

Are you stressful tonight?

by Roy Stall



The results of yet another survey of stress in different occupations made the newspapers recently. And, sure enough, listed there were the predictable extremes — miners at the top, and librarians at the bottom. Depending upon which survey you read, miners, dentists, or air-traffic controllers are the usual competitors for the dubious distinction of topping the stress ratings. Invariably, in the literal sense of the word, the humble librarian rates the lowest on the stress parade; like an old forgotten Kamahl record, not destined for higher things, gathering dust on the shelf. Not for the librarian is any platinum award or chart-busting performance.

What I'd like to know is, when are those occupational surveyors going to contact me? I'm starting to believe that these surveys may be created rather than carried out. By the way, have you ever been contacted by political pollsters on your voting intentions this month? Or last month? At all??! No, I haven't either — not by telephone or by mail. My opinions are registered on voting day only, and my personal data registered with each national Census. As I push aside the Serepax and other 'downers' to make room on the dining room table for the lap-top computer on which this is being typed, I try to forget the good-natured jibes from my teacher colleagues earlier in the Staff Common Room. They wear their higher-stress-than-librarians badges with a silent air of authority, letting me know in a subtle way that they're made of the Right Stuff and, by inference, can handle whatever stress is put their way.

'Not a bad job you've got they say,' with mock envy. 'Drinking coffee in the common room, browsing the newspapers — and all those books to read whenever you want . . .' Their voices drift off as they gaze into the distance,

searching for the path which might lead them to this Utopia.

It's reassuring to get this perspective of one's own occupation from one's colleagues. In a way, of course, it's our own fault that we permit this image to continue to be held. But you're damned if you don't. Let me explain. If you put in a lot of extra effort and hours above the call of duty, quite often to maintain the status quo, it may not be noticed — so it must be the norm. If you don't, or can't, for a variety of reasons, you're letting the job get on top of you and things start slipping. Like your credibility.

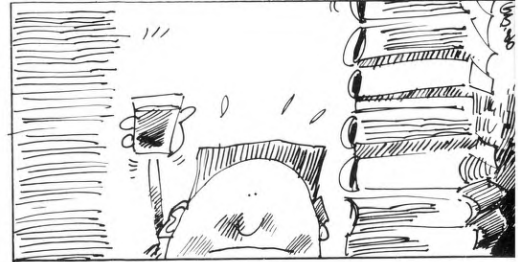
How do you actually measure stress in an occupation? Pulse rates measured at the work interface? Rates of nervous breakdowns or mental instability? Deaths per thousand work days? In the library profession there could be some interesting measuring techniques. Perhaps the number of library fines/detentions/punishments doled out correlates not only to administrative vigilance but is also a barometer of one's own stress level? Similarly, do users being evicted from the library for misdeemeanors achieve a flow-rate through the turnstiles in direct proportion to one's blood pressure?

Did you hear about the Perth psychiatrist (or psychologist, I'm not sure which) who was known to counsel the meek and mild to enrol in librarianship courses because he saw it as a laid-back, low-stress occupation? I'm assured it's a true story. That person, as well as those writing up their stress surveys, may never countenance the following scenarios:

- i) Senior librarian (public, academic, or whatever) arguing vigorously for adequate, not extra, funding to maintain their delivery of services to a demanding clientele, the latter being unaware of or indifferent to the back-room machinations.
- ii) School librarians trying to maintain a degree of law and order during a wet lunchtime when students have no alternative 'meeting place'.
- iii) Reference librarians in understaffed institutions trying to deal efficiently, professionally, and courteously, with a demanding public, the latter half-expecting immediate answers to their queries.
- iv) A librarian 'turned' software manager or systems analyst talking 'turkey' with a stubborn client or argumentative company director?

No doubt there are many examples of more stressful situations which will come to mind. But I reckon it's a pretty safe bet to wager that

the vast majority of our public, business, and educational institutions see librarians as those mouse-like creatures scurrying in and out of libraries with collections of esoteric literature under their arms, or in the case of male librarians, in their Gucci shoulder bags. They spend their lunchtimes sipping claret whilst reading the latest Peter Carey or Blanche d'Alpuge novel. Our clientele doesn't see us frequently subsiding into a comfortable armchair at home



gratefully clutching a brandy and dry, trying to avoid the growing pile of reviewing journals, professional reading, etc. on the table beside us. Silently counting the days to the next holiday — or next weekend.

A colleague who with his wife runs a small but very efficient suburban bookshop confessed to me recently why he entered the book trade. He had visions of sitting back sipping coffee, flicking through his favourite literature (all within arm's reach . . .), selling enough books to pay the rent, and listening to Mozart or Vivaldi being piped softly through the store. The reality came as something of a shock. The music is there, so is the hastily gulped coffee, but he's selling a lot of books — in between fending off booksellers or publisher's representatives, signing delivery dockets from interstate couriers, answering the constantly ringing telephone, and dealing with even more frustrating questions about biggist books with blue covers than those directed at librarians.

Pass the Valium, Friend.

Roy Stall
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BRaille CATALOGUE

For the first time, a braille catalogue of the Royal Blind Society's braille library is available to borrowers. For many years, users of the RBS Braille Library have been denied a service most users of ordinary libraries take for granted: the ability to browse through a catalogue unassisted and at their own convenience.

Taking advantage of the new Braille double-sided embosser at the Royal NSW Institute for Deaf and Blind Children, the four volume catalogue provides author and title information arranged alphabetically by the author's name.

Both the RBS and the Braille Production Centre at the Institute use the same type of Digital computer. A catalogue is prepared at the RBS and copied onto magnetic tape; this is sent to the Institute's facility at North Rocks mounted on the computer there and the Braille translation program is run against the file. Then the catalogue is embossed and dispatched to the RBS.

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Chief Librarian, Jennifer Berryman, envisages updating the catalogue annually but points out that borrowers won't need to buy a new copy each year, since regular lists of new books are sent out. She expects most borrowers to buy a copy this year and then wait one or two years before buying the next edition especially as the rate of acquisition of new books by the RBS is quite low.

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