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Career sea change – from shopping to libraries



Maryanne Hyde

"So, tell me about your career plan and how do I get to do what you do?" The eyes of the graduate student I was mentoring drilled into mine as he sat eagerly awaiting my response.

While I would have loved to have said that my career path had been strategically planned with carefully considered decisions at every crossroad, in reality it has been more of a happy series of accidents and coincidences which have led me to a job that I love, and one which is eons away from what, as a school-leaver, I thought I'd be doing at this point in my life.

After a ten year career in retail marketing and event management, an enforced career break in the form of our now six-year old twins and a relocation from Melbourne to the Gold Coast gave me a chance to reassess my career. Although I had thoroughly enjoyed all of my roles BK (Before Kids), I was keen to look at other options that would not involve as many weekend and evening commitments.

After some soul searching and a fantastic session with a career counsellor, I came to the conclusion that teacher-librarian was the job for me: interesting and challenging with the bonus of school holidays and minimum outside hours commitments. I enrolled in QUT's Master of Learning Innovation (now Master of Education) to commence in February 2007.

Then I saw the ad. Gold Coast City Council (GCCC) were looking for a part-time program development officer and after I read the description of the role, I thought, "I can do that!" So, never one to shy away from a challenge I started the job a week in to the Masters and here I am two years later, half way through the course and enjoying my new life in public libraries more than I thought was possible.

It has been a fascinating journey to move into the world of the librarians. I spent the first few months in my new role marvelling at the diversity of the role and the enormous wealth of resources, both informational and experiential, that library professionals hold.

I have learned so much through the course which is relevant and appropriate for my role in program development, as we explore the many facets of learning and new developments in pedagogy. I have also been a beneficiary of the truly generous sharing of experiences and expertise which my colleagues have offered.

I have found that there is much from my former 'career life' that I have been able to bring across into my new life in program development. My event management skills

have been invaluable and the level of creativity honed and developed over years of developing event schedules for shopping centres has assisted in the development of some exciting new programs for the GCCC libraries. Rather than encouraging people to spend more money, my current role is to encourage and enthuse people as they travel on their lifelong journey of learning and to enhance their experiences through programs and events.

In making my career sea change I have come across the intriguing perception that librarians seem to have of the profession. I was one of the 'new' (as opposed to young) librarians who attended the New Librarians' Symposium (NLS4), and one of the themes that I heard time and time again was the issue of how to tackle stereotyping of our profession. I believe it is far more important to examine how we view ourselves professionally and not spend time worrying what the rest of the world thinks. I don't imagine lawyers and doctors waste much time worrying about how they are portrayed in the media and popular culture!

As a group, I believe we need to become much more savvy about promoting the incredibly valuable work we do to a mainstream audience. We know our users understand and appreciate the depth of knowledge and experience and value-adding that librarians can bring to their search for information. But as we have traditionally been reluctant to promote ourselves, we are not recognised for our true value in society.

So how do we market ourselves? I would love to see librarians on the *Today* show during Library and Information Week talking to Karl and Lisa about what amazing public spaces libraries are and what librarians can do for you. I think it would be fantastic if we had a book talk show syndicated on breakfast radio around the country, hosted by librarians. And where are the librarians on Jennifer Byrnes' *First Tuesday Book Club*?

What Dr Karl and Adam Spencer, The Sleek Geeks, have done to promote the significance of scientists in everyday life, I would love to see librarians doing and we can do it in our own way everyday. Another message that I took home from NLS4 was how absolutely critical libraries are to our community. By taking steps to raise our profile across all sectors we can let everyone in on the secret.

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