



Column: A New Generation of Librarianship

Simultaneously Establishing Oneself in a New Field While Maintaining Current Life Goals

Casey Phillips, *Metropolitan Community College, Kansas City - Longview*

ABSTRACT

We bring many skills and experiences when entering librarianship as a second or third career or after many years of being a stay-at-home parent. Yet, balancing previous life and work goals with new information and tasks in this career change can be daunting. New employers and new environments can be confusing as we try to successfully navigate the world of librarianship. In this column, we will look at who we were before this career change and what we want to be as we move forward. We will evaluate current expectations, future plans, and how they relate to already established life goals—not forgetting the strengths and skills that we bring with us from our previous work and ultimately balancing a thriving library career with our already formed life.

KEYWORDS

career change, life-work balance, goals

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Starting a new career can be exciting, intimidating, and overwhelming. This column will help us reflect on our past experiences, our passions, and goals while looking at tools that may help us in setting boundaries, asking for help, and achieving what we want in this new chapter of our lives.

Past Experience

Being a career changer means that you may have several years to a lifetime of lived experience that you bring to your new workplace. The beauty of librarianship is that people come from all aspects of life with different earned degrees. It makes expertise varied across individuals, which in turn strengthens the workforce itself. Whether it is customer service, budgeting, teaching, organizing, or something else, we each have experience from volunteer work to professional work that can aid how career changers manage our new roles in the library and information science fields.

Many skills are acquired by staying home and running a household that can also be greatly utilized in the professional world, according to Cynthia Usui, a hotel manager in Japan (EC&H, 2021, p. 49). She says that those that stay at home cannot swap their families for new ones when things get difficult. As children grow, their needs change, and parents have to continually adapt. For caregivers of adult parents, as their needs and challenges grow, caregivers again must adapt accordingly. Usui sees this as resilience, which is much needed in the changes in the professional world. We can see how valuable resilience is in how libraries have had to adapt through the COVID-19 pandemic and the endless stream of book challenges. Usui says that parenting also made her a “keen observer of people,” which has helped her to mentor younger colleagues and to anticipate the needs of her clients (EC&H, 2021, p. 49)—a skill that can also benefit the library world.

These are just some of the talents we may bring to a career change that we may be overlooking. These skills are also oftentimes not valued equally in our society. Another possible surprise for career changers is that missed promotions, career shocks, and setbacks have been seen to positively affect career resilience (Peeters, 2021). These experiences, especially when someone is more flexible about their career, lead to depths that individuals can use to navigate change and challenges (Peeters, p. 375). So, when we doubt if this new career path was the right choice and will work out okay, we can be encouraged that these past experiences may lend themselves to becoming strengths and guide us forward.

Reflection

Evaluating these past experiences and skills can guide you in seeing your gifts and what you have to give to your new coworkers, your position, and yourself. As one of my guided meditations states, there is also some purpose for this new career. Whether it is providing for yourself and/or your family, teaching students how to find quality sources, or aiding patrons in

the complex world of technology, changing the narrative to be one of purpose rather than disbelief can empower you when you are feeling inadequate.

A little reflection and mindfulness can go a long way. Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as “a specific kind of attention given purposefully in the present moment with a non-judgmental gaze” (Bolm & McMillian, 2022). When we can observe our circumstances without judgment, we can begin to see what we truly want to accomplish in this new field, to see what is important to us to maintain and what we need to let go. Taking time to give attention to the present has been associated with increased resilience, reduction in perceived stress, improved performance, and increased job satisfaction (Bolm, 2022, p. 66).

A gratitude or a “what have you accomplished” daily, weekly, or quarterly journal can help refocus and understand where you are being successful. It may also give you insight into what you value and what motivates you. There is no right or wrong way to do this (morning, midday, bedtime; paper, keyboard, recording), just whatever works best for you. Pausing and reflecting can help slow down the need to accomplish expectations that may not even be relevant.

Passion and Boundaries

In addition to bringing skill sets and job experience to your new role in librarianship, you also bring personal goals and passions. Pairing all of these with your new position can be rewarding and beneficial for everyone. Personally, I have learned that I tend to overcommit to a variety of issues. As I started my new position, I promised myself that I would only work on two committees in addition to my work and at-home responsibilities. This way, I can give more of myself to the goals and aspirations I have at work, as well as personally to myself. There are others out there that can fill the gaps of any other requests that come my way. This is not always an easy commitment to uphold, especially when there are exciting opportunities, but keeping this boundary has already proven helpful and productive for me. As Jocelyn Green—actress turned entrepreneur—says, “Pay attention on what you love working on, and get help with the rest” (Frost, 2022).

It can take time to come into your new role and figure out how to manage both the new career and our already established (or not yet fully established) goals. It can feel disorienting and frustrating as well. Here are some things to consider as you work toward balancing your new job and existing priorities:

- View this new path as the long-game, and if you feel inspired to do something creative, you owe it to yourself to explore that (Frost, 2022).
- Think about your priorities.
- Ask yourself, what are you willing to be flexible about?

- Consider what is most important to you (income, prestige, flexibility) (Frost, 2022).

Knowing your passion and creating boundaries will not only make you more successful, but also more fulfilled.

Personal Goals

Being in a field that is mostly comprised of women (DPE, 2021), the majority of library workers may face conflict between their work and personal lives. Much of this could be due to the role that women play within their families and households (Vatharkar, 2020). Some see this domestic labor as women having a “second shift”; they leave their paid job and go home to their second job. Here, they fulfill roles that conflict with other roles in a limited amount of time (Kremer, 2016). Organizational support from employers (e.g., flexible work arrangements) and institutional support (e.g., child/elder care facilities) can greatly help strengthen employees’ personal goals and success at work (Vatharkar, 2020).

It has also been shown that putting goals in a hierarchy gives individuals “diverse and expanding opportunities” to achieve that goal. If these goals are also seen as progress as they attain smaller/easier goals to the bigger/broader goals, individuals are more successful (Klug, 2015). Like mentioned before, this is the long game, and reflecting on steps leading to the greater goal can provide energy and understanding.

You have journeyed this far.

You have started this new career, so do things for you. Remember, though, that success is relative to the eye of the beholder (Frost, 2022). We live in a professional system that was mostly created for white, heterosexual, cisgender men, so success for us may look different than what has been valued for centuries. Success for you may be not checking your emails after work and spending more intentional time with those you love. Success may be saying yes to a project that may not be popular, but may elevate those who are underrepresented. You can work hard and do great things in your position while you honor your priorities as well.

Being Bold in What You Want

It can be overwhelming to ensure that you are doing all the things that will bring you the best success; however, in a helping industry, forgetting how to prioritize what is most important to you can get lost, especially if you feel the need to prove yourself in this new, professional role. Knowing which people that can support you internally and those in your personal community can benefit immensely when speaking boldly of your priorities, goals, and perspectives. Social support in the workplace as well as in your personal life has shown to positively affect the work-life balance (Rynkiewicz, 2022).

This may feel especially tricky for professionals of color in the field. As Jennifer Ferretti writes, “My friends and I are probably the ones getting photographed at a national conference,

but also the ones getting microaggressed or worse in the same venue” (p. 135, 2020). The library world is mostly white women, with white men making between 8-36% more than women depending on the statistics and race of the librarian (DPE, 2021; Zippa, n.d.; Wikipedia, n.d.). Recognizing how the gender wage and race wage gap and lack of representation can affect our colleagues is important. Giving voice to what you want and need while promoting coworkers makes for a healthier and safe workplace (Stoewen, 2016).

Asking for Help

Lastly, ask for help. Vatharkar (2020) says that society and, in particular, women need to be able to ask for others’ help more often. We cannot do it all, but we can find balance in the places that are most important to us. This is not only a systematic change that needs to happen (Vatharkar, 2020), but one that internally many of us need to adapt in our brains. Shonda Rhimes (2014) says that when she is succeeding in one area of her life, she is probably failing in another. With knowing what we bring to the field, what is most important to us, and where we need others’ help, we can help change this broader mentality in our society while supporting ourselves in a healthy, prosperous way.

Conclusion

Being successful in your new career while balancing the goals and priorities that are important to you is possible. Acknowledging your past experiences, your passions, and your goals, and creating boundaries, asking for help, as well as being bold in what you want and reflecting along the way can be steps to knowing yourself better and how a new career can work best for you.

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