

THE SHERBORN LIBRARY READER

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As we are about to enter a defining moment of a new century, many of us will reflect on the activity that often defines who we are – our work. Ever think of re-tooling your career? This month's column outlines a path to becoming a librarian – should you want to put a new cover on your book of life.

If you have followed me to this second paragraph, then chances are you either use the library frequently or you are struck curious, having never given a moment's thought to librarianship as an attainable, professional career.

In fact, it is a versatile and rewarding career. When I was enrolled in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College in 1986, earning my M.S. degree after spending 8 years as a paraprofessional librarian, many of my classmates were enrolled to launch a second career, having burned out or gotten burned in a previous one. Lest you suppose our profession consists of the working wounded, au contraire: the library profession benefits from the very resourcefulness and resilience of career-changers among our ranks who figured out what's eating them and left the table before they became flambe.

When I asked why the career change led them to libraries, the answers typically were: "I always fantasized about working in the learned atmosphere of libraries and finally decided to take the plunge," or "because I love books", or "libraries are such nice quiet places with no stress," or "when I was a child my parents took me to the library weekly and the children's librarian treated me like I was special." The career-changers were wide-eyed as they replied with these answers to experienced librarians, but to their former colleagues they'd retort "I made enough money in the stock market to retire and my job is just my hobby!" Invariably my question was echoed back. My reply: "I played library with my Barbie and Ken and assigned all the paperbacks I loaned to my friends a due date."

Career-changers are often faced with other conversation stoppers such as the day when they have to trade "the plunge" for a plunger (yes, the facilities sometimes need help too), and a dog-eared, hard-copy of Winnie the Pooh for an e-book version on the 'Net, and trade the hot-shot, high-stress-high-salary attitude for a cup of green tea handed to them by a children's librarian. But all in all - librarians top the charts when it comes to job satisfaction

Picture yourself in one of these settings: You have decided to make public libraries the rest of your life's work. Like the Medicis, you call the people who walk in your door your patrons. You acquire books and disseminate information that you think your patrons should have in their minds. You will acquiesce to their request for 40 copies of the latest Grisham, but you ask in return that they get on the waiting list for your single, paperback copy of War and Peace.

Perhaps the idea of an academic library appeals to you. You call the people who walk in your door your students, but they can't hear you through their headsets nor the alarm their electronics have tripped while passing through the automatic theft detection gate. You watch them listlessly wander the aisles for 20 minutes, and then you smile and offer to help. The headphones come off, the wariness too, and two weeks later he shows you the grade A earned with help from your reference expertise.

Reluctant to waste your original MBA, you opt to be a corporate librarian. You call the people who walk in your cubicle your clients. They call you the knowledge manager. Competitive intelligence is the name of your game and you have your company's trade secrets so highly classified in the Dewey Decimal System that you have proven yourself indispensable to the company. Your mind is brimming with the Grisham books you borrow from the public library, so you think law librarianship would be thrilling. You call the people who walk in your door your suits. Your job provides you with the fodder you need to write your own Grisham books, and make a fortune selling 40 copies to each public library in the nation.

The choices continue: you could be a medical librarian, a cybrarian, a special librarian in charge of esoterica, and more. Whenever you get bored in one setting you can simply pull down another backdrop. And though the rewards are not financial you are motivated by the strong sense of carrying out a worthy mission that is as American as apple pie. But think about getting what it takes to work in your own home town. If you would like more career counseling, we have the resources. You know where to find us - we're the picture-postcard building on Route 16. "X" marks the spot where we work. Wish you were here.

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