

Energise>>Enthuse>>Inspire

Re-invent yourself

JANET: *Back in 2004, I was an Intensive Care nurse, single mother, and on my way to a Post Graduate Library and Information Sciences Diploma! My thinking was that for the next part of my life I wanted something for me, something in the world of ideas, art, literature, and technology. Slight problem: the word in the profession was that I had Buckley's chance. Jobs were very scarce; getting a fulltime ongoing position in a library seemed a lot like Monty Python's search for the Holy Grail. I am now a Liaison Librarian at QUT, currently acting as Research Support Librarian.*

CRAIG: *Before I was a librarian I worked as a hydrographic surveyor in West Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. After weighing up what I enjoyed in my other jobs, what I valued, and listening to a suggestion from my wife, I decided to make the leap to librarianship in 2005. I secured my first job as library assistant at Cleveland public library six months into my studies and did my professional placement at QUT. I started at QUT on a 12 month contract in 2006 as a Liaison Librarian and I now work there in an ongoing position where I get to use my subject knowledge from my previous career.*

From London intensive care nursing and the Nigerian oil fields to an academic library in Brisbane: a career change worth making.

"It's tempting to fantasise about completely changing your working life, especially on a bad day, but who manages to actually do it? "(Transcript, *SBS Insight*, 21st April 2009). A complete change of career forces a seismic shift in every aspect of your life. From day one, you have to face the loss of long held beliefs, behaviours, the known world of self, and security. But that shaking up, although hard, holds the key to growth. We came from professions that in themselves are poles apart, and many of the challenges we faced entering the profession were the same: juggling full-time work, part time study, and family commitments, taking a pay cut, and loss of social life. But over a short period of time we both transitioned to our new profession successfully. So what made our successful transition possible?

The breakthrough was rewriting ourselves, translating and framing our experience and skills to the library context. We took apart our CVs and highlighted the skills, incidents, experiences, and professional attributes that would show we could fit in. Dr Ann Villiers book *How to Write and Talk to Selection Criteria* is a great book to help you do this. Although our previous careers couldn't have been more different in title and function, the professional skills and attributes we had acquired and developed were very similar. Both of us were used to high pressure environments, fast paced change, and very diverse people environments. Patience, care, respect, self-discipline, ability to negotiate, experience with marketing, and IT were also key skills and attributes. The recent NEXUS 2 report (<http://www.alia.org.au/employment/workforce/>) highlights these skills as some of those in demand by the profession. Other standout

transferable skills in this report are interpersonal communication skills, the ability to be flexible, and being able to deliver a high standard of work on time.

Getting a foot in the door is also critical and to do this you need to promote yourself effectively. While living from one contract to another can be stressful, it gives you the opportunity to be seen as someone who is prepared to take on projects that are 'out of the box' and develop an understanding of the bigger picture of the profession. Once you've got a foot in, it's important to demonstrate your capabilities, show initiative, and take opportunities as they present themselves — and this may mean you have to stretch yourself and move out of your comfort zone.

Working in an academic library is a rewarding and challenging job with many opportunities for secondments and project experience. It is an environment where continual learning and professional development is the norm. Mastering new skills, learning about new technologies is an everyday experience. The fast pace of change in academic environments means that everyone is learning, you have to be open to new ideas, new ways of working, and, if you want to get ahead, it means never really being in your comfort zone

Changing careers is good for the profession and good for you. It is very good for the soul, the brain, the morale, and it keeps you young. Life was meant to have many possibilities. The process of re-invention requires you to open your mind, give things a go, and volunteer for opportunities and experiences that you might otherwise consider outside of your competency or imagination. When you come to librarianship from a completely different industry, you can really see the opportunities available and how good a profession it really is. We both find that having another career to compare our present daily work life to a really positive experience.

Librarianship is a great profession and although it's not quite the same as saving lives or working on multi-million dollar oil projects on a daily basis, it offers many challenges and opportunities. If you are feeling comfortable in your job, are you doing enough? Perhaps you could push just a little bit out of that comfort zone and see where it takes you. Being prepared and confident about going forward into the unknown is necessary for success. The profession is evolving and we have to evolve with it.

Janet Baker
Liaison Librarian, QUT
(currently Research Support Librarian)
j2.baker@qut.edu.au

Craig Milne
Liaison Librarian, QUT
c2.milne@qut.edu.au

Energise>> Enthuse>> Inspire!

...gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column co-ordinator Naomi Doessel, naomidoessel@gmail.com