptors have been very helpful for managers and employees as an important communication tool in setting performance expectations and ensuring individual accountability for performance.

To support the ongoing achievement of these shared values, the Workplace Environment Committee sponsors an employee recognition program every year. As part of this program, all staff throughout the library are encouraged to nominate colleagues and supervisors who have done outstanding work in service to fellow staff or patrons and who best demonstrate our organizational values. We just held an all staff day to present the awards to this year's recipients. This recognition is well-received by our employees in part because nominations come from their colleagues. It is one of several ways that the library acknowledges the contributions of all of our staff. Further developing our theme of staff engagement, this year the library has launched an idea campaign established by our internal Innovation Team to solicit ideas from library staff about how we can become more innovative to achieve one of the key goals of our strategic plan, "Foster an Organiza-

tional Culture of Innovation." Our goal is to take staff engagement to the next level, and to create a transparent partnership between idea-gathering and decision-making.

Our first project was itself a pilot—an online forum called IdeaLab where staff were encouraged to post and help develop ideas on how we might better understand and support our communities. The project was sponsored by another new library committee with broad staff representation: our



**“Our goal is to take staff engagement to the next level, and to create a transparent partnership between idea-gathering and decision-making.”**

Innovation Team. All ideas were welcome, regardless of how far out-of-the box they might seem or whether the creator of the idea had the resources to make it a reality. The response was enthusiastic. Over 125 ideas were presented for consideration. To ensure transparency, one of our shared values, all library employees were given access to the entire forum, encouraged to share thoughts and vote on their favorite ideas, and invited to comment on the potential of each idea to directly support our strategic goals and service priorities, thereby benefiting Seattle residents. A summit was recently held where a large group of library managers

and representatives from staff and the union discussed and offered recommendations for ideas that would move forward for further consideration, taking into account feasibility based on cost, complexity and staff capacity. We look forward to launching more idea campaigns on other relevant issues affecting our library as we respond to our changing environment.

The Workplace Environment Committee now looks ahead with enthusiasm about a project to assess the effectiveness of our internal communications. We currently have an internal online forum, our InfoNET, where employees can speak directly with all staff members about developments in library operations, and share news, information, and ideas. This tool is well used and has provided many excellent opportunities to build community, especially for employees who do much of their work using a computer. However, it has not completely met our goal to offer all Library employees the chance to engage, communicate and share knowledge in new ways. We believe we can do a better job of bringing together employees in different locations and work groups, and those who perform very different roles within the library, or who have different schedules. We will be surveying staff to find out how they feel about our current methods and solicit their ideas on ways communications throughout the Library could be improved. This work directly supports our mission and our goal to provide highly responsive service to our internal customers and our library patrons.

Through all of these activities, under the leadership of our City Librarian, Marcellus Turner, we are embarking on a path to become the “Employer of Choice”—an employer that embodies our shared values, supports employee development and advancement, is inclusive and promotes open and honest communication, and helps employees see their individual contributions in making our library system a great library for our city. We are excited about our future and what we can achieve working together for the benefit of our Seattle patrons. 📖

## Creating a Positive Volunteer Environment: **The InfoCamp Way**

by Cadi Russell-Sauvé

InfoCamp Seattle is an annual unconference which has been held in various venues around Seattle, and is now in its sixth year. It features an egalitarian, community-driven format in which the agenda is created during the event. Session proposals are created the day of the event, not months in advance as is done at traditional conferences. While this adds a level of beautiful chaos, it also ensures that programming is current, relevant, and of interest to the conference participants.

You may think that “unconference” implies less work than a typical conference. However, we still need to wrangle a venue, caterers, keynote speakers, day-of volunteers, think about logistics and flow, market the event, and make money through registration and sponsorships to at least cover our costs.

So how do we do this on a volunteer basis? And why do people keep coming back to the volunteer planning committee? Like most organizations, InfoCamp retains volunteers by ensuring that everyone is working toward the same mission, goals, and ends, and by maintaining open communication, trust, accountability, and recognition. This helps to ensure positive relationships among committee members. In addition, strong leadership is essential to managing conflicts, difference, and changing circumstances, as well as providing the catalyst for cooperative arrangements.<sup>1</sup>

### **Toward the Same Ends**

Working with a unanimous purpose in mind is probably the most important piece to a healthy volunteer organization. While InfoCamp Seattle does not have an explicit mission statement, everyone interested in serving on the planning committee sees the value of an annual unconference for information professionals and students with a variety of backgrounds and knowledge to encourage idea sharing, networking, and professional development. We're all interested in providing educational, professional, and social opportunities to students, professionals, and supporters of information studies and professions.

Working toward the same end of connecting information professionals strengthens our group. We're all passionate about making InfoCamp Seattle an amazing experience. Working towards the same end also encourages planning volunteers to return to the committee year after year. Sustained and engaged volunteering is important to “maintaining or improving the benefits of service quality linked with volunteering.”<sup>2</sup> Retaining volunteers is often a difficult task for nonprofit organizations, and can be even more difficult for organizations that are also run by volunteers. Understanding what InfoCamp Seattle is and promoting our egalitarian, information-centered mission engages our volunteer committee, and also brings us together to create a positive and cohesive environment.

### **Communication and Trust**

Conflict management is the least pleasant aspect of any organization. Fortunately, at InfoCamp there is very little conflict since we are all motivated information nerds who want to throw a successful unconference—i.e., we work towards the same goal. When conflict does arise, it is managed in an arena of open communication. Problems are worked out through informed discussion in a collaborative manner. For example, more than one person manages our Twitter account, leading to an inconsistent voice in tweets, which worried the Twitter Lead. Both volunteers were aware of the incongruity and worked out the most immediate issues over email. At the next in-person meeting, there was a full committee discussion of best practices for Twitter, and now everyone who tweets with the [InfoCamp-SEA](#) account follows those guidelines. In addition, civil discourse and problem-solving skills were modeled, demonstrating how open communication is not meant to hurt feelings but rather to encourage growth and participation.

Since our planning committee members are working on the event on a volunteer basis, we have to build flexibility into our planning. In April, the planning committee begins work on the unconference, including finding a venue, setting deadlines, and getting to know each other. From April until June, we meet in person once a month; from June through August we meet twice a month; and from September to the event we meet once a week. Sometimes, life gets in the way and volunteers have to miss meetings. It's understandable! To ensure accountability, those who cannot attend are asked to submit a brief report to the agenda master or email the committee. We trust our planning committee members to successfully accomplish the tasks they have taken on, and at the same time offer an open forum for help should the need arise. Those who have served on the planning committee before offer assistance to those new in their roles.

### **Accountability through a Healthy Mix of Members**

Not only does the planning committee have a mix of returning and new members, we also have a mix of professionals and students. This diversity of planning committee members creates an atmosphere of mentorship and a team-oriented organization. In general, “nonprofit organizations are typically quite labor intense, with heavy use of both professional and volunteer labor” to meet programming needs.<sup>3</sup> While currently not a registered nonprofit, InfoCamp Seattle has many similarities to nonprofit organizations. Like many nonprofits, we also rely on volunteer labor. Since we are not a membership organization anyone interested in participating at the event or serving on the planning committee is eligible. Decisions on who should serve are also decisions on how to balance representation from a variety of different information fields (we have librarians, information architects, business owners, and students on our current committee) and different levels of experience.

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*Cadi Russell-Sauvé is a faculty librarian and collection development coordinator at Bellevue College. She has participated in all six Seattle InfoCamps and has the t-shirts to prove it.*

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# Overdue for Optimism: Creating a Positive Work Environment

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InfoCamp 2012


Photos: jsracher (CC BY-NC-SA)

## Recognition

Role recognition is the public honoring or appreciation of volunteers and is “important in sustaining role performance and enhancing satisfaction with volunteer programs.”<sup>4</sup> Planning committee members attend the conference free of charge for the services they have contributed to ensure the event happens successfully. Further, planning committee volunteers are recognized in a [blog post](#) on the InfoCamp Seattle website. Not only does this post act as a thank you to those who serve on the planning committee, but it also provides recognition to the larger community.

Planning committee members also act as the day-of masters of ceremonies, introduce attendees to the InfoCamp spirit, announce keynote speakers, and perform other visible actions to signal their importance within the organization. We also try to have fun at our meetings: some meetings are at bars, other times we might order pizza, people bring treats and sweets, and we spend some time at each meeting just talking. We acknowledge individuals who have met or exceeded their responsibilities. We support and recognize each other and the individual assets we bring to the team.

## Conclusion

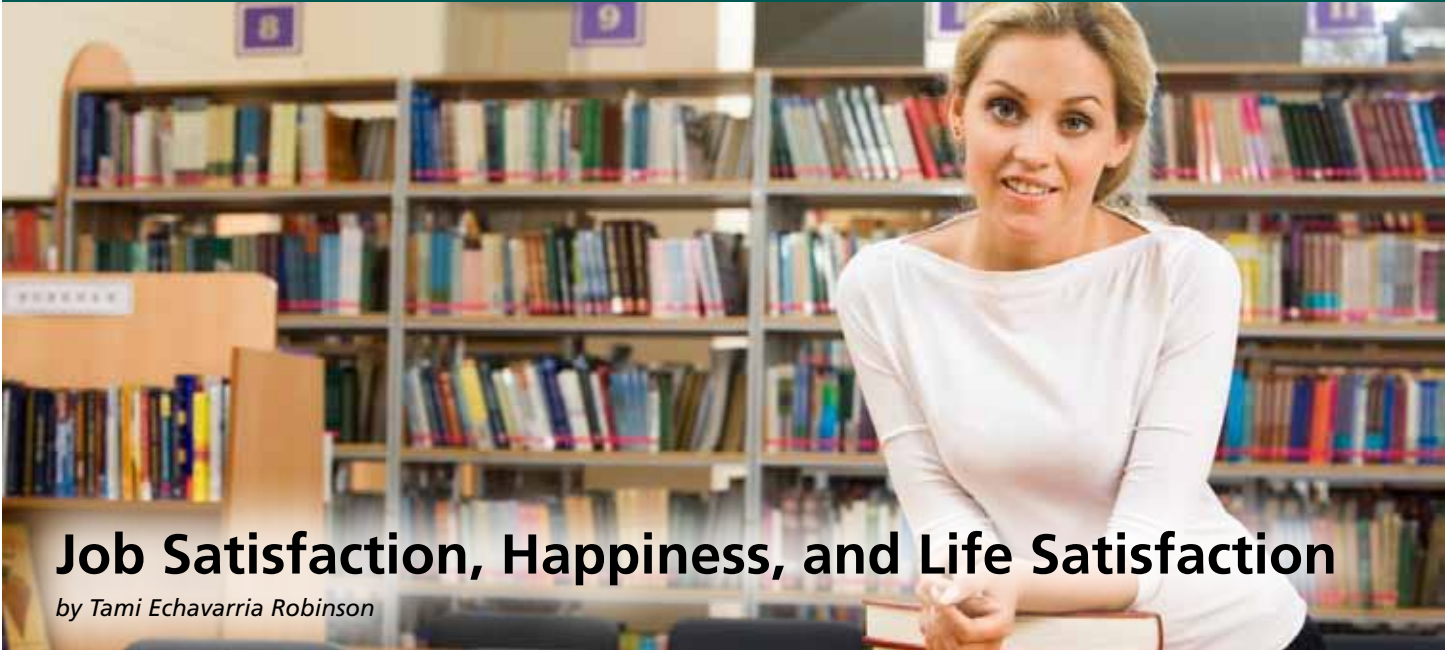
At InfoCamp Seattle, we have found that the effectiveness and happiness of our volunteer planning committee, as well as our retention levels, depend largely on the steps we take to support our committee. Because InfoCamp is fun and engaging, we want our planning committee to reflect that. While our organization is not perfect (we argue, have communication issues, and replicate efforts), we reflect upon and act with the best interest of our supporters in mind. We are all passionate about connecting members of the various information fields and ensuring none of the various fields feel marginalized. We use our mistakes as learning opportunities and continually work to increase productive communication and build trust, which takes time. This is why unstructured time is so important for our group: we get to know each other and our various working styles and learn ways to hold ourselves and each other accountable. Planning InfoCamp takes time from our other responsibilities, obligations, and interests, so working on making the planning committee enjoyable and recognizing both big and small accomplishments (and birthdays) ensures that our work, while time-consuming, is not uninteresting. We offer opportunities for new projects and endeavors, a place for the cross-pollination of ideas and fields, and an involvement in meaningful volunteer work which promotes the various fields of information studies. 

## Notes

1. Kevin P. Kearns, *Private Sector Strategies for Social Sector Success: The Guide to Strategy and Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 262–264.
2. Fengyan Tang, Nancy Morrow-Howell, and Songjee Hong, S., “Institutional Facilitation in Sustained Volunteering among Older Adult Volunteers,” *Social Work Research* 33, no. 3 (2009): 172.
3. Sharon M. Oster, *Strategic Management for Nonprofit Organizations: Theory and Cases* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7.
4. Tang, Morrow-Howell, and Hong, “Institutional Facilitation,” 173.

As a grassroots organization the management structure is very horizontal. Our committee members are provided with more freedom through democratic and peer-based management. While members are accountable for specific planning tasks, we aim for no one to feel isolated or overwhelmed in their positions. Some of the more labor-intensive positions, such as sponsorship and marketing, have sub-committees of two to four people to share the workload and minimize mistakes. As a volunteer organization, we understand that mistakes are inevitable and we all hope to learn from them. Each year we have improved our management of the planning committee. Our errors demonstrate where room for improvement lies.

# Overdue for Optimism: Creating a Positive Work Environment



## Job Satisfaction, Happiness, and Life Satisfaction

by Tami Echavarría Robinson

Finding satisfaction, self-efficacy, and a sense of fulfillment in the workplace is one of the most important factors contributing to a sense of happiness and contentment in life... Consider the benefits that success in the workplace can bring. The workplace is a place where people have positive social interactions with others. It is a place where people find a sense of identity that contributes to the self-view that they are worthwhile people. The workplace is one of the venues where people achieve social status that affects how they are treated in other arenas of life such as their communities and churches...The workplace provides an income that allows people to support themselves and other family members. It can provide other tangible benefits such as medical insurance and a retirement plan.<sup>1</sup>

Hopefully, as you read this you are working in a job that gives you satisfaction. Many of us have experienced jobs we were dissatisfied with, for one reason or another, and we have moved on to jobs we find more satisfying. As Kirsten J. Wells explains, “job satisfaction stems from an individual’s perception of the fit between him- or herself and his or her job.”<sup>2</sup> The impact of vocation on a person’s well-being and happiness is of interest to positive psychologists, industrial organizational psychologists, and employers. Perhaps more important, it is of concern to the individual.

It helps to unbundle what job satisfaction really means to a person, what actually contributes to happiness and a sense of well-being. It is then helpful to examine how that plays into job performance. Psychologists differ in their views on this matter. Some think that employees who are happy with their jobs are more productive, while others think that those employees who are more productive find rewards in their behavior that lead to outcomes which are more satisfying to

the individual. Still others think it is a circular pattern that goes both ways. In my own experience I find myself more satisfied with my own productivity when I am satisfied not only with my work, but with my life as well. Work satisfaction is closely related to life satisfaction for most people, according to social psychologist David G. Myers.<sup>3</sup> Life satisfaction is the “cognitive evaluation of one’s life based on self-selected standards and is one of the key components of happiness... [It] influences important life outcomes, for example, life satisfaction has been shown to predict interpersonal, educational, and vocational success.”<sup>4</sup>

Many serious thinkers have attempted to define and grasp the meanings of these concepts. Aristotle thought that happiness came from identifying one’s virtues, cultivating them, and living life in accord. This “tradition of well-being focuses on the aspects of human functioning that promote and reflect the pursuit of meaningful life goals.”<sup>5</sup> Not only psychological well-being but also social well-being is important for sustained job satisfaction and flourishing. Individuals who are flourishing are filled with emotional vitality and function positively; they thrive, prosper, and fare well in endeavors. The component factors of social acceptance, social actualization, social coherence, social contribution, and social integration determine the extent to which individuals overcome social challenges and function well in their environment. These are important for an individual to flourish in a career and in a particular job.<sup>6</sup> These factors not only affect a person’s life satisfaction, but also how meaningful they find their work. “Those following the path of meaning typically report a robust attachment to something larger than themselves and have a strong sense of purpose in life.”<sup>7</sup>

When a person is fully engaged, psychologists use an interesting term

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to describe what happens in the moment to that individual: *flow*. It means that the individual is so completely absorbed and involved with what s/he is doing that time, fatigue, and everything else except the activity itself is forgotten in the moment. The person is functioning at his/her fullest capacity and is doing it simply for the sake of doing it without regard to recompense or reward. This experience is so enjoyable that the person welcomes opportunities to experience it again: “Typically people devote a good deal of mental energy to thoughts that are irrelevant to what they are doing at the present moment...During flow, however, attentional resources are fully invested in the task at hand, so that objects beyond the immediate interaction generally fail to enter awareness.”<sup>8</sup> Myers calls this “the ideal state of satisfaction” and says that the common feature of activities, whether work or play, in which flow is experienced, is that the activity fully challenges the skills of the participant.<sup>9</sup> For me, this experience often comes about when I write, so I keep writing, pursuing the next flow experience.

As social creatures, human beings are motivated with a powerful urge to belong. This need to belong influences our thoughts and emotions. “Those denied others’ acceptance and inclusion may feel depressed... Much of our social behavior aims to increase our sense of belonging.”<sup>10</sup> Feeling a part of something meaningful reflects positively on our quality of life. Ideally, wouldn’t it be wonderful to experience a robust attachment to and strong sense of purpose in the career you’ve chosen? I think that this sense of belonging does happen for many of us in the career of librarianship, more often than not. Over the decades of my career, I have known few librarians who have left the career due to disillusionment with it. However, as all of us know, many have shifted from one job to another searching for better job satisfaction. It happens quite often that an individual is discontented with even a potentially great job. A person can love his or her job and still be displeased with certain aspects of it, providing a challenge for improvement.

According to Myers, two reasons account for work being unsatisfying for many of us: overstress—because work challenges outweigh time and/or skills—and boredom—because time and skills outweigh work challenges.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, three emotional needs most strongly accompany satisfaction: self-esteem, relatedness (feeling connected with others), and empowerment (feeling in control)<sup>12</sup>

Unbundling the concept of what makes someone happy in the work environment can lead to a list of components that contribute to job satisfaction. Each person must determine how important each of these is to him/her and what meets his/her needs at any given time in life. It is an individual assessment to determine what makes you happy with your job. Here is a list of some components of job satisfaction, to which you may want to add:

- remuneration
- benefit package
- professional development opportunities
- advancement/promotion opportunities
- positive relationship with supervisor
- supportive relationships with coworkers
- pleasantness of coworkers
- pleasant surroundings
- respectful language in the workplace
- polite conduct in the workplace
- use of one’s skills
- empowerment
- work/life balance
- stress level balance
- sense of purpose/meaning
- work that aligns with one’s values
- sense of belonging
- job security

**“ Libraries, by their very nature, bring diverse people together in an environment of learning. ”**

“There is ample evidence that work can be enjoyable, and that indeed, it is often the most enjoyable part of life,” according to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.<sup>13</sup> Libraries, by their very nature, bring diverse people together in an environment of learning. They are an environment that demands civility, moral attitudes of tolerance, respect and consideration. “In a pluralistic society, civility requires listening with an open mind to the beliefs and attitudes of others who may hold vastly different worldviews, and come from different cultures.”<sup>14</sup> This is the case whether one is reading or conversing. The desires to seek commonality lead to community building. Librarians promote such an atmosphere that encourages lifelong learning and community building. My experience is that the more commonality of interests and purpose there are among coworkers in a library, the more teamwork naturally occurs. The environment is naturally interactive and supportive with all staff valuing and respecting each other.

Bonnie A. Oslif, a librarian at Penn State, advises, “It is important that the library be a welcoming, useful place to students, to the general public, the decision makers, and those who spend their days

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and nights working in the library...Apologies and forgiveness are the lifesavers of relationships. They are two splendid examples of smart ways of treating others well. Use them unsparingly.”<sup>15</sup> This is valuable advice; just one staff member who refuses to behave collegially can change an inspiring, energetic, and intellectual place into a demoralizing, isolating, depressing place. Incivility is so powerful that experiencing or witnessing rude behavior adversely affects cognitive processing, working memory, creativity, and job performance.<sup>16</sup>

Civility is more about consciousness regarding how our actions affect individuals and the larger community around us than simple courtesy and good manners. Building relationships among library staff and beyond in the community that the library serves enhances goodwill and civility. Politeness, considerateness, respectfulness, and kindness go a long way toward building relationships.

**“ Individuals who enjoy their work enjoy a greater portion of their lives than those who don’t. ”**

People’s feelings about their work are a function of their own personalities and the work itself. Individuals who enjoy their work enjoy a greater portion of their lives than those who don’t. “Part of whether you enjoy your job is the attitude you take to it”: people who look forward to their work, who think they make a meaningful contribution to society, find that doing their job well is intrinsically rewarding.<sup>17</sup> They enjoy their colleagues, feel challenged, and experience success and creativity. They tend to stay in the same job and are less likely to grow discontented and search for a new job. Research reviewed by Peter Warr “indicates that greater employee well-being is significantly associated with better job performance, lower absenteeism, reduced probability of leaving an employer, and the occurrence of more discretionary work behaviors.”<sup>18</sup>

When employees do become dissatisfied, research shows that their reasons for leaving might have been prevented if their employers had addressed their issues. The research findings of why employees leave a job fit into seven reasons, according to Leigh Branham:

- job or workplace isn’t living up to expectations
- mismatch between job and person

- too little supervisor coaching and feedback
- person feels devalued and unrecognized
- stress from overwork and work/life balance
- loss of trust and confidence in senior leaders<sup>19</sup>

Wise employers pay attention to creating a stimulating work environment for their employees. Such an environment is a workplace where workers can engage in a variety of tasks, professional development is encouraged, supervisors are fair and approachable and show interest in their employees, and compensation is good. Workplaces that afford people respect boost a person’s self-esteem so that workers feel worthwhile.<sup>20</sup> Does this sound like the library in which you work? Shared core values are important because they generate trust. For a work environment to be healthy and productive, people need to trust each other. Healthy organizational cultures value respect, responsibility, honesty, fairness, and integrity. According to Graham Lowe, “The biggest difference between healthy and unhealthy cultures is the values...How employees experience their work environment has an enormous impact on performance-related work attitudes and behaviors, as well as on their overall sense of well-being.”<sup>21</sup>

How likely are libraries to be workplace environments conducive to a workforce with high job satisfaction? Both *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal* have conducted surveys to determine job satisfaction in the library science profession. These large surveys have included academic libraries, public libraries, and school libraries. In all these surveys the overwhelming number of librarians and library support staff indicate they are satisfied with their jobs and their career choice and would recommend the career to students choosing their own careers. Reasons those surveyed found job satisfaction in their library careers included “helping people,... making a positive difference in the larger community,” “creating a generation of readers capable of using information critically,...connecting people with information,...[and] teaching information skills and the joys of satisfying one’s curiosity about the world.”<sup>22</sup> Despite the challenges, the profession attracts a certain personality type that wants to make a difference, likes working with people, and feels that the library is somewhere we belong, so “librarianship is more than just a job.”<sup>23</sup> These qualities led survey respondents to make comments relevant to both job satisfaction and life satisfaction which indicated they are flourishing. Respondents enjoy their work, their colleagues, their work environment, and the relatively stable work schedule that allows flexibility to attend to family needs, the family-friendly nature of the profession, and the public service inherent in it.<sup>24</sup> As *School Library Journal* expresses it, “most librarians are crazy about their jobs...it is impossible to overstate the satisfaction [they] derive from their work...Our participants—no matter what type of library they’re in—relished the variety of their workdays and the level of creativity their jobs afforded them.”<sup>25</sup> One interesting aspect from these surveys is that the longer people remain

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in library science jobs, the more satisfied they become. Fulfillment and job satisfaction seem to predominate in the library profession. A person's overall well-being has a strong impact on his/her job well-being and happiness. Life satisfaction and happiness are strong contributors to vocational satisfaction. These overlaps all add up to flourishing. The aspects of the profession that attract and keep us working in our careers are gratifying and sustain us throughout our work life. Few librarians are disillusioned with what they find in library careers despite the challenges they encounter, and most remain in the profession preferring to retire from it.

That doesn't mean there is no room for improvement. The surveys showed competency in management is high on the list of areas needing improvement. Civility and collegiality are continuously needed, and we must always work to make our workplace more congenial. Without such an environment the flourishing can be all too easily squelched. As we face the challenges of all libraries, we must maintain a positive learning environment for those who come to our libraries and for those who work in our libraries. This is how we flourish, and this is how we provide a place for others to flourish. 📖

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### Are We Having Fun Yet? Musings on the Positive Workplace

by Tony Wilson

Our *Alki* theme this issue has to do with optimism and creating a positive work environment. I think I can suggest some ways to create a positive work environment when it is out of whack. I can identify some ideas that may have gotten the work environment out of whack in the first place. Most importantly, however, I can suggest that the normal situation for a library and library work is very positive to begin with.

There are several reasons why library work is normally positive, happy, and satisfying. First, it is work that helps people. Knowing that you have helped someone is intrinsically satisfying, even without overt displays of gratitude from the helped. Those who work in cataloging, in affixing labels, or in shelving materials may rarely see much gratitude but can feel how they have helped merely from circulation statistics. Despite the potentially controversial nature of the materials we handle and make available, we have faith that we are making the world better.

A second positive and satisfying facet of library work has to do with content. Content is what the public means when citing our jobs as sitting around and reading all day. If you are in both selection and cataloging, you may literally do just that—spend your day reading.

An especially satisfying period in my career as an academic librarian was when the Richard Abel company would send me a weekly packet of slips announcing all the academic books worldwide that became available that week. My job was to weed, sort, and distribute these slips to potentially interested faculty members. With their feedback,



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we would receive many of the books on approval. The process made me feel as though I had my finger on the pulse of knowledge as it was being developed.

It was not that I read the books, certainly, not in the sitting-under-a-tree-lost-in-the-text sense. Rather, I knew about the books and had some sense of what was in them, which was content knowledge of a sort. Anyone who has spent a summer or two shelving books will have developed a similar sense of the world of knowledge, and he or she will have a general sense of the shelves on which specific knowledge may be sitting. So there is a sense in which the shelver has spent the day reading.

In a fairly serious and tightly reasoned book, *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*, Pierre Bayard quotes Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*. Here we see how not to be overwhelmed by the bulk and extent of knowledge represented in the library:

The secret of a good librarian is that he never reads anything more of the literature in his charge than the titles and the table of contents. Anyone who lets himself go and starts reading a book is lost as a librarian...He's bound to lose perspective.<sup>1</sup>

If we think of books as the tools we use to transform ourselves, Musil's librarian makes perfect sense; if reading the book changes you, how could you be objective about it?

The upshot, then, is that any library task, from cataloging to shelving to setting up displays, puts you in contact with knowledge and with a way to structure it. It is satisfying that some of the knowledge rubs off on you.

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A third satisfying facet of library work is its system-building aspect. Whether or not building a collection as a whole still means anything when we all go to Amazon first, library work, from cataloging to setting up displays or designing signage, lets us build a system that we can observe in operation. It is not as unified as building a race car or a laptop computer, but it is set up to do something, and we can take pride in watching it work.

A final facet that makes library work positive and satisfying is that we operate in a gift economy. We are not here to see how much we can get for ourselves or for absentee shareholders. Our status, pride, and satisfaction lie in how much we can give away. I've had students who specifically chose library work because the main thing is not having money change hands. Our ridiculously low fine structure for overdues (3 cents, 10 cents) reflects this point; the party with overdues is not threatened with something he cannot afford. Instead, he is being told that he is shifting his relationship to the library out of the gift economy and into the world of cash exchange. For a majority of patrons, such a shift can lead to small feelings of shame.

In all this positive workplace environment, what could possibly go wrong? I suggest that there are three main sources: your supervisor, your top leadership, and you. First, however, let's clear the air about brainless whining, by which I mean knee-jerk statements repeated without relevance to any facts. The kind of generic whining I would have us either avoid or challenge can be found in the phrase, "In these trying times, when we are underpaid, overworked, and being asked to do more with less..." Such phrases are often uttered with the assumption that, because they are back-handedly supportive and provide excuses, no one will be rude enough to examine critically what has been said (and thus, maybe, what is about to be said).

That we are in "trying times" or "critical times" may be true only in the sense that it is now rather than some other time we are living in. These times must, therefore, rank among the most trying times in the history of the world. By objective measures, say longevity, starvation levels, fetal deaths, literacy rates, or any other handful of objective measures, we could argue that we live in the least critical times in the history of the world. Much of what passes for the assertion of "trying times" is but egocentric froth.

The claim that we are overworked and underpaid does not ring very true to those who have worked retail or construction or most any private sector job. Besides, we have chosen to work in a field that resides within the gift economy—a place we chose specifically because remuneration and profit are not the central motivators.

Finally, what about "being asked to do more with less"? Who, we might ask, is doing this asking? The Seattle Public Library has been

asked to do less with less and has furlough days. The voters passed a levy asking SPL to do more with more. Let's face it, we are the ones asking ourselves to do more. In fact, we often find ourselves seeking resources to serve the unserved, specifically people who are not (yet) asking us to do more.

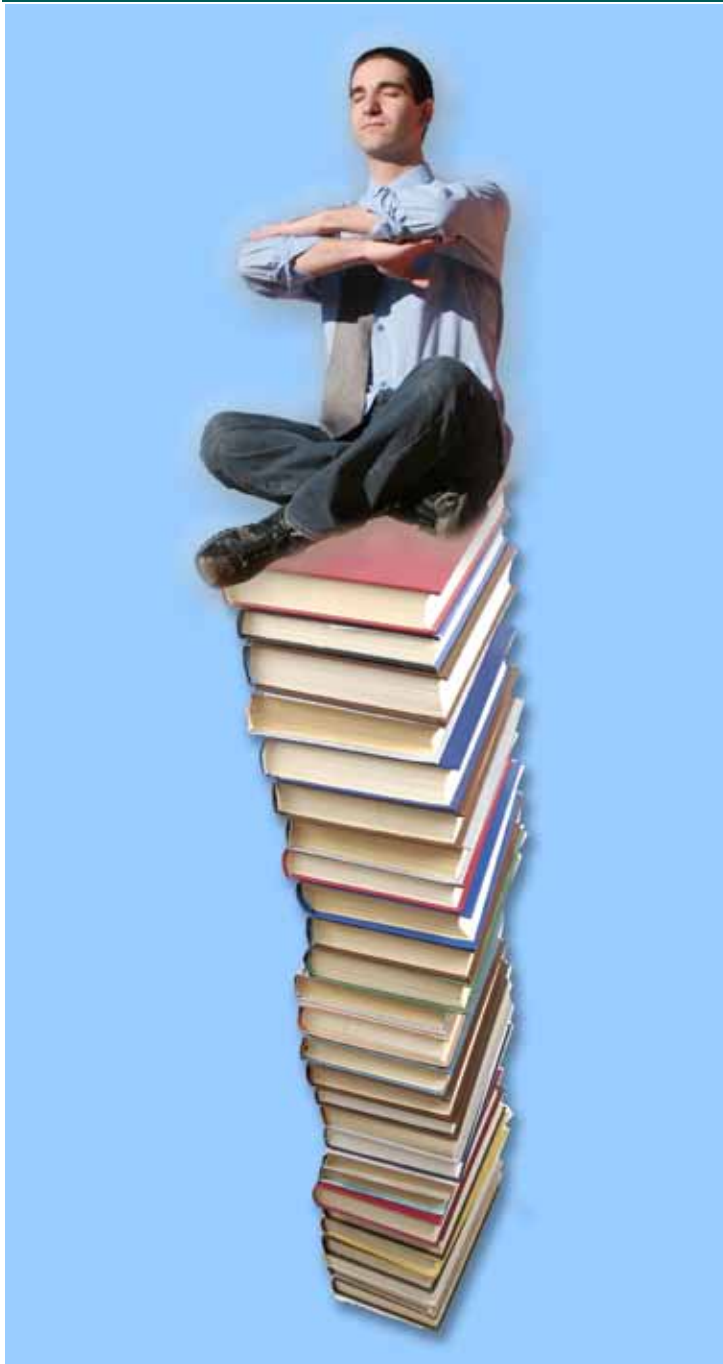
In reality, then, what we are and what we do is good, and there is no logical upper limit on the good we could do, such as bigger collections, more story hours, more outreach. There would be something wrong with us if we could not easily imagine doing and providing more. We should not confuse our own desires to do good with a clamor of demand from the outside. If we want to get more and do more, we just need to make our case. Perhaps we only get what we deserve. I suggest that we stop whining and become competitively deserving. All of us have more of the world's knowledge at our fingertips now than at any time ever, most of it free. In that light, even the most underfunded library can do more with more than ever before.

**“The claim that we are overworked and underpaid does not ring very true to those who have worked retail or construction or most any private sector job.”**

How, in such a fine environment, do things get out of whack? The roots of negativity can come either from us or from the system. Looking first at the system, the person with the greatest potential to make your work life worse is, of course, your immediate supervisor—and, in a large enough system, those a step or two on up. A good supervisor needs to be familiar enough with what you do to appreciate when you do it well. (Have you noticed the employee who has become an accomplished athlete at affixing Gaylord book jackets?) The supervisor may help you set your parameters but then needs to be emotionally free enough to set you loose to do the job and then to be proud of your success. The bad supervisor sees himself as the driver and you as the car, allowing your success or failure to be not your own, but merely components of his own ego. One trap that turns supervisors into drivers is the trickle-down or pouring-down of half-understood, context-free buzzwords: "Starting today, we are going to treat all patrons as customers!" We are to do this regardless of a context where it might be more appropriate

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to treat the user as a client, a reader, a patron, a partner, a colleague, or—as David Lankes makes a case for—a member.<sup>2</sup> Some of these management gimmicks may work, especially in the corporate world. We like it when the Les Schwab kid comes running to attend to our tire needs, or when the Safeway sweeper greets us with a smile when we enter the ten-foot radius.

Some years ago I was part of a tour of Weyerhaeuser offices that was a little disturbing. The company had recently implemented some version of Total Quality Management, and each representative could and would recite nearly the same set of slogans about what they were doing. It may have worked for Weyerhaeuser, especially in dealing with trees. In library work we deal with individual people using a wide spectrum of techniques and resources that must be tailored for the context of another human being, one who is unlikely to share our list of slogans. The worker needs to be able to respond with originality in real time.

The system can also be put out of whack by top management. Arbitrary, capricious, and punitive management can cause staff to fight back through grievances, court proceedings, or unionization. Unionization is likely good where it happens, although I have often thought that, given the mission of libraries, the workers are driven to unionization to the extent that management deserves it. Then things go forward again, but there is no going back.

More difficult to deal with or remedy is the situation where management, while urging employees to give lip service to library values (for instance, access to anything in privacy and confidentiality), violates such values. The workplace is considerably more positive if the employees can respect top management. Would you want to work in a library that refused to stock *Fifty Shades of Grey*? Or one that would go to court to maintain its Internet filtering of such titles as *Women and Guns Magazine*? There is no easy answer here. One of my students quit her job in a major system immediately on meeting the director. This student went on to be a successful techie in an academic library. There should be things that offend you in your library, but if that includes the leadership, maybe you can handle the situation as you would handle an offensive book. You can help your head by attending WLA meetings and sharing some perspectives.

**“If the workplace you want to stay in is not as positive as you need, you have two choices: change yourself or change the system. Both options boil down to changing yourself.”**

It is, of course, your own perspectives, knowledge, attitudes, and perhaps skill shortages that are the most likely source of a less than optimal workplace for you. First, how well do you fit library work? That does not mean do you like orderliness, drink tea, and pet your cat? All okay, if you happen to do it, but the real question is whether you buy into the whole package of library values: free and open access to everything in a setting that provides safety, privacy, and confidentiality. The patron who once reported to me that people were browsing in our government documents sec-

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tion, which worried him because the browsers might see things they shouldn't see, probably should not work in a library without a class in open government. If a child glimpses a page of *The Joy of Gay Sex*, do you find yourself praying that the child's mother is young enough to have another child now that this one is ruined? If so, you should work somewhere else.

Next question: Do you hate everybody? Ann Miketa, pseudonym of Sally Stern-Hamilton, seems to. In her self-published *Library Diaries*, she writes mean, nasty, and identifiable little sketches of patrons in her library, followed by musings about why such people are allowed to breed and live on "our" tax dollars.<sup>3</sup> Miketa should not work in a library and was, indeed, fired. If she is your ideal, you as well should work elsewhere than a library. Do not buy *Library Diaries*. If you wish to experience it, get it from your library, read it free on your Kindle Prime account, or browse the [reader comments in GoodReads](#).

Even if we buy into the library ethic and do not hate everyone, our personalities are not always predisposed to do what is needed. Librarians are famously noted for being Meyers-Briggs introverts. My own pattern is INTP. The first dimension, the I for introversion, implies that meeting a new person is not what is most likely to make my day. Working as a barber or a children's librarian is not my most natural fit; those jobs are natural for extroverts.

With the second dimension, iNtuitive vs. Sensing, the intuitive style tends toward solitary insight rather than group or interpersonal processes. In the third dimension, Thinking vs. Feeling, and the fourth, Judging vs. Perceiving, thinking and perceiving ought to be advantageous for library work, leading to nonjudgemental perception of the bigger picture. Miketa's *Library Diaries* is a fine example of feeling and judging gone wrong.

Maybe the personality types drawn to library work are best suited to be catalogers. We need fewer catalogers all the time, however. Centralized ordering avoids anything not on OCLC. Well, then, if the workplace you want to stay in is not as positive as you need, you have two choices: change yourself or change the system. Both options boil down to changing yourself: You can internally change how you see and feel about your situation, or you can change what you do, which is also changing yourself.

Most of us have a range of personality flexibility when the situation requires, but it may be a stretch. One book suggests that we are more permanently adaptable than we previously assumed. Now that neurologists can do real-time brain scans (of monks and meditators, and grad students), much is being objectively found and verified about our emotions and about neuroplasticity, the ability to rewire our brains and responses through experience and through intentional practice.

Richard Davidson, author of *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*, has interpreted brain scan results to sort personalities along six Meyers-

Briggs-like dimensions. The Davidson dimensions are Resilience (adversity recovery), Outlook (sustained positive feeling), Social Intuition, Self-Awareness (connecting bodily feelings with emotion), Sensitivity to Context, and Attention (sustained focus). Davidson then prescribes meditative exercises, not in great detail, for rewiring your head in ways that you feel are improvements and which could, in theory, show up on a brain scan. Davidson's book is an odd mix of technical brain neurology, autobiography, and self-improvement advice.<sup>4</sup>

A very cheerful book, more practical, and more oriented to an organization setting, is Chade-Meng Tan's *Search Inside Yourself*. Tan does his thing for Google, first as an engineer, then as head of personal growth, and now with their talent team. Primarily, he is teaching mindful meditation. He cites Davidson, Jon Zabat-Zinn, and other mindfulness gurus and researchers, but on his own and while avoiding religious and New Age trends, he provides a cheerful, compelling, and useful guide to a more positive workplace.<sup>5</sup>

NPR recently broadcast a discussion of [business schools teaching mindful meditation](#). You could try it yourself. Try Tan's book, or search "mindful meditation" for plenty of material. You should probably hurry if you want to try it on your own, because it won't be long before your supervisor has been made to try it for an hour and comes with mat and pillow to take you away from whatever deadline you are trying to meet.

If you do not want to get into meditation, just wait until a stressful situation comes up at work. At that point, try watching yourself and all the other characters from above, twelve to twenty feet if the ceiling is high enough. When you see the whole, evaluate how you are acting. Then try to act as you would like to be seen in a movie of what is going on. 📖

### Notes

1. Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, vol. 1, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York: Knopf, 1995), 503, quoted in Pierre Bayard, *How to Talk about Books You Haven't Read* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 7.
2. R. David Lankes, *The Atlas of New Librarianship* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2011), 333.
3. Ann Miketa, *The Library Diaries* (Baltimore, MD: PublishAmerica, 2008).
4. Richard Davidson and Sharon Begley, *The Emotional Life of Your Brain: How Its Unique Patterns Affect the Way You Think, Feel, and Live—And How You Can Change Them* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2012).
5. Chade-Meng Tan, *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness (and World Peace)* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).



# Take Action: Managing Workplace Stress

by Anna Shelton

For the past year, like many of my colleagues and fellow students at the University of Washington Information School, I've been neck-deep in seeking to understand the opportunities and challenges currently facing libraries and information organizations. Many *Alki* readers have years of experience in libraries anticipating and navigating these challenges first-hand. Similarly, you also likely recall moments when your library successfully recognized and ran with an unexpected opportunity. As a newcomer to this field, I look forward to hearing these stories—they're invaluable.

What I can offer is the slightly removed perspective of someone preparing to dive into the pool. I've studied the pool, dangled my feet in the water, and have a general sense of the temperature. I've been mentally preparing to swim by imagining proactive responses to some of the greatest challenges I anticipate in the field during the next few years. From a newcomer's perspective, libraries have a lot on their plates right now. We are fully engaged in reaching toward the immense potential of the future, while simultaneously grappling with how to meet current demands with constrained resources. Against that backdrop, the ability to manage stress is increasingly important.

Though new to libraries, I've worked in nonprofits for ten years. Great colleagues and mentors have taught me many things. One is that the ability to adjust to a changing environment is critical. Another is that enjoyable workplaces acknowledge and address organizational and personal sources of stress. Based on my beginner's experience in libraries, these lessons carry over to library workplaces as well.

Stress experienced by library staff is an issue that's been written about and studied since the mid-1980s. Most of these studies have focused on librarians rather than all library staff.<sup>1</sup> Several times over the past few decades ([most recently in 2010](#)), reports have been published listing "librarian" among the least-stressed of all professions, an assertion often received by the library community with incredulity. In contrast, a [2006 study](#) found library employees to be the most stressed among five occupations reviewed in England (the other occupations being firefighters, police officers, train operators, and teachers).

Several recent articles offer advice to library employees regarding stress management. Law librarian Raquel Gabriel highlights being able to turn in times of stress to colleagues with diverse backgrounds whose experiences and skills one can draw from.<sup>2</sup> Academic library professional Todd Spires, reflecting on his own experience, provides tips for stress management while seeking ten-

ure. Like Gabriel, Spires emphasizes reaching out to colleagues, and also addresses self-care and suggestions for staying organized.<sup>3</sup> The role of training as key to relieving workplace stress emerged from a 2011 study of academic and public cataloging paraprofessionals in Florida.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, concerns about organizational change outranked all other major issues in a study of the well-being of public library employees in the U.K.<sup>5</sup>

Based on a brief review of library literature, my coursework, and discussions with colleagues this year, as well as lessons I'm transferring from other fields, I see three primary categories for considering how stress impacts library employees in the workplace: personal work style; organization-level situations impacting whole institutions and systems; and society-level issues affecting our communities of service. For each category, I offer a few examples of possible sources of stress, as well as action ideas that library employees might try to better manage stress and promote a more positive work environment.

### Personal Work Style

**Source of stress:** Dreaded personal job tasks piling up unfinished.  
**Action:** Think of particularly stressful job tasks you could ask someone to help you make sure you get done, or at least celebrate with you when you've completed them. Consider what's stressful to your colleagues and whether there might be ways you can better support them when those moments come around. Seek training to increase confidence levels.

**Source of stress:** Work-life balance feels off kilter.  
**Action:** Identify what work-life balance looks like for you personally, as well as understanding what it means for your colleagues (it may be very different). Consider creative solutions to meet individual needs while maintaining equity. Explore flexible work schedules to meet family, educational, and volunteer priorities. Encourage conversation across generations about what successful work-life balance looks like in terms of work hours, breaks, and responsiveness expectations regarding email and other forms of communication.

### Organizational-Level Issues

**Source of stress:** Budget cuts and resource constraints.  
**Action:** Help your organization or team put tools in place to get the financial information you need to make good decisions. Consider a variety of ways to prepare scenarios to solicit input from staff that may be affected by new resource constraints. Build a sense

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Anna Shelton is an MLIS student at the University of Washington's Information School.

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## Overdue for Optimism: Creating a Positive Work Environment

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of security that everyone will receive organizational financial news in a timely manner.

**Source of stress:** Rapidly changing library technology; hard to keep up.

**Action:** Help everyone get on board with a clear understanding of the ways that new technologies allow you to achieve your organizational mission. Spend time to find or create easily accessible and clear troubleshooting guides for staff. Identify which staff will be using and troubleshooting the technology most frequently, and determine what training or information they need to feel excited about it. Build in time for training and practice.

**Source of stress:** Fewer personnel than in the past for same or increased workload

**Action:** Get a handle on current workload and prioritize essential, good-to-have, and least essential activities. Consider which activities might need to be dropped or put on hold. Consider changes to staffing models in order to avoid burnout.

### **Society-Level Issues that Impact Our Communities of Service:**

**Source of stress:** General public perspective that libraries are old-fashioned, endangered, or unnecessary.

**Action:** Widely and proactively communicate a vivid, updated definition of “library” and “librarian” and help people understand how we can enrich and improve their own daily lives. Reflect on what excites you about your library’s scope of services. Be prepared to face the implicit or explicit question, “aren’t libraries going away?” by knowing what you will share with strangers about your library that will knock their socks off. Change your answer each week.

**Source of stress:** Library users in the building and accessing digital services, who are increasingly stressed themselves by lack of work, financial troubles, and reduced safety nets, causing more desperation and higher need at the point of library service.

**Action:** Offer top-notch programming that helps library users hone and develop their skills; create and promote strong partnerships with referral resources in the local community; anticipate and experiment with new roles libraries can play to meet emerging local needs; be clear about what your library can and can’t be involved with. Consider new services or service delivery models that may be necessary to support people stressed by the economy. Go back to potential community partners working with underserved groups and proactively remind them of existing library services. Be clear about the boundaries of what you can provide and why.

The list above includes just a few examples to get you thinking about types of stress that you or your colleagues may experience on the job, and a few possible suggestions of ways to reduce that



stress. If you’re already doing many or all of these actions in your workplace, or if you have a different set of stressors, perhaps try conducting a similar exercise to the one above and come up with better answers for your circumstance. It may be helpful to consider how your sources of stress break down into these three categories: personal work style (things you can try experimenting with on your own); organizational-level (things your organization could try differently to shift a dynamic); and societal-level (external factors you can choose how to respond to). Or it might be helpful to make a list of what’s stressful to you right now, accompanied by an action you can take to reduce your stress in each area.

While some sources of stress may be similar for many people, other workplace stress triggers depend on personality and past experience. Knowing what’s stressful for yourself and other members of your team can go a long way toward creating a more positive work environment. Being able to identify stressful situations as having personal, organizational, and society-wide elements may make it easier to brainstorm solutions and try out new ideas.

Libraries are vibrant, vital sources of solutions. In order to stay healthy and nimble, and to best serve our communities, we have to continue prioritizing the health of ourselves, our colleagues, and our organizations. Recognizing the impact of stress and addressing it proactively is one way we can stay focused, creative, and energized to enact our future visions. 📖

### **Notes**

1. Edna McClellan, “Stress and Cataloging Paraprofessionals in Academic and Public Libraries in Florida,” *Southeastern Librarian* 59, no. 1 (2011): 20–29. <http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol59/iss1/5>.
2. Raquel Gabriel, “Dealing with Stress,” *Law Library Journal* 104, no. 3 (2012): 471–475.
3. Todd Spires, “The Busy Librarian: Prioritizing Tenure and Dealing with Stress for Academic Library Professionals,” *Illinois Libraries* 86, no. 4 (2007): 101–108.
4. McClellan, “Stress and Cataloging Paraprofessionals.”
5. Bridget Juniper, Pat Bellamy, and Nicola White, “Evaluating the Well-Being of Public Library Workers,” *Journal Of Librarianship and Information Science* 44, no. 2 (2012): 108–117, <http://lis.sagepub.com/content/44/2/108>.



# Bringing Community to the Summer Reading Program

by Martha Ashenfelter

Five years ago, after running three successful Summer Reading Programs averaging three hundred children each year, I knew that something was missing. Families were excited about the wide variety of programs offered throughout the summer as well as the incentive for kids to keep reading during the summer months. However, there was nothing built into the structure of the program to give kids a sense that they were part of a community of readers. I decided to think outside the box and add a new dimension to the traditional Summer Reading Program (SRP).

This is where local artist Drew Elicker comes into the story. Elicker is not only an artist who works in many mediums, but he is an inventor with a quick and curious mind. In 2008 the theme for the SRP was, “Plant a Seed—READ!” I approached Elicker with the idea of creating a way for the library to track the number of books that all of the participants in the program had read, and for it to be visually inspiring.

Drew created the “Super Duper Extra Special Spiral Sunflower Book Counter” and it was a huge success! For each book read, participants dropped a dried pea into the sunflower and watched it spiral down the transparent stem. The placement of leaves marked calibrations on the sunflower stem to show the total number of books read.

A concept was born, and for five summers now, patrons of all ages have watched as a new SRP creation or contraption is unveiled.

In 2009, using the theme “Be Creative @ Your Library,” I approached Elicker with an idea I had dreamed of for several years. How many “masterpieces” could the children of Jefferson County create in the course of one summer? I purchased posters of well-known masterpieces, drew a numbered grid on the back that matched a cardboard grid the same size as the poster, and then cut the posters into one inch squares. Elicker’s job was to create frames that were worthy of the National Gallery. Throughout the summer patrons entered the library to see an easel with a large golden frame surrounding a partially completed masterpiece. For each book read, participants glued one square onto the masterpiece. At the end of the summer, fourteen completed masterpieces were displayed on the walls of the Children’s Room and


remained there for several months as a testament to the community’s support for reading.

When it was time to “Make a Splash—READ!” in 2010, Elicker built a sunken treasure chest that sat in the middle of the library, complete with pirate booty affixed to the top. Participants dropped golden coins into the chest and watched it fill as the weeks passed and books were read.

Elicker’s pièce de résistance was the “Readerator.” To celebrate the theme, “One World, Many Stories” Elicker researched clocks and clock-making to create a timepiece that challenged participants to complete one year’s worth of reading in one summer. The Readerator included over twenty hand-cut wooden gears that inter-connected in

such a way as to turn a magnificent color globe of the world and count the total number of hours read. Adult patrons were drawn to the beautiful innovation that held a central place in the library for the summer. It became a conversation piece, bringing community awareness to the Summer Reading Program.

“Reading is Out of This World” was the theme for 2012. To accompany depictions of the phases of the moon on the Children’s Room walls and planets hanging from the ceiling, Drew built a rocketship, complete with launching pad. With grins on their faces and excitement in their eyes, children climbed the space station steps to drop marbles of “rocket fuel” into the calibrated spiral tube, watching the chambers fill, measuring hours of reading.

The initial goal was to find a way for reading participants to feel that they were part of something larger than themselves. The library has been successful in achieving this end. Children are inspired by a visible, graphic representation of their cumulative reading efforts, and they enjoy watching the progress. An unanticipated benefit has been the response of adults. Elicker’s creations have proven to be an effective public relations tool in that they have brought awareness to the Summer Reading Program as well as other programming offered to teens and children. 

“How many ‘masterpieces’ could the children of Jefferson County create in the course of one summer?”

Martha Ashenfelter is the youth services librarian at Jefferson County Library.

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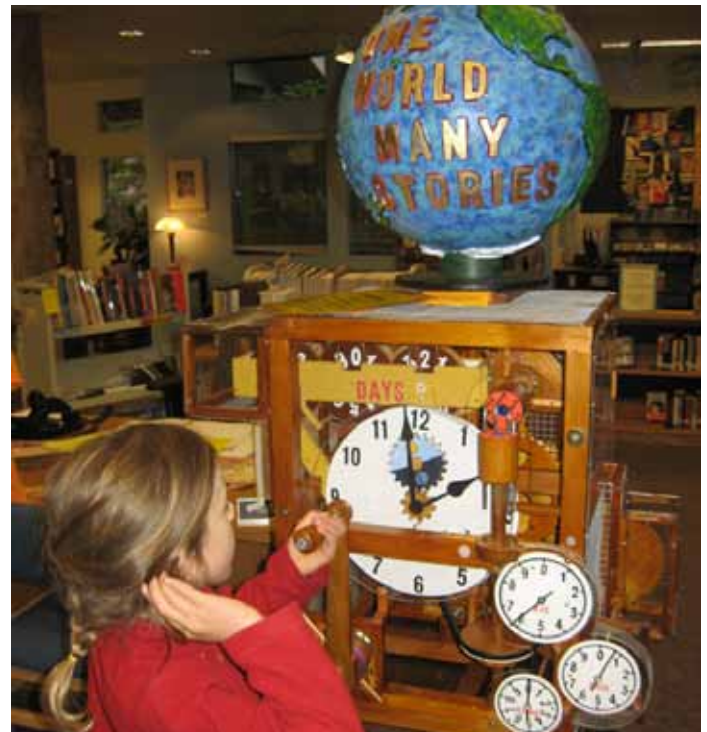
**"Out of This World" rocketship**



**Masterpiece in progress**



**Coins representing books read by SRP participants**



**The Readerator**

# Hope Behind Bars

by Alberta Hendrickson

The sun beats down on me and a slight breeze ruffles my hair as I wait at the crosswalk with a stack of new paperback books. I cross over to the Courthouse complex, which houses the Skagit County Juvenile Detention Center and county jail, among other judicial buildings. I walk up a short breezeway to a door. I am being watched now. Somewhere there is a camera focused on me. I press the button and speak in to the intercom. "It's Alberta from the library. I'm here to do book talks." "Come on in," says a voice muffled by static. And then there is a loud buzz, signaling me that the door is now unlocked and I can enter.

The noise ricochets off cinder-block walls as I pass through a series of locked, metal doors. At times I must press a button so the door can be unlocked. This sense of powerlessness is unfair and unnerving. It is hard to stop the spark of emotion in my stomach. By the time I reach the door which leads into the main facility, I am equal parts terrified, excited, and sad.

The juvenile correction officers sit in large chairs behind banks of buttons in a glass-enclosed room. Surrounding the room are the cafeteria and the recreational area. You cannot pass from one area to another without being buzzed through a door. The cafeteria is circular and is surrounded by the red doors. These are the doors to the cells. The recreational area houses an elliptical machine, treadmills, an exercise bike, a television mounted to the wall, and orange metal tables. A door at the far end of the room leads to the computer room and school. I usually conduct my book talks in the recreation room.

"What is your favorite movie?" I ask a detainee named Juan (all names in this piece have been changed to ensure confidentiality). "Blow," he says. He is sixteen and in eleventh grade, with caramel-colored skin. Grouped around him are other inmates, males and females of varying ethnicities, ranging in age from twelve to seventeen.

The average population ranges from nine to eighteen detainees housed in the facility at one time. Their stay can range from a few weeks to around nine months. I speak to an average of five detainees each visit, since the sessions are limited to those who are on good behavior and, out of that number, those who chose to come.

**“It is a strange dichotomy; the kids who request books about the Green River Killer also want to read *Goosebumps*.”**

The city of Mount Vernon is over thirty percent Latino, and that number increases annually. The Latino population of Mount Vernon brings a wealth of cultural diversity to this town of 32,000 located an hour south of the Canadian border along the I-5 corridor. But Mount Vernon's rapid development (we have just recently acquired our own

Super Wal-Mart) and location have made it a prime target for gangs and drug trafficking. And it is the young people sitting in front of me who are the victims. Many of them are just fourteen years old, and the majority of them are Latino.

One of the most popular books requested is *The Black Hand: The Bloody Rise and Redemption of "Boxer" Enriquez, a Mexican Mob Killer* by Chris Blatchford. Many also request books such as *Tweak* and *Crank*, which are about crank addiction. But they also ask me to bring Calvin and Hobbes, *Holes* by David Sachar, and current titles like the *Hunger Games*. It is a strange dichotomy; the kids who request books about the Green River Killer also want to read *Goosebumps*. It is like they are caught between two worlds, and here in juvie is their chance to stop facing adult issues and just be kids.

The detainees have the option to keep the books I hand out, add them to the communal shelf, or pass them along to a friend. Each time I visit I ask the detainees where the books they requested have ended up. On one visit I ask, "Where is Garfield?" "It's in the control room," one of them says. "The correction officers have it."

The juvenile correction officers are always present when I do a book talk. They are a mix of men and women. They are nurturing yet firm, and many times join in to our conversations. Today, the correction officer stands over by the kitchen window, his arms folded in front of his chest. I am telling a joke. "Why do bees have sticky hair?" I ask. The detainees I am speaking to become quiet, thinking earnestly. Finally, I break the silence, "Because they use honey combs!" I say. This brings smirks and sarcastic laughter. On my first visit, one of the correction officers told me "there isn't very much laughter in here. We could use more of it." Bring on the corny jokes.

I came up with this book talking idea after learning that the Margaret

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Alberta Hendrickson is the youth services assistant and teen specialist at the Mount Vernon City Library.

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Alexander Edwards Trust was awarding small grants to librarians who developed programs to promote pleasure reading to young people. I wanted to create a program for teens who don't have the opportunity to go out and pick up a book off the shelf; those most vulnerable and at a crossroads in life. I was nervous to contact the Detention Center, but they were very enthusiastic and welcoming about the program idea. I had to go through a volunteer screening and background check before I was cleared to start the program.

The effect you have on a person is invisible. When that effect becomes visible, you know you are making a difference. In the course of each year, I visit schools and speak to hundreds of middle school and high school students. On one visit to a middle school back in May, a girl who was attending an after-school book talking session asked me, "Do you remember me?" I told her that I recognized her but was unsure about where I had seen her. She said "you were at the facility" (meaning the detention center) "Well, I'm very glad to see you here," I replied. I think books are only one of the important components of this program. Underlying the importance of pleasure reading is the value of making community connections, and showing teens that someone cares. By providing juvenile offenders with books, I hope I am not only promoting pleasure reading, I am also empowering them, giving them hope, and showing them that there is someone that cares about their well-being.

My book talks aren't always about providing the detainees with entertainment. They do get serious; sometimes we get involved in conversations about gangs and drugs. What makes it more serious is that I know that a lot of these kids have been there. I remember one detainee in particular who reminded me of the serious issues that these kids were facing. His name was Nick. He seemed like he would make an excellent student; he was polite, paid attention, and readily joined in the book discussions. I was describing the books that I brought with me, taking time to talk about each one. But then, I pulled up a book called *Whirligig* by Paul Fleischman, which is about a boy who kills a young girl in a drunk-driving accident. I noticed that Nick had gotten quiet. He ended up taking the book.

I don't know what they've done and I don't ask. I am there to give them entertaining things to read. But I also use the opportunity to offer them books that will make them think or offer guidance. It is my goal to provide the detainees with the books that they don't know they want.

I've learned many lessons from my year of book talking to detainees at the facility. On one visit I brought in a brand new book by Michael Connelly called *The Drop*. One of the inmates who did not request the book selected it. He ended up taking it with him when he left without letting anyone else read it, which upset the others. It occurred to me (too late) that valuable books can be sold on the street. I stopped bringing high-demand titles. Now I just bring fun and meaty books. I especially try to bring books which reflect Latino culture, such as



**The detainees' communal bookshelf**



**The recreation area where book talks are conducted**

*Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan, *Red Glass* by Laura Resau, *Breaking Through* by Francisco Jiménez, and *Buried Onions* by Gary Soto. Classics like *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt and inspirational books such as *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* by William Kamkwamba seem to capture their attention as well.

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## When Your Library Is a Pasture

by S. Madden, etc.<sup>1</sup>

*Paper presented to the April 19, 2012 meeting of the Society Gaius Julius Solinus v. Washingtonius*

You in the public sector may have noticed a new level of patron frequenting your libraries. These individuals, part of the Baby Boomer era—or “mid-century,” as the antique dealers and design shows label it—are retirees. But this group is a very special segment of that population: retired library workers. Remember the old saw: old librarians never die; they just turn into the stacks? Well, they’ve been put out to pasture, and guess what; your library has the greenest grass around.

Not only do they come in frequently, they tend to come in when you open and stay until closing, occupying all the comfortable chairs in the building. If they spot a familiar face, patron or staff, they’ll initiate long sessions of remember whens. If they spot a new staff member, they’ll speak glowingly of the good old days, and dredge up juicy bits of gossip. If they see someone they know from those “golden” times, they’ll hit them up for fine reductions, new titles in the back room, current juicy gossip, and detailed and lurid explanations of their medical conditions, their partners’, and old co-workers’.

To assist you in the inevitable interactions, let me help you with the identity and treatment of specific types you’re bound to encounter.

First is the retired reference librarian. She intervenes as you attempt to help a patron, and suggest other sources—all print. Treat her like the interfering homework mom and send her on a genealogy quest. Next comes the ex-children’s specialist. She can be found lurking in the J section, pulling kids into corners, and telling old-fashioned stories like *Millions of Cats*. Ask her into the back room to mend picture books or give her a bulletin board to decorate.

Then there’s the circulation clerk: He hovers by the checkout area and directs patrons from the self-serve area to the main desk so that the interaction records are elevated. Ask him to help by personally checking out several hundred titles himself. (Remember: retirees are heavy readers and do help your circ figures significantly!) Meanwhile, the media specialist is muttering to herself because there aren’t any more audio books on cassette. Remind this techno-nerd about vinyl, eight-tracks, and UNIVAC.

The regional manager, on the other hand, is by the staff lounge trying to explain the concept of triangulation and shifting staff to eliminate favoritism in neighborhoods. Offer him a blank flip chart and three-colored markers with a vague promise of sharing it at the next staff meeting. The old directors, of course, are muttering about how things were done in *their* day and how change is *not* always a good thing. Smile and agree.

The IT specialist is sitting in a corner by a self-checkout terminal giggling maniacally. Hand her a Kindle or a Nook and go the back room so you can giggle too.

The outreach ex saunters in wearing Birkenstocks, and offering WRLB-PH brochures, while the old volunteer coordinator tries to intercede with dated recruitment forms for literacy, ESL, and book sale opportunities. Give them both updated materials and stand back.

The previous pages are sneaking Mac and Mc authors into the general Ms and putting Dewey numbers into numerical rather than decimal order while laughing maliciously. Ask them to develop a volunteer book truck precision drill team and escort them to the parking lot to practice. If you find the building and grounds guys weeding the new exotic (and expensive) decorative grasses, ask them to assist the pages with the book trucks. When the old bookmobile and delivery drivers start haranguing the staff about Thomas Guides vs. built-in GPS systems, send them out to the drill team to help with wheelies. If that doesn’t work, set them down with mileage maps to find the cheapest routes for gas-guzzling runs.

The Friends of the Library chairperson is way past retirement, and wants the silver service polished, and to have Queen Mary Teas and Café Besalu pastries for the next meeting. Thank her and explain how pleased you are that the YA Punk Rock/Rap/Open Mike/Poetry Slam will be sharing the meeting room with the Friends from now on. The expired library board members are checking your policy manuals and quizzing the staff on the First Amendment. Thank them extravagantly and gently suggest how welcome their wisdom and experience will be in Olympia. In fact, that’s not bad advice to give any old bookie farts that come in and expect privileged treatment or hours of staff time and attention.

Unless it’s me. 📖

### Notes

1. Susan Martha Cecelia Brooks Madden (Mrs. John Charles Thompson)<sup>2</sup>
2. AARP, AAA, ACA, ACCESS, ACLU, ALA, ALMA, AMD: TTT/F&AS/S, ASCLA, AS, BA, BAM, CAYAS, CI, DIV., ESLit, FT.R.F. GRAM4, H-AB, HCC-AB/GL, IFIG, KCLC, KCLS-Ret., LA/C-S, LWTC-AB, LIT-IG, MM, MALS, MOM2, M-I-L-2, NA, NWPCG, PFAW, PERS-1(!), PLA, PNA, PNLA, PIRANHAS-WSG, PAM, QWE, SA, SAS, SASMD, SODA, SAM, SOFRV, STJESL, SWAY, S-G11, S-M6, UD, UP, ULC, UW-GSLIS aka TIS-GL, W 4 K 3 DBCT, WashYARG, WCAC, WLA, WLMA, WALitBd, WOIS, WASBA-BAD BD & DC, WIC, YALSA

## People and Places

The **Foley Center Library** at Gonzaga turned twenty in September. To celebrate, the Marketing Committee, led by **Zoe Mayhook**, decided a birthday party theme was in order for our twelfth annual Foley Fling, complete with party hats, balloons, and gifts for our students. Each student was given a card to collect stamps at the various service desks where they were also treated to goodies and information about that service point. Once their cards were filled, students turned them in for an Italian soda and a cupcake.



### Foley Center Library celebrates twenty years

The Government Finance Officers Association presented **Pierce County Library System** with the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award. The prestigious and highly coveted award recognizes state and local government organizations for preparing budget documents of the very highest quality. Pierce County Library earned the highest rating of “outstanding” for its 2012 budget in many categories, including strategic goals and strategies, descriptions of funding plans, and goal setting.



Neel Parikh

**Neel Parikh**, Executive Director of **Pierce County Library System**, earned the prestigious and coveted Woman of Influence 2012 Award. Judges, comprised of past Women of Influence winners, further recognized Parikh with the Lifetime Achievement Award. Women of Influence recognizes outstanding female leaders in the South Puget Sound. The Lifetime Achievement Award goes to a woman who has made significant and noteworthy contributions to the South Puget Sound. Since 1994 Parikh has directed and guided Pierce County Library with a passion and a vision, making the Library into a premier reading and learning center.

A group of Seattle-based library volunteers just finished cataloging and arranging the entire library collection of the **Seattle Aquarium**. Under coordinator **Electra Enslow, Greg Bem, Christine Malinowski, Nick Fraser, Michael Baird, and Margarete Walden** transformed a the jumbled mass of materials into a finely-organized center of knowledge. The project took several months worth of weekly meetings, and it will contribute to the Aquarium’s upcoming accreditation review.

In August 2012 **Liberty Lake Municipal Library** became a Koha/By-Water Solutions library within the Cooperative Information Network consortium of libraries. Joining CIN has increased Liberty Lake cardholders’ choices dramatically from thirty thousand to five hundred thousand items. Library users are ecstatic, and library staff are excited to be able to offer patrons so much more and in a timely manner.

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# WLA Communiqué

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**Kathy Smargiassi** presented a very successful science series in Marysville during August. Up to sixty elementary-aged children came, many of whom were middle-grade boys. The first week, after Smargiassi read *The Boy who Harnessed the Wind* by William Kamkwamba, they took apart broken electronics. Next, after Kathy read *Color Chaos!* by Lynn Rowe Reed, they conducted two color experiments with chalk and milk. After Kathy read *The Marshmallow Incident* by Judi Barrett, they built catapults. Finally, Kathy read *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* by Dr. Seuss, and they experimented with making oobleck (Borax and glue). Both parents and students had a grand time!

The **Burlington Public Library** inaugurated its new Early Literacy Center with great vigor in September. About one hundred children, caregivers, and funders came together for a concert and Great Tractor Unveiling. In addition to the new tractor kiosk, designed by the Burgeon Group, the library added flying snow geese branded with the core skills of the PLA Every Child Ready to Read Initiative, and new interactive play panels on the Story Barn. The farming theme celebrates the bounty of Skagit Valley and makes a place for children and caregivers to interact with each other in a supportive, kid-friendly place.



## Burlington Public Library's Great Tractor Unveiling

The **Washington State Library** hosted the 2012 CE Forum, which brought together continuing education and training coordinators from state libraries across the nation, August 27–29, 2012 at the Mayflower Park Hotel. **Jennifer Fenton** organized the event and Library Development staff served as hosts. Acting State Librarian **Rand Simmons** emceed the event. A wonderful reception was held at the **Washington Talking Book & Braille Library**.

**Trina Hotaling** recently accepted a library media paraeducator position with the **Bellingham School District** in Bellingham, WA. This is her first library position, and she is very excited to learn about facilitating the educational and recreational needs of over seven hundred middle school students.

**Nancy Tessman**, formerly director of Salt Lake City Public Library, began her tenure as executive director at **Fort Vancouver Regional Library District** on July 16. Tessman rose through the management ranks at SLCPL during a 30-year career there. She joined the library as a branch librarian in 1976, then moved on to become director of community relations, director of human resources, branch manager, branch services director, and deputy director. She became SLCPL director in 1996 and led the library to earn the title of *Gale/Library Journal* Library of the Year in 2006.



Nancy Tessman

Washington Rural Heritage recently celebrated its fifth year of service to small public and tribal libraries throughout the state. Managed by the **Washington State Library**, the collaborative digitization project aggregates local history resources from more than eighty cultural institutions (including thirty libraries) and two hundred private collections. According to staff at the Connell branch of **Mid-Columbia Libraries**, which recently completed a 2011–2012 WRH grant project: “Images of our community that had been forgotten are now available for all to see! This project has allowed us to provide better service to our customers.” In 2013, five new collections will be added to the repository.



Sheep and Baseball, Grant County Museum.  
Courtesy of North Central Regional Library.

**Spokane Public Library** was selected as one of eight libraries nationwide to host ALA's new *Discover Tech: Engineers Make a World of Difference* exhibit. The National Center for Interactive Learning at the Space Science Institute selected SPL to be the kickoff site for the tour, because they were sure SPL “had the experience and the partnerships



# WLA Communiqué

established to begin the tour successfully.” SPL will co-host the exhibit with its partner, Tincan, at the Downtown Library in Spokane through November 27.



Spokane Mayor David Condon builds an arch with his kids at the *Discover Tech* exhibit.

**Spokane County Library District** Technical Services coordinator **David Girshick** retired from the District on October 5, 2012, after 23 years of service. Girshick came to the District from the Montana Historical Society Library where he had been a cataloger and librarian. Girshick migrated the District to the Sirsi ILS as the IT Manager in 2002–2003. He was also active as chair of the Exhibits committee for WLA and chaired the WLN user group.

The **Woodmont Library** garden is being used in conjunction with children’s programming throughout the year. Garden activities are integrated into both the preschool and family story times, and each month through the end of October, there is a garden program highlighting concepts of stewardship, nature, community, and nutrition.



The Woodmont Library garden

Preschool-age children often visited the garden after Wednesday morning story times. They enjoyed picking peas at the beginning of July, and also got to take home some herbs and nasturtiums in mid-July. The final program of the season took place in October.

New director **Tim Wadham** wants to make **Puyallup Public Library** the Library of the Year! No small goal, but the staff is up for it. He says, “I believe that PPL is well positioned not only to continue and grow in its role as the heart and soul of this city, but also in terms of its reach, user following and in the quality of its materials and services. Last night, a citizen welcomed me here and said ‘The library rocks!’” He has an impressive CV as an author and librarian, but the most important thing is his creativity and love of libraries. Welcome aboard!

Long-time city employee and **Grandview Library** assistant librarian **Ruth Dirk** recently received a 25-Year Service Award from the City of Grandview.

**Grandview Library** page **Mary-Alice Herrera** has been named this year’s Harry Christian Cook & Blanche McLane Cook Art Scholarship Winner. She is currently attending Yakima Valley Community College with plans to transfer to Central Washington University where she will continue her art studies.



Mary-Alice Herrera

The **Grandview Library** has been awarded Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Gold certification. Established by the U.S. Green Building Council and verified by the Green Building Certification Institute, LEED is the nation’s preeminent program for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings. This marks the first LEED-certified project in Yakima County.

# The Learning Curve

## Better Together

by Jeanne Fondrie

Since my initial involvement with WALT, the WLA interest group for library trainers, I have been intrigued by the concept of an all staff day. Over the past eight years, I have been hearing about my training colleagues' successes with their staff development days and how they implemented this learning opportunity. Starting an all staff day at my library, Whatcom County Library System, became a pet project of mine. Last year, our administration focused on growing WCLS as a learning organization, and staff day became a great opportunity to kick off this initiative. Our first staff day was a great success, and it was because of that experience that I was more than willing to take on the role of Program Chair for the WLA 2012 conference when asked.

Whatcom County Library System provides library service through our nine branches and outreach and mobile service throughout Whatcom County, except in the city of Bellingham. The Bellingham Public Library serves residents within the city limits through its downtown main library and two satellite branches. Our library systems have a long history of collaboration—we share a catalog and patron database, and materials move between us so seamlessly that many residents of either Bellingham or of the many communities throughout the county do not realize we are two separate systems.

This year, in the spirit of collaboration, we invited the staff of the Bellingham Public Library to join us in our staff day. At first I found it a challenge to take on the involvement of another library—I wanted to have one more year under our collective belt and build on the success of last year. Inviting BPL staff to participate in the planning committee, in the presentations, and in the workshops did seem like the next chapter in our relationship. The benefits of this collaboration in learning have far outweighed any trepidation I had.

What is a staff day? Staff day celebrates the value of library employees. It is a day of learning and team building for all staff regardless of position, planned and produced with very little budget by folks who are not professional event planners. Staff day planning is often done by a committee of staff representing a variety of levels and departments throughout the library. Planning can take from three months to a year or more, depending upon the size of the library and the budget. And, as many of us in staff development know, it is critical to the success of a staff day to have not only approval from administration but also buy-in from managers and key staff.

Our staff day has been organized as a mini-conference, with an opening activ-

ity that includes an introduction by the director, workshop sessions in classrooms, a break for networking and viewing the displays, and a closing activity.

Every workplace has its own culture, and our libraries are no exception. There is nothing like having the perspective of outsiders to help us realize that we have made progress in growing a culture of fun and of learning. Planning this conference together was not the challenge it might have been had we not already had that collaborative relationship. Some of us on the planning committee realized we already know our BPL colleagues through our history of collaboration.

For the past two years we have used the facilities at our local community college for the event. This has worked well—the college is between quarters so there is plenty of parking, and the facilities available include theater, classrooms, and computer labs. In addition, this year the college's library director welcomed our attendees during the break between sessions with a reception and open house.

We started the staff day planning by inviting Bellingham Public Library to join us first; then each library asked for staff volunteers to be on the planning committee so that we would have a group representing a variety of levels and departments. We came up with a theme, "Better Together," which guided us throughout the planning process. Once assembled, the planning committee solicited session topic ideas from staff and developed a list of workshops. We surveyed staff for interest in these sessions to narrow the programs to a final list.

To showcase the individuality of staff members, we decided to ask staff to contribute items that reflected something about their lives outside of work, and attendees at the conference were amazed at the variety of hand-work, musical instruments, photos, and art on display. We also compiled organizational charts of staff photos from both library systems which were also popular, as these helped put faces to names.

After a few introductory remarks by each of the library directors, we started off the day with an energizing activity to visually demonstrate the importance of each person's contribution to the whole. We had everyone up and moving to a song ("Gotta Keep Reading")—we divided them into groups, each doing an assigned movement led by a team onstage in colorful t-shirts. What an inspirational sight from the stage!

Workshop session topics included tips and tricks about our shared library catalog, an eBooks and eReaders petting zoo; giving excellent customer

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Jeanne Fondrie is the learning coordinator at the Whatcom County Library System.

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Staff day begins with a musical activity.

service; our collection development and distribution practices; as well as trends in publishing, early literacy, and technology. The most popular session was called “Innovations in Libraries”—exploring changes libraries are making to respond to community needs, and technologies that are around the digital bend. That this was the most popular workshop speaks volumes about our staff commitment to the future of libraries.

The second most popular session was called “Follow a Book: From Publicity to the Reader’s Hands.” For this presentation, we photographed that particular book from patron request through acquisitions and cataloging, onto the delivery truck, to the holds shelf in a branch, and into the requestor’s hands. This presentation also included changes in publishing in the past twenty years, such as “fads” in book cover design, which authors are making huge sums of money and how much, and the consolidation of the publishing industry. This session’s popularity surprised the planning committee, but it makes sense. Staff from all departments are curious about the nuts and bolts of how our libraries work. Since books are still a central part of libraries it was fun to follow the path of one specific book as it moved through our system and see how each of our jobs contributes to this journey.

Another highlight for many was the closing session celebrating those life’s-not-perfect moments, with presenters telling the stories they submitted about embarrassing mistakes and the lessons they learned. (Always carry a cell

phone with you because you never know when the handle on the restroom door might break and you need to call your co-workers for help!) Who knew we had such amazing comedians and poignant storytellers!

Staff day also provided opportunities for our people to catch up with colleagues from other departments and get to know their counterparts from the other library system. From energizing team-building activities to informative workshops, from networking opportunities to celebrating mistakes, our staff day was a great success and we experienced how our two libraries are truly collaborative.

Lessons learned? Our patrons often don’t know, or don’t understand, that we are two different library systems because workflow between us is fairly seamless: we are the ones who want to understand our differences and our similarities. How do we each process requests? How do we each develop our collections? Who does what at each library? What are the library and technology trends influencing how we will work together in the future? Having a chance to share experiences brings us closer together as colleagues and as people who truly care about our users. We strive to build community and foster learning by starting at our own door, building our own library community, workshop by workshop, discussion by discussion. And our libraries truly are better together.



Staff day participants





David Wright

## An Rx for those Library Blues

by David Wright

As beautiful as this autumn is being, dark days will be upon us soon, just as dark days are befalling libraries, or so many say. Whether it is Seasonal Affective Disorder or Library Budget Blight that is afflicting you, a little positive bibliotherapy may be just the thing.

I confess I'm not a licensed bibliotherapist (and yes, there is a certificate you can get), though I have read an interesting book on the subject—*Read For Your Life*, by Joseph Gold—which, together with Gold's *The Story Species*, makes a compelling case for the primacy of story in how we cope and find meaning in our lives, individually and collectively. But as a readers' advisor I confess I find that bibliotherapy feels a bit too literal and prescriptive, even edging into pretentiousness. Alain de Botton offers bibliotherapy sessions in London at £80 a throw, just down the street from undervalued, underfunded public librarians who do much the same thing on an ongoing basis, free of charge.

Still, I think most readers' advisors get in a fair bit of bibliotherapy on the side. Just yesterday a woman came up to me at the desk and said "I've been diagnosed with cancer: give me some funny stuff to lift my spirits." We had a great time, and I look forward to many more sessions with her in the years ahead. So I'll venture the following prescription of recent titles for anyone who is feeling overly stressed about the struggles of libraries.

***A Universal History of the Destruction of Books: From Ancient Sumer to Modern-Day Iraq***, by Fernando Baez. Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got till it's gone? Hardly a cheerful work, Baez's eloquent, devastating tour of biblioclasms and bibliocausts throughout history helps remind us why libraries matter, why we care, and what's at stake in our struggles to assure their future. Dip into this from time to time to remind yourself of just how heroic it is to keep a library going, and how much we should not take it for granted.

***Hands Around the Library: Protecting Egypt's Treasured Books***, by Karen Leggett Abouraya and Susan L. Roth. With brightly

colored collages of papers, photographs, and fabrics, this picture book tells of a recent inspiring counter-example to Baez's seemingly endless cycle of pillage and plunder. In January 2011 amidst the uprisings of the Arab Spring, a group of protesters joined hands to form a human barricade around the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, avoiding what might have become a terrible repetition of history. A rousing tale of frontline library advocacy, made even better when you share it with a child.

***No Crystal Stair: A Documentary Novel of the Life and Work of Lewis Michaux, Harlem Bookseller***, by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson, illustrations by R. Gregory Christie. Library workers will feel an immediate kinship with Michaux's mission to empower and enlighten his fellow man, informing his struggle against overwhelming odds to found the National Memorial African Bookstore, the first black-owned bookstore in America. Michaux created a crucial community of thought and discourse whose far-reaching influence is still felt decades after the shop shut its doors. A great reminder of what we're about, what is possible, and the kind of influence we can have in the lives of people and communities.

***The Reading Promise: My Father and the Books We Shared***, by Alice Ozma. An inspiring memoir that cuts past the bromides and zeroes in on the heart of why literacy matters, telling of a father and daughter's pledge to read to each other for one hundred nights, and then one thousand nights, and then on to an epic uninterrupted streak of readalouds lasting 3,218 nights, through all the vicissitudes of growing up until Alice left for college. I'll give you one guess as to the father's day job.

***Epistophilia: Writing the Life of Ona Šimaitė***, by Julija Šukys. The moving story of a librarian and cataloger at Vilnius University who regularly risked her life—and came very near to losing it—to aid and rescue Jews during the Holocaust. Šimaitė's story might never have been told except that her passion for letter-writing made her an archivist for her own remarkable and inspiring life.

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David Wright is a reader services librarian at the Seattle Public Library's Central Library, is a regular contributor to many library publications, and teaches readers' advisory at the University of Washington iSchool.

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***Libriomancer***, by Jim Hines. “Books are a uniquely portable magic.” So says Stephen King, referring to the way words set on a page spring to vivid life in our minds as we read. Hines’ rollicking fantasy adventure takes this fact and runs with it, telling of a librarian caught in a struggle against dark powers, armed with the ability to summon forth real objects out of books. A perfect escape from the everyday, brimming with literary references and positive library vibes, the start of what is sure to be an enjoyable series.

***Tempted Again***, by Cathie Linz. A former librarian, Linz revisits the stacks frequently in her sly, funny romances. When she returns to her hometown to take a job (and a pay cut) at the deliciously titled Hopeful Memorial Library, Marissa Bennett’s own hopes are all but dead. Then she finds herself face to face with the town sheriff, an old sweetheart who has returned home for his own reasons. At one time they were each other’s everything, but now he doesn’t seem to recognize her. *Awkward*.

***The Atlas of New Librarianship***, by R. David Lankes. Although I’m not quite sure why this coffee-table sized book on the future of librarianship has quite so many reiterative diagrams and flow charts, I’m refreshed and inspired by Lankes’s basic message, which is that librarians are more important than ever in fostering knowledge in their communities, going on to suggest what “fostering knowledge” might actually mean. Are all the answers here? No, but Lankes definitely shuffles the deck. Refreshing. 📖

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My book talks never go as planned. I like to write questions down to ask the detainees—if they are bored I change direction. Sometimes I talk about a book for twenty seconds. Sometimes we discuss it for a few minutes. I always ask the detainees a series of questions in order to get a better picture of their reading life. These questions include “Did your parents read to you when you were young?” “What is your favorite book?” and “How many books do you have at home?”

Some of the detainees answer that last question saying that they have hundreds of books at home. Some say they have none. I remember asking this question to a teen named Carlos. Carlos was a tall, hefty Latino boy who was always very cheerful and volunteered his opinions readily. The first time I met him I asked him how many books he had at home. He said none. I went through my talks, and he selected *Esperanza Rising* at the end of the session. A month later, he was very excited when he told me that he had given *Esperanza Rising* to his mom and little sister, and they both had read it. This time when I asked him the question “How many books to you have at home?” he said, with a smile, “one.”

I purchase my books from a local, independently owned bookstore in Mount Vernon called the Tattered Page. Half of the program is funded by the MAE grant, and the rest of the money is generously donated by the Friends of the Mount Vernon Library. With this money I buy books, which I choose carefully. I try to balance fun titles with serious and inspirational ones. I also bring in as many requests as I can, limiting the serial killer and drug lord titles that are in high demand. But if I do bring in a controversial or edgy book, I am sure to balance it with an inspirational title. I bring in self-help books like *The Teen’s Guide to World Domination* by Josh Shipp, which is an excellent book on how to make good choices and take control. I also bring in adult titles such as *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch, which is true story about a man who is dying, talking about how he achieved his dreams.

After the session is over I watch the teens line up to go back to their cells. It is this part of the visit that is most poignant to me. They stand in a line in their orange jumpers holding their hands behind their backs as if in invisible handcuffs. Today each pair of hands holds a book. I recognized the dark gray cover of *Dune Messiah* by Frank Herbert in the hands of the last boy in the row. Sometimes I feel I am a fool to pin my hopes on this. “Will it work?” I wonder. “What will happen to them when they get out?” But mostly I feel happiness radiating upwards from my gut. I gather my things and stand waiting at the door that leads to the exit. The door buzzes to let me out. “Thanks for coming!” says a disembodied voice, and I feel the cool metal door handle press against my palm, just before the concrete tunnel swallows me whole. 📖

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