

# 10 WAYS TO DEVELOP PROFESSIONALLY

**A** *LIA's PD Scheme is a great way to help you make progress in your career. But, as CHRISTINE MACKENZIE writes, you can also grow professionally in many other, less structured ways.*

After completing the 23 Things program 10 years ago, a staff member at Yarra Plenty Regional Library remarked, 'This is not a profession you can retire into.' It's important to find ways to stay on top of new ways of working, so here are my top 10 ways you can develop professionally.

### 1. UNDERTAKE A JOB EXCHANGE

The opportunity to exchange jobs with someone locally or internationally is just about the best experience there is. Personal and financial reasons can make it difficult to organise, but if you get the chance, go for it. The job exchange I did at Baltimore County Public Library in Maryland, USA, was life-changing. It shifted my entire perception about customer service in public libraries and boosted my confidence to try out ideas when I came back home.

### 2. ADD MANAGEMENT QUALIFICATIONS

If you aspire to library management, then you should have a library degree. I know this is a contentious point, but in any profession there is a core list of competencies, and if you don't know them, you will be at a disadvantage. But once you are a qualified librarian, a general management qualification will be a great way to improve your knowledge and skills and make you more marketable. Find a course that stretches you and that exposes you to different professions and new people.

### 3. BECOME A TRAINER

It's often said that the best way to learn something is to teach it. Baltimore County had developed a reference



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training program that it rolled out to all its staff. When I came back to Australia I teamed up with a colleague, Leneve Jamieson, who was then the reference librarian at Eastern Regional Libraries, and we adapted the STAR reference program from Baltimore and ran it for staff at public libraries and State Library Victoria. You can share your knowledge with your peers or your community – and increasingly public library staff are training community members in digital literacy and other skills they have learned on the job.

### 4. PARTICIPATE IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Where else can you safely practise your networking, minute-taking, chairing, finance and facilitation skills? There are so many ways to be involved, and if you don't see a group for your interests, then start one up. The new Cardigan group is the product of a need that one person saw to network with young professionals in the GLAM sector in Melbourne. And if your thing is public libraries or cataloguing or statistics, there will be a group somewhere for you. Join ALIA. And then think about broadening your sphere and engaging with IFLA. You'll open up a whole new world for yourself.

### 5. NETWORK

Strangers become acquaintances, acquaintances become friends, and colleagues become trusted confidants when you invest in relationships. Sitting at home isn't going to grow your network, but getting out and attending seminars, events and professional social occasions will. And if you get the opportunity to become part of a network, take it. Belonging to the Bertelsmann Foundation's International Network of Public Libraries was the best thing I ever did.

6. WRITE

If you have done something interesting and innovative or if you have a good idea to share, then write about it. There are so many ways now to publish your musings and learnings. Your writing could help someone do their job better or make a difference in their community.

7. READ

Don't be like Elle McPherson who, when asked in the 1980s about her reading habits, replied, 'Oh, I never read anything I haven't written myself.' All of us are now getting very good at skimming and absorbing small bits of information. But make time to read some things in depth and without hurrying, allowing enough time for the ideas you are reading about to permeate your consciousness.

8. PRACTISE

We can't expect to be really good at something the first time we do it – whether it's giving a presentation, running a program or doing a performance appraisal. The more you do something, the better you will become at it.

9. ATTEND CONFERENCES

Who doesn't love a library conference? When I went to my first library conference in 1988 I felt totally overwhelmed. But once you understand what you want out of them and

what you can put into them, they are a great source of inspiration and a special way to grow your network. Many people self-fund to attend international conferences and it can be tax effective too. And don't underestimate library tourism.

10. VISIT

It's amazing what you can pick up on when you visit libraries. Apart from being endearingly familiar environments, there is nearly always some idea or feature that is worth exploring, whether it's the furniture, a program that's on at the time, a brochure or the shelving. And if all it engenders is a sense of superiority about your own library, well, that's okay too.

The only person who is responsible for your professional development is you. Your employer can send you to any number of courses, seminars or workshops, but you are the only one who can learn from them. Seize your opportunities and grow and prosper. ☞

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