

WHOLEHEARTED LIBRARIANSHIP

*Finding Hope, Inspiration,
and Balance*

MICHAEL STEPHENS

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FOREWORD

K. G. Schneider

I WILL REMEMBER WHEN TERESA KOLTZENBURG from ALA TechSource, a technology publishing unit in the American Library Association, pitched her idea for a blog to Jenny Levine, Michael Stephens, Tom Peters, and me. I could hardly believe our good luck: we were told, go forth and write it. This launched what was to be a highly satisfying editorial run. Editing and blogging may seem antithetical, but I love a good editor, and Teresa is one of the best. The guidance she provided was like a visit to a favorite stylist: our writing still emerged with our stamp on it, and yet we looked so much better, each in our own distinctive way. I was the pugnacious author in the bunch—the titles of my best-known posts are not fit to be repeated in polite company—while Tom was highly technical in a very readable way. As for Michael, in the TechSource blog and later, in columns for *Library Journal*, he was *hygge* when *hygge* wasn't cool (and yes, there is a piece in this book on *hygge* and libraries): reflective, calm, but deeply passionate about everything he wrote about. Michael gently encouraged us—never through scolding, directing, or shaming; that is not his way—to step away from the keyboard, mute our phones, make a pot of tea, find our favorite cardigan and a cozy chair, and *think*.

In this thoughtfully organized collection of TechSource blog posts and columns for *Library Journal*, Michael invites us to slow down and reflect on who we are as professionals, who we serve, and what kind of world we want to be in. Though these columns first began appearing the year YouTube was created and two years before the first iPhones were unveiled, they are all remarkably on point today, and more so because Michael unfailingly—to use his own expression—speaks with a human voice.

Never is Michael’s voice more present than in “Talk about Compassion,” where he writes about the heartbreak and joy of adopting Dozer, a senior dog, and what he learned about empathy and libraries. And he won’t let us plod forward mindlessly in our careers, in ever-narrower circles: in “On the Ground, Online, and On Target,” Michael reminds us that we should always be learning, and always seeking new ways to learn. We are accountable, Michael is telling us, regardless of where we work or where we are in our careers.

You can read this book straight through, and it will be a deeply satisfying experience, not unlike polishing off a bag of your favorite cookies. But this book also serves as an advice nurse for whatever ails you. Did you have a frustrating encounter with a library worker who insisted, “That’s the way we’ve always done it”? In several essays Michael shares advice on introducing innovation—to others, but also to ourselves. Are you a new professional, or newly reentering the library job search field? Read “Making a Name,” in which Michael explains how why and how to build your presence while remaining authentic. Are you feeling overwhelmed by the endless stream of news (and fake news) flowing into our brains through our phones, tablets, computers, TVs, and smart speakers? Revisit Michael’s restrained but pointed piece written after the 2016 presidential election, “Chaos and Caring,” for ageless ideas about grounding ourselves in meaningful interactions with others. Do you want to become a mentor, but don’t know how to get started? Are you planning a conference and want to revisit the shopworn “sage on a stage” model? Are you a library educator, seeking inspiration, encouragement, and advice on engaging with this generation’s library students? Michael addresses all of these topics, and more.

In its own sotto voce manner, this is a wildly radical book. Michael’s humanistic approach to librarianship, and his insistence on deliberation,

reflection, and compassion, are essential correctives for an increasingly thoughtless world where each day brings the newest online outrage, and hashtags, shares, retweets, and likes substitute for engaged and informed discourse. *Wholehearted Librarianship*, with its beautifully crafted *pensees*, is a clarion call for a better way.