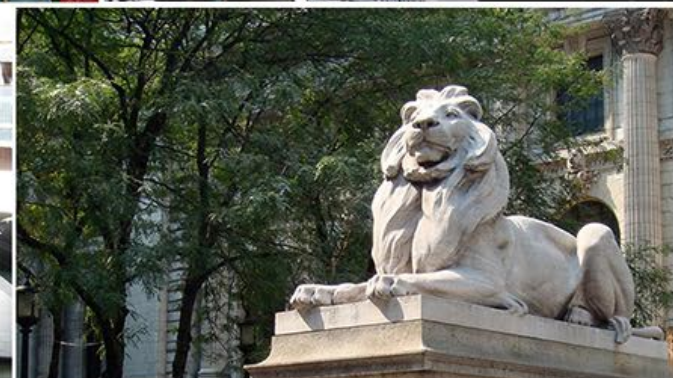
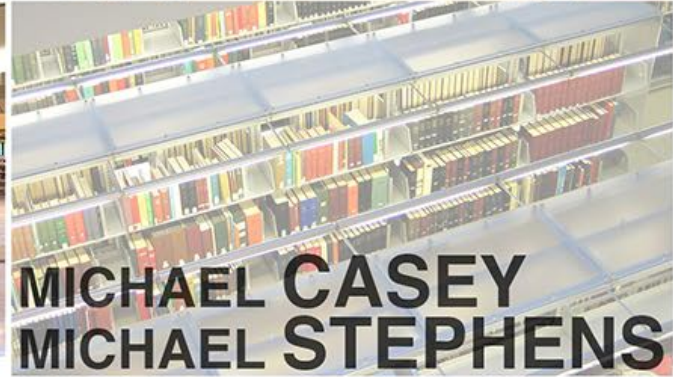




THE TRANSPARENT LIBRARY



The Transparent Library

Michael Casey and Michael Stephens

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2014

Michael E. Casey and Michael T. Stephens

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We've wanted to assemble the "Transparent Library" columns for some time. Including a few extra pieces from "Office Hours" and Tame the Web, we believe this collected group of essays offers insights, conversation starters, and roadmaps for improving the openness of an information organization. Thank you for reading.

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The Transparent Library Revisited

Via a Google Hangout in February of 2014, Michael Casey and Michael Stephens chatted about the “Transparent Library” column and how things look for transparency a few years after having originally written their column.

MS: What comes to mind when you think of the transparent library in 2014?

MC: We started writing the column just before the major economic downturn, which hit a lot of people really hard. It also hit libraries hard. You and I were writing about getting staff to stand up and be noticed—in the proper way—and we were asking administrators and directors to be open in their actions and to be transparent in their decision-making and to reach out to their communities. We were trying to tell staff that if they want to be noticed, there are some better ways than others. That was good advice for the period that we were in at that time.

But some very difficult times started in 2009, and I think we saw a lot of libraries taking two different paths. Some libraries continued to grow more open and engage with their communities—to use participatory methods in formulating services and programs and events for the public. We saw others use those difficult times as an excuse to retrench and take a step back, close the doors a bit on openness and transparency, and revert to whatever they defined as core library services. So, fast forward, and here we are in the beginning of 2014, and we have a lot of reasons to be positive, and every reason to hope we’re turning an economic corner. We have examples of libraries that have really used this opportunity. In our column, “Reasons for Optimism” we wrote, “This is not a time to retrench or retreat.) Rahm Emanuel, then President Obama’s Chief of Staff, said, “Never let a serious crisis to go to waste.”

And from our column, “For libraries and librarians—now is the time to look around and ask ourselves, what could we be doing that we’re not? What additional services could serve some of the increasing number of people in need of assistance?” I think, at that time, that we were really stressing to libraries, “Listen, look outside your comfort zones, be aware of what’s happening around you, and adjust your services accordingly. Use this opportunity to look out into your community that really needs assistance and deliver it to them.”

I think we saw some libraries reaching out. Unfortunately, we also saw some libraries not reaching out. But now we’re in 2014, better times are on the horizon, and this is the time, whether you’re talking to library administrators and directors or front line librarians—now is the time to politely and diplomatically stand up and shine. That’s where I envision libraries at this point, after writing for so many years and sitting back and watching this progress.

MS: Well, I agree with you. I think we did a couple of things over those 29 columns. I think we focused on library administrators, like “Dear Director,” and I am so glad that we did. But the columns where we addressed the front line staff were important. Those folks could now be managing libraries and could have taken something away from *The Transparent Library*, and now they may be leading a library or a branch. The most interesting thing,

looking back at that last column, were two of our suggestions: “teach them” and “learn always.” It’s timeless, beautiful stuff, and if we look at the first one, “teach them,” who knew we would become teachers in our jobs as librarians? It is so clear to me that, if you are going into librarianship or if you are mid career in librarianship, you are *teaching* or you are *guiding* others who are teaching in librarianship. King County Library, in Washington state, which I highlighted in my presentations, expanded into teaching and assisting in their county during the economic crisis. So, let’s fast forward to what this looks like in 2014. We’ve run the gamut from LA County helping people to get high school diplomas to everything the Chattanooga Public Library is doing on their “Fourth Floor” to encourage the community to collaborate. The list of things libraries are doing is so broad—from technology to social topics to advocacy. It really makes me happy. If we go back to our very first column, “Introducing the Michaels,” one of the things we emphasized was to have open communication and to be scanning the horizon. We also wrote about the importance of learning.

MC: I think one overriding theme I see in all our columns is this shift or move from passive librarianship to active librarianship—where the library reaches out to the community and is actively involved with the community to better understand what they need. Whether it’s career counseling or the maker spaces and everything in between—all the levels of literacy, digital, etc. that are out there to choose from—and no single library can address them all. But we’ve now got a lot of fantastic libraries steering in new directions, doing a damn good job at it, with staff leading the way. In a lot of the great examples we’re looking at, library staff couldn’t be doing what they’re doing, such as at Chattanooga Public Library, without great leadership from the top, but you also have some very driven middle level people there, who are absolutely making some exciting things happen.

MS: I’m looking at “Embracing Service to Teens” from May of 2008, and it’s very interesting to see how far we’ve come in that realm and the opportunities for teens in some of the real cutting edge libraries. I think of Justin, who writes for me and works at the Chattanooga Public Library.

MC: We were writing about how teens should have access to Facebook, and now flash forward to 2014, and teens don’t care a whit about Facebook.

MC: Where are the front line staff now? What’s their situation in 2014, and how has it changed since 2009?

MS: I think it’s changed. When I think of front line staff, I think of everyone who is meeting the public, and that includes our degreed librarians, as well as the paraprofessionals and those folks who keep everything running. One thing that is very interesting is that as self-checkout has become much more the norm, staff duties have changed to be more focused on helping people. I remember a story about a director saying that with self-checkout, there would be no more need for circulation staff. What message did that send? Maybe it wasn’t really meant to sound negative but crafting the message is so important. The positive thing that happened in many libraries was circulation staff were able to do far more interesting and useful things such as readers’ advisory, helping people with technology, and levels of service, which I think are so important. It’s interesting that much of the frontline staff has

changed, but maybe it has stayed the same a bit too. We still don't know how willing everyone is to have those conversations and determine what actually goes on at the library.

MC: I think we touched upon something—about some libraries accelerating during these times—and I think we've continued to see this trend. Some libraries that entered this economic crisis still have two very distinct points of service in their library: the checkout desk and the reference desk. Some libraries were a little ahead of the curve and consolidated before the crisis began, and some took the crisis as an excuse to merge those two points of service and they added self-checkout/in. From what I've seen and heard, a lot of the readers' advisory came from the circulation staff. Those libraries that have employed some of the new learning tools, the Learning 2.0 training and other trainings, have been able to get the new technology into everyone's hands and help all staff be comfortable dealing with the public. Libraries that aren't doing this training are, I think, having a more difficult time with this transition. Hopefully, with budgets getting a bit better, libraries will be able to put a few more people in their training departments and begin talking to all staff for some of these training issues. We look at Chattanooga Public Library and others that have great technology, like 3D printers and creator software, and sometimes staff is uncomfortable, if they don't know how to use all of it. There are changes in some types of service delivery that librarians are having a difficult time getting used to. We're putting these things out there for the customer, but we're not going to be completely fluent in how to use this equipment. I don't want to say this is cutting edge equipment we're putting out, it's not, but it is new for the library to be able to offer this. The customer is going to have to know or learn how to use the new equipment, because the library cannot afford to train all the staff on how to become experts. That's a difficult concept for many library staff to get comfortable with, but it's an area they're going to have to get comfortable with.

MS: This brings a couple ideas up for me. Having just taught the MOOC, one thing that is interesting is the group of people who came, were community participants, and were the core group. To some degree they were so excited, and that says we need more of that—Learning 2.0, 23 Things, 23 Mobile Things. Those were excellent programs, and the potential for large-scale professional development and learning for librarians was huge. These trainings can be helpful to combat some of the things you mentioned about maybe not knowing exactly how everything works and starting to understanding these trends. The other side of it is that we have to be comfortable enough to say, "I don't know, let's figure this out together." That is uncomfortable for us—we've always been the ones who *knew*.

MC: We always knew more, typically knew more about the tools we were offering and how to use them. If you came to us with a medical issue, we didn't necessarily know the medical issue, but we knew the databases and tools where we could steer you to find the answers to your questions. Now we're just steering them to a tool or piece of equipment and saying here you go. Now, we know where to point them to learn how to use it—in other words, here are the places you, the customer, can go to learn how to use this tool. But you can't ask the librarian how to use these new tools in detail because it's too much of a niche area. For the library, it's a balancing act and a trade off. We can't offer all of these things with any reasonable expectation that our staff will know all about it, but we want to offer these tools and technologies to the public. So that word "uncomfortable" is important because what

comes with “uncomfortable” is stress, and we don’t want that as a standard operating environment. We don’t want a stressful environment to be the norm for librarians. In order to get past that, we have to get comfortable saying, “Here’s the tool. I can’t teach you how to use it, but I can point you to these sources and give you the time and resources to learn how to use this tool.”

MS: Right, and possibly there might be some co-learning going on. That’s the thing I would like to see happening. I am going to disagree just a little and throw this out and tell me what you think. As staffing patterns change, if we take this model and go forward with it a bit more, might we continue to hire degreed librarians who will be managing projects and services but maybe there will also be some very specialized folks. They may or may not have a library degree, and they will work with customers with new technologies in these collaborative spaces.

MC: Yes. I think what we’ve seen over the past few years are patterns of library staffing models that have moved to the generalist idea. They got rid of the separate circulation and reference desk. They created a Help Desk, or whatever it was called. We saw a decrease in the number of children’s and teen librarians. Everyone was moving towards this concept of generalist. But I don’t think that these are viable long-term solutions to efficiency issues in librarianship and libraries. So, I would agree with you, I think what we will see is more people who have specialized areas of knowledge and interests. They may not be available for every hour your local library is open, but they will be available. Hopefully, there will be a structure in place that allows you to arrange to meet with them when they are there, so you can learn from their knowledge and specialized skill sets.

MS: I would also venture to say that one of the roles for the librarian is knowing how to put people together: “Here’s someone who wants to do this, and here’s a staff person who has these skillsets. I’m going to be the connector that brings them together and gives them the space to learn from each other.”

MC: And this is where we’re seeing that this does not necessarily have to be library employees. This is where partnerships with your local community organizations and schools can pay real dividends. We’re seeing high school robotics and CAD/CAM teachers and students coming into local libraries and teaching classes for high school and middle school students on those same subjects that they teach and learn during the day. They’re reaching a broader audience of people interested in learning about this stuff, but who otherwise don’t have access to people with those areas of expertise. These are partnerships where I’m hoping we see more and more activity.

MS: Right, I like that. The community experts become part of the library.

MC: And there’s a reward for the teachers, too, because now they’re in front of an audience who is there not simply because they must be there, but because they want to be there.

MS: As I look at the data coming out of the MOOC we taught, I really see a place for public libraries to host hybrid online learning opportunities, as well as learning opportunities within the library from community experts. This is broad—this can be academic, as well as public libraries and others.

MC: And hopefully some of those different library types are actually cooperating in their communities.

MS: To conclude, we're still tied to what we've always done—we're just doing it in different ways and involving our constituents in new ways.

MC: Yes, we still need to talk to our communities, include them in our decision making, give them data and stories along the way, and make ourselves a part of that community. We just went through a difficult economic time. We know these things will happen again. Let's find ourselves better situated for it the next time it happens. Let's make sure we're tied more closely with those community organizations that can help us weather economic storms. These could be ties with education over various literacy efforts, or with other organizations. Don't let your library be isolated from your community.

MS: I'd say those libraries that existed as "islands" in their communities, those that rely on people coming to them, may have suffered more than other libraries that had a community rally and come to their defense. So those inroads, those connections to the community are probably one of the best things we can do.

MC: We saw a lot of very different reactions from libraries regarding funding issues. Some libraries would have nothing on their website or in their branches regarding their budget woes. It was as if nothing was happening. The only indication was a closed front door due to reduced hours. If you weren't paying attention, you might not know what they were really going through. You weren't aware that they were cutting books, cutting staff—no one was going door-to-door in their community saying "help us." And then there was the exact opposite. Go to the New York Public Library website, and you'd see the popups right in front of your face saying, "Hey, this is what's going on. Write to your local political representative and help us out." We saw some libraries being very active and others being very passive. Hopefully, there will be some interesting case studies coming out of these past few years before the next go around of economic difficulties.

MS: It was Troy, Michigan that did the video, [Save the Troy Library](#), about what happens when a library faces a vote for a tax increase. The reverse psychology tactic they used is brilliant. It's also demonstrative of radical community engagement - libraries don't often do things like promoting a book burning party.

We saw two huge examples of a lack of transparency with the issues in Champaign, Illinois and in Virginia, where the books were going into the dumpster. It amazes me, and I wrote in "Office Hours" that this would have been the perfect chance to write a "Transparent Library" column.

MC: We've seen that in some decision-making—don't tell anyone anything and only answer questions if you have to, and that results in some bad incidents, as we've seen.

MS: And we still hear from librarians. I think we thanked them in our last column—all of the folks that would come up to us at a conference or send us an anonymous email that said, "Here's what's happening at my library." Hopefully, those things are changing.

MC: And I think times *are* changing. It's worth looking at "Check Your Ego at the Door." There's an art to being heard.

MS: I think some of that comes back to reflective practice: "Here's what I want to do with my career." If you are so inclined, and you want to go beyond service in your library, and publish, make presentations, or serve on a committee, you should set a course and stick to it. Say, "This will be my practice, and this is how I will present myself."

MC: Right. You always want to be aware of the perception of your words—how you are being heard.

MS: Be aware of that and be humble. That's a word we used many times in the columns.

MC: Yes, in "The Road Ahead," we said, "Shine, but be humble."

Introducing the Michaels

April 1, 2007

What prevents a library from being transparent? Barriers. Roadblocks. Inability to change. The culture of perfect. The transparent library contains three key elements: open communication, adapting to change, and scanning the horizon. We'll explore these ideas and offer solutions for those struggling with new models of service, technology, and a decidedly opaque climate.

The web has changed the old landscape of top-down decisions. "As the web becomes the greatest word-of-mouth amplifier in history, consumers learn to trust peers more and companies less," said Chris Anderson, author of *The Long Tail*. "And as the same trends play out within the firm, businesses are shifting from command and control to 'out of control,' distributing more and more power to the rank and file."

Wade Roush's idea of continuous computing connects to the present environment of blogs and wikis. The rise of the citizen journalist, armed with a cell phone camera and a desire for fairness and openness, has created a great stir in media and the nonprofit sector. How can libraries, scrutinized by as many blogging voices, respond in such an open, online environment? The Cluetrain Manifesto, published in 1999, urged businesses to speak with a human voice online. In 2007, the social world of "continuous computing" demands it.

Below are some tenets of the transparent library.

Open communication

The talking library has no secrets and gathers as much input as it can.

The transparent library both listens and talks.

The transparent library is connected, breeding the expectation for open conversation.

The transparent library establishes ways for our users to talk to us and among themselves with tools like blogs and wikis, community open houses, outreach events, and surveys.

Do we hear our users and staff when they ask for change and new services? Do we hear them when they tell us that what we're doing isn't working? Becoming the corner office curmudgeon is painfully easy, but maintaining an open and accepting ear takes hard work and a willingness to listen.

Open communication means talking to the staff and community about the library's mission, plans for new services, and idea building. It means having open meetings where library administrators can discuss new ideas, either inviting in younger staff to high-level planning sessions or taking your meetings to the far points of the community to converse about new buildings or major service changes.

The transparent library wants to hear from the squeaky wheel but, even more importantly, also wants to hear from those without a strong voice, those in the community who need the library's services but don't always have the time or ability to speak up at board meetings or write letters.

By structuring the transparent library for constant and purposeful change we reduce the negative impact that change has on both the staff and user. Incorporating change into the organization through creative teams and open lines of communication allows the transparent library to add new tools, respond to changing community needs, and move ahead with new initiatives without shaking up the foundation.

Scan the horizon

Trend-spotting should be a skill for 21st-century librarians. Recognizing trends can lead to innovation and improvement. Folks like the technologists at Hennepin County Library, MN, or John Blyberg at the Ann Arbor District Library (now at the Darien Public Library, CT) recognize that people seek human connections online and integrate those social mechanisms into their catalogs. The open source software movement as a trend is changing the way libraries and vendors interact. (See Roy Tennant's "Open Letter to ILS Vendors" for more.)

Successful gaming programs in libraries not only shatter the stereotypes of shushing librarians trying to control young people but offer a noisy, exciting, and fun place to be after school. And as we've seen in Maplewood, NJ, and elsewhere, the ability of the contemporary library to respond to after-school issues successfully is critical. Libraries have always been places to do more than simply read books, and now they're becoming social networking centers, whether the librarian comes along willingly or not.

Turning "No" into "Yes"

May 1, 2007

Often times, it's born at the desk. Staff members think of a new idea, and they want to share it with the decision-makers. They put together a presentation or proposal at the suggestion of their immediate supervisor and take it up to administration. But they receive a cold reception. Not only are they told, "No," but they were "talked to" by the department head: "How could anyone think such an idea would work? Didn't they realize that their idea had been tried five years earlier?"

Other times it's born at a rousing conference or workshop. Ideas, innovation, and inspiration are the order of the day. Back at the library, a proposal for that new blog, instant messaging (IM) reference service, or the technology du jour gets the green light. But reality sinks in as roadblocks go up; poor planning diverts a good idea into limbo and a chain of long, drawn-out meetings sucks every bit of life from the inspiration.

A committee forms to analyze the technology, then a team comes together to write best practices, and then a workgroup begins a pilot program-and suddenly it's 12 months later, and nothing has happened. More time is spent proofing and wordsmithing than actually planning and implementing.

Openness to change

Is this an exaggeration? Far too much truth lives in this scenario. And it's not just new ideas that get trapped in this culture of perfect. Good people every day get trampled on by staffers who insist on blaming others for their own ineptitude. How many times have we all heard, "We're not going to answer your question because you didn't ask it correctly"?

Good employees who were once open to change and receptive to new ideas become entrenched in their positions and somewhere along the way become closed, curmudgeonly, and unreceptive to new ideas. Things now must be done "my way" and "by the book."

New ideas are feared, and the words used to describe their birth become weapons. We hear "immature" and "kids" and "inexperienced" casually tossed off to symbolize the younger generation, while older staff who have new ideas are labeled whiners and dissenters and "those who should know better."

Avoiding disaster

These dual issues of "the culture of no" and "the culture of perfect" are not easy to address. Alone, they can cause serious damage to the library. Together they spell real disaster-- public relations nightmares, financial debacles, and, perhaps most damaging, the complete

loss of trust between staff and administrators. This last rending is sometimes near impossible to repair.

Fractures that run this deep in an organization require structural change. Setting up vertical teams with staff from all levels of the organization is one of the first things that can be done. Strong vertical teams engender trust and solicit buy-in. They make frontline staffers actually part of the solution, and they allow everyone from the top-level administrator to that desk staffer see the big-picture issues the library faces.

Choose what fits

Successfully turning a "no" into a "yes" might simply mean allocating some time and staff to the Emerging Technology Team or Emerging Ideas Committee. Their exploration, evidence gathering, evaluation, and open discussion via a blog may be time very well spent. The more we know about a technology and its pitfalls the better.

The more we see past technolust and keeping up with the library down the street or on the cover of L., the better we are equipped to make decisions for our users. We'd rather see three well-researched, well-planned initiatives go onto the project board than every foray into new realms and new sites the Biblioblogosphere is buzzing about. Simply put, choose what fits for you.

Get around the problem of "no" by creating an innovation workgroup. This team, charged with accepting new ideas and using the vertical-team format to give them all a fair and impartial review, can meet monthly to examine the newest crop of suggestions and ideas. Done properly and without reprisals, all ideas can get the open and honest evaluation they deserve.

A few libraries even keep logs of each time staff members are told "no." Debriefing once a month, they discover that sometimes a string of nos can become yeses if policies are changed or shifted even slightly. Try a "no log" or innovation workgroup and see.

Right tool for the job

We've done many presentations highlighting the tools of the day--and we've written on them extensively. It's easy to forget they're not for everyone. Choose the tool combination that fits for your library.

Taming the culture of perfect can be done with a different mindset, one that involves play and experience.

Living Out Loud

June 1, 2007

You're "out there" whether you want to be or not. In the March 2007 Wired cover article, "The Naked CEO," Clive Thompson illustrates that corporate blunders, missteps, and outright lies are exposed every day. One of our favorite examples is Diebold insisting that its voting machines are safe and secure while YouTube hosts a video of how to crack its security.

It's similar to a child standing in front of you and saying he has not eaten a candy bar when you can see chocolate all over his face. We can understand lies from a four-year-old, but from an adult or, worse, from a large corporation, we cannot. And the public cannot, either.

It's the cover-up

Transparency and arrogance are like oil and water--the two simply don't mix. This is a very good reason for encouraging transparency in any organization. It's very difficult for a transparent library to lie and shy away from the truth--the structurally transparent organization protects people from themselves. But the idea that transparency builds morale and creates buy-in is less known and worth exploring.

How do libraries embrace this idea of transparency? Part of the Library 2.0 mission is to involve the community in creating and evaluating library services. It's simply not possible to include a community in this sort of service evaluation without providing honest numbers and evaluations. Transparency in service review is critical to its success.

What should stay private?

We think many personnel issues and financial dealings need some level of privacy or discretion. However, sharing big-picture thinking with staff is beneficial because it moves the library forward, and it is always best to be honest. If you talk to staff openly as employees or contributors who can innovate, meet user needs now, and eventually move into positions of leadership, then you've done succession planning correctly.

Are you promoting people because of their contributions and potential to lead or is someone being put into a management job "because she's been here the longest"? We would certainly want potential management candidates to be clued into the library landscape, having already participated in the creation of services or enhancements to existing services.

Buy-in creates success

It's easy for staffers to give lip service to an idea they don't believe in and then step back and watch it fail because they had no input or information or, in some cases, not even an inkling that a new service or technology was coming.

Corporate blogs and wikis--and any other tools that create transparency in the organization--foster the concept of vertical teams, where front-line staff have the ability to communicate and cooperate with top-level administrators. This internal openness is as important as external transparency. Building morale within the organization--and sharing the big-picture ideas with everyone who will listen--creates a stronger and more motivated work force, one willing to participate and share new ideas. Such internal openness will translate into external transparency, which is vital to the library's future.

This column, like Clive Thompson's article, began on our blogs. Jeff of gathernodust.com commented, "I think the transparent manager has to be able to open the decision-making to his or her staff and be able to handle criticism openly. Managers must remember that if they don't open up decision-making, often the decision may not be followed."

Lies unwelcome

Thompson correctly points out that secrecy is sometimes required in any organization--he uses the excellent example of Steve Jobs and the iPhone. But Thompson says that "it's not secrets that are dying"; it's lies that are no longer tolerated in the transparent organization. Openness is a one-way street; there's no going back. Your public, your customers, expect it and will hold you to it.

The Open Door Director

July 1, 2007

The job of library director is difficult and often underappreciated. These days, library directors are more like university presidents, needing to build support in the community, raise money, and make a name for themselves and their library. Obviously, this varies by the size of the community, but all library directors need to garner sufficient political and community capital to get budgets approved and expansions funded and to keep door counts high.

It's no longer enough for the library director simply to keep the place running. Today's director is politician and lobbyist, fundraiser and spokesperson, juggling all of these titles while administering a library.

Why is this relevant to a column about transparent libraries? Because it is one of those dark truths that most people in the field know but few dare speak about. Libraries do not operate in a vacuum. They are not preordained to receive funding or even to exist [see Jackson County, OR, story, News, LJ 6/1/07, p. 14ff.]. Like every other organization, libraries must account for the money they request and consume. Transparency-putting our cards on the table-allows us to learn and grow, and it lets our community see us for all we are, including our vulnerabilities.

Remaining relevant

One foundational Library 2.0 concept is that the library must make itself sufficiently relevant to the local population so that funding and political support remain and grow stronger. This means libraries must act in concert with other nonprofits that use marketing campaigns, lobbying, and grassroots networks to develop long-term, deeply rooted sustenance across different demographics and political strata.

Transparency plays a role in helping library directors achieve these goals by opening the process to everyone. How many times have libraries held closed-door meetings about budget problems, or tried to hide fiscal shortfalls by moving money around so no one would notice? We often think that keeping such things from the public will save us from being "in the news," but what it really does is keep the public from knowing just how dire our situation might be. We confuse the short-term advantage of avoiding media coverage with long-term success of stable funding and greater outreach to patrons.

Making actors

Opening the process takes the public out of the role of spectator and transforms them into participants. If the library director has done her job, the community becomes even more

than a participant, it becomes a stakeholder. And, as any lobbyist will tell you, stakeholders are far more willing to fight for what they have a stake in than almost any other group. And stakeholders vote.

Today's library director can facilitate transparency by building openness within the organization and using the power of communication to reach out to the community. Open organizations, where staff and public feel free (and safe) to contribute new ideas and suggestions and to play a role in their implementation and evaluation, will win more long-term proponents than closed organizations that hide failures and weaknesses.

Reaching out

Open communications, one of the three key elements of the transparent library (LJ 4/1/07, p. 30), includes going out to the community, both physically and virtually, talking to people about their needs, about what the library offers and wants to offer, and about what it requires to move forward.

The 21st-century library director visits local community groups, business organizations, civic associations, and churches. He uses surveys-both paper and online-as well as some of the newer tools such as blogs and social networks.

Building broad community support today means reaching a population that is online and interacting. Different demographics call for different tools. This may require the use of several online social networks, with a message targeted to each group.

Online transparency

Your MySpace presence might talk about your plans for teen activities and your need for their parents' vote in an upcoming referendum. Your Flickr page could boast of your latest children's services activities, and your blog on the local senior center's web site might talk about your upcoming computer classes and tax preparation workshop.

The goal, however, is to use all of these new tools just as you use the tools that you've been working with in person. Reaching out, being open and honest, and inviting feedback and input will help you succeed in a most difficult task.

The Transparent Library School

By Michael Stephens, May 15, 2011

LIS faculty, administrators, and other stakeholders could take a lesson in transparency from their students. At the “Hack Library School” blog (bit.ly/eAeELW), students in various LIS programs around the country offer up opinions, insights, and some useful truths about their LIS education. Recent posts have compared information architecture courses across schools and addressed the divide in classes between students whose focus is user services and those focused on technical services.

The posts are open, straightforward, and reflective. The discourse is --transparent.

Individual student blogs like Ben Lainhart’s also offer a glimpse into the detailed workings of LIS coursework. In his “Is Online Education Still Stuck In 2001?” (bit.ly/hpCr5k), he writes about taking an online course that featured an out-of-date textbook as well as a less than engaging delivery: “I do not want to take any more online classes that are exactly the same: sign into BB, read the ‘lecture,’ read the articles, make my obligatory posts on the discussion board and occasionally write a paper. How -uninspiring!”

Later in his post, Lainhart adds, “I am convinced that there have been days that I have learned more on Twitter than from an entire class.”

Here comes everyone

Education should be inspiring for all involved. Learning should be filled with discovery, encouragement, and experimentation—both with ideas and tools. The best online and in-classroom experiences can and should be enhanced by the online LIS professional commons.

Apparently, some LIS schools need a big dose of radical transparency. The issues and ideas relating to openness and communication in libraries that Michael Casey and I explored in LJ in The Transparent Library column apply equally to LIS education. Library school students deserve a less opaque educational environment, too.

From admission to graduation and beyond, students should be encouraged to engage with faculty and administration in open forums about everything related to their programs: coursework, curriculum, accreditation standards, long-range planning, and faculty hires. School committees made up of all stakeholders should post their minutes and plans to the web for comments and sharing.

The big picture

Course evaluations alone are not enough. We need ongoing “big picture” program evaluations presenting students and others with a chance to weigh in on issues beyond individual classes and professors. Schedules of courses, environments for learning (even “the classroom was always freezing!”), and IT infrastructure might be some of the issues ripe for feedback. Appropriate administrators would be expected to respond openly, with the opportunity for further sharing and conversation.

Students would benefit from coauthoring/cocreating class resources with faculty. For many courses, a stale textbook might give way to a collection of web resources, online articles, and the voices of practitioners shared via social media.

Curriculum itself should be nimble and easily adaptable to changes in the profession and technology. One seminar section a semester might focus on bleeding-edge ideas or trends and how libraries might respond to them. Professors might guide the group, but students would be on equal footing to present information and perceptions.

Imagine a seminar on local community support building, or one on dealing with budget problems on a local level where students hear from some of the key players and get to discuss possible solutions in a more real-world environment and not isolated in a classroom. Transparent discussions in practical decision-making would be invaluable.

Global sharing

Beyond these mainly internal changes focusing individual schools outward, the next step is to take the conversation global. I’d like to see a community site like “Hack Library School” include students, professors, deans, and others, plus those who will be hiring new grads. Here’s where an organization such as the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) might play a role, as might library schools and associations from other parts of the world.

With such transparency also comes radical trust. Yes, anonymous comments might encourage a negative, slam book “Rate My Professor”-style environment on the school blog, but most students given the chance to engage would do so positively and with respect.

Just like libraries, the transparent library school needs only to create guidelines for the use of communication tools. Fear of open communication or too much emphasis on command and control does not create the encouraging environment needed to foster 21st-century information professionals.

This essay was originally published as part of the Office Hours series in Library Journal, May 15, 2011.

Ask for What You Want

August 1, 2007

When was the last time someone said lawyers or doctors needed to update their images into the 21st century? How many skits on *Prairie Home Companion* or *Saturday Night Live* have you seen where doctors appear as outdated, dowdy spinsters in need of love or romance? None. Yet Garrison Keillor's "Adventures of Ruth Harrison, Reference Librarian" parades antiquated and stereotyped images of librarians as humor. Unfortunately, librarians are often portrayed as technologically backward, fearful of teens and loud noises, and overly protective of books to the point of not wanting anyone to "touch our stuff."

This misperception may be caused by librarians' desire to create rules and procedures to combat what are really behavioral issues instead of taking direct action. Just this week, a former library director told us about a situation she witnessed where staff wanted to remove from in front of the library a couch used by many patrons--moms reading to kids, older users waiting for rides--because one person who came in every day slept on it.

Enforcing the rules

Instead of removing the couch, the staff could have asked the sleeping patron to respect the library's policies and get up. When asked why they hadn't done so, the librarian replied that many years ago, she'd been verbally harangued by a patron after trying to enforce a similar policy. Instead of confronting the problem, or others like it, staff failed to enforce already existing rules. They acted in a passive-aggressive manner.

In the past year, we've heard about libraries that are considering closing because of rowdy teens, and we've seen libraries respond to behavioral issues by blocking social network Internet sites. Taking away chairs or couches, blocking legal web sites, and creating more and more rules create an environment where confrontation becomes more likely, not less.

Act without fear

In a seemingly unrelated problem, getting new initiatives off the ground sometimes seems to need an act of God, simply because new services mean change. For some librarians, change represents the potential to fail. For others, it's a fear of success, that a new service might be too popular and draw too many people.

What underlying theme flows through these things? Timidity. Whether it's the staff member who wants to remove the couch to spite the sleeping man or the librarian who wants to shut out the teens because they're having too much fun at the computers, the librarians are often too timid for their own good.

Missed opportunities

When Amazon rolled out customer-written book reviews, and Google became our customers' search engine of choice, where were the library directors who should have been standing up and demanding similar features from our ILS vendors?

When audiobook vendors gave us downloadable material that was incompatible with iPods, why did we roll over and buy it (at exorbitant prices) instead of declining the service and explaining to our taxpaying customers that we could not ethically spend that much money on a technology that only a very small fraction of our customer base even owned.

Working together

Yet this happens all the time. Our collective power is far greater than our individual power, yet we seem to be incapable of getting together and harnessing this strength to demand better products and services from our suppliers. How many times have librarians said XYZ company would never put up with this from its vendors?

And how many times have we looked at other companies' services and equipment that seem so much more polished and refined than ours. We work individually and without centralization, so our vendors see thousands of weak buyers, unable to stand up and demand better quality. To be fair, library consortia address this need, often with great success.

Recent shifts toward open source collaboration [see "Evergreen: Your Homegrown ILS," LJ 12/06, p. 38-41] and the vendor cooperation John Blyberg noted in "Always Pushing Information" [netConnect, Summer 2007, p. 2-4] spell out the promise of what could be achieved if we all work together.

Avoiding confrontation

How can we eradicate the theme of timidity that runs throughout our profession? How do we work to become stronger, prouder, and more willing to do our job of walking up to those loud or obnoxious persons and politely yet firmly telling them that they must either change their behavior or leave the library?

Our focus should be more on reinforcing existing policies instead of banning technologies. Focus on trust and open conversation instead of new rules. Focus on understanding those folks who might be breaking your rules by listening to their needs. Then act. You and your users will benefit.

Going to the Field

September 15, 2007

How many times have decisions been met with resistance and misunderstanding in your library when word reaches the front lines?

Sometimes it seems like higher-ups create policy without a feel for what actually happens on desks throughout the library. Often, those higher ups are labeled "out of touch."

And those staffers who are on the front lines or working in the branches-whether they're public or academic libraries-do know what goes on every day.

You know what it's like. You know how you must juggle immediate customer service needs with longer-term issues such as training, staff evaluations, community outreach, event programming, collection maintenance, and more. You know that when a ceiling-mounted light bulb goes out that you need to request maintenance to come out and get it fixed. And you know that the daily deposit forms must be filled out exactly as required.

But you also know that you have to deal with other immediate issues-the angry customer on the telephone, the upset employee, or the crowd from the story hour that just ended.

Front-line management staff, especially, must be able to triage every situation that comes along and properly place it in the greater scheme of everything that needs to be done. Time is limited, and efficiency is required. Many managers simply do not have the option to devote an hour to looking for and properly filling out paperwork.

The effects of juggling

However, juggling these responsibilities is difficult. When you have to deal with individuals back in accounting or physical services who think that you have all day to follow their painstakingly laid out instructions for performing what should be a simple task, well, then you begin to develop a morale problem. Time is far better spent at the front end of the library than at the back, but not every department head or administrator understands that.

It's not entirely the fault of the administration. Those people in accounting and collection development and, yes, even IT, perhaps have never worked in a library. Oh, they work in the offices of a library, but they've never really stood at a reference desk and answered questions during science project season, or dealt with an angry mother who just found something she refers to as "erotica" (or worse) in the children's area. They've never had to juggle those "in-your-face" customer needs with administrative tasks.

Don't misunderstand; those administrators deal with an entirely different set of demands and duties, but the purpose of the library is to meet the needs of the user. Remember, the service desks, branches, and satellites are the front lines in your library's ability to deliver quality customer service.

To the front lines

So how do you get administrators and support staffers to understand the daily operations of the real library? How do you get them to recognize that you deal not only with their guidelines and expectations but also with those of many other departments as well, all on top of your local duties?

Bring them out.

Bring out the maintenance administration and let them see just how dark that corner area is-perhaps sending out staff to replace lighting once a month simply doesn't work. And get those accountants out there to see how you have to count the money amidst screaming kids and a full book-drop and do it all on a tiny table without a proper chair.

Get collections staff out to see your full rows of boring fiction and your empty shelves devoid of graphic novels. Use these visits as a means to start conversations about what the users want.

Rotate administrative and support staff through the branches or various departments. Have them go through the same training that all of the front-line staffers go through. Write policies and guidelines so that staff can easily understand and comply with them.

A multitude of issues

We're not trying to turn accountants and administrators into desk librarians. But we do want them to see and comprehend the multitude of issues that branch or department staff and management deal with every day. If support and administrative staff see the processes for what they really are, then, we hope, they'll begin to view their roles in a new light.

The transparent library's fluid nature and open communication allow all levels of staff to understand what it takes to meet user needs. By following this simple rule-bring them out-you'll develop a big-picture understanding of library services among your staff, and you'll see dividends immediately.

Triumphing Over Opacity

October 15, 2007

We recently heard from a 'librarian in the trenches' who copied our recent column on transparency ('The Open Door Director,' LJ 7/07, p. 29) for colleagues but was chastised by the library director for being too open with 'lower levels of staff.' We've received several comments like this since The Transparent Library began last April, which indicates that some library managers still prefer opacity. We'd like to share some examples and ideas on how to improve the situation.

Michael S.: As an academic, I've talked with many librarians this year about these topics. I spent 15 years working in a medium-sized public library, so I know what it's like on the inside. As a reference librarian and Internet trainer, I served the public. Later, as a department head, I went to meetings, corrected time cards, and guided technology training and planning. Open, consistent communication was crucial. Staff became upset if a new technology (new drives, a new desktop image) appeared on their public desks without any announcement or instruction. Buy-in, we learned, required training and inclusion.

Michael C.: I've also worked in all levels of public librarianship, from front-line part-time staffer to director-level administration. I've seen some public relations debacles and internal problems brought on by a lack of transparency. It's far too easy to become less transparent as you move up the management/leadership ladder and use a simple 'need-to-know' rationalization. Top levels of management, fearing flaws in their decisions, often hold information tightly.

MS: It's not always upper managers who push back. Sometimes an administrator ready to change the organizational structure and flow meets resistance from the staff. But what's a leader to do when staffers blatantly refuse to change processes--be it blogging for the library, job rotation, or a major shift in the library's mission and goals? Steve Backs in 'Blog About Libraries' offered a resonant comment: professions do not stand still. I think it's easy to hide behind 'we have too much work as it is' or 'I don't have time for that,' when the world is changing. We can and should let go of outdated methods in our processes, such as typing new book lists or funneling all of the library's web content to one staff member who has access to make changes, when technology can free up our time for more important matters, such as proving our worth to governing bodies and creating useful services.

MC: Good point. Middle managers may have found what works and fear change might make them more vulnerable. Still, I believe that organizational cultures are changed from above.

MS: I couldn't agree more. Buy-in from leadership will make or break some libraries. Some of those in the middle and below are chomping at the bit to try some new things such as a Facebook group for the library or a Flickr account to promote youth services. They want to break down some barriers and engage in an honest, human conversation with users, while, up top, the proposals for those new services languish on administrative desks.

MC: In 'The Open Door Director,' we noted the negative implications of hiding budget problems. Unless your users know the troubles you face, they may not react favorably to the money-saving cuts you must make. Not explaining major actions to the public can cause a very bad, long-term PR problem. Unfortunately, many administrators only learn this lesson the hard way. We've had too many accounting failures, mortgage lender failures, and Enrons for people to look the other way.

MS: Nowadays, an unhappy public can be more vocal than ever before, thanks to the Internet. When Apple dropped the price of the iPhone by \$200 just weeks after the device went on sale, various Apple discussion forums caught fire with angry posts, and savvy geeks launched web sites to protest. How might a library director respond to the launch of a critical blog posted by community members or even anonymous staffers? (Check AFPLwatch.com for a perfect example of the latter in action.) Imagine if a site just like that debuted for your library. One of the toughest--and most crucial--things a library director can do is open the door, loosen the reins, and throw out that opaque institutional policy. A director's blog (with open, unmoderated comments and a comment policy) would be a good start.

The Technology Storm

November 15, 2007

We're a far cry from the days when technology was solely the domain of the IT folks at the library. Now, much of what we do is linked to using, planning for, implementing, and evaluating all manner of technologies—from web site design/redesign and the rapidly growing trend of using social tools in the library all the way to finding out what hardware works best for the library and how to implement radio frequency identification (RFID).

While teams and committees ponder decisions about how a technology will fit in, the big picture decisions also require a transparent approach to politics. This may be easily overlooked, but it is painful if forgotten.

Political openness

Remember what makes the transparent library work. The new web is open, so be willing to share. Do you allow anyone on staff to contribute a post to a blog? Are the blog writers and readers willing to hear criticism without playing the blame game? The answer should be yes.

Larger, more involved projects can stir the political and organizational culture even more. Consider recent RFID implementations at many libraries. There have been well-publicized conflicts at the San Francisco Public Library and nearby Berkeley Public Library, but other facilities struggle under the radar to gain buy-in and smooth transitions.

What worked so very well in a demo may not translate to immediate success in your building. Polarized staff and users may feel frustration as tagging projects slow and the technology is pushed to the limit. Unfortunately, with expensive projects administrators often need to demonstrate immediate returns.

The web site challenge

Consider the library's web site. Too many organizations refuse to put up anything new until it has been examined and focus-grouped to death. The transparent library announces to everyone that improvements are being made and pushes out the new product as soon as it can. An informed public is (usually) an understanding public; users should prefer a work-in-progress over an old, customer-unfriendly web site.

Modern web sites are driven with content management systems, both the software type and the human type. Teams should get together and share information, looking at system needs. They must organize the content with an eye toward end user needs, not internal department power grabs. Various departments must share the responsibility of creating

and maintaining fresh web site content; the web site manager then becomes more of a project manager than an original content creator.

OCLC's 2005 report "Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources" told us a dirty little secret: only one percent of information seekers start with the library web site, preferring easier-to-use web sites, even if the latter don't lead to information of comparable quality.

Library web site managers often must contend with many different and entrenched interests-materials selectors who want to market their books, outreach staff who want notices for upcoming events, children's section staff who want a visually appealing kid's page, and administrators who simply want a popular, error-free site. It can't be the job of one person.

Unlocking the organization

In this new world, these models no longer fly:

- Locked-down library web sites held captive by overzealous IT departments or marketing/PR offices.
- Technology purchases driven by accounting departments instead of front-line staff and savvy professionals.
- Technology decisions and plans without staff buy-in.
- IT projects driven by artificial time lines instead of customer service needs.
- A siege mentality because of concerns about security, privacy, and safety of data.

The models might be better replaced by the traits of the Transparent Library:

- Make decisions in public. Hold meetings and invite staff and public comment for all major projects.
- Create multiple avenues of communication and encourage vertical communication among all levels of staff.
- Share plans and steps for projects and listen to feedback.

As you create and adapt library services, also consider technology usage statistics. Analysis of computer use, web site traffic, and the return on investment for all technology projects is essential.

This should also be part of the library's story you tell to boards, governing bodies, and, of course, our users. Mindful, genuine, inclusive planning is the best way to navigate the technology storm.

Revisiting Participatory Service in Trying Times

By Michael Casey, October 20, 2011

Participatory library services have come a long way over the past six years. You don't have to look far to see libraries participating in social media outlets, interacting with their community through blogs and SMS, and polling their users with online surveying tools. Entire industries have grown up around the idea of the participatory library; just take a look at Springshare.

We see many great examples of public libraries using services like Facebook to reach out to, and engage, their community. The New York Public Library has almost 42,000 Facebook fans, Hennepin almost 6,000. Many other libraries around the world have created a presence on Facebook.

But in those two examples, as in so many other library Facebook pages, you see some interaction between the library and the individual library user, but most of what you see is one-way. Most library Facebook pages are used for announcements and events notification, not true communication.

Yet this is just one example. Take a look at the Blogging Libraries Wiki and click through to a few library blogs. Many of them are no longer active. Others are gone and the URL simply redirects to the library's homepage. And when was the last time your local library sent you a survey link that asked you for your ideas? For many of you, the answer is either "never" or "not for a few years".

Over the past six years we've seen and heard a lot of push-back regarding the use of new social tools in the library. One quote that comes to mind is from 2007, "Right now people are enamored of blogs and wikis and Facebook and this sort of thing. But that's this year's set of technology. Five years from now we'll be talking about a whole different set of things."

Ironically, the world still uses those same tools today. The only difference is that in late 2007 there were 50 million active Facebook users, today there are over 800 million.

So with this huge audience available to us, why haven't we made greater use of the tools at hand? Why haven't we moved beyond the idea of just talking to our community to actually engaging them? Or, to quote Tim O'Reilly, "How do we get beyond the idea that participation means "public input" (shaking the vending machine to get more or better services out of it), and over to the idea that it means government building frameworks that enable people to build new services of their own?"

The participatory library is open and transparent, and it communicates with its community through many mechanisms. The participatory library engages and queries its entire community and seeks to integrate them into the structure of change. The community should be involved in the brainstorming for new ideas and services, they should play a role

in planning for those services, and they should definitely be involved in the evaluation and review process.

These are not new ideas. I put them to paper in my 2007 book. Some critics of that book argued that libraries have been doing these things for ages. I wish I could say I agree.

The economic downturn has created very difficult times for libraries in this country. We've seen many public libraries struggling to stay open and remain relevant in their community. Many libraries have had to reduce hours and lay-off staff. Some have reached out to their communities, not only for short-term help in raising badly needed cash, but also for long-term help with planning.

The importance of this participation cannot be overstated, especially in these difficult economic times. Taxpayers are more and more reluctant to part with any percentage of their diminishing paychecks. Getting them to participate, at any level, will go a long way towards gaining their buy-in.

With limited resources, public libraries need to struggle for every dollar, and with limited tax revenue, funding agencies will part reluctantly with every dollar. It's up to the library to be heard, to get its community of supporters to be heard. When faced with the question of who to cut, those funding agencies must know that a cut to the local public library can not be done quietly. Public libraries are a core and critical resource in the community, and public library supporters are vocal and they vote.

Take a look around your library. Is there someone in charge of your social networking presence? Better yet, do you have a group of librarians charged with reaching out on Facebook and Twitter and, soon perhaps, Google+? You take reference questions over the phone and via text, why not through those other social outlets? And how are you involving those Facebook fans in your library's planning process? Are you asking them to participate?

Your library's blog may be shuttered for good reason — maybe your Facebook page has far more readers. Or, perhaps your blog went dormant simply because you didn't assign someone (or some group) with the responsibility to keep it going. Whatever the case, spend a little bit of time reexamining all of the ways you're reaching out to your community and reallocate resources in order to most efficiently talk to, and talk with, that community.

There are far more tools available to us today than there were in 2005. And our communities have grown over these past six years. Kids and adults of all ages are now far more involved and engaged through social networking outlets. The ideas of participation and transparency are no longer new — many in our community now expect these things as a standard part of organizational operations. By taking advantage of those available tools you may find that renewed efforts by your library are met with much greater success today than ever before.

It's far from the end for public libraries. It's easy, in these tough times, to only listen to the naysayers and prognosticators of doom, to only hear those in our community calling for the elimination of libraries. But limited tax revenues, the Internet, and eBooks are not burying the public library. Limited tax revenues will force us to become more efficient, the Internet

is part of our future, and eBooks are simply another delivery vehicle. We control this future, and we can make it a successful one by making full use of the tools at hand.

This essay was originally published on Tame the Web, October 20, 2011.

A Road Map to Transparency

December 15, 2007

In our experiences at a larger public library system and in a university setting (after numerous years in a medium-sized public library), respectively, we often have had access to resources that smaller libraries/systems do not.

While that sets our frame of reference, we intend to give advice aimed at libraries of all sizes. No matter the dimensions of the institution, the building blocks of transparency allow a more honest, open flow of ideas, where staff and users are valued.

The "To Do" list for transparency is simple but requires commitment from administrators and staff and a willingness to learn from failure. While the list mostly fits all sizes, note that the challenges in achieving the first two items are faced mainly by medium and large libraries.

The list

1. Give your staff multiple avenues for open communication, including internal blogs and vertical teams.
2. Visit front-line staff regularly.
3. Cross-train staff so they have a sense of what their fellow front-line workers do all day.
4. Encourage new ideas and the hearing of ideas among all levels of staff and with the public.
5. Provide learning opportunities for all staff, including regional and web conferences. Start a Learning 2.0 initiative so that staffers can learn from the comfort of their own desk. Reinforce their knowledge of the library's mission and introduce them to the planning process and how things get done at all levels of library administration and management.
6. Invite staff (on the clock) to attend governance meetings and other user community gatherings to get to know the political leadership.
7. Get all departments, all divisions, to plan their projects as a group so everyone knows (and can prepare for) what's on the upcoming calendar and so everyone can offer input and suggestions.

Potential pitfalls?

Unlike the "To Do" list, the pitfalls to implementation vary according to the size of the institution. Smaller libraries can benefit from easier communication, a more cohesive feel among all levels of staff, and a clearer view of the big picture. Directors and staff work closely and meet their users regularly.

However, smaller libraries sometimes inadvertently allow strong dissenters to derail new initiatives and spread fear, uncertainty, and doubt among the staff. Training sessions can easily be overturned by one vocal naysayer. Sometimes it's simply time for the sour apple to fall off the limb and for fresh ideas to be watered.

Medium-sized and larger libraries may have the resources to provide ample training opportunities, staff movement, and communication tools but their organizations may be based on silos and barriers.

Silos occur when departments dig in and don't recognize the importance of big picture planning. One department's attempt to implement new initiatives can run smack into another department's project. Departments must talk as they grow so that everyone is on board with strategic thinking and project scheduling. Naysayers may be here, but a skillful project leader or library administrator can turn gridlocked obstinance into diversified opinion.

Say yes

Midsized and large libraries must take measures to insure that the culture of "no" does not become entrenched. How many libraries still ban cell phones and portable devices, refusing to acknowledge their varied uses? How many libraries like to think that only true "research" represents a valid use of the library computer? How in this day of content creation, social networking, gaming as learning, and a return to the idea of learning as play can we ever decide what's research and what's not?

While outdated thinking still persists, it is decreasing as libraries begin to listen to their users, come to learn about new technological tools, and see that a "yes but quietly" is so much better than a big "NO."

A public face

What better way to show the face of the library than to get some of your staff to come to board or governance meetings. They can meet and greet the local politicians and form friendships with those holding the power of the purse.

This also gives staff a more global understanding of what is going on with the library and its community. An involved and aware staff, like an involved and aware public, is far more likely to support you in the long run.

Look at your library with the steps mentioned above in mind. You may have already done some of the items on this list. Some may fit with your organization now, while you may need to wait until the climate for introducing others is better. That's just your local reality.

Coping with Anonymity

January 1, 2008

Picture this: your library has launched a visionary long-range reorganization plan that sparks an anonymous, critical blog from staff members. Or your library appears in an anonymous YouTube or Flickr extravaganza that targets your authoritarian signage, unfriendly staff, and dirty public restrooms. Or your soon-to-be-launched web revamp is reviewed on an employee's personal blog before the library goes public. Hypothetical? No.

Such events, which have occurred at various libraries, can make for difficult and stressful times. Are they entirely negative? Can transparency and anonymity coexist? Is it better to turn a blind eye to the conversation playing out online?

Progress and perils

Our goal is better libraries-and transparency usually can help. The underlying concept of transparency is an increased (and unfettered) flow of information, but today's technology allows for unidentified blogs, untraceable survey responses, and the freedom to say pretty much anything anonymously.

If you hold tight to information/plans/new services until the time is right, it may hurt. Control can sometimes stifle creative thought and constructive criticism and thus spur anonymous carping.

Many organizations pursue transparency by creating more open means of communication. Secrets are a thing of the past (within legal limits, of course) and everyone-staff and public-is kept informed as much as is practical.

Major organizational and operational changes are discussed and decided openly, if not necessarily democratically. Long-term projects are managed so that staff have multiple avenues to contribute questions and advice.

Bumps on the road

However, we've seen numerous organizations, including several high-profile libraries, hit hurdles that frustrate and demoralize staff. Other organizations where entrenched leaders offer no more than lip service regarding transparency are prodded into transparency by desperate staff or the public. In response, anonymous complaints and concerns may emerge. Such outlets can run the gamut from constructive criticism to unproductive griping or even defamation.

A common anonymous outlet is the pseudonymous or anonymous individual blog. The less common but far more powerful variation is the group or community blog or web site that may be written by several writers but accepts unsigned comments and submissions.

And how about exposure via Flickr or YouTube? What might have taken months to make the rounds through libraryland, or sat at a local newspaper waiting for a decision on whether it was worth publishing, now can spread rapidly across the biblioblogosphere.

A nimble response

Your best response to this new world is to audit signage, library policy, and staff communication. Walking through the library with a customer's eyes might lead you to change inappropriate signage. A user-centered look at the public policy manual may yield less rule-bound guidelines. Finally, establishing a way for staffers and patrons to comment freely fosters openness. See the Link List for examples.

The response to such criticism can be vital. A defensive stance, accompanied by a "we know and you don't" attitude, often provokes anonymous critics to redouble their efforts and, in some cases where many people can comment or post, may result in more vitriol.

However, organizations willing to accept some level of criticism in return for ideas, suggestions, and the opportunity to change may be able to turn around a difficult situation. Leaders with a thick skin may be able to discern the legitimate criticism beneath the vituperation. (Purely mean-spirited, nonconstructive posts, however, are best ignored.)

Such breadth of speech can be found in answers to surveys and often deters libraries from conducting broad public (or even staff) polls. Harshly worded survey answers, however, should be simply par for the course; an unwillingness to see and read such commentary only hurts the organization.

A positive outcome to negative perceptions is our goal. It may be frustrating, especially for leaders who strive to make a difference in their institutions, but the benefits of entering the conversation-eyes wide open, carefully listening to the feedback, willing to respond to reproof in the open arena-will make it worthwhile.

Insights from the Front Line

February 15, 2008

This column is directed to front-line librarians and staff, who deliver customer service and have damn good ideas for what can be done to improve things. It's often a hurdle to get library administrators and managers to listen to your concerns and views. But there are ways. And we believe this advice holds true for everyone on the desk, from reference librarians to support staff.

Be vocal but not obnoxious. You know the story probably better than anyone as to how your users perceive the library. You know how they use (or don't use) the catalog. You know what questions they ask. You know how they react to policies instituted by management.

Tell these stories in your own meetings in an even manner. Present them as evidence, because that's what they are. Keep track of how often a policy or procedure stands in the way of good service. Send your data collection upstairs, framed as a request to improve service. Center your requests on user needs, not your own whines.

A tactful approach is better than a public standoff; carefully presented data, spiffy charts, and reviews from library publications and the biblioblogosphere can help you make your case. Then hit them up for a more streamlined mechanism to share the data: a blog? a wiki? a team sharing reports via Google docs?

Be honest with yourself about library use. More than once in our careers we've heard librarians say, "Most of my patrons don't care about...." Oh, really? Or is that just you and what you think your patrons need or want?

Tap into reports. Some 30 percent of folks polled for OCLC's 2005 report *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* didn't know what "electronic databases" were, and over 80 percent were starting their own information searches at a search engine. Pew's December 2007 *Information Searches That Solve Problems* tells us that younger people really do use the library.

Use this as a foundation for change--maybe it is time to disband the ten-person reference department for new workflows and job duties.

Request an online suggestion box. These mechanisms have done wonders for some libraries. Front-liners can share their stories and ask questions; management should respond with answers and actions.

We're reminded of the rules posted for the Library Loft teen space at the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County, NC: "Respect yourself, respect others, respect the space." Both front-line staff and library management and administrators should follow these simple rules. Request a hard-copy box as well, placed in a staff area for those folks who prefer paper.

Embrace change. The folks upstairs may be waiting for you to pitch a fit. Don't do it. Use the tips above to respond, learn, and grow. When an idea comes down that you don't think will work, don't be knee-jerk. Talk to your coworkers, and listen to your customers.

Exactly what about the new change is bad? Good data will always trump hearsay and conjecture. Keep a log of customer comments, good and bad. Or, if the new change is primarily internal, draft a brief memo stating how much time is being used to implement the new initiative. Point out where that time is coming from--the front desk, shelving, etc.--and make an argument for how the time could be better used.

Set the example. You may be in a position to make local changes in your office or branch that, while still complying with your library's policies and philosophies, are just different enough to stand out as a positive alternative.

Perhaps the programs your library offers will embrace more new technology. Perhaps your story hours will be held at different times or go on the road and visit local schools in an effort to reach users where they are. Maybe your book displays will be more dynamic and more frequently updated than elsewhere in the library system.

The key is to gather data and illustrate the impact these changes have. Are you circulating more books with those new displays? Are more people attending your story hours when you hold them at new times or go offsite? The goal is to show the powers that be that there are affordable benefits to your new plans.

Be a strong yet positive voice. Keep your criticisms and concerns constructive. Couching your worries in a positive light will get you on teams and committees where you'll be better poised to make long-term alterations. Set your example locally and others will take notice.

Cheers and Jeers

March 15, 2008

We've been writing the Transparent Library for a year, so it's time for some thumbs up and thumbs down.

Cheers to the widespread librarians, library staff, administrators, trustees, and others from libraries small and large who have participated in localized versions of Helene Blowers's Learning 2.0 program. As we write, the entire state of Minnesota is running the program for all interested parties, reinforcing the idea that inclusive, self-directed learning applied to emerging tools can bring people together and get them talking.

Cheers to the State Library of South Carolina for its engaging, personalized web portal created with Joomla. Other state libraries should look to this as a model: blogging state librarians, open online forums for discussion, and shared videos of South Carolina librarians.

Jeers to SirsiDynix for leading us down the primrose path of Horizon 8, Rome, and then Symphony. Now that our confidence is lost and our trust in most major ILS vendors is shot, we have to begin to look inward for our future.

Cheers to the many libraries and librarians brave enough to enter the world of open source software and open ILS systems such as Evergreen, Koha, LibX, and LibraryFind. It's not easy deciding to jettison long-established library brand names. Those willing to take the leap have been crafting and perfecting the tools, easing the path for others.

Cheers to LibLime for recognizing the power and potential of open source and for creating the "Open Source Evangelist" position, hiring Nicole Engard.

Cheers to the many librarians who have joined the local and global conversation via blogs, wikis, Flickr, and other social networks. The expression of shared ideas, feedback, and solutions furthers the professional discourse.

Jeers to IT departments that still hide behind "it's not secure," "we can't support that," and technology plans/decisions made without involving librarians or users. We're ready for an open dialog about security, privacy, and what resources we can realistically spend. We understand how busy IT can be. We simply want the discussions to be more inclusive.

Cheers to libraries like North Carolina State University (NCSU) for the "transparent reference desk" at its Information Commons. Much more than furniture, this acknowledges what can be done in an open collaborative space. With iPods and digital cameras available for checkout, NCSU shows that librarians can be technology support leaders, trainers, and advocates for collaboration.

Cheers to those creating specialty libraries for youth. The Stockholm Public Library's Serieteket library for comics and graphic literature does a wonderful job of reaching out to the youth market, offering great public spaces.

Cheers to the Library of Congress and its Commons Project on Flickr. This grand experiment in group tagging should be exciting to watch. It has provided yet another argument for libraries to step outside of their traditional thinking and use new online tools.

Jeers to libraries that make decisions and craft policy, whether on signage, hours, meeting rooms, or Internet filtering, but won't defend them publicly.

Cheers to the Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne (ACPL), IN, for using technology as an opportunity to extend the library's reach. Sharing a "Day in the Life" of the county via user-submitted images and presenting ACPL director Jeff Krull on YouTube discussing reading are priceless.

Cheers to those brave librarians who post photos of signage both good and bad. A library should be able to defend its way-finding methods to its users-or make changes.

Cheers to John Blyberg for writing "Library 2.0 Debased," pointing to broader issues of policy, programming, and space rather than shiny new tools and semantics.

Cheers to other librarians who've reported on changes they've made to web sites, physical spaces, policies, and programming. Now we must focus on how to evaluate emerging technologies in the library setting.

Measuring Progress

April 15, 2008

The most difficult part of 2.0 librarianship is not the creation of new services nor even the job of convincing those in charge to let you try those new ideas. No, the hardest part is often the reexamination of ideas. It's a key factor of any library service and part of the definition of Library 2.0 that sometimes gets overlooked.

The evaluation of newer and existing services is critical for any successful library. It can be accomplished via vertical teams or a mix of internal and external evaluators; either way, you must look at the original goals and determine if your services are meeting them.

"Cool tools"

Adopting a new technology can be fun, whether it's Web 2.0 applications like Drupal or cutting-edge technologies like RFID. It can be seductive to watch these tools used by other library systems. We've seen many "cool tools" presentations at conferences that play up the wonders of Twitter, FriendFeed, or Facebook apps.

However cool these new tools might appear, it may not be easy to inject them into your library-nor do they all belong there. Check out the Libraries Using Evidence blog, created by a group of Australian librarians, for insight into how evidence-based practice meets 2.0 initiatives.

Administrators must take a big picture approach to evaluating new services and tools, factoring in budget issues, staff hours, and community impact. The new tool or service must fit into the library's philosophy. If it's a new tool for library communications, then administrators can give it a kick-start by using the tool themselves.

It takes front-end work to evaluate services properly. Well-defined expectations and goals and a written statement regarding some measurable return make the evaluation process more effective and worthwhile.

Also, get staff and customers/patrons on board for the review process. Let everyone know that, eventually, you'll evaluate every service you roll out. This lends more transparency to your planning process.

Successes and setbacks

We've seen and heard about a lot of new technology projects, and while we're not doing many of these in our own organizations, we can see where there have been some striking successes and, in some instances, some questionable decisions.

Many libraries have taken the plunge into RFID, with widely varying results. While RFID can be very popular, RFID migrations are expensive and can sometimes require new furniture or even retrofits of entire buildings. Stories of RFID snags suggest that library staff (and some customers) are not yet convinced that tagging is better than old-style barcodes. Whether it's RFID or some other project, the long-term returns must be demonstrably clear.

Ways to gauge progress

Track hits and uses of statistical software for blogs, wikis, and other web applications. If not, you might be creating web resources that see little use. Measuring these social networking tools is often not easy. Open source does not equal "free"-it can take many hours in staff time. Whatever you're using should deliver the returns you need. If it's not, maybe it's not the right tool. Use 2.0 tools for the right reasons, not just because they're cool.

Check comments to gauge the readership of a library blog or news site. Don't get too hung up, however, on tracking comments, since managing them can cost time. Also, just because the library blog is not a hotbed of commenting activity does not mean you aren't getting value from an easy-to-use publishing platform. The same can be said for using RSS feeds to update content and build portals.

Mine user behavior. Instead of posting signs prohibiting students from moving furniture, one university library let students rearrange furniture into their favorite configurations for collaboration and interaction. Administrators then used that "blueprint" to plan for future space needs.

Engage staff and users by asking them for anecdotal evidence on how a new service is working. A story about how useful the library's digital creation station Mac or PC was to a student on deadline can be incorporated into reports and updates. Solicit a request for stories online and in person.

Remember, whatever you choose to use must conform to your library's mission and vision. Simply adopting a tool without having it fit these criteria is a waste.

Embracing Service to Teens

May 15, 2008

When did it become an acceptable customer service response to try and push out an entire age group of users? Never, but that's happening at too many libraries. Can we remain transparent, open, and focused on the core value of access and still tell young people to find another place to be social online?

MC: I still get emails from librarians who endure meetings where administrators bemoan having to accommodate teens. One even said her director thought stats showing lower senior citizen library use reflected the increased teen presence.

Banning MySpace

MS: My hometown library in Mishawaka, IN, near South Bend, just banned access to Facebook and MySpace because of what the South Bend Tribune called "Fights, lewd language and cars being blocked in the parking lot by teenagers." As a Mishawaka taxpayer, curious librarian, and LIS professor, I stopped by the library and learned that other sites, like Flickr, remain available. It is disturbing how easily the library administration and board made the leap from unruly teens to "let's block access to two of the most popular social tools on the web."

Comments on my blog ranged from the forward-thinking, right-up-Ranganathan's alley and the "Anonymous" who said, "Of course that crap should be banned" to the thoughtful critique and commentary of Ian McKinney from cutting-edge Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, IN. He reminds us the problem was specific kids, not technology. Indeed, I worry the teens in Mishawaka won't care about the library and that will hurt the whole community. Were other solutions considered?

MC: When we advocate bringing teens into the library, we don't acquiesce to rowdy teen behavior, as some suspect. Behavioral problems are never acceptable in the library. Foul-mouthed teens need to be booted out for the day, and problem teens for longer periods. Sometimes this means hiring security guards, and sometimes this means setting a firm tone at the beginning.

But don't misunderstand; teens will be teens—they need to talk and socialize—so don't expect a library with a lot of teens to be quiet. Carving out a teen area is great, if you have the room. If not, try to find an area that can be kept relatively quiet and offer it to those users who need a sanctuary.

Issues with teens are often larger community challenges. Kids need interesting and safe things to do. The entire community should be a part of the solution.

Plan with pros

MS: Right. Don't ban technology or the web (cell phones, games, social sites) but instead offer guidelines for behavior. As public libraries evolve, one of the most important jobs will be that of teen librarian or youth specialist. I wonder if libraries that have had trouble with teens lack such specialists. You can't just tap Sally from the fiction department and say, "You work with the teens now."

MC: We continue to see great teen programming. Maria DeSapa, a library assistant at Troy Public Library, NY, coordinates gaming activities for teens. Nearby, at the Stillwater Free Library, Director Sara Kipp even brings her own PlayStation console for teens to use. I like how Stillwater combines game night with a book club meeting.

Focus on users

MS: That's a dedicated focus on the user, not a rush to control and gatekeep. I think that's why many of us wound up with library jobs-a giving, encouraging nature fits with libraries' mission.

After my talk at the Public Library Association conference in Minneapolis in March, an attendee told me how a librarian at a library he visited said "we don't like" having graphic novels. In the classroom, I've reminded students of the American Library Association's Code of Ethics: "We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access...."

So, what could Mishawaka have done differently? I would suggest open forums involving the community and a stronger focus on teen outreach.

MC: Also, just deal with behavioral issues. After all, if the seniors get a bit loud when knitting, do we ban knitting? It's hard to defend banning specific social networking sites when other libraries not only allow access but integrate those sites into their library marketing plans.

If we don't get them in as kids and keep them as teens, we likely won't see them later in life. Kudos to librarians embracing service to teens.

How To Find the Right Fit

June 15, 2008

Dear MLS grad (and others who may be looking for a new position),

We're glad you are ready for the first (or next) step in your career. We know that the job market can be tight and that most newly minted librarians are happy to get their foot in the door, recognizing that no one library will conform to your workplace ideal. Still, we'd like to offer some pointers for a good fit.

First, look at "In Search of an Emotionally Healthy Library," by Nancy Cunningham (now director of the Learning Resources Center at Southwest Florida College, Ft. Myers) for tips, interview questions, and warning signs. Then, ponder these questions.

How things work

Ask about the library's mission and vision. Sure, you went to the library web site-checking on the currency of the web presence, as well-in preparation. But how does the library actually live those values? Are the library's goals your goals? If your vision of a library and your perspective employer's image don't exactly mesh, can you still live with them?

How does the library celebrate staff? What opportunities are there for staff development? What outside learning opportunities will you have? Even if you must go to outside training on your own dime, will you be allowed to attend conferences and seminars?

If there's not a lot of library money for continuing education, there should at least be a willingness to send staff to local workshops and state library functions. Time to participate in online learning activities should be included as well.

Celebrating staff entails something as simple as an annual staff day. Does the library administration recognize teamwork? Does it reward those appreciated by peers?

How does the library communicate internally? Externally? Is it an open process? How is staff feedback addressed and used? We heard more than one speaker at the recent Computers in Libraries conference note that soliciting staff input but not putting it to use can lead to a breakdown in trust.

A structure in place for staff to submit ideas and be heard by top-level management is a good sign. Libraries that have internal blogs, allow all staff to contribute, and ask that their administrators field questions are more likely to be less rigid or autocratic. The Virginia Beach Public Library's "VBPL Talks" blog even responds to anonymous questions.

Participation 2.0

What's the library policy on blogging and social networking for staff? Can you maintain your personal/professional blog if you accept a position? We'd urge hiring librarians to encourage new staffers to continue their blogging or participation in social networks.

Does the library employ vertical teams for planning and implementation of new services? Can new hires participate and share their voices from day one? Inviting new staffers to play a role in service creation signals a willingness to hear new ideas. Ask for examples.

What mentoring opportunities are there? A recent job listing from Davidson College in North Carolina included this bit: "We want your newbie enthusiasm and fresh ideas, and we'll mentor you in your growth." This is a promising trend; it's vital for veterans to mentor and encourage new librarians.

Due diligence

Also, don't forget to spend some time researching the conversations and coverage concerning your potential workplace via sites like Yelp, Technorati, and Google News.

Look at the social networking presence of said library. Are comments enabled on the recently updated, thriving library blog? Are images of the library's recent events being posted on its Flickr account? What other clues can you find about the library's online presence?

Real-world outreach also can be telling. Does the library offer programs and services for a variety of user groups and populations? In the public library arena, story times and adult book groups should be a staple, but look for outreach and programming for teens, seniors, and other constituencies to gather a wider picture of the service philosophy. Academic libraries should offer outreach to students, faculty, and staff.

Finally, remember that no decision is permanent. You may find, no matter how good your questioning, that you've ended up at a library that just doesn't match your expectations. Do your best to enact change, learn as much as you can, and then start to look elsewhere. Build bridges and move on.

Check Your Ego at the Door

July 1, 2008

Egos can insidiously prevent us from doing what we could do best. Recently, in a late-night conversation, a few trusted librarian colleagues told us how much damage an inflated ego can do to a library's culture.

One in that small circle had clashed with a department member and been called out by the administration for "only thinking of herself" in planning and implementing a new project. Another had been recognized in a national forum as a rising talent, only to have that accolade ignored by employers. A third led a well-regarded project but was almost fired by an angry administrator who couldn't control the message.

Thankfully, one among us had also received national recognition and reported his library had responded with a party and a press release, helping him feel a renewed sense of belonging.

The ego, we concluded, can be a very damaging thing. Inflated. Overbearing. Egos create rules for rules' sake. Egos complicate procedures and keep good people down. Egos squash good ideas and can take the best of an organization and turn it on itself.

Fostering openness

We believe that creating a transparent, open environment, fostered by new technologies, is paramount to the success of businesses, organizations, and nonprofits.

In this new age, however, you have to lose the ego! In leading a library, a project, a department, or a small work group, keep an eye toward the whole and the benefits found there. Consider these suggestions:

Recognize and appreciate talent. Outside awards and recognition bring praise and attention to the library. Our profession, like any other, has rising stars. The Internet has enabled these stars to gain national and even international attention at a pace much faster than ever before. How coworkers, supervisors, and administrators respond to this person's "15 minutes of fame" is very telling. Encourage and embrace the exposure and make sure to alert the library's user community.

Grow your own talent (and don't see it as a threat). Libraries should provide opportunities for staff to learn and grow. It should not be a threat to the institution or its administrators to have individuals who excel at their jobs and projects. In a climate of encouragement, library leadership will mentor and grow the talent around them.

Appreciate those who bring issues and problems to your attention, even if you don't really want to hear about them because it indicates that something needs to be fixed or improved. These people are valuable—they are not annoyances! Acknowledge that you don't know

everything. Ego makes us unwilling to admit when we aren't familiar with something or someone, but being a good manager or leader means owning up to our limitations and knowing who to call for help.

The art of leadership

Good leaders surround themselves with talented, outspoken individuals, not yes-men (or -women).

Understand that while we have very good reasons for doing things, we may not communicate them well. Staffers who question administration and decisions should not be perceived as threats but as reminders that we may need to reexamine how we communicate our strategies and our justifications.

If you pretend someone is not there, if you pretend the awards and honors that someone on your staff receives aren't worth mentioning, then this reflects upon you. People will notice it and question your awareness. If they see you deliberately refusing to recognize talent, then they will begin to ask, "Why?" The results from this questioning won't aid in your leadership.

However, if you recognize and embrace your talented staff, if you give them the skills they need to continue improving, then your staff, your organization, and the greater library community will not only recognize those talented people but also respect and honor your organizational efforts.

They'll notice that you're sufficiently comfortable as an executive to salute the great talent around you and your willingness to use that talent for the greater good of the entire organization. That is true leadership.

Avoid timidity

The flip side of ego is timidity, as we've written (see "Ask for What You Want," LJ 8/07, p. 29). Too often, librarians smother their need for professional recognition in their desire to provide great service.

We see this when librarians must argue for libraries—we've become so good at dealing with limited resources, setbacks, and a lack of public recognition that we sometimes stifle our ability to stand up and shout about everything that makes us great. Some in our field need to suppress ego. Others may need just the right dose.

Let's All Lighten Up

August 15, 2008

Sometimes, it's simply not easy. When life throws us \$4-a-gallon gasoline, rising unemployment, a housing credit crunch, and tight local, state, and federal budgets, libraries feel the pinch.

It's natural for work morale to suffer. Boards and administrators feel pressure to make cuts and increase staff efficiency. Front-line staffers get hit from both sides--supervisors who expect more (and sometimes give less) and users who expect the same services they're used to, plus a smiling face. During times like this, the natural inclination is to "get serious," push your staff harder, and make every dollar go further.

Yet getting serious is almost always the wrong way to encourage more from staff. Study after study illustrates this, and conventional wisdom reminds us that when work becomes more pressure-ridden, turning up the heat won't result in a more efficient and productive workforce.

"She sucks the fun out of everything we do; it just makes it harder to do our jobs," wrote a library staffer responding to our July 2008 column ("Check Your Ego at the Door"). "What can we do?"

Making libraries fun

Libraries--all libraries--should be fun, even in difficult times. Just scan LJ's recent Movers & Shakers (M&S) roster or peruse the library blogosphere to see library workers who have discovered that a sense of play and creativity, even what seems like frivolous experimentation, can result in useful services and solutions.

M&S Tony Tallent, while at the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County, NC (he's now at Boulder PL, CO), devised "Drop Everything and Learn Day," aiming at "encouraging staff to stay curious and inspired."

But some libraries, mired in hierarchical leadership structures, closed communication systems, and restrictive policies, drain the life out of users' curiosity and damage staff morale as well.

Fun can mean a playful use of space, technology, and people. It can cost money, especially with some technologies, but many web sites, such as Flickr and fd's Flickr toys, offer a way to create fun signage, name tags, and more.

Global goodies

Look at how the librarians and staff at the DOK Library in Delft, The Netherlands, have incorporated games, color, and technology. The romance section, painted a brilliant, passionate red, beckons to readers. A Bluetooth message appears on users' cell phones upon entering DOK: "Welcome to the most modern library in the world." And game systems abound for young and old.

A "fun" library, our peers (on Twitter) have told us, depends on the tone established by administrators and also lets patrons who don't necessarily come for reading still enjoy being in the building.

"When they're laughing, they're listening," write Adrian Gostick, a lecturer and educator in strategic communication and leadership from Seton Hall University, NJ, and Scott Christopher, a humorist and columnist, in their recent book, *The Levity Effect* (Wiley). "Fun at work can provide a competitive advantage, help attract and retain employees, and provide the spark to jumpstart creativity."

Adding some fun

Here are a few simple guidelines to up the fun quotient at your organization.

Administrators: Give creatively. Warren-Newport PL (Gurnee, IL) director Steve Bero offered two hours of his time to any department that won a staff day raffle for charity fundraising. Even if you decide not to raffle off your services, just get out there and talk to your staff (and not just your favorites). Make yourself available. Listen.

Librarians and staffers: Don't dismiss Guitar Hero or Learning 2.0 because you didn't come to work to play games or write a blog. The bigger picture of your work life is important: balance, mind, body, and spirit. Then, extend the playfulness to your users.

Team leaders and others: Check out *The Levity Effect's* Chapter 7 for "142 ways to have fun at work." Many of the suggestions, from promoting a staff "Wall of Fame" to late afternoon game sessions as a break, may work for your team or provoke additional brainstorming. The "Wall of Fame" could easily become a "Staff Recognition" blog or an online photo gallery of the best images created with the Flickr toys.

Everyone: Laugh. Explore. Play. Try new things. Give a little. Share a lot.

When Worlds Collide

September 15, 2008

As the buzz around social networking continues, consider that author Kevin Kelly has called the emerging web "One Machine" and predicts that "total personalization in this new world will require total transparency."

So, where do we fit in? Where do we position ourselves as professionals? We two don't completely agree, so we thought we'd try to tease out the relationship between personal/social transparency and library transparency.

MS: I think the line between the personal and the professional online has blurred so much recently that it's impossible to separate them.

MC: Our worlds are colliding-I remember that George Costanza line from Seinfeld-and I'm not completely comfortable with it. Our personal lives on Flickr and Facebook mingle with our professional lives on LinkedIn, and everything is tossed into the Google blender. The social side of the Internet has merged our personal and professional lives and taken away a wall in which many took comfort.

Going with the flow

MS: I don't mind that very much. In fact, I embrace a lot of it. I use Facebook to interact with students as well as with LIS colleagues and friends. I use Flickr to share the way I see the world-though I'm still surprised when someone at an American Library Association conference tells me they saw what I had for dinner the night before. The benefits outweigh the costs right now, though I also believe those of us of a certain age or awareness self-edit their lifestreams to a certain degree.

MC: And how do we manage this personal/professional divide? Should we be worried that supervisors "friend" subordinates on Facebook and can look into their personal lives while at the same time they must evaluate their performance? Do we go to someone's Flickr stream or Twitter status to check on them when they call in sick? Ethical questions surround what we can now "find out" about coworkers, job applicants, potential friends, etc.

MS: Indeed! Our location-aware iPhones and applications like Loopt make it very easy to follow someone's movements. I am both excited about broadcasting my whereabouts to trusted friends/colleagues and a little rattled when I see how easily the "nearby" functions in iPhone apps reveal one's location-if people choose to be public with their data. Friending and un-friending is a tough call. I've deleted contacts in many of my networks but not others because of the transparency of the tool; I don't want to send the wrong message. Kelly was right: transparency will play a key role in the richness of the cloud.

MC: Breaking down the dualism concerns me. We speak a lot about a balance in life-the personal and the professional, the family vs. the workplace-and while these areas will often blur, we should be able to keep them relatively separate. I recently deleted my Facebook account because I found the return on that investment to be rather small. It also brought together my personal and work lives a bit more than I wanted-and how do you politely remove workmates from your friends list?

Personalization & privacy

MS: I'd have to disagree. I am concerned about an overemphasis on privacy and a lack of personalization in libraries. I want to see pictures of the staff and library users online. I want to take pictures inside some of the beautiful libraries I visit. I am so happy to see that innovative OPACs like BiblioCommons allow user profiles. I wrestle with new definitions and new ideas about privacy these days. I also get my students writing for the web on Day One, not inside some safe Blackboard or WebCT-secure island. Sure, we need some closed spaces, but new librarians won't be working online behind a safety wall. They'll be writing, interacting, responding, and working with users and other librarians. They must be ready for that. I just don't know how much presence is the right fit.

MC: I think we can achieve personalization without having everyone know that I went to see Elegy last night. We should all have a choice regarding how much of our lives we put out there. This is where we need to educate kids: being "out there" may not be a bad thing, but they need to understand the choices involved before making the decision, especially when high school and college students make the transition to the work world. Parents have a role, and sites such as GetNetWise and SafeKids can provide useful guidance.

Library PR 2.0

October 15, 2008

The rules of marketing have changed. Do libraries know that?

Corporate PR-types used to control the message. Sitting behind a desk, they'd write a carefully crafted press release and then send it off to newspapers and upload it to their web site. The attention the company got might barely justify the salary of the PR professional.

Today's world is fundamentally different. Neither news nor brand identity are controlled through press releases or carefully choreographed newspaper articles. Brands are molded and shaped by the audience-and the audience is everyone. People talk. And people listen.

Social tools, social media, and social engagement are the norms for many large advertisers that have populated sites like Facebook and Twitter with brand-focused pages and interactive techniques. Are you following your favorite brand?

Are libraries catching up?

Not all libraries have embraced this world. Just as some IT departments block new tools because of unfounded security fears, some library PR departments are holding out from using these new 2.0 tools. We've heard from librarians who tell us they are blocked by a PR person-often acting on orders from above-who will not allow multiple voices, direct customer engagement/feedback, or any type of library message that hasn't been vetted.

It's nice to think that you can control the outflow of information and discussion, but the truth is, you can't. Those days are gone. Staffers talk to customers, and customers talk to customers. It's no longer possible to control a solitary message from one central location.

As our followers on Twitter reminded us, the grapevine can be a good thing. "Even stories told to friends and family carry weight," one observed. In fact, libraries have internal and external grapevines. How can we use both to the benefit of all? One thing we know for sure: trying to silence the grapevine hurts the organization.

Keep watch online

The mechanisms for PR 2.0 are varied and sometimes overwhelming. PR maven Brian Solis's "Conversation Prism" identifies 22 different channels of social tools where discussions take place and stories are told. We strongly advocate that library staff participate in these discussions, answering both the easy questions and the hard ones, as well.

Remember, if you don't participate in the story, it will be told without you. Consider the not entirely positive reviews of the central library in Minneapolis on the popular review site Yelp.com. "The library itself is spectacular," one library user wrote on July 2, 2008. "The librarians are kind of surly. Hate the fact that they're closed Sunday and Monday."

Why hasn't a nonsurly library employee responded? Not only should librarians monitor these conversations, we should respond in such cases with thanks for the positive reviews and "how can we do better" to the negative ones.

What you can do

With this important sea change in mind, we offer some guidelines for your library's marketing 2.0 program.

PR-speak stinks. Happy-time press releases and spin that lack a human feel will not go as far as an honest announcement. If you've tried something and it hasn't gone well, tell your users. If you've had great success, do the same.

Anticipate the questions and answer them. Explain new services or respond to breaking news stories, then ask users what else they'd like to know.

Monitor and participate in the conversation about and around your library via the social tools featured in the Prism. Staff at all levels should be actively involved in telling the library's story. Ad hoc marketing committees can spring up easily to promote the next big thing at the library.

Think about your library brand. What is it? How can you tell the story of your brand with your users? How can they add to the brand? Deirdre Breakenridge's book *PR 2.0: New Media, New Tools, New Audiences* (FT Press) offers a primer that we've drawn on here.

In fact, our users should be part of the library's brand. The Columbus Metropolitan Library, OH, does a wonderful job of putting staffers' faces on the library's homepage. The Vancouver Public Library, BC, puts patrons on its homepage, touting the library's benefits.

Beyond that, it's time for all libraries to feature user photos, recommendations, and more front and center on their web sites, in the catalog, and in all of the library's marketing efforts.

Six Signposts on the Way

November 15, 2008

We recently presented a workshop in London at Internet Librarian International, based on our writings here, and realized that throughout the columns we've identified a set of mile markers for the journey toward transparency.

Give everyone an avenue to talk. Offer online and real-world mechanisms for all of the library's stakeholders, staff and users, to talk, react, and suggest solutions. A good start is a suggestion box and a way to share the answers with everyone. Add an online forum or blog and "town hall meetings," and the stage is set.

Your goal is to engage your community and get them talking even if it is within the confines of your firewall or within your institution. Encourage trust, respect, and a willingness to be open. Remember, no one should be punished for speaking up or speaking out. And use that feedback from staff and library users for planning.

Play nice and be constructive. The new suggestion box or blog is not a soapbox or place to share petty grievances or diatribes. Staffers should use it constructively. Administrators shouldn't let fear or loss of control dissuade them from a good idea.

Couch your ideas and suggestions in ways that decision-makers will understand. Show the positive return on the investment, whether it's a monetary savings or a customer service deliverable. Good ideas are difficult to ignore, and good ideas that save the library money or bring in new users are even more imperative.

Grow and develop your support community. Everyone is a stakeholder in your library, even those in the community who don't use the library. There will come a time when a bond fund or tax initiative needs community support, and the library will have to be able to call on those sponsors.

Nurture interested parties in your user community: whomever you serve, whether they be teens, seniors, faculty, staff, or students. Remember that, as with schools, even those who use the facility little or never still benefit from a community with a thriving library. However, you can and should draw in those nonusers, turning them into critical participants whose voices will be heard in difficult times.

Be willing to accept anonymity. Anonymity can encourage people to share observations or ask questions that might otherwise never emerge. Be willing to look past nonconstructive critical statements gathered from staff or the public via surveys, comments, or feedback forms. There may be substance behind the snark to be addressed and used.

What about bad or "not so useful" statements or suggestions made by staff? Name-calling, for instance, may not merit an open reply, but it's best to address even slightly feasible ideas, if only to acknowledge the input and encourage more feedback. Explain why a particular idea might not work at this time, and direct focus to other areas. Or involve

staffers in exploring the costs and benefits of particular ideas that might demonstrate their feasibility to all.

Tell the truth. Lies don't work. Your staff and users will remember deception for a long time. Honesty creates buy-in for initiatives and plans, and that buy-in creates success.

During difficult times, pull constituents in so they understand reasons for changes to services. Don't hide behind "happy talk" PR when an honest voice is much stronger and more memorable.

Be honest with yourself as well about what your user community wants. Don't let one vocal critic change policy for the entire library; know that the squeaky wheel doesn't necessarily reflect the populace.

Focus on user-driven policy, not driving users away. Usage patterns, user needs, and the grim reality of tough economic times mean we must steadily reevaluate our mission, our services, and our policies.

We recognize that true reference questions are slipping on our stats pages, but demand for access to the web, emerging technologies, and traditional public library services can still thrive, as the recent upturn in library use shows. Keep track of what users gravitate toward and respond nimbly to their needs.

Fewer college students browse the shelves these days, but the academic library can remain central. Academic libraries recognize the need for technology and collaborative space to respond to changing patterns of use.

See your library through the eyes of your users. Brian Herzog's "Work Like a Patron Day" invited library staffers to experience their facilities as users do: What signage do they see? How are they treated? How does the library feel?

Join us next month for the final six signposts.

Six More Signposts

December 1, 2008

Last month, we presented six mile markers for your transparent library. Here are six more.

Have an open-door policy. You have to listen to be heard. And you have to be out there to be noticed. Whether you're a director, leader, or manager, listening to your community and working with other leaders and managers is the only way you will remain relevant and grow stronger as a leader and help build a stronger organization. Seth Godin reminds us in his book *Tribes* (Portfolio, 2008) that anyone can become a leader in this new, connected world. All it takes is a shared interest and a way to communicate.

We must listen in every direction, using both old and new tools. We need to hear our users and staff when they ask for new tools or services. And we must listen when they tell us that things are broken. We, of course, notice the loud voices, but we also need to hear the concerns and needs expressed in quiet tones.

Participate in the conversation. As we previously observed, people are sharing reviews and observations online about your facilities, staff, and services. We must participate in these forums; it should be part of your duties. In fact, the truly transparent library might find ways to facilitate, encourage, and nurture the conversation. Why couldn't a thriving "ask the experts" site like MetaFilter be duplicated in the library setting, tapping into user knowledge and expertise?

Measure progress. You can't review and change those services or tools if you aren't measuring their progress. Almost all technologies—web pages, blogs, and library catalogs—have some method or means for quantifying usage.

Ed Byrne, senior librarian (web services) at Dublin City Public Libraries in Ireland, recently reminded us that many of these new tools are so new that we don't know everything there is to know about them. So, while allowing time to analyze these new measurements, be sure to collect anecdotal evidence about usefulness, time saved in the process, and any other benefits. Look for ways to solicit comments and feedback. Mine your library users' behavior by watching what they do and how they interact with your building, collection, and computers. Engage them in impromptu dialog, both online and in person.

Serve all of your user groups. Review your mission and vision. Are you serving all of your users? Sometimes the easy route is to cater to those already using the library. Consider commuter students, teens, twentysomethings, and online library customers. Do you have designated positions and services for them?

We're reminded of library efforts to ban social networking sites on public computers, or to ban young people during school hours to prevent truancy. Don't forget that these users will someday decide the fate of the library as they vote for funding or expansion. If you show them the door today, they may never return.

How do you reach out to nonusers? Are they aware of your offerings? Position the library where these individuals will find you. The librarian who frequented a local Panera Bread outlet, promoting the library, answering questions via a laptop, and signing up people for cards is a great example.

Check your ego at the door. Good leaders don't surround themselves with "yes" people. And good leaders know that if their message is not being heard, or it's being heard incorrectly, then the fault does not lie with the listener but with the speaker. Stop worrying about the snarkiness of survey responses and start worrying about the meaning behind those negative comments.

Be sure to listen through the criticism. Behind relatively unconstructive criticism may lie a real concern. Show those critics you can listen, and show them that you'll respond.

Recognize and grow your talent. Talented staff reflect better on you. Talented staff can help you take your organization places you didn't think possible. However, if you view talented staff as threats, or, worse, ignore them completely, then you are doing a disservice to yourself and an injustice to your organization.

Embrace change. Build change into everything you do. Don't plan, implement, and forget. Recognize that the tools will change, but the purpose and mechanism will stay the same. Not trying a library blog because "next year there'll be something new" is not a workable excuse. We need to communicate now with our users.

At a recent conference, we overheard someone say, "Every time people really like something, we get rid of it." Wouldn't a better solution be to examine the reasons that something becomes popular or well used and find ways to deliver it as much as possible, be it Facebook access, more tables and chairs, or niche materials?

Properly handled and managed, adaptation to change ensures our survival. You can build that change into your organization through the use of review teams and community forums, drawing on staff and users alike.

Measure the Silence

January 1, 2009

You make every effort to create a transparent library. You listen to your staff and customers and give them all possible means to talk to you-email, blogs, paper comment cards, telephone numbers, instant messaging, etc. You try to listen in via Twitter and Yelp.

You hold community nights for customers to talk to you and go out to where they are and try to hold conversations where it is most convenient for them. From all of this, you try to steer your library on the right course, paying heed to and responding to input.

Types of silence

But what are you not hearing? As with any healthy relationship, personal or public, you need to hear what's not being said. What about the silence? What are people not telling you and why? How do you measure the silence?

First, recognize that there are two types of silence, actual and perceived. Actual silence is easy to understand-no one is communicating even though you're listening and paying attention.

Perceived silence can be more insidious. That's when your staff or customers are saying or doing something and you're not hearing it because either you haven't put the proper mechanisms in place for them to talk to you, or, more likely, because you're ignoring the conversation.

What to do

First, review your communications tools. Are they working? Are they easy to locate and use? Do they allow anonymity? Do they reach out to the different demographics in your community by being available in multiple languages and obtainable offline in a printed format and at a variety of locations?

If you've checked the tools and they pass inspection, you must turn a bit more inward. You've got your favorite sources for information and feedback-those people you call upon regularly to give you updates on the "feel" of the organization or feedback on new initiatives and services.

Still, begin looking at the rest of the organization. Whom are you not hearing from? And worse, whom are you ignoring? Are there discussions going on that perhaps you'd rather not hear?

Some measurements

Sometimes the silence is good. If you have recently upgraded a service or technology and then help desk tickets or complaints declined, that's good.

Still, you want to measure the change in feedback. If you put a lot of work into repairs or upgrades, you want to be able to prove that the return was worth the effort and cost. Measure the silence by highlighting the reduction in complaints, the increased uptime, or the improved use or attendance numbers.

Putting review structures in place will also greatly assist in hearing that silence. As discussed in the book *Library 2.0* (Information Today, 2007), by Michael Casey and Laura C. Savastinuk, creating teams that review new services and initiatives will ensure that nothing is "planned, implemented, and forgotten."

By regularly reviewing everything your library does, you can be certain that you're hearing what's being said or not said. And by including both staff and members of the community in your review process, you can invite those people who might not otherwise talk to you to participate in the evaluation and development of library services.

Bad silence is when something is wrong, but you're not hearing about it. Are there individuals who used to complain about things but have stopped? Ideally, you've been placing customer comments and complaints in a database for review and follow-up. If you're no longer hearing from particular groups, it may be because they simply stopped complaining and went elsewhere.

Go to the field

Don't forget about "going to the field" (*The Transparent Library*, LJ 9/15/07). Talk to staffers who don't talk to you. Find out what they think, and ask them what they might be hearing from the library's customers. You'll be surprised what customers say to front-line staff that never reaches the decision-makers.

If you target customers who have not used their cards in a while, you have another way to measure that silence-and to find out what it will take to get them in the door or onto your web site.

Public libraries' outreach to teens is a good example. Dedicated librarians hosting teen advisory boards, gaming nights, open mic nights, and more have attracted previously underserved groups to become regular users of the library. This successful outreach effort, nontraditional in many ways, signals a way to further expand future library services.

Dear Library Directors

February 15, 2009

We appreciate your feedback, positive and negative. As we move into 2009, even as you grapple with budget challenges, keep in mind that these Five Things We Just Can't Ignore in Libraries require moxie more than money.

Privacy: We really need to rethink our privacy concerns, offer varying levels of opt-in, and educate our users about a networked world in which our life streams are saved through social networks and servers in the "cloud." We believe the default should be privacy, but if patrons want to share, we should let them.

Rethink your library privacy settings, as well. Is the "No Photography" rule really for your users' privacy (beyond minors), or is it a loss of control to see pictures of your facilities and signage on Flickr? Cameras are everywhere today, including in phones. Sharing images might just bring nonusers and potential funders your way-or serve as a wake-up call. Imagine how useful Jenny Levine's photo tour of DOK Library in Delft, Holland, is to librarians and LIS students who might never get to visit.

We thank those who gave us tours of their libraries this past year and were tickled to have the photos stored online.

The Environment: Saving money is important but so is saving resources. As you plan your new buildings and new services, how can you lessen the impact on the planet? We're happy to see new buildings, like the Darien Library, CT, open with green certification, limiting energy use in a larger structure.

Even little things can help. Do your libraries have bicycle and skateboard racks? Can you create ride-sharing programs for staff? Can staff grab a quick shower if they bike or walk to work? Telecommuting should be considered for jobs not tied to public service desks.

As librarians lose their conference travel budgets as well, we urge meeting planners to offer opportunities for learning and exchange locally or online. Also, when was the last time you met with library people in your area for a luncheon "round table" or facility tour?

The Nature of Information: As people find information "on the fly" or "just in time," how can we still play a role? We're excited to see new ways libraries are offering reference: texting, Meebo, and outreach to places like Panera Bread. It's not time to stop those innovations. Could your reference staffers be doing their jobs in other channels? In other spaces?

We were impressed by Columbus Metropolitan Library, OH, and others that have changed imposing reference desks to friendlier stations where staff and users stand beside one another. The reference interview these days should be all about collaboration and context.

But remember the role of privacy. Consider private reference interview areas, much like hospital admissions cubicles, where patrons can quietly and confidentially seek

information. Online channels like Meebo also provide a low-cost way to answer sensitive questions from library users online.

Generation C: Our spaces, policies, and service offerings must reflect that young people grow up to be creators. Let them create along with you. In order to do this they must work in groups, and groups are not usually "shhhh" quiet. Can you designate both quiet space and collaboration environments?

Create multiple channels to engage your users. Have your staff-and you, too-explore the possibilities of social networking tools. Many libraries are creating thriving communities via sites like Ning or sharing spaces via wiki software. Mine the biblioblogosphere for useful "how to do it" posts and examples from all types of libraries. And get involved yourself. You don't have to understand all the tech to use it and see what returns it might bring to your library.

Telling Our Story Well: Tough economic times can spell disaster for library funding, even as use skyrockets. Make sure you tell your story well in various channels. It's no excuse to say, "We don't have any money to do that" when the examples here highlight ways to engage users and funders with simple, open tools.

Make sure you sell your successes to your board, dean, mayor, commissioners, faculty, local press, chamber of commerce, and student body. Perhaps an electronic annual report (isn't paper old-fashioned, expensive, and wasteful?) could be sent to the key players in your community, highlighted with library user photos from Flickr or Facebook.

We know you have a tough job. We thank you for your attention and request that you keep the feedback coming.

You Can't Afford Not To Do These Things

March 15, 2009

We've written about ideas for improving customer service, boosting staff morale, fostering change, and building a management and communication style that is win-win for both staff and administration. Almost everything we've discussed has, as its only cost, time—necessary to plan, implement, and review.

There are no expensive technologies to purchase, no cutting-edge software to struggle with, and no \$500-an-hour consultants. Our suggestions involve listening, dialog, and transparent actions. Trust is the underlying concept. Communication is its foundation.

Economics hit morale

On April 1, 2007, when we began writing The Transparent Library column, the nation's economy was reasonably strong, and library budgets were relatively sufficient and stable. But things have changed. Federal, state, and local budgets have begun to suffer seriously, and many libraries now face hiring freezes and, in some instances, layoffs and closings.

The economic downturn also hurts morale. If your library is experiencing layoffs and closings, this is unfortunate yet understandable. But we hear from some librarians that managers are using the economic crisis to close their doors and ears to new ideas and initiatives.

That is the worst thing they can do. In fact, now is the best time to implement many of the ideas we've advocated for the past two years, to listen to your staff and your users, seeking new and more efficient ideas to boost service delivery and morale. It is not the time to hunker down stubbornly.

Directors shouldn't hide

First, managers and administrators should take some time to visit your locations. Listen to your constituents. While costly new initiatives are unlikely, ideas that make use of existing tools should be encouraged and studied. Honest dialog goes a long way toward addressing staff worries and concerns.

If you can't get to all of your locations, go to some, then record a video for the staff as a whole. For a look at transparency at its best, check out the video of Allen County Public Library, IN, director Jeff Krull addressing his staff and user base about the current property tax reform issue in Indiana.

Building teamwork

Many libraries are responding productively to improve or augment internal interaction and the management of day-to-day tasks. Teams and committees can alternate between actual physical meetings and virtual meetings, reducing the fuel and downtime costs associated with travel. Free online tools can open up dialogs among physically and hierarchically separated groups within your organization.

Take a look at what the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga library is doing with a MediaWiki install to plan for its new building and highlight the workings of various departments.

Never stop learning

Unfortunately, many libraries are cracking down on just the things their staffers need. Recently, we heard from a librarian who found her “Learning 2.0” initiative on hold as her library system grapples with budget cuts and a hiring freeze. “I was told we don’t have time to take on new things,” she reported via email.

While we’ve previously promoted inclusive learning and open management, how do these ideas hold up in troubled economic times?

Budget woes, hiring freezes, and cutbacks are not reasons to suspend innovation, creativity, and learning. The mechanisms and priorities may change, but the culture should not.

Actually, tight budgets should foster creativity and the exploration of free online tools for outreach and low cost programming that taps into user needs. A program called “Super Couponing”—available throughout the Chicagoland area at public libraries—recently attracted almost 200 people to the Schaumburg Township District Library, IL.

Making use of time

While staff time isn’t free, it also isn’t permanently affixed to specific tasks and services, especially those that return little on investment. Sandra Nelson, author of *Managing for Results*, points out that a few hours here and there devoted to something as simple as a bulletin board can add up to misallocated time.

If you can find such black holes of time—whether it be hours spent on displays or hours spent on programs that few attend—you might reallocate some staff to more productive and lucrative projects that boost both morale and door-count.

You may also find that some teams or projects should be delayed or canceled in light of the budget. Staff time devoted to these initiatives could be redirected toward projects with

more immediate returns. If you have a monthly team meeting to discuss a new ILS but, owing to budget cutbacks, that system is on hold, then you could retask that team or staff to look at other customer service initiatives.

Some new ideas

With the above in mind, try out some of these ideas to create buzz and interest with staff and your user base:

Mine the biblioblogosphere for innovative yet cost-effective ideas for programs. Rick Roche's "How To Manage Your iPod" class at Thomas Ford Memorial Library, Western Springs, IL, is a recent example of programming success.

Community conversation

If your community is being hit by the economic downturn, take every chance to talk with your user base and reach out to other organizations. San Diego County Library is offering "hands-on support" for citizens in foreclosure via programs and partnering.

Other ideas you can explore:

Host "Town Hall" meetings to discuss openly how the library is handling budget shortfalls. Encourage participation with users.

Consider creating a video for extending the town hall online—involving administrators or staff. Call for video responses.

Ask your user base to help you promote the library with their own video or graphic creations, as the New Jersey State Library did. Have a contest. Give the winner a "no cost" prize, such as freedom from fines, free video, or 50 free printouts.

Don't make sweeping changes without checking in with your users and mining the appropriate data. For example: cut hours with low use not busy times.

Consider taking the conversation online via a site like "14 Days To Have Your Say" from Western Libraries, Western Washington University, which gathers and tallies user-generated ideas and the responses to them.

Keep your eyes on the ball

And, please, librarians, don't take the easy way out. "Our budget cuts mean we have no time for staff development" could become "Let's offer a free Learning 2.0 program for all staff and our users."

The above is within reach at little or no cost and an outlay of staff time. The tools are free or low cost. All it takes is ingenuity and the proper mindset.

Cheers & Jeers

April 15, 2009

We've been writing the Transparent Library for two years, so it's time for some more thumbs up and thumbs down.

Jeers to the five board members at Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, KS, for voting yes to restrict four books about sex. This does not help library users-who shouldn't have to face barriers in seeking such books-or public perception of their community.

Cheers to the director and librarians at the Topeka library for fighting the good fight to maintain a well-balanced, useful, and inclusive collection for all.

Cheers to the library in Fox River Grove, IL, for its outreach to teens and the FRGMLTABLOL (Fox River Grove Memorial Library Teen Advisory Board LOL). They're creating lifelong library users by encouraging use, exploration, and participation.

Cheers to all of the libraries and other organizations that have offered a Learning 2.0 program to staff and users. Last we heard, over 1000 organizations have offered a version of the free program created for self-directed exploration of social tools.

Jeers to the librarian mind-set that in troubled economic times, learning, curiosity, and play must take a back seat. Now is the perfect time to find ways to extend services with free open tools.

Cheers to libraries like Roselle Public Library, IL, and Lafayette Public Library, CO, for creating user-centered communities for their patrons with Ning, a free DIY social network site.

Cheers to the American Library Association (ALA) for embracing Twitter and promoting the use of hash tags like #ALAMW09 that conveyed streams of Midwinter Meeting information to folks all over the world. And cheers, too, for launching ALA Connect, a virtual online space.

Jeers to the organizations that still don't understand that controlling the conversation-call it public relations, marketing, etc.-has passed out of your hands. Brands are created by users and conversations about your brand happen all over. Find them. Chime in. Respond.

Cheers to the New Jersey State Library for creating www.solvinglifeproblems.org to gather stories from users about how their libraries transformed their lives. Such true stories of how libraries change people impress funders.

Cheers to the folks using emerging tools to enhance conferences and learning opportunities, such as Skyping speaker, UStreaming a trends session, or tagging tweets, posts, pictures, and more with a common moniker.

Jeers, however, to some who criticize in the conference back channel. We've been disappointed with snarky chatter and lack of respect for speakers and conference attendees at some events.

Cheers to the gaming initiatives happening in libraries worldwide. **Half-jeers**, however, to the folks at the Nebraska Library Commission who could have contextualized that notorious YouTube video-and **jeers** to the Nebraska State Auditor who should have known better than to go after a legitimate library initiative.

Jeers to the libraries that still have signage restricting the use of cell phones inside the building when it's all about simple common courtesy.

Jeers to the library that restricts computers to "library research only." Guess what? Games, chat, instant messaging, Facebook, etc., might be part of the 21st-century student's curriculum-we know they're in LIS curricula.

Cheers to the academic libraries that asked students about their lives and needs and how the library could fit into their workflows. Rather than having "the students fit our rules and regulations," the University of Queensland in Australia opened the doors to food and drinks in covered cups.

Cheers to marketing guru Seth Godin and his book Tribes: We Need You To Lead Us (Portfolio)-a touchstone for us this year. We agree with Godin that the market will reward organizations and individuals who choose to lead while those stuck within archaic rules and outdated practice-or guided by fear-will not flourish.

Which will you be?

Reasons for Optimism

May 15, 2009

These may be tough times, but libraries are more important than ever. We find reasons for optimism and also offer advice to new graduates.

Libraries are going through some difficult times right now. What gives you hope?

MS: Libraries are forging ahead with low-cost technologies and new initiatives. Many nimble librarians are adapting quickly to the current economic climate, offering access to government programs, résumé workshops, and projects centered around saving money. We can and do think on our feet.

MC: I'm encouraged by the number of libraries that offer training classes in various basic skills and services. Community outreach now means instruction in using Word and PowerPoint to put together job application packages, career nights with tutorials on online job search databases, and evening seminars in career-centered social networking.

As my library goes through a strategic planning process, this is an amazing time to be looking ahead. We're being asked to do more and more with less. We're using computers for longer cycles and refreshing those computers and making them function in new ways. And we're creating teams for more innovative services, getting projects off the ground and managed without needing to hire or transfer many staff.

Does this add to the workload? Yes, but staff are stepping up and delivering. They realize that the top performers now are the ones who will be recognized when some of the difficulties pass.

This is not the time to retrench or retreat. Rahm Emanuel, President Obama's chief of staff, reminds us, "Never allow a crisis to go to waste." For libraries (and librarians, as we'll discuss below), now is the time to look around and ask ourselves, What could we be doing that we're not? What additional services could serve some of the increasing numbers in need of assistance?

What should MLS students be doing to make themselves more marketable in this tighter job pool?

MS: I just concluded a section of my favorite class to teach: LIS768 Library 2.0 and Social Networking Technologies. Centered around the concept of participatory service, the class encourages students to experiment, play, and think critically about improving services in a changing world. I close the session with some counsel to students as they head out into the job market.

Make Issues Opportunities. Look at any of the issues impacting libraries right now, for example, the economy, new converged devices, and digital streaming and downloads. Then look at what innovative thinkers have done regarding such issues. Learn to be such change agents.

Never Stop Learning. By graduation, our students should have learned, through successes and stumbles, how to address a problem and find solutions via evidence and their own thinking. When one student expressed her excitement at mastering Facebook, I commented, "Now you can take on anything." The master's degree is just that, not an end point for librarians' learning.

Be Curious. Marketing guru Seth Godin suggests, "To be curious means to explore first." New grads should emphasize this trait and even add it to their résumés, saying something like, "I'm curious about how libraries and librarians can help change the world, one library user at a time."

Focus on the Heart. No matter where they find work, new grads should remember they're human-focused. Consultant and blogger Karen Schneider reminds us that "the User is the Sun." If we help people achieve the best they can-satisfying information needs, providing entertainment, enabling social connections-we're reaching the heart.

MC: It's difficult to get a foot in the door; I think library administrators are looking to hire people not only with a good philosophical understanding of the role and purpose of libraries but also with a solid working knowledge of customer service. With tight economic times and shrinking budgets, libraries need to know that they're getting the absolute most for their money.

It's not enough that you have an MLS and can quote Ranganathan's five laws. You must understand customer service and be willing to do everything and anything thrown at you, whether it's shelving, weeding, working the desk, or reading a story to kids. The new keys are versatility and flexibility.

Don't give the impression that menial tasks are beneath you. It's not an option to sit at the desk updating your Facebook status while waiting for "real" reference questions. Help where you can, and meet the users' needs.

Veteran librarians and administrators should be honest and open with new librarians. Far too often, we make it look like everything we try and everything we do is a success. Sometimes, it's not. We should learn from those efforts and do better. Librarians, especially new ones, need honest encouragement, not quixotic tales of generations past.

Be Selfish, Promote Service

June 15, 2009

Now, More than ever, we need to deliver our best customer service. No library users should walk away feeling that their questions or needs were not fully addressed. No teen should come to the reference desk only to be met by a sarcastic answer and a hand gesturing them to some distant region of the stacks. No senior should be expected to use our newest technology without being offered a training session.

Is this hard in today's tighter economic times? Absolutely. Time is at a premium, as is money, but right now, you, you, need to be selling yourself.

This isn't about "the library," but, as in "Reasons for Optimism" (LJ 5/15/09, p. 20), it is about you, the librarian, the individual, making yourself stand out. You need to be the most energetic, multitasking, forward-thinking, driven librarian you can because administrators, managers, and your fellow workers (who may be your future bosses) are all watching to see what you're doing.

Economic hardship and crisis make life difficult in libraries. Budgets are being cut, staffs are being stretched thin, and morale is being tested with every cutback or increased job responsibility. Many staffers respond with complaints and unproductive annoyance.

Smiles and energy

So what can you do, especially if you're already busy and working as hard/fast as possible? As silly as it sounds, bring a smile to your tasks. Volunteer for teams and committees. This is a great way to get yourself recognized by administrators and management.

Ask your supervisor if you can cross-train in another department, perhaps filling in for someone on leave or simply helping an understaffed section. This is a great way to grow your big picture understanding of your library.

When you're at the desk helping customers, be sure to get out from behind that counter and walk customers to the shelves. Use that time as an opportunity to tell them about new services your library might have. Are there upcoming events you can bring to their attention?

Spend a little time talking to the customers. Find out what they're looking for in a library. Do they expect to see or find things that you don't offer? Do they want training or classes in areas your library doesn't currently provide? Potential new initiatives abound.

You're a librarian, so read

Begin reading a bit more about libraries. Cruise the many librarian blogs for new ideas and initiatives. Read through the professional journals to find out what other libraries are doing to address today's economic challenges. Keep an eye on other organizations for how they might be adapting to deliver quality customer service more efficiently.

Read outside the profession, too. Seth Godin's *Tribes: We Need You To Lead Us* (Portfolio) and David Weinberger's *Everything Is Miscellaneous* (Holt) are two favorites that can illuminate your thinking and your work. Scan the best sellers lists. Spot trends in *Wired*, *Fast Company*, and other publications. Check out TED Talks to hear some big thinkers share their insights for free.

Look for ways to improve efficiency and see what you can do to share and implement them. Is there a team or task force that accepts ideas for review? Can you talk with your manager? And remember: always couch your ideas constructively, not critically.

No immunity for the boss

Administrators and managers don't get off the hook when it comes to standing out in times of crisis. But if you're the boss (or one of many) and you're working 60-hour weeks, your staff may have no idea. Take a walk out onto the floor before you leave for home so everyone knows you're still there. Make it a point to talk to staff about the increased workload, mentioning that you, too, have been pulling extra hours in an effort to keep the library on track. Stop by a branch library while driving home and ask how everyone is doing-face time is very important.

We don't work in a for-profit world but rather in public service, nonprofit agencies. We need to serve more people with less because what we do is so darn good and important. Everyone from front-line staff to the top dog needs to understand this. But it is possible to excel during times of sacrifice.

If you can find it within you to embrace this downturn as an opportunity to shine and to grow as a team player, you will find that when better times return, you will be rewarded. Anyone can shine when money and time are in abundance. It takes a positive and progressive individual to stand out when things are difficult.

It's Fine to Drop Dewey

July 1, 2009

We think it's good news that the Rangeview Library District, CO, is experimenting in one of its branches with an alternative to Dewey.

MC: I started highlighting Dewey's failings when I was helping build and open a new branch library. I asked the many contractors and vendors if they used the library. Many responded that they had gone as kids but that they never continued use into adulthood.

Many said they went to the book superstores but had given up on the library. Why? Coffee, collection, and classification.

Today's busy, working adults want to find what they want, quickly, and be able to have a latte or iced tea while they browse. And Dewey, no matter how good for librarians needing to locate a book fast, is simply not suited to a popular collection intended more for browsing than research.

Missing the big picture

MS: Recently, while visiting a library in a distant city for a meeting, I entered the building with a librarian who was about to check how series titles were cataloged, saying, "So many libraries do it wrong." Such granularity of concern among some colleagues bothers me.

Some commenters on LJ's Rangeview news story can't understand why more signage placed on top of the Dewey framework wouldn't fit the bill. Another suggested that the Rangeview people were just making the library "more confusing." One person noted this approach had been tried in the 1980s, serving browsers well but not folks seeking a particular item.

MC: Does this mean libraries should become bookstores? Absolutely not. We offer services that bookstores simply cannot. Libraries are nonprofit public service organizations. That doesn't mean we can't experiment with ways of providing better access to our materials.

Compromises include better subject signage and improved shelving layouts. The West Palm Beach Public Library, FL, is trying something like this with a mix of bookstore categories and Dewey classification.

MS: The response from Rangeview director Pam Sandlian Smith (who used to run West Palm Beach) is spot on, because she recognizes customer convenience and the DIY movement.

Amen. User-centered self-service and easy-to-access collections should be the order of the day. It pains me to think we still expect people to come to the librarian behind the reference desk--the gatekeeper of all knowledge--to beg for some snippets of information.

Findability issues

MC: Findability can be complicated; to some it means locating things easily while browsing and to others it means finding things precisely after doing a catalog search. The relationship between shelving style and findability has a lot to do with the size of the collection. Smaller collections (perhaps 100,000 volumes or less) are probably better suited to de-Dewey shelving strategies.

Improving findability will not take us closer to becoming bookstores nor will it lead to the "commodification" of libraries in general. It will make access to our materials easier for our users to understand, which will improve use, which will result in happier library customers. And this is what we want, right?

Improving service

MS: Each semester, during an intro class unit on organization of information, we discuss these issues. Dewey designed a system that worked well for its time--and way beyond--but it has deficiencies we've tried to cover with Band-Aids, like more signage. We listen to Marshall Shore interviewed on NPR about the original project at Maricopa County Library District's Perry Branch. Then the students share their views and personal experiences--and many echo what Michael mentioned above.

Smith has an answer: "WordThink allows library staff the freedom and creativity to develop collocation relationships that could never happen in Dewey. [It] allows staff to anticipate customers' inquiries and shelve items that have natural affinities."

What a perfect duty for librarians: creating connections among materials to inspire users. To me, this naturally pairs readers' advisory with the foundations of collection management.

I have no idea where these innovations may lead, but I'm glad others are following the initiative at Maricopa. Isn't focusing on innovation, creative thinking, the delivery of intuitive user-focused service, and streamlining workflows a bit more important and timely than worrying if the catalog is perfectly correct?

Collection Bashing & Trashing

By Michael Stephens, August 1, 2013

A few months ago in "Holding Us Back" (LJ 4/15/13, p. 42), I suggested that one of the things preventing librarians from working at web scale might be "a lingering emphasis on collections over users." I and others have argued that the evolution of libraries and library service will include a pronounced shift from libraries as book warehouses to libraries as centers for discovery, learning, and creation via any number of platforms.

I might have been guilty of a bit of collection bashing in these discussions, and recent occurrences of collection trashing have given me pause. I still see the path forward detailed above as viable and inevitable, but we must also not forget that stewardship must not be sacrificed for a 3-D printer or a wall of monitors highlighting a digital collection.

Learning from #bookgate

I followed with great interest the weeding kerfuffle now known as #bookgate at the Urbana Free Library (UFL) in Illinois. Tweets, news stories, and Facebook shares painted a grim picture of a weeding project gone horribly wrong. In a nutshell: books more than ten years old were removed from the nonfiction collection without reference to any other criteria.

I wished Michael Casey (now information technology director, Gwinnett County Public Library, GA) and I were still writing LJ's Transparent Library column, because as the story unfolded, most of what I read about the weeding process and administration of UFL was decidedly opaque. A possibly misguided strategic planning process was criticized as lacking community involvement.

Outrage ensued across the online spaces librarians inhabit, as well as those of UFL patrons and watchdog types. I would call this an example of closed governance -- something we see going away, quickly, in the face of the open government movement. It will also be a case study to end all case studies in collection development and management classes across LIS.

Carol Tilley, assistant professor at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, was instrumental in sharing links, commentary, and retweets during #bookgate and, with others in the community, put together a website devoted to reclaiming and supporting UFL. It will remain a valuable resource even after the immediate crisis is resolved, because all of us in the field should learn from these events.

Even as books go digital and directly to readers' devices, there are still print materials and media to purchase and share -- and deselect when the time comes and criteria are met. Engaging with the public during each step of this process keeps them involved and reduces after-the-fact wrath.

One of Tilley's Twitter shares was a link to a news piece about Onondaga Public Library in Syracuse, NY, headlined, "Save 1,100 vintage science fiction books from destruction!" The library is seeking creative proposals for passing on a little-used sf collection. Great books, not circulating, must go to good homes, the library is essentially saying. That's

transparency at its best -- transparent and shared leadership. Organizations like libraries can either battle their public or work with it. The long-term solution is openness.

Beyond the Collection

The tale of #bookgate should be a catalyst for librarians to offer more participatory avenues, to engage with not only the care and nurturing of our collections but with all aspects of our services. A library operating without the input of its constituents is missing a vital component.

I bounced these thoughts off Casey, who replied, "We can even look to radically transparent movements in the area of government budget building with some of the new participatory budgeting processes coming out of Chicago and New York City. Urbana and some other libraries would do well to look to some newer forms of radical transparency."

Programming is another area where public involvement would enhance offerings. Does your library engage with a group of constituents to map out possible ideas for programs and events? Are you still offering the same programs you developed years ago because they are easy to replicate? Paying attention to user interests will help gauge what's hot right now. Fresh voices and ideas from beyond library staff input might lead to some intriguing and popular initiatives.

These ideas should permeate our work in LIS classrooms. LIS courses that incorporate participatory design into student work give new graduates the skills and mind-set to use it in practice. This summer, my coinstructor, Kyle Jones, and I are designing a new assignment for the Hyperlinked Library MOOC (massive open online course) and course that my school is offering this fall. This community engagement exercise will get our students thinking about building services and planning for the future with participation and feedback from all stakeholders. I hope libraries considering sweeping changes will do the same.

This essay was originally published as part of the Office Hours series in Library Journal, August 1, 2013.

The Road Ahead

September 15, 2009

We've been writing this column for more than two years, and though it's been a wonderful experience, it's time to move on to other projects and topics. We appreciate the feedback we've received on the LJ site, via emails, and in person--including all of those wonderful "please keep this anonymous" stories. Since April 2007, we've seen the rise of Twitter, the closing of libraries, and the burgeoning of social applications, among numerous changes. One constant: an open, flowing conversation is best to involve and engage everyone. In closing this column, we present one more list of suggestions.

Be kind. Kate Sheehan, Darien Library, CT, told a group at the Computers in Libraries conference that the "chief export of the library is kindness." That rings so true with us. Michael S. recently suggested performing a "Kindness Audit" of your spaces and services. How user-friendly are your policies and spaces? What message does your signage carry to your clientele?

Can you justify limits on services? How do you treat staff? And in an era when people go to libraries for everything from job searches to filing for government assistance, how do we treat them?

Be human. As stated in The Cluetrain Manifesto, "A human voice sounds human." Indeed, we'd much rather hear the real story about anything related to your library than a PR message.

Monitor the social networks for talk about your services--and respond in a true voice, supported by library administration. Managers, if this makes you uncomfortable, get a grip. It's not going away.

Teach them. Who knew we'd become teachers in our jobs as librarians? Take every opportunity to teach your patrons how to access collections and get the most out of the library.

Ranganathan said it best: "Books are for use." These days everything in your buildings and online should be as available as possible to all. Don't have time or resources to do this? Reallocate. Managers and administrators should spend time on the front lines helping out.

Learn always. Roy Tennant offered this touchstone: "We are born to learn, but somewhere along the way many of us pick up the idea that we must be taught in order to learn."-- "Strategies for Keeping Current," LJ 9/15/03.

In the age of Learning 2.0 and the content-rich web, there's no excuse to fall behind on current practices and emerging trends. Conference budgets are tight, but we can still learn and exchange ideas, locally or online. Launch a learning blog for your staff and accept contributions from all. Record a video at your desk about your recent successes in tough times and share it.

Shine, but be humble. In our "Be Selfish, Promote Service" column, we urged library staff to shine--to do their best helping users and promoting the profession. Those writing blogs and making presentations at conferences should shine, too. The biblioblogosphere and other online venues have allowed many librarians to stand out.

But, shining stars, please be humble and acknowledge your home library and those who have helped you. You are representing the profession to the next wave. They will learn from what you do, what you say, and how you act--online and at that vendor reception.

Encourage one another. Administrators and colleagues should let the stars at your library shine--and everyone can be a star in some way. Celebrate little successes and big ones, outside achievements, and inside accolades. Acknowledge great customer service and rewarding ideas brought to fruition.

We still hear whispered horror stories of recent LJ Movers & Shakers who feel like outcasts at their jobs or who have had to leave for other pastures. Remember "Check Your Ego at the Door"? Administrators, remember to grow your talent, encourage staff, and promote their accomplishments--big and small.

Finally, say yes. New ideas, new methods, and new services can thrive in a culture of yes. Our column "Turning 'No' into 'Yes'?" argued that the culture of perfection can hurt an organization while a culture of experience and curiosity can lead to better things, such as library use, public awareness, and recognition.

Consider the DOK Delft Library and its innovations with Microsoft Surface and user interaction. Its motto--keeping stories, sharing stories, and making stories--should be part of every Transparent Library's mission.

We hope these columns have helped you toward transparency.

Author Bios

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