

Elizabeth J. Cox

On being a new librarian

Eight things to keep in mind

Last month I celebrated my first year as a new librarian. I decided that I needed to take a look back over this past year to see what I had learned, what I did wrong, and what I did right. I've come up with a list of do's and don'ts that will hopefully be of use to other new librarians.

1. Meet people and get involved. Some librarians have service to the profession as part of their job description and/or requirements. Even if you don't, get out there and get involved. It will be good for the profession but also for you. Meeting people who have similar positions or have had similar experiences will be beneficial to you in the long run. And years from now when you're a seasoned librarian, you can do the same for someone new!

But don't get overextended.

Once you're out of grad school, it may seem like you have a lot of time on your hands. It is very important to get involved locally, nationally, and anywhere in between. But remember that you need time to adjust to your new job and your new environment (both work and home).

2. Cultivate relationships. Get to know your new co-workers. Learn what everyone's specialties are and what quirks they have. Soon you will know who the best person is for questions about the local catalog system and who to go to when you need supplies. This will take some time, but it's worth it.

But be cautious.

Everyone you've met has probably said this, but it's worth repeating. Do not get involved in any politics or gossip. My opinion

is that it's worth knowing each individual's quirks and hot buttons so you can avoid them, but stay out of the gossip and conversations about those quirks.

3. Cultivate mentors. Some institutions have mentoring programs, but many don't. Even if you have been assigned a mentor, be watchful for unofficial mentors. These can be people outside of your department, like the guy in reference who is the best editor. Or the cataloger you met via e-mail who is really good at what he does and is willing to answer your simple questions.

But make sure the relationship works for you.

This may sound selfish, and it is. But if there was ever a time to be, this is it. Pay attention to your needs and what your mentor(s) can do for you.

4. Document what you do and/or write a manual. This is something I learned at my previous job as I was leaving. No one else knew how to do my job, and there was not going to be any overlap with my successor. I spent my last two months writing down everything I did. If I had started sooner, it would have been a lot easier to keep up. Even if you're simply writing it for yourself, keeping track of what you do is also essential when it comes to evaluation time. Each January it can be a pain to remember what you did the previous February.

Also be sure to work closely with your supervisor when writing the documentation.

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You want to make sure you are following all the local rules and procedures, especially if this material will be posted online for anyone to access.

5. *Get training, or read the literature in your area.* I have heard of many new librarians who were basically told where their office was, what their responsibilities were, and then left on their own. Even if you're given training and guidance, seek out other information. If there is one thing that most librarians do very well, it's documentation. There are tons of articles and books on every aspect of librarianship. Keep those ILL folks busy!

6. *Read!* Even beyond the literature in your area, read some of the basic journals of librarianship. Keep up on the current issues of the profession. If you're interested in issues about mentoring, achieving tenure, or writing for the profession, there are tons of articles and books to be found. Also look into local and regional publications. Even if you're not involved at this level, it can be beneficial to know what's happening. And many of these publications are now online. Start Googling.

7. *Keep notes.* In meetings, workshops, etc., take plenty of notes and keep them. You never know when you might need to refer to them. If you attend workshops, be sure to get contact information from the trainers, if possible, for follow-up questions.

8. *Keep your résumé/curriculum vita up to date.* Most likely, if you're new to your position, you're not looking for a new job. That doesn't mean you can't keep your records current. When I was last job hunting, I hadn't updated my résumé in over seven years. Can you remember everything you did in the last seven years? I couldn't either. I have to submit my curriculum vita every year with my evaluation for my pretenure review, so I have a reason to keep it up. But even if you're not required to, I highly recommend it.

There are probably tons of things I've missed that I could recommend for other new librarians, but these stand out to me as the most important.

If I had to pick the most important piece of advice, I would say "When in doubt, ask someone!"

("Top ten . . ." continued from page 241)

8. *Distance learning will be an increasingly more common option in higher education, and will coexist but not threaten the traditional bricks-and-mortar model.* Throughout higher education, technology has made possible the rapid proliferation of online instruction. The just-in-time model of imbedding library tutorials into Web-based courses complements traditional just-in-case library instruction, and may surpass it in the future. Libraries will want to continue to develop products and services that scale, i.e. are easily replicated, in an increasingly resource-stretched environment.

9. *Free public access to information stemming from publicly funded research will continue to grow.* This is perhaps the most unpredictable and exciting of the ten assumptions, and legislation will play a key role here. Finished research will still need to be vetted, edited, organized, and disseminated in logical ways. It could be advantageous for the academic community to return to the

scholarly publication business if it can be proven to address the soaring cost of access to published scientific research. Libraries could and should play a leading role, understanding that it may require reallocation of institutional resources.

10. *Privacy will continue to be an important issue in librarianship.* This is another assumption that has taken on greater attention and importance due to advances in technology. The debate becomes even more of an issue for libraries that are moving toward authentication and/or password access to electronic workstations located in public areas of the library.

The above assumptions underscore the dominant roles that technology and consumer expectations are increasingly playing in libraries. The trends underlying these assumptions offer new opportunities for those academic libraries and librarians who are ready and willing to embrace the future. That future is with us today—and it is exciting!