THE HEART OF LIBRARIANSHIP

ATTENTIVE, POSITIVE, AND PURPOSEFUL CHANGE

MICHAEL STEPHENS

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MICHAEL STEPHENS is assistant professor in the School of Information at San José State University. He has consulted and presented for U.S. embassies in Germany, Switzerland, and Turkey, and presents to both national and international audiences about emerging technologies, learning, innovation, and libraries. Since 2010 Stephens has written the monthly column "Office Hours" for *Library Journal* exploring the issues, ideas, and emerging trends in libraries and LIS education. To review Stephens's archive of work, visit his Tame the Web website and blog http://tametheweb.com.

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FOREWORD

WE COULD BE living in the age of empathy. Or at least the age when empathy—defined by *Psychology Today* as "the experience of understanding another person's condition from their perspective"—is getting some fabulous press, if perhaps not a whole lot of practice.[1]

One of empathy's major cheerleaders is none other than President Barack Obama, who's espoused the benefits of empathy—and decried the "empathy deficit"—from campaign speeches to commencement addresses, even controversially citing empathy as one of the criteria for Supreme Court justices.[2]

Publishing has helped draw attention to empathy with a steady parade of books, including Jeremy Rifkin's *The Empathic Civilization* (there's a Ted Talk), which positions a growth in empathy as the only solution to our many technology-induced problems—and my favorite—Roman Krznaric's *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It,* which calls on us to regenerate our empathy through six practices.[3] For Krznaric, exercising empathy will not only make us more creative and happier, it will also lead to a more just society.

To seal the deal, empathy has even received the blessing of science. Mirror neurons, it turns out, provide a neuroscience-based explanation for why the same parts of the brain "fire" whether we are actually experiencing an action—dropping a freshly scooped ice cream cone—or merely observing someone engaged in the same misfortune.[4]

Heads up, librarians! If this all sounds a bit remote, some recent research points to reading literary fiction as having the ability, according to psychologist Raymond Mar, to place you squarely in the

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character's shoes, giving rise to the headline, "How Literature Inspires Empathy." [5] Nice to get science's acknowledgment, but could any reader have really thought otherwise after spending a weekend with Madame Bovary?

Empathy isn't just a faddish notion getting play in the popular literature. The age of empathy is having a real impact on medicine, nursing, and the other helping professions, like social work. The Internet is awash in research, studies, and reports on why doctors lose empathy, how to (or can you?) teach them empathy, and how empathetic doctors have patients with better results.

But search for "librarians and empathy" and you won't find much. Yes, there's an occasional mention of it in discussing the arcane "reference interview," a clinical term that is quick to suck any empathy out of an otherwise human conversation. In fact, librarians, I would argue, have always had trouble with empathy, often equating professionalism with the ability to keep your users at a distance, never mind walking in their shoes.

Which is why, of course, I love the writing of Michael Stephens. While the "E word" only makes an appearance a few times, his writing, indeed his worldview, is imbued with empathy. It informs his perspective as a professor: "As a teacher, I practice radical trust. I will never look over shoulders and scold a student for peeking at e-mail or the score of the big game, or practice scare tactics to make sure they do the assigned readings. They're adults." In creating library services, he flips us from planning for ourselves to empathizing with our public: "When a librarian asks me how to figure out what new services, tech, or materials to provide, I'll always start with 'ask your users.'"

Empathy is key in collaboration, how we work today: "Understanding and empathy among cross-cultural partners in a technological environment is key to success. Technology doesn't solve our problems, but it can be a conduit to making change and promoting progress." It's also an important skill that library and information science (LIS) educators must cultivate in their students: "You must be a people person in today's library. Empathic listening goes hand in hand with acceptance."

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While full of tales of innovation, ideas that challenge our practice, and a regular dose of critical thinking, these pages are likewise full of humanism and heart. Quoting a participant at a conference, Stephens writes: "Participation occurs when someone welcomed as a guest feels as though they have become a host." I would rewrite that to read: participation occurs when someone experiences empathy and feels as though they can now empathize with others.

I think that all readers of *The Heart of Librarianship* will experience this gift of empathy from Stephens, and will, I hope, hand in hand with our communities, go out and create the libraries for our future.

Brian Kenney

NOTES

1. *Psychology Today*, https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/empathy.
2. Mark Honigsbaum, "Barack Obama and the 'Empathy Deficit,'" *The Guardian,* January 4, 2013, www.theguardian.com/science/2013/jan/04/barack-obama-empathy-deficit.
3. Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization* (New York: TarcherPerigree, 2009), https://www.ted.com/talks/jeremy_rifkin_on_the_empathic_civilization; Roman Krznaric, *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It* (New York: TarcherPerigree, 2014).
4. Marco Iacoboni, "Imitation, Empathy, and Mirror Neurons," *Annual Review of Psychology* 60 (2009): 653–70.
5. Raymond A. Mar, Keith Oatley, and Jordan B. Peterson, "Exploring the Link between Reading Fiction and Empathy: Ruling Out Individual Differences and Examining Outcomes," *Communications* 34, no. 4 (2009): 407–28.

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PREFACE

I FEEL FORTUNATE. Fortunate to have found my way to public library work in 1991, fortunate to have discovered the wonders of the Internet and World Wide Web with the incredible librarians at the St. Joseph County Public Library (South Bend, Indiana) throughout the 1990s and 2000s, and fortunate to have found an online community via blogging and various other networks over the years where sharing and collaboration know no boundaries.

I have also traveled a lot over the past twelve years or so, speaking at conferences, teaching workshops, and conducting research. I joke that I've been asked to "run my mouth" in a lot of wonderful places, but truth be told I approach each trip as a way to tap into the mindset of library folk everywhere. I have learned valuable lessons about our work from librarians all over the world.

Drawing from these meetings and conversations, I shared my insights in articles and my "Office Hours" column in *Library Journal*. A charmed hour at a *Stammtisch* (regular get-together) in Berlin with library and museum professionals sharing concerns and successes. A deeply reflective group experience in the mountains of Colorado challenging the nature of what we do through the lens of risk and reward. These and other experiences have influenced and informed my writing and teaching. Like revisiting a favorite story or song, the "Office Hours" columns of mine collected in this book capture moments in time when I gained insight about the profession.

Preparing this collection has given me time to reflect on our practice. For me, the heart of librarianship is learning. It's a cyclical process of support, engagement, and discovery with deep roots in

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the concepts of service, access, and freedom to pursue interests of all kinds. No matter what type of institution, someone is gaining knowledge, finding information, or creating something new based on our facilitation. And in my opinion, the role of facilitator and guide is best delivered with humanity and heart.

Libraries encourage the heart, which means we should lead from the heart, learn from the heart, and play from the heart. It means we are all-in all the time, not just when it's convenient. It means bucking the status quo to do the right thing at the right moment. It means owning our actions as professionals. It means creating institutions that expand minds and craft futures.

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1

THE HYPERLINKED LIBRARIAN

Skills, Mind-Sets, and Ideas for Working in the Evolving Library

"THE WEB HAS changed everything." A simple statement but so indicative of how the world has evolved with emerging mechanisms for global communication and collaboration. I've used this statement in slide decks and in my teaching. It has also become an integral part of an evolving model of library services focused on user-centric opportunities to engage and learn, capitalizing on the affordances of network-enabled technologies.

The hyperlinked library model is synthesized from data collected on emerging societal trends, socio-technological research reports from Pew Internet and American Life, OCLC, EDUCAUSE, and the writings of such authors as Henry Jenkins, David Weinberger, Clay Shirky, Douglas Thomas, John Seely Brown, and Seth Godin. My model for the "hyperlinked library" is born out of the ongoing evolution of libraries and library services. Weinberger's chapter "The Hyperlinked Organization" in *The Cluetrain Manifesto* was a foundational resource for defining this model.[1] I've been writing and presenting about it for a few years around the United States and abroad—expanding and augmenting as emerging ideas and technologies take libraries in unforeseen directions. The evolving library is not a new idea—we've been talking about it for years. "The Library is unlimited and cyclical" is just as powerful today as it was when Jorge Luis Borges wrote it in "The Library of Babel" in 1941.[2]

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Hyperlinked library practice is based on the ideas, concepts, and trends of our socio-technological landscape. The hyperlinked librarian understands the following:

- The library is everywhere—it is not just the building or virtual spaces.
- Hyperlinking subverts existing organizational structures.
- Our institutions should be flatter and team-based.
- Seamless service should be available across all channels of interaction.
- We must reach all users, not just those who come through our doors.
- The most powerful information services to date are probably found in the palm of everyone's hand.
- The path forward will always be an evolutionary one.
- Inevitably, there will always be some amount of chaos.

The hyperlinked librarian uses the following methods to inform practice:

- Gathering evidence of all kinds to make decisions
- Spotting trends that impact service and changing user behavior
- Integrating the new built on a foundation of core ethics and values
- Playfully approaching opportunities to create learning experiences and engaging information-based services

We can meet change with traditional methods or more chaotic methods, or somewhere in between. Regardless, future librarians need to understand that the current environment requires handling multifaceted issues simultaneously. One way of handling change graciously is through reflective practice. As we take time to contemplate our environment and circumstances, and the decisions we make, we will be more open to new ideas and poised to take action on those ideas.

As we seek to make change, we need to be careful and not let the status quo or the excuse of no time hold us back from progress.

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Putting this into practice requires consideration and reflection. The following essays explore these ideas for the skill sets and paradigms required for evolving library service. Although changing the status quo is difficult, our libraries must evolve to meet user preferences.

Above all, librarians entering the hyperlinked arena must be curious and creative.

NOTES

1. Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger, *The Cluetrain Manifesto: The End of Business as Usual* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).
2. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel," 1941, www.sjsu.edu/faculty/harris/DigLit_F10/Readings/Borges%20Babel.pdf.

HERETICAL THOUGHTS

DURING A PHONE conversation with a valued colleague who runs a university library, we discussed the process of hiring. My colleague described working hard to streamline staffing and budgets owing to a financial shortfall, while holding steady to a strategic plan anchored in creating useful information and collaboration spaces for the student body. I asked the question I always ask when I'm talking to someone who hires new librarians: "What non-traditional skills and competencies should a new librarian have?" His response? "I want risk-takers . . . innovators . . . creatives . . . I don't want someone who's afraid to make a move or make a decision without getting permission." We chatted longer about skills that are becoming more important, usurping some of our long-standing curricular mainstays. Afterward, I continued to think about these skills and how they can be taught.

STRATEGIC THINKING AND PLANNING

As budgets fall and library use rises, LIS students need a solid foundation in project management and planning. I honestly can't recall too much devoted to strategic, technology, or long-range planning

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in my own graduate work. I do remember watching reference books being wheeled into the classroom and explained one by one. That class time would have been better spent developing a mock plan for phasing out part of our print reference and the ins and outs of acquiring, leasing, and paying for online resources.

Programs drawn from schools of business and public administration would be a good fit for the soon-to-be-librarian. Our students need grounding in concepts like decision-making, advocacy, human resources, administration, and management of nonprofits. As staffing structures change, like in the example of my colleague, a newly hired librarian may be called upon to take over departments or projects.

How do we LIS educators—and others—create pragmatic projects to reinforce these important abilities? In my classes, the dreaded group project becomes a real-world example. Here's an intriguing assignment for students: give a group a plan that was halted midstream, with directions to pick up the pieces and "make it work"—complete with roadblocks from administrators above and front-line staff below.

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Thinking and planning are important but so is innovation and creativity. I've used Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind* in my introduction to LIS classes to highlight the importance of right-brain thinking.[1] Pink argues that the logically focused left brain, though necessary in professional work, has given way to the more artistic and conceptual right brain. Creative work is what remains after outsourcing and turning repetitive work over to computers.

Pink also stresses the importance of empathy and the power of story to transform products and services.[2] Solutions to common problems can come when librarians tap into their creativity and inventiveness. For example, we could create and deliver library services built on human emotion that add to the ongoing story of a community, as they are doing at the DOK Library's Agora in Delft, The Netherlands.[3] Agora is a multimedia center where patrons can craft personal stories using provided space and software, and then broadcast those stories on one of many screens on a 33' × 10' video

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wall. The exhibits focus on a community-driven theme and change periodically. Clearly, this project was born out of creativity and interest in the library user.

Not all students are immediately ready to take this on. Some can only operate within the constraints of their own limited assumptions of what library work is. However, we can build greater creativity through our instruction practices. To conclude one semester, my introduction to LIS students walked a local labyrinth, as Pink describes, to engage the left brain and free the right to explore new ideas. "Think about your professional practice," I said before the walk. "What can you do to encourage the heart of your library users?"

I caught up with one of the students from that class, Tara Wood, and asked her what she thought about it. "I think that it is just as easy for students to fall into a certain 'comfort zone' as it is for librarians. We get used to coming to class, listening to lectures, writing papers, etc., but these are not always the best methods for learning. At first, we all felt a little silly walking the labyrinth, but by the end we felt differently. . . . [I felt] a sense of clearing out the 'junk' in my mind and being able to focus."

FOCUS ON THE HEART

As a teacher, I practice radical trust. I will never look over shoulders and scold a student for peeking at e-mail or the score of the big game, or practice scare tactics to make sure they do the assigned readings. They're adults. In exploring the idea of fear as a mechanism for learning, Seth Godin writes in *Linchpin* that instead of "fear-based, test-based battlefields, [classrooms] could so easily be organized to encourage the heretical thought we so badly need."[4] As my colleague agreed, heretical thought may be the quality of choice for future employers.

Personally, I don't want students to memorize facts. I never give exams and focus instead on writing and personal reflection about the practice of librarianship. I find the strongest student papers are usually those with a personal slant that tell a story as a means to show comprehension of course material. I want LIS students to un-

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derstand what it means to be in the ultimate service profession. Being a good, innovative librarian means taking a humanistic stance toward policy, decision-making, and experimentation. It means focusing on the heart.

NOTES

1. Daniel H. Pink, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future* (New York: Penguin, 2006).
2. Ibid.
3. Erik Boekesteijn, "What's Your Story? Dutch Library DOK's New Cutting-Edge Community Tech Projects," *Library Journal,* September 1, 2010, http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2010/09/technology/whats-your-story-dutch-library-doks-new-cutting-edge-community-tech-projects/#_.
4. Seth Godin, *Linchpin: Are You Indispensable? How to Drive Your Career and Create a Remarkable Future* (New York: Portfolio, 2010), 44.

CAN WE HANDLE THE TRUTH?

IF YOU HAVEN'T read the 2010 *Project Information Literacy Progress Report* from Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg, you should.[1] "Truth Be Told: How College Students Evaluate and Use Information in the Digital Age" is for anyone who plans for or serves the needs of students of higher education. Published by the iSchool at the University of Washington and funded by the MacArthur Foundation, the report is valuable for public and school librarians, too. The traits of the information consumers studied here are those of your users or potential users. The authors note that research is daunting for college students. They first turn for help to instructors, classmates, and friends or family, not librarians.

A WAKE-UP CALL

Some of the specific findings should galvanize all of us. On the research process: "Students relied on librarians infrequently, if ever, whether they were conducting research for coursework or for per-

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sonal use. Moreover, students . . . [used] librarians less often than they reported in the 2009 survey results."[2] On evaluating resources: "Few students in the sample asked librarians (11%) or writing center staff (7%) for help . . . and even fewer turned to librarians for help evaluating information for personal use (5%)."[3] On information-seeking for personal needs: "70% of this year's sample of students frequently turned to social networks, such as Facebook . . . in their daily lives."[4]

Ultimately, the authors of the report make a series of recommendations, including a few that librarians must heed. "We believe library instruction could benefit from some serious rethinking and re-examination. We recommend modifying sessions (in-class and reference encounters) so they emphasize . . . framing a successful research process . . . over research-finding of sources."[5] Librarians' focus on sources over teaching the research process itself has probably contributed to these disheartening survey results. But they also make me wonder how most college students see librarians. Are they invisible within their libraries and academic departments? Ineffective in bibliographic instruction sessions? (Just typing "bibliographic instruction sessions" makes my eyes glaze over.)

These findings complement those reported by Ithaka in 2013, which state that university researchers are relying less and less on the services of libraries and librarians and more on specific online resources.[6] What role will academic librarians play in the lives of students as well as these faculty who view the library as less and less of a partner? In a phone conversation, university librarian Jeffrey G. Trzeciak at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, told me he believes "librarians have lost their audience already. . . . They will likely never come back." His gloomy words should be a rallying cry for all university and college librarians and to LIS education as well.

CHANGE WE CAN EMBRACE

There may be an antidote to this grim news. Here are some proposals:

End the disconnect between some LIS schools and the libraries in their institutions. Instead, LIS schools should partner with their

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institutions' libraries to form learning laboratories. Professors, librarians, and students must work together to create new models of service and outreach. These models are evaluated and tweaked, and effective practice is reported to the greater community.

Replace "bibliographic instruction" with multichannel delivery (in person, online, at the point of need) of the basics and advanced steps for research. LIS students should learn fewer "subject of the week" resources and focus more on process, critical thinking, and workflow. It's not just about "five databases for finding articles" but social networks and alternative information streams as well.

Increase the value of students' own personal learning network—they probably have one and don't even know it. Use Facebook and other info streams to match up similarly focused undergrads and grads to enhance their learning and sharing—and feed into the research process.

Expand liaison programs, where the librarian is housed in the discipline's school—visible, vocal, and active with faculty. While much current LIS education can prepare people for this, these embedded librarians will also need other skills focused on communication, the specific discipline, and research methods and support.

Make the library building itself the Commons—as per Georgia Tech and Loyola—where support, technology, and space inspire student creativity.[7] LIS schools must offer coursework devoted to planning, implementing, and evaluating the Commons both physically and virtually.

Overall, we need to handle these truths. The solutions above will clearly move us in the right direction. Only then will libraries/librarians avoid fading into the background and increase visibility in ways that may surprise our students and our faculty.

NOTES

1. Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg, "Truth Be Told: How College Students Evaluate and Use Information in the Digital Age," *Project Information Literacy Progress Report*, November 1, 2010, http://projectinfolit.org/images/pdfs/pil_fa112010_survey_fullreport1.pdf.
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3. Ibid., 13.

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4. Ibid., 40.
5. Ibid., 39.
6. Ross Housewright, Roger C. Schonfeld, and Kate Wulfson, "Ithaka S+R US Faculty Survey 2012," *Ithaka S+R*, April 8, 2013, www.sr.ithaka.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Ithaka_SR_US_Faculty_Survey_2012_FINAL.pdf.
7. Library Commons, http://librarycommons.gatech.edu; www.luc.edu/ic/.

HOLDING US BACK

WHAT IS HOLDING LIBRARIANS BACK?

This question is from a friend who has done great work in the museum field. During one conversation, we pondered what's preventing many libraries from ramping up community engagement and user-focused services. I argued for a few factors: in some places (not all) there's a lingering emphasis on collections over users, a lack of a future focus by administrators, a lack of public awareness, and, frankly, confusion on how to go forward into a landscape that seems new and frightening.

SERVICES IN MIND

A 2013 report from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, "Library Services in the Digital Age," sheds light on what library patrons want.[1] It summarizes findings from a survey asking Americans over the age of sixteen what existing library services they like and what new services they would like to see. Such reports should be required reading for all in LIS education, especially those involved in strategic and long-range planning. They are a call to action for reevaluating core and elective course content so that library professionals are better prepared to enter the workforce and build programs and services that meet patron needs.

Regarding technology, the Pew report indicated that a "notable share" of respondents would like to see more services such as app-

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based access to collections, the ability to test-run devices in a "technology petting zoo," and "Redbox"-like kiosks located throughout the community that disperse library materials.[2] Around 60–70 percent of the respondents indicated they would be "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to use these and other innovative technologies. This is a big deal, and those services absolutely merit discussion. The study also notes that people use the library website to search the catalog and find basic library information, even as library web presence promotion is lacking. "When I receive the e-mails, they never reference the website," writes one user. "I didn't even know they had a website."[3] Another intriguing fact: respondents want the library to use the channels they use—Facebook and e-mail, specifically. What's not surprising: no respondent mentioned Quick Response codes, those smartphone-readable, bar code-style squares that for a few months librarians put on *everything*.

Meanwhile, the description of libraries as "book warehouses" is giving way in many communities as collections evolve and space is at a premium. Users and library staff alike broadly agreed that moving collections out to make room is a good thing, though some librarians expressed concerns. Positive statements, such as this from a librarian—"We don't have space to waste on things people don't use. It's not about us—it's about the community"—emphasize the user direction that should illuminate planning for the future.[4] In terms of current viewpoints and future ideas, quotes from library staff are likewise revealing: "The administration is overly hesitant to make any changes to services, even small ones, for fear of repercussions for other branches in the library district."[5]

REACHING OUT

It's easy to focus on the folks who use our services consistently, the ones who borrow materials, attend programs, and bring children to story time. However, the next step I would call "radical community engagement," and it begins with statements like this: "I think our strength is in our ties to the community and the relationships we build with our customers. That should be our focus and should

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drive how we develop our programs and services in the future." Golden! The need to be vocal can't be overemphasized: "We need to change the concept of the library as a restricted, quiet space—we bustle, we rock, we engage, but so many people in the community do not know this." The Pew report is evidence that tapping in to community needs and interests is paramount for libraries, and active interaction with citizens, businesses, nonprofits, and other entities will yield a promising future. Open the doors to local experts and creators to teach and share.

MORE THAN TEACHING

Take a look at the "About" page for the 4th Floor project at the Chattanooga Public Library.[6] "While traditional library spaces support the consumption of knowledge by offering access to media, the 4th Floor is unique because it supports the production, connection, and sharing of knowledge by offering access to tools and instruction." This exemplifies the potential of thinking beyond collections to a library space that promotes creativity and collaborative learning. Just as the Chicago Public Library's YOUmedia space has inspired similar spaces, the 4th Floor will set a standard for the next evolution of what we consider a library.[7]

As I've mentioned already, Daniel Pink, in *A Whole New Mind,* talks about focusing on creativity and empathy and how those who think with the right brain will "rule this century."[8] I think it's the converse mind-set that's holding us back. This quote from the survey scares me the most: "If I had wanted to teach people how to make stuff, I would have been a teacher. I think libraries are more about helping people learn for themselves."[9] That's certainly not the mindset we want coming out of library school or guiding our libraries. We should be able to say, "We teach, we develop independent learning skills, we inspire, and so much more!" If we can teach our students about these new things, but they enter a workplace culture that doesn't support transformation, their skills will go to waste. Thus, librarians should seek to encourage and facilitate learning of all kinds within our spaces.

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NOTES

1. Kathryn Zickuhr, Lee Rainie, and Kristen Purcell, "Library Services in the Digital Age," Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, January 22, 2013, http://libraries.pewinternet.org/files/legacy-pdf/PIP_Library%20services_Report.pdf.
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3. Ibid., 28.
4. Ibid., 56.
5. Ibid., 73.
6. "About 4th Floor," Chattanooga Public Library, http://chattlibrary.org/content/4th-floor/about-4th-floor.
7. "Youth Media Chicago: Youth-Powered 21st Century Learning," Youth Media Chicago, http://youmediachicago.org/.
8. Daniel H. Pink, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future* (New York: Penguin, 2006).
9. Zickuhr, Rainie, and Purcell, "Library Services in the Digital Age," http://libraries.pewinternet.org/files/legacy-pdf/PIP_Library%20services_Report.pdf, 74.

ALWAYS DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE

SOME OF THE most creative and flexible librarians I know have been working for more than a few years in libraries. Some of the most inspiring and influential professionals in our field have had distinguished careers and still continue to make a mark on our governance and future. I was lucky to learn about collection development, reference service, and weeding during my public library days from professionals who had worked in the system for multiple decades. These are the same folks who did not shy away from the Internet and its capabilities in the mid-1990s.

WE'VE ALWAYS DONE IT THIS WAY

That said, I must comment on some threads of conversation I had at one Annual Conference (ALA). In 2006 I wrote a post at Tame the Web (TTW) entitled "Five Phrases I Hope I Never Hear in Libraries Again."[1] It got a lot of traction back then, during the hey-

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day of LIS blogging, and I used a slide of the phrases for many years in presentations. One of the phrases was: *We've always done it this way*. Back then I wrote, "I think it's time to red flag any utterance of that phrase in our libraries and make sure it's not just an excuse to avoid change. It may, however, be the best way to do something." I urged readers to explore alternatives and new ways of working to make sure efficiencies couldn't be improved. I cautioned: if librarians are hiding behind that phrase because they've had enough new things or just want to keep things the same, it might be time to move on. It has been ten years since I wrote that post. But sometimes I still have colleagues in the field say to me that they are stymied by people who "have always done it that way" and refuse to change.

Another phrase is closely linked with the above: *He/she is a roadblock to getting anything done*. One colleague noted a supervisor who wouldn't implement a needed and beneficial change in processes because the person responsible for the work had been doing it the same way for thirty-five years. Another said simply, "People are waiting for her to retire." I often heard this phrase in a whisper from an exasperated librarian who can't seem to get anything done because someone on his or her team or above stopped everything in its tracks. "A proposal has been on her desk for six weeks . . . we're all waiting," said one colleague in hushed tones.

WHY WE CAN'T WAIT

In this climate of rapid change and tight budgets, we can't take six or twelve months, form a committee, write agendas, meet, transcribe the minutes, make more agendas, have more meetings, and on and on. The best librarians make good, rapid decisions based on evidence, experience, and a view of the big picture.

I recently tweeted out the link to the old TTW post. Daniel Cornwall, from the State Library of Alaska, replied, "This 2006 post is all too relevant [now]. But at least it doesn't quite seem the dominant point of view anymore. Hope?" Yes, there is hope. Perhaps these tides have turned, and even though we're still hearing of a few institutions mired in dysfunction and a lack of forward-thinking, they are no longer the norm.

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NOT JUST INDIVIDUALS

I'd argue, though, that the profession as a whole suffers a bit from this. Do some association committees talk things to death? Why do some vendors we work with use the same old licensing schemes? It's safe to have endless meetings. It's safe not to disrupt the way our business works.

HOW TO CHANGE THE GAME

How can we get around these issues? Nimble and quick teams, such as Skunk Works, come to mind.[2] They are empowered to push through or around any roadblocks, fast-tracking solutions to get things done. This works best if the administration is on board. In fact, getting rid of these sentiments is easiest when the person at the top is leading the way. I recently chatted with Sean Casserly from Johnson County, Overland Park, Kansas. He had this to say:

"Understanding your organization's collective mind-set is a complex problem. If you can understand where you are and you have a general idea of the direction you want to go in and can share that vision with your staff and they believe in that vision, then you need to support them and get out of their way."

If you are currently leading a library, department, or team, I'd suggest you do the same.

Finally, if you are leading a library and have said things such as, "We've always done it this way," maybe it's time to take a long, hard look at why you are saying them. Maybe it's time to get to the root of the problem: a mind-set focused on the past, not the future.

NOTES

1. Michael Stephens, "Five Phrases I Hope I Never Hear in Libraries Again (Based on a True Story)," Tame the Web, April 9, 2006, http://tametheweb.com/2006/04/09/five-phrases-i-hope-i-never-hear-in-libraries-again-based-on-a-true-story/.
2. "Skunk Works," Lockheed Martin, www.lockheedmartin.com/us/aeronautics/skunkworks.html.

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