

**Wednesday, April 22**

3:30 - 4:45 PM

***What I Wish I Knew about Librarianship: A Discussion***

Dartford C&D

Every seasoned librarian has advice to share with people coming into the profession. As we mature professionally in librarianship, there are things we wish we had known early in our careers. Come join this discussion for tips and thoughtful advice on what to expect while you are in the field, and how to start, or maintain, a successful library career.

Patrick Wilkinson, Director, Forrest R. Polk Library, UW-Oshkosh

Gene Engeldinger, VP for Academic Information Services, Hedberg Library, Carthage College

Karen Dunn, Information Services Librarian, Steenbock Library, UW-Madison

Gretchen Revie, Reference Librarian and Instruction Coordinator, Lawrence University

Megan Fitch, Director of Information Services and Resources, Beloit College

Jess Bruckner, Kilbourn Public Library, Wisconsin Dells

Sponsored by New Members Round Table

**The Vitals from Jess:**

Program Layout

Type: Panel Discussion; Pack-em-in

Time Management: 5 minute for introductions, 50 minute panel discussion, 15-20 minutes for questions and answers

Requests of Panel Members/ Program Goals

\* Please, no sacred cows for this program

\* Thoughtful advice

\* Take the time to reflect in preparing for this program

\* Give new librarians the advice they need to be successful in this field; all the tools they need to be successful

\* Feel-good program; honest program; program brimming with integrity

**What I wish I Knew:**

If I had known how much fun and satisfaction I would receive from my work, I would have pursued it earlier. But, then again, seasoning can be a good thing and perfectly wonderful and appropriate to come to this profession from myriad places. With life and other work experience, comes confidence and wisdom. Age should not prove a deterrent (from either end) and this can be a long career if you can and so choose.

That change is a constant and that my ability to roll with it can be an asset. In order to remain relevant to our user groups, librarians need to assess and to reinvent what resources and services we provide—how, where, when...

How much the human touch matters, yet, in this profession despite the profusion of what appear, on the surface, to be 'self-help' utilities in our automated/online world. To the extent you can, privilege library users with your time (schedule appointments/consultations, extend the service via email, as need be). Professionally, my most satisfying experiences with users have been when they express their gratitude—that sincere thank you at a time of need, that tearful break-through when you have been able to instruct them successfully to perform a task, that moment when they comment that they can really tell how much you enjoy your job, etc.

That interpersonal relationships and the ability to cultivate them matter, even in the workplace. We do not work in a vacuum. While we cannot expect that we will get on famously with everyone on staff, we should look to behave professionally and respect/esteem what our colleagues do contribute well to the workplace. Every job contributes to the whole—do not let classification or rank blind you to how you must work cooperatively with others. Ideally, look for, what I would term a flat hierarchy, a workplace where units interact and/or have programming and social events that bring staff together.

### **Strategies & Tips:**

What type of position do you wish to have in libraries? Take a look at current job listings/descriptions for those desired positions—can you speak to the qualifications itemized? Consider positions that welcome new professionals, that are entry-level, so-to-speak and that celebrate/recognize the need for professional development and support while you 'learn the ropes.'

As a new staff member, take some time to observe the culture of your new workplace; there will likely be long, enduring histories and strategies for communicating that you will, ideally, want to get a handle on. Aim to be on the best possible terms with everyone.

Pursue free and inexpensive opportunities to bolster skills—practicums, shadowing, technology workshops.

Be a lifelong learner. Seek out continuing educational opportunities—including those in human resources, marketing, and business management (fiscal, budget).

In addition to your resume, develop a practice of maintaining a CV—that is, document your activities, accomplishments, accolades, postgraduate coursework, presentation and instructional materials. Not only will this provide your current employer with important information during your annual review, it can also supply a rich portfolio to draw from should you pursue another position.

Find a workplace mentor (or maybe, even another librarian colleague—old chum from library school). Is there someone with whom you can meet with to chat, brainstorm or seek advice of a professional, yet confidential, nature?

Contribute articles/content to your library's newsletters. Not only do you get to contribute to an outreach mechanism, but the task enables you to explore your library's collections and services—particularly useful if you are a new staff member.

Celebrate your creative spirit. Can you offer to write a library blog, organize an art exhibit, promote a library service or special collection, create a books display as tied-in with area or campus community event? You may be surprised by what your user group finds engaging! You can have a serious mission but remain light-hearted in its approach.

Be a presence in your community (within reason, privacy does matter) or on campus. In other words, participate in campus events (if you are in academic libraries), volunteer on service committees or related, outreach (Wisconsin Idea) events. Put a library spin on them, if you can. [For instance, I have contributed programs to *Wednesday Nite @ the Lab* (science outreach) and *Expanding Your Horizons* (career exploration conference for junior-high girls)].

Join your professional organizations, locally and nationally. They abound with opportunities to network, to give programs, to discover new resources/techniques/strategies. Good for keeping current.

Keep current with the library/professional literature and blogs—they will prove amazingly useful for discovering and exploring a variety of tools, gadgets/widgets. Use a feed-reader such as Bloglines or Google Reader which can make short work of it.

Sport a can-do attitude—even if it requires some new skill-building. Volunteer to explore the new initiatives your library wishes to consider.

Do not be the 'I don't do windows' staff member (and I do not mean to imply the operating system)! Some staffers can become rigid as to how they interpret their job descriptions or what hours they work that they miss opportunities to innovate. For instance, if you have an opportunity to supply a library program to students at their residence hall—but it just so happens that they would like you to visit on a Sunday afternoon at 2:00 PM—what do you do?

To the extent you can (deadline projects being an exception), endeavor to not take work home with you or, at least, not habitually. Take time to reinvigorate and to recuperate from your day. I spend the lion's share of my day surrounded by and engaged with people—and, while I enjoy it, it can also be exhausting. Be kind to yourself and you will be kind to others.

Kindness matters as do good manners.

Public service is a performance art. Be genuine and personable, but aim to provide courteous and efficient service. Practice active listening, be attentive to what is happening around you, make eye-contact, welcome users, and aim to leave your bad mood in a private space.

Appreciate your library's student staff and volunteers (express your gratitude). They will often be working those hours you may not be—weekends, evenings/late nights. They may also be your future colleagues provided they have enjoyed their library experience.

Appreciate your library's key-masters—that is, be on good terms and express your gratitude to your building/facilities managers, office managers and custodial staff.

Dress the part; appearance matters. Observe your library's culture (and be mindful of its primary user group) or take your cue from staff you meet during your orientation or interview to determine how you will merge personal style with what will be expected, professional attire.