Make Your Own Path: Self-Directed Professional Development

Alexandria Abenshon - Library Manager, Webster Library
New York Public Library

Over the past few years, my library system moved to a predominantly video-based learning platform which makes on-demand training easy and efficient. It creates a vast archive for staff members past and present and is great bang for our buck - but we always felt something was missing. Maybe that connection with others, a chance to step out from behind the public service desk, or just the opportunity to explore some tactile learning.

Let's be honest - in person training opportunities offer a wealth of benefits that extend far beyond the brass tacks of what you're planning to observe. You have the chance to meet other colleagues, both within our immediate network and the greater library field; witness the running of another library (again, whether within our system or beyond); and leave your experience either inspired and excited, or ready to come home. It's all learning.

After the shift to our video learning system, my team was hungry for the in-person learning experiences that influenced the beginnings of our career. After a magical experience at the Public Library Association conference in March 2018, I returned to my library ready to give them exactly that.

We immediately began implementing quarterly staff learning - a chance for staff members to get out of the branch at least once per quarter to visit another branch, observe a program, or chat with a superstar librarian. Initially I planned for this to be conducted entirely in house, within our sister branches throughout the 3 New York City boroughs we serve.

New ideas to share?

Send your articles to the editors at

editor@alalearning.org

ALA Midwinter – LearnRT Meeting

Are you heading to ALA Midwinter in Philadelphia?

Be sure to join us:
Sunday, January 26, 8:30 AM-10:00 AM at the Pennsylvania Convention Center, Room 106-B.

Board meetings are open to all members and are a great way to get learn more about our organization. Hope to see you there!

Annual Fund Opportunity

ALA is your national voice for libraries. Support our work to advance the core values of the profession with a gift to the ALA Annual Fund!

This is a wonderful opportunity to support the various activities in LEARNRT. Consider giving to one of the following areas:

LEARNRT General which ensures that your gift is applied to essential projects most in need of funding. (i.e., the Pat Carterette Professional Development Grant awarded to an individual on an annual basis to provide monetary support to participate in continuing educational events)

Training Showcase Funds help support staff development, continuing education, and training initiatives. https://ec.ala.org/donate/projects

No gift is too small! Thanks for your support in these efforts.

Make Your Own Path

Some choices included:
- Game Night
- Speaking Techniques and Vocal Exercises
- Busy Builders
- Advanced Sign Language
- Multiple book clubs

Quickly though, this program grew. It now encompasses cultural institutions, other libraries in the city, and tangentially related events, like a screening of The Public. Some staff members have made connections with library professionals at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Morgan Library and Museum, while others have taken in exhibits at the Society of Illustrators. There's something useful to be gleaned from each and every experience we have, and what is most exciting is the self-directed nature of these excursions. Autonomy is a huge part of my philosophy and I believe in carving out time for people to dictate what they do, when they do it, and with whom.

That's not to say that this entire regimen has to come from within: I've also used quarterly staff learning as a chance to direct some staff members' growth, cherry-picking learning experiences for them, in an effort to help them grow in a particular skill or area. In the past few months, I've sent staff members to other branches to explore new tech programming in hopes of reimagining our existing computer program and bringing 3D printing to the Upper East Side.

This type of "program" is what you make of it - it can be as casual or as strict as you want it to be, as often as you find useful, and can evolve easily. I've found that my team seeks out these opportunities more and more and have become increasingly creative in the choices they make. It's been a pleasure to watch each and every staff member grow, and I am always delighted (and sometimes surprised!) by the choices they make.

If you've been looking for a way to shake up your learning and travel down a self-directed path, turn over the decision making to your team. You never know what you may learn. .
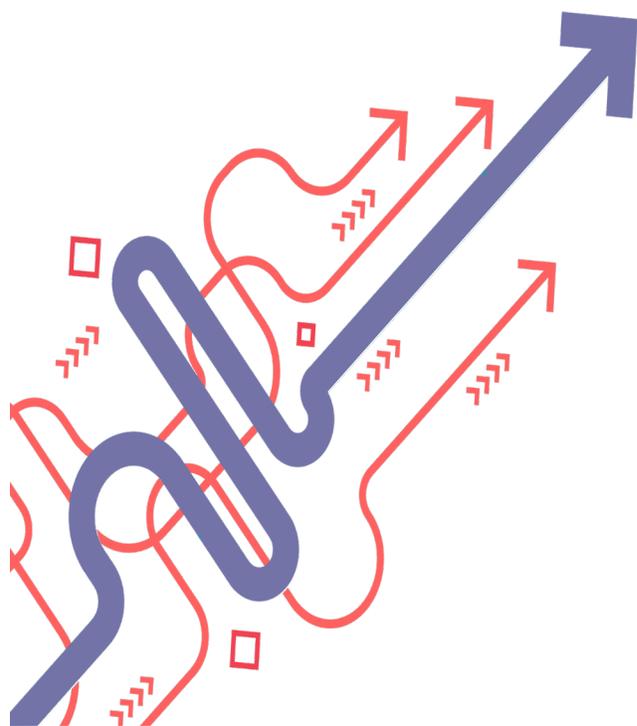
President's Message
How do YOU Collaborate?
Cheryl Wright

Manager, Organizational Learning and Development at the Indianapolis (IN) Public Library.

As trainers, it is so easy to get bogged down in planning and executing training, that we forget to rely on all of the great resources we have out in the world. How many of you do this? I know I do! However, because I serve on our State Library Professional Development Committee, I am forced (okay maybe just nudged) to work with others on ensuring that training is happening across the state and especially in my library.

As a librarian new to the world of training, this served as a great resource for me in learning how to present training and learning what to offer. It also helped me to understand that I don't have to build it myself, and instead should utilize those resources that are already developed. How great is it to see all the webinars that are out there and available for free? Thanks to the many libraries who provide lists of upcoming trainings such as the Indiana State Library Current Training Opportunities and the Wyoming State Library Training Calendar.

By reaching out to others, I can provide state of the art Early Childhood Learning training for my juvenile librarians, offer attendance at local conferences on customer service, find new contacts for training security, reference, programming, etc. and call my colleagues for advice on how to build new training.

Don't be overwhelmed by feeling you have to do it all on your own. That is why the Learning Round Table is here! We have created many online classes that you can already access through WebJunction such as Building on Successful Examples: Exploring Programs that Work, and, Creating Awesome Supervisor Training. We meet on a regular basis to share ideas and we offer a Chair's program at ALA Annual that always covers a big training topic. *SNEAK PEEK – the topic for 2020 is Tech Competencies!*

I have found many great new ideas through my fellow LearnRT members. Just last June at ALA, our Chair's Program was on providing diversity training and how to get started and our pre-conference was on learning to host an UnConference. The panel of instructors brought fresh, new ideas on getting started from scratch, methods for making training stick and how to keep the learning going.

Whatever you do in the training world, make sure that you reach out to others. You don't have to re-create the wheel. Trainers are givers by nature and want to share all of their great ideas (as well as their challenges!) Join us in our continuing, learning journey. .

How to Get Workflow Under Control - From Inbox to Done

Doug Crane, Library Director
Palm Beach County Library System

Do you have more to do than you have time in the day? Have you ever forgotten something important? Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed and don't know what to do next?

If you are like most library employees, the number of projects and actions that are possible to do at any given time is more than work schedules allow. With so many factors competing for our time, we need a system that allows us to prioritize the important over the trivial. Library staff, like all knowledge workers, make inefficient use of their time when they fail to have an organized system in place to handle the volume of new information and ideas. In simple terms, we all need to master our workflow.

Workflow is a concept that simply refers to how we move things from ideas to actions. One of the simplest workflow systems available is known as GTD, short for Getting Things Done. David Allen, a former management consultant, devised the system over twenty years ago and it has developed into one of the most heavily used approaches to handling knowledge work.

Implementing the system requires very little set up time and can be done in any office situation. The system is immortalized in his famous book, Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity.

According to David Allen there are five stages of workflow:

•	**Capture**: Information is coming our way all day in various forms, such as emails, phone messages, or notes from a meeting. Successful capture involves taking good notes and carrying out mindful inbox management. Holding items only in your head is problematic and a recipe for disastrous forgetting.

•	**Clarify**: After we capture items, we have to clarify what they mean to us. Is it a question from the boss, an advertisement for the new pizza place, or a monthly report to review? Once we understand the importance, or lack-thereof, of that item, the next step is to determine whether it is actionable. If no action is needed, it becomes trash or reference. If actionable, figuring out the next physical action to move it forward is vital to get to completion.

•   **Organize**: If not completed immediately, the note or reminder of the actionable item must be stored in a simple system so that it can be found later. One approach is to create a series of functional file folders along with a timed reminder system. This way, items can be easily found hours or days later with the context intact. Messy desks and messy file folders lead to inefficient work.

•   **Review**: No system survives without regular maintenance. Once a week, it is suggested to review all folders and project lists to ensure that everything is up to date. Don't let inertia drag down your productivity.

•   **Engage**: Finally, when we have discretionary time, we must engage with our system to get things done. Taking into account time and energy, look through your lists of actionable items to see what would provide the best bang for the buck. Break down your next actions to their smallest components to reduce resistance. Just focus on the next email, phone call, or draft to keep projects moving.

I have been using GTD for the past nine years and it has transformed my work. I found it so important that I began to teach seminars and webinars on the topic under the title,

The Efficient Librarian. For me, mastering workflow and creating systems that were tight, clean, and quick was the key to accomplishing more, keeping my head clear, and having more fun at work. I believe that the application of these principles saves me weeks of time every year to focus on creative and exciting work that takes me along new innovate paths.

To learn more, please visit David Allen's site, www.gettingthingsdone.com. Also, my blog, www.efficientlibrarian.com provides weekly insights at the point of intersection between librarianship and productivity.

Happy workflowing! .

Pat Carterette Professional Development Grant

The ALA Learning Round Table will award up to $1,000 to an individual to attend a professional development event between September 1, 2020 and August 31, 2021. The award recipient will be required to share their new learning with other Round Table members in some way (newsletter article, blog, listserv, etc.). Applicants do not have to be ALA members to apply.

Applicants must respond to the Survey Monkey questionnaire located at this link by February 15, 2020, at 11:59 pm CST.

This grant, named after our much admired past-president, the late Pat Carterette, is designed to honor her passion for professional development in the field of library and information sciences. A former staff development and continuing education coordinator, Pat believed in quality library service, leadership development, and continual learning.
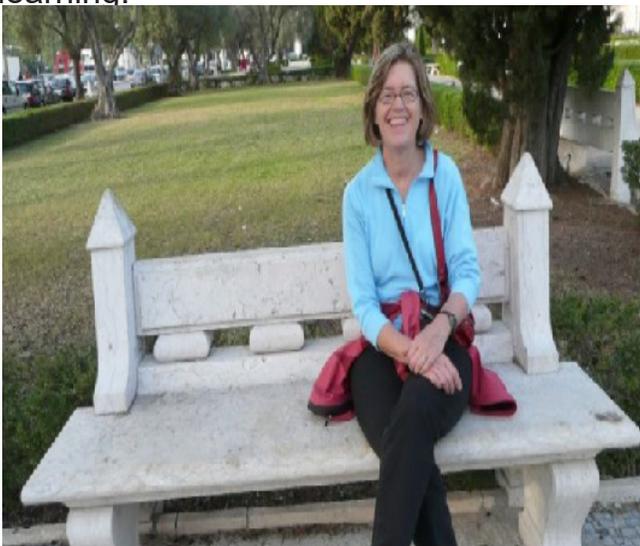
Pat Carterette in Portugal (nd)

Please note: The maximum grant amount is $1,000 (with receipts). Any costs above this will be the responsibility of the recipient. In addition to the financial award, the recipient will be provided with access to a member of LearnRT, who will serve as a "Professional Development Mentor" throughout the award year. If the recipient is already an ALA member, they will also receive a free one-year membership in LearnRT. The award recipient will be notified in May 2020.

In the words of previous recipients:

"The Pat Carterette Professional Development Grant is enabling me to attend possibly the only conference out there specifically tailored to library leadership in youth services. Because of this grant, I will have the opportunity to develop my skills in a variety of areas crucial to my fairly new position: strategic long-range planning of youth programs, maximizing the potential and effectiveness of the Youth Services meetings I lead, creating professional development programs for librarians providing story times, and change management in Youth Services. This conference is not only going to lay a foundation for my own professional growth; it will help me grow the reach of my library's Youth Services department."

Sara White
Youth Services Senior Librarian
Seminole County Public Library