

Introduction

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It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

The universal nature of those words, written in 1933 by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, inspired and motivated a country and a people during the height of the Great Depression. They seem as appropriate in 2009 as they were then and entirely fitting as the inspiration for a book dealing with risk and entrepreneurship.

In stereotypical fashion, librarians are often described as old fuddy-duddies, stuck in a rut, and too timid to experiment with new ways of doing things. In 2007, before chinks in the national (and global) economic and sociopolitical façade became visible, librarians were already aware that the library landscape had changed. It was with that knowledge that the idea for a symposium to explore the topic of risk and showcase entrepreneurial activities in libraries was conceived by members of the 2008 ALCTS President's Program Committee. In January 2008, in Philadelphia, ALCTS presented the Midwinter Symposium *Risk and Entrepreneurship in Libraries: Seizing Opportunities for Change*.

Transformative actions are urgently needed if libraries and the practice of librarianship are to flourish. The contributors to this book represent a variety of backgrounds and points of view, yet their examination

Introductory quote from Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Looking Forward* (New York: John Day, 1933), 51.

of the way libraries manage risk and their perspectives on entrepreneurial enterprises appear to be quite similar. They recognize that maintaining the status quo is not possible and that to play a dominant role in the lives of their communities, librarians need to take risks and seize entrepreneurial opportunities.

Marshall Keys, the well-known consultant, self-confessed *flaneur* (someone who strolls around in apparent idleness observing the world) and entrepreneur sets the tone for the publication (as he did when he gave the opening address at the symposium) with an essay entitled *Entrepreneurship and Risk in Libraries: Seizing and Creating Opportunities for Change*. Keys characterizes himself as someone whose passion is “helping libraries prepare for change, especially the kinds of changes that technology [brings].”¹ Using behavioral economics as a framework, Keys examines the process of change from a practical point of view, conveying his familiarity with risk and entrepreneurship in the not-for-profit sector and offering useful strategies for managing risk.

Conversations about risk and entrepreneurship in libraries must take into account questions about copyright and intellectual property. Professor Michael Carroll, an expert on intellectual property and cyberlaw, is well-positioned to assess the risks and opportunities associated with acquiring, managing, digitizing, and providing access to collections. Carroll is a member of the Board of Directors of the Creative Commons, Inc. and a staunch advocate for open access to scholarly literature. In *Copyright, Fair Use, and Creative Commons Licenses*, he explains what is meant by the “public domain,” discusses the fundamentals of fair use, and describes the advantages of acquiring materials under a Creative Commons license.

In *Moderately Risky Business: Challenging Librarians to Assume More Risk in an Era of Opportunity*, Joyce Ogburn points out the delicate balance that exists between risk and entrepreneurship. She describes a number of interesting challenges for libraries and explains how these challenges offer both risks and opportunities. Librarians must learn to manage risk so that they can navigate successfully through a changing universe and create an environment which is, first and foremost, responsive to the needs of library users. Ogburn makes a strong argument for the value of experimentation coupled with an understanding and appreciation of the underlying risks.

For a subject that is often underappreciated and difficult to understand, Regina Reynolds and Diane Boehr provide a fascinating and clear approach to the business of cataloging in *Bibliographic Control 2.0? Entrepreneurial Lessons from Web 2.0*. They outline both the risks of a business-as-usual approach to cataloging as well as the potential rewards of employing new

strategies for access and discovery. Reynolds and Boehr discuss the importance of several of the recommendations in the report of the LC Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control and the urgency of making library processes Web 2.0-enabled.

Providing a counterbalance to the papers that offer a global approach to risk and entrepreneurship are chapters by Amy Badertscher and Lynne Scott Cochrane, as well as Jeff Trzeciak. Both these chapters describe risks they and their libraries took to establish a climate conducive to change. *Two College Libraries Merge Their Technical Services Departments: A Case Study of Denison University and Kenyon College* by Cochrane and Badertscher outlines the painstaking research and study that ultimately led to the ground-breaking merger of the two technical services departments. Jeff Trzeciak's *McMaster University Libraries 2.0: Transforming Traditional Organizations* provides an overview of the transformation of the McMaster University Library from a tradition-bound academic library into "an innovative, user-centered partner" within the university. Trzeciak displays a flare for the dramatic and clearly grabs the reader's attention with his passionate description of the changes that have already taken place, as well as those still being planned, at McMaster.

Taking a more provocative approach to the topic, public librarian Rivkah Sass believes that her peers must develop a much stiffer backbone and be much less risk-averse if they are going to create friendlier, more efficient environments for their users. The title, *Warning: When Rowing Forward This Boat May Rock!*, recalls an ancient Chinese proverb and serves as a reminder that even with the most careful planning and taking into account all eventualities, there may be strong opposition to change.

In the September/October 2008 issue of *Technicalities*, Diane Hillman wrote, "sometimes being embedded in traditional practice can blind us to the possibilities of new approaches."² Now more than ever, as they face threats to their continued relevance, librarians should take this observation to heart. As Rivkah Sass noted, "instead of seeing themselves and their institutions as unique, [it is time for] librarians in all types of libraries to consider what their organizations have in common and build on that commonality."³ The authors represented in this book have skillfully illustrated how ambitious, energetic librarians can transform their organizations, re- envision library services, and focus attention on the needs of library users. By managing risk, by doing due diligence, by sharing their experiences, by supporting each other, and by encouraging entrepreneurial enterprises, librarians will be well positioned to seize and create opportunities.

REFERENCE NOTES

1. “Snapshot: Marshall Keys,” *Information Link* 8, no. 2 (February 2004): 2, http://my.simmons.edu/gslis/docs/il/03-04/Information_Link_2-04.pdf (accessed 20 April 2009).
2. Diane Hillman, “Talk to Me about Terminology Services!” *Technicalities* 28, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 2008): 7.
3. Rivkah Sass, “Warning: When Rowing Forward This Boat May Rock!” *Risk and Entrepreneurship in Libraries: Seizing Opportunities for Change*, Pamela Bluh and Cindy Hepfer, eds. (Chicago: ALA/ALCTS, 2009), 103.