

# DEFINING SUCCESS: LOOK UP AND THINK BIG



*In the second part of this series on career success, GREG BELL asks what it takes to become a national and international leader.*

MARGARET ALLEN is the CEO and State Librarian of the State Library of Western Australia. She is also a former International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Board Member, Chair of the IFLA Working Group on lending, and Chair of the Australian Libraries Copyright Committee. Margaret was ALIA President 2011–2012 and received an ALIA Fellowship in 2014 in recognition of her longstanding service to the information sector and ALIA.



After studying a Bachelor of Arts in Library Studies, Margaret Allen's first full time job was in a public library. She knew this was the career for her as it combined the structure and discipline of organising information and knowledge, and the opportunity to work with people.

Margaret says, 'I have always been open to new and different challenges and willing to take on something that was asked of me. Careerwise, I've often taken on emerging fields, or things that no one else wanted to do; it always challenged me and I gained new skills and knowledge along the way.'

Margaret's international work has provided a rich and varied view of the wider information profession, and helped put Australian challenges into perspective. She believes that it's important to help improve the quality and extent of library services in communities outside Australia, as we all stand to gain from a stronger and more vibrant global profession. Global issues, such as publishing and copyright, also affect Australia, as most Australia-based publishers are local arms of large multinational publishing companies, and ebook lending policies are set by EU-based head offices.

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Margaret says that there is always 'the need to resolve the niggling sense of doubt that you aren't quite ready for the new role that you're about to take on' and that 'the only way to do that is to get on with the job – not everything will work out well, or as you might have planned, but reflecting on what you have learned certainly helps inform and shape the future.' She adds, 'To succeed, inspiration, dedication, hard work and good planning are critical, but so too are risk taking, fostering and maintaining partnerships, evaluation, reflection and program evolution. No project can simply sustain its own momentum; it needs to be nurtured to reflect the changing society it is

a part of, and continued advocacy for the program and its community benefits is required.'

Asked what tips she had for information professionals aiming to make an impact, Margaret gave this advice:

**'Don't limit yourself'** – Be open to a broad range of possibilities and work across a variety of roles and organisations. As an employer, a broad range of experiences is appealing and brings an underlying set of life experiences that complement the professional skill base.

**'Keep learning'** – Formally and informally. Invest in your own career by attending conferences, meetings and further training. Don't expect your employer to be responsible; you are in charge of your own career, not them.

**'Get involved'** – In your local ALIA branch and network, or an IFLA section and its extended global network. Volunteer to take on both short- and longer-term roles; you will broaden your networks, enhance your professional and personal skills, and your understanding of our profession and the communities we serve.'

CHRISTINE MACKENZIE is a freelance librarian, formerly Manager of Brisbane City Council Library Service, CEO of Yarra Plenty Regional Library and Executive Officer of the Public Libraries Victoria Network (PLVN). Christine is the 2017–2019 IFLA President-elect and will be IFLA President in 2019–2021. Christine was ALIA President in 2003 and received an ALIA Fellowship in 2008.



Growing up on a dairy farm, Christine Mackenzie was a voracious reader who loved the escapism offered by books. After completing her studies in the RMIT School

of Librarianship, she began work at the State Library of Victoria. Christine took on increasing responsibilities as her career progressed.

Christine says, 'Providing leadership to highly regarded library services is my proudest achievement. At both Brisbane City Council Library Service and Yarra Plenty Regional Library I was privileged to work with clever, talented and hardworking people who care passionately about public libraries. In both services, the leadership teams were exceptional and we were able to achieve success using innovative approaches to develop new service models and introduce new technologies.'

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Christine is a firm believer in the power of networking. She considers being part of the Bertelsmann Foundation's Network of Public Libraries and the opportunities it provided a career highlight; 'It opened up international opportunities for me and has led to great professional and personal fulfilment.' She continues this work with the INELI program (International Network of Emerging Library Innovators) which since 2011 has supported young leaders and includes over 500 people.

Networks and collaborations are also important for organisations, and one of the main themes Christine will follow through her IFLA presidency is the need for libraries and library associations to pursue and foster partnerships and collaboration with like-minded organisations. 'The power of partnerships is already evident in public libraries such as Dokk1 in the Danish city of Aarhus, where most of their programs are delivered through partnerships.'

Like Margaret, Christine expressed a fear early in her career of not being ready for the challenges she had taken on. Christine also has a similar cure for this anxiety: 'Carpe diem. Our profession is more important than ever as we enable access to information, facilitate community building, promote literacy and ensure preservation of our intellectual heritage.' Her advice is to 'Get involved at work, put your hand up to do things, be enthusiastic, take opportunities that are presented to you. Build your network, look up and think big.' 🌟

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