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Craighton Hippenhammer

Librarians of the new century will have a very different look: they will be militant segregationists, control freaks, and techno-believers. If these three core ideals do not happen, libraries will fade away, becoming empty hulks of their former selves, virtually replaced by commercial solutions and private-sector values.

Librarians have long been divided into two camps: public services and technical services. For a long time, this segregation has been seen as good—seen as a key element in the way librarians are trained and in the way their jobs are defined. In recent years, unfortunately, this distinction has been declining. It's time to reinvigorate the "separate camps" concept. Let's call them something new, too, like "content services" and "process services."

The last thing I wanted to be when I graduated from library school was a technical services librarian. I hated cataloging, thought acquisition duties should be relegated to clerks, and never even saw a computer during my MLS days. The first substantial part of my career, then, I spent in

public services as a children's librarian in public libraries and as a reference librarian in an academic library. On the side, I kept up an interest in personal computers from their inception in the early 1980s. The expertise I gained from that hobby paid off in effecting technological change in more than one library, and I found that process both fascinating and challenging.

I think many if not most librarians prefer to be in one camp or the other, whether by interest, expertise, or personality type. Currently, I supervise Circulation, oversee Interlibrary Loan, run Information Technology, do my stint on the Reference Desk, help out with bibliographic instruction, and teach our two-credit library class. Am I feeling schizophrenic, torn, split apart? You bet. You know that feeling like you're attempting too much and not doing any of the things terribly well? Far too many of us are doing exactly that.

In academic libraries it has become very common for all librarians to be dragged out of their offices to cover the reference desk. Over the years, public services has gained power and technical services has lost prestige. Which services have come to be seen as important? Anything that has contact with patrons: readers' advisory; reference; instruction; storytelling. Libraries can't exist without catalogers and processors of books, but they can exist without reference librarians, et al.

Ah, but our library mission statement reads that we have a service orientation here at our library, you say. Since when is service limited to face-to-face contact? Do you always meet the mechanic that fixes your car? Or the radiologist that reads your CAT scan? And what is your reference librarian saying about her declining statistics because online research tools are replacing so many face-to-face "beautiful reference moments"?

The 21st-century librarian needs to come to realize that it is okay for many librarians not to be "content" (emphasis on first syllable) librarians. It's okay to be librarians involved only in the process of making information available and not in the memorization of content types, the location of information, or the knowledge of a literature. It's okay to be librarians involved only in the creation and processing of a physical or virtual library.

Never did I think I would ever support an argument in favor of catalogers (who now should all be called metadata librarians), but as an Information Technology Librarian, I believe we in process services must be freed to do what our job demands without always being pulled away constantly for this content service and that content service. Now that so many research and educational services can happen with no actual, face-to-face library visit, process services has already regained some of its

power and influence. Library directors only have to recognize that fact so they can stop wasting valuable personnel resources. They simply have to be bold and say, "We will no longer do that face-to-face service so we can support that other growing, but more hidden, process service."

Let's be militant about segregating these two very different types of library work. It will concentrate talents and expertise and will help our virtual libraries to be a stronger presence in the world.

Librarians in the 21st century must also control their physical and virtual environments. Library schools should not train students who have little likelihood of becoming leaders. Controlling one's own work sphere can be as simple as creating a new and better way to do some task. Professionals create policies and procedures. Clerks and library assistants follow them. As elementary as this is, it is amazing how many librarians in charge insist on operating at a clerk level, by either keeping things always the same or by allowing others to make changes in their sphere of influence for them. Professional librarians must always be trying to improve the work processes around them. If they don't, libraries will gradually become irrelevant.

Librarians must also gain control over their virtual environments. Amazingly, this has been the most challenging for academic libraries. The difficulties are legion: institution home pages that have no direct link to the library; public relations departments that have been turning university Web pages into slick color-magazine marketing tools, and that insist the academic pages follow suit; computer centers that answer to the vice president of administrative services rather than the academic dean, and therefore serve professors and librarians after departments like admissions and alumni; computer centers that have a "turf" mentality, making it difficult to grow a library information technology department; the impossibility of adding information technology library staff to manage the new virtual presence, crucial especially in the big technical jump from static Web pages to interactive Web pages.

Gaining control over one's own virtual library presence challenges all types of libraries. Just being able to hire one's own technology talent has long been a problem, although with the recent collapse of the dot-coms, nonprofits have been recently hiring well-trained talent from the private sector. This window of opportunity is not likely to last long, however, as the more usual career path is to get experience and training in nonprofits and then move on to the higher salaries of the corporate world. Hiring librarians with technology expertise can also be a challenge. Having a librarian on staff to manage technology changes, upgrades, and applications has been crucial for libraries since the mid-1990s—someone who can

see the big picture, recognize practical applications of important technologies to library situations, and be able to implement solutions that work.

Technology has been stripping control away from librarians now for more than a decade, and is the main reason why librarians must become control freaks. Control over selection decisions has suffered perhaps the severest blow. E-books and e-journals come in preselected packages, as do online indexes. The full-text of journals in online periodical databases come and go with no librarian input. To fight the high cost of these online products, libraries have to band together in consortia to gain leverage in cost negotiations. What is lost is local selection of databases and other online products that are tailored to a specific institution or community. Some consortia allow selective adoption of products negotiated for, but others do not.

Control is also seeping away from librarians in the areas of research technique (keyword vs. subject searching), fair use (software EULAs), and free speech (federal laws limiting Internet access in schools and libraries), and so on. Librarians must fight for control over their work policies and professional environment harder than ever, because if we don't control the technology, the technology will control us.

Librarians of the future must be believers in technology. It's no longer enough for non-IT librarians to send polite nods and faint compliments in its direction; they must be truly convinced that technology is necessary for their future survival. This convincing must be done in library school, where they should be trained in the basics—specifically in the ways technologies are applied to library situations. While not all librarians need to learn the ins and outs of implementing technologies, they need to be eager to work with technologies and capable of seeing where they can be applied to their work situations. Information technology librarians can suggest technology applications, but non-IT librarians need to be able to ask for technology solutions when work situations can be improved by them.

The personal computer has proved to be a revolutionary force in the workplace, increasing efficiency and speeding up laborious tasks. Fonts, graphics, manipulatable spreadsheets and databases, and word processing are all available on the desktop. The connected computer is having an even heavier impact on the way librarians do business, from providing patrons access to research materials to greatly increasing communication between library planning centers, between peers located at great distances, and even between librarians and students located in different states. Learning is increasingly done at home, and providing reading material over distances needs to be as convenient as ordering a book online from Amazon.com or groceries from a nearby Internet-connected food

store. If librarians fail to provide both convenience and speed in the services they provide, private businesses will step up and fill the vacuum. Libraries need to continue being full-service nonprofit entities, and technology is a big part of that picture.

It is simply time to end the production of new librarians who want nothing to do with technology. We have enough dinosaurs out here now, and we don't need to be adding to them. We do need techno-believers who want to be able to control and improve the library services within their spheres of influence and are willing to fight for dropping nonessentials so they can concentrate their efforts on doing what they should be doing and doing it well.