

LearningExchange

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“School ends, but education doesn’t.”

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Finding Your Leadership Pathway part 2

Doug Crane

Director, Palm Beach County Library System

Plan of Action

In most journeys, complications arise that force us to take alternative paths. Once these obstacles are apparent, the next step is to formulate a plan of action. There are several ways to develop these strategies. Two are highlighted below.

A solitary method to address potential roadblocks is brainstorming options. I suggest using map maps to avoid the trap of linear thinking. Take a sheet of blank paper and write the name of the roadblock in the center. Around that center point start listing potential solutions. Avoid early self-censorship by writing down anything that comes to mind. Don’t worry if ideas seem unworkable. The point is to get them out of your head for full review. In fact, sometimes ideas that seem silly at first might have merit upon closer examination.

Challenge yourself to come up with a least five options. For example, if the roadblock is lack of project funding you might:

- Ask the owner/director for additional funds
- Seek out grant opportunities
- Arrange for a loan from a bank or colleague
- Identify options to reduce the project’s overall costs
- Close out other projects to divert funds

A collaborative way to overcome roadblocks is through a support network. Too often we fail to seek help due to embarrassment or ego. There are many with experience and resources that could be amenable to assist. Being willing to reach out to colleagues can be the difference maker.



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SUBSCRIPTION questions

(e.g. missing issues, address changes) should be sent to:

Danielle Ponton

ALA/LearnRT

50 E. Huron Street

Chicago, IL 60611

Fax: 312-280-3256

CONTENT questions

should be sent to:

LearningExchange Editor

editor@alallearning.org

GENERAL questions about

LearnRT should be sent to:

info@alallearning.org

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fperkins@areaagingsolutions.org

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mmpotter@burbankca.gov

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Midwest Collaborative for Library
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seaboltp@mcls.org

Newsletter Editor (Ex Officio)

Colleen Hooks

Orange County Library System

hooks.colleen@ocls.info

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.

Leadership Pathway

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To that end, utilize professional networks, even ones outside your occupation. Oftentimes the way to overcome a roadblock is by applying ideas from another profession. Lawyers, doctors, accountants, construction workers, and librarians all have different mindsets. Join the local Chamber of Commerce or attend a Toastmasters club. Both are examples of cross professional organizations. Tapping into alternative viewpoints is a helpful way to find novel solutions.

Journey Reflections

Through perseverance, effort, and a little bit of luck the desired leadership destination can be reached. Even if goals change, it is important to celebrate success every step along the way.

Too often we fail to celebrate our victories. This could be due to a feeling of modesty or simple exhaustion from the journey. However, failure to acknowledge the hard work can make the achievement feel hollow. Therefore, it is helpful to plan ways to celebrate success in advance of its arrival.

Consider that during real life trips, we make efforts to secure them in our memories. For example, photos are taken at important waypoints

and with fellow travelers or locals. Souvenirs are acquired to frame specific places. We may journal or post on events and places visited. All these artifacts allow us to reminisce on the journey well after it is over.

As you travel down your leadership pathway, what parts of it are worthy of remembrance? Will it be attending conferences? Will it be specific people? Will artifacts be created or acquired? Consider in advance what items will capture the essence of the journey even before taking the first step.

For example, every time I attend an American Library Association conference or a Public Library Association conference, I bring back a small souvenir such as a shot glass with the name of the host city. It is a small memento that unlocks larger memories.

What will you acquire on your leadership journey? It is helpful to consider this in advance to ensure you capture them on your travels. Of course, when detours happen, allow yourself spontaneous acquisitions when the mood strikes. Anything that helps celebrate success is worthy of consideration.

I wish you good fortune on your leadership journey. ▪

President's Message

Amanda Standerfer
President, ALA Learning Round Table

Greetings, LearnRT members! I'm Amanda Standerfer and I'm your new President! I'm thrilled to be working with a great group of library folks on the LearnRT Board this year. While I've been a member of ALA for many years and been involved in various committees, I've never held an "office" before, so I'm excited to learn alongside all of you this year.

My very first library job in 1999 (shout out the now merged Rolling Prairie Library System based in Decatur, Illinois) required me to support member libraries by developing and providing access to continuing education for all types of libraries. I've been hooked on the power of CE and staff development ever since, and while none of my subsequent library jobs were entirely devoted to staff development, it's always been part of what I've done whether I was paid to or not.

Besides working in libraries, I have spent about half my career in the philanthropic sector. From this work, I've been able to bring new ideas to the libraries I work with when it comes to capacity building and holistic organizational development. I'm looking forward to sharing some of these ideas with you, too.

I'm also excited to infuse more LearnRT into upcoming ALA events.

We are working to organize a LearnRT networking event at LibLearnX, and also plan to reboot the Training Showcase at ALA Annual in Chicago in 2023. We hope to see you there! PS: If you have an idea for a conference program that LearnRT can be part of, please reach out! amanda@fastforwardlibraries.com

I recently presented at PLA about learning organizations and one critical component of practicing being a learning organization is to make time for reflection. This is so hard to do when the next task is knocking at your door! If you've read this far (thank you!), take a moment to think about an amazing learning experience you've had lately. What was it about that experience that made it great? How can you replicate that experience at your library? Even if your thoughts are not concrete, can you share with a colleague to get the creative juices flowing? Better yet, write up a brief article for the next LearnRT Newsletter! We all want to hear what you've been learning!

Until next time...
Amanda E. Standerfer
President - LearnRT
Founder and Lead Consultant - Fast Forward Libraries ▪

Using Library Statistics to Prepare New Employees

Casey K Wallace, Staff Engagement Manager
Gwinnett County Public Library

Part of my role is to help new employees see themselves as library professionals if they don't already. Introducing them to common library statistics, both system specific "in house" stats, and statewide numbers, helps. In the last 2 years, we have been eagerly checking our system statistics (circulation, door count, etc.) to chart our usage regrowth following the pandemic. This mild obsession has a practical use in welcoming new employees for the following reasons:

1. Statistics explain librarianship to those new to the field
2. Statistics explain recent history and current workplace climate
3. Statistical trends forecast details of the job experience

Explaining Librarianship: Usually it occurs to me towards the end of the year that certain data is available from the prior calendar or fiscal year to update statistics we use in new hire training. I know several stats reporting deadlines are due in June, but reports are usually published a few months following. In my use case for orientation, I am speaking to an audience that may be completely new to libraries and new to my library system at the same time. As some people are "stats people" and numbers can tell

a story, I like to show the kinds of stats libraries collect and explain that this forms a picture for stakeholders about library usage. It helps fight against that troubling question "do people even use libraries any more?"

Workplace History and Climate: Specifically, when I introduce library statistics I look for the raw number, per capita, ranking within my state's libraries, as well as which other library systems are in the top 5 or 10 in the state for the following metrics:

- library cardholdership
- circulation total
- computer/wifi total
- customer visits

These metrics generate conversations around what "busy" means: what impact this can have on staff time and efforts, similarities and differences between our community and others in my home state, and how these numbers shape their daily experience.



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Statistics

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Job Experience Forecast: I have been showing new hires how usage numbers have dropped because of the pandemic and we are experiencing a “bounce back.” This means their jobs are getting more active, more quickly. We want people to be prepared for this change and demonstrate this explanation numerically. As we move from “shut down” to “all cylinders” mode, employees who do not have the frame of reference for busier traffic should have this addressed in an overt manner from the outset in order to best manage expectations and forge the best possible relationship with their new workplace.

An extension of this practice is talking about professional organizations, such as state library services, ALA, PLA, etc. within new hire training. Many new library employees do not know these acronyms or group names, nor the relationship between these groups and their workplace. Basic definitions and explanations are appropriate for this audience and not too time intensive to include. If they are already familiar, it gives new employees a chance to share experiences, information, and participate in some team building. As we work towards a better DEI mindset in our job cultures, using statistics is a way of teaching some of the vocabulary of librarianship, and hopefully inviting different voices into our profession. ▪

TRAINING SHOWCASE AT ALA ANNUAL

Coming to ALA Annual? Is training your superpower?

We would like to invite you to consider hosting a table at our Training Showcase at ALA Annual in Chicago on Sunday, June 25 from 2:30-3:30pm.

The showcase is an annual event sponsored by our round table to give trainers and training organizations a chance to showcase best practices in library training, learning, and continuing education. All types of libraries, and staff and public trainers will enjoy coming to learn, share, and meet new people! It’s a casual, fun, atmosphere with refreshments and prizes for participants who visit tables.

Interested in hosting a table?

The Showcase normally attracts 80-100 attendees – all of whom are interested in training and staff development. As a presenter, you will be provided with a table and chairs to share your tips, tricks or sage advice on training. You can bring handouts, small displays, SWAG or just your great personality! This is your time to share your training tip/topic with the attendees.

[Training Showcase 2023 Participation Form](#)

Please complete this form by May 12. Once submitted, you will receive a follow up email with more details.

Questions? Contact Amanda Standerfer at amanda@standerferconsulting.com.

Record Keeping and Learning

Edmund A Rossman III

Ed is a retired librarian and former adjunct professor at Kent State's Library school

Within any library the ability exists to distill knowledge from a never-ending supply of raw material. This can be done by the practice of a daily discipline. Librarians should, faithfully and methodically, describe their challenges and accomplishments defining great educational and social environments. Debriefing reports from programs and activities can provide helpful knowledge.

Taking the time to document meetings and activities has great benefits. In essence, what you are doing is Journaling. You are bringing the magic of writing to witness your endeavors, enhancing their effectiveness.

There are studies that show there are positive physical effects from writing as well. A study in JAMA found that asthma and arthritic patients who wrote about stressful events in their lives showed improvements and control of deterioration after writing.

But according to the study, it's important to write right. Simply relating stress onto paper did not seem as helpful for some patients. Writing and applying meaningful

emotions and gained insights seemed to help people improve much better. Cause and effect words such as "because," "realize," and "understand" also aid in the benefits of writing. These words draw out the magic in writing, making the bridge between emotions and actions, actions and memory, memory and knowledge.

In *Schools That Learn*, part of the Fifth Discipline series of books on education, author Peter Senge identifies 5 key disciplines of organized learning. One is Systems Thinking, techniques for giving feedback and dealing with complexity. In many institutions, reacting to problems, fixing them, and moving quickly to the next crisis creates an "attention deficit" culture within an organization.



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Record Keeping and Learning

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Systems thinking tries to go beyond this by putting problems and goals into the context of a system that can react better and learn from change. Taking the time to properly document and reflect on past activity is one of the techniques to building a stronger organization, not one with a short attention span. The cure for organizational ADHD is the discipline of writing.

Every day another lesson is learned. Someone from your team must always be observing and reporting types of community questions, to develop tactics and resources for success in those areas. School assignments, weather conditions, issues caused by news stories: all come in waves. They'll repeat over and over through the course of one day, or for several days. As library staff rotates through the day due to shift changes, the momentum of discovered knowledge could be broken if the initial wave of questions is not noted, and responses not documented. Written down, the wisdom from those experiences and proper answers and resources to respond to them, can be efficiently passed around. Any type of team needs

this institutional memory. As the old quote says, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Exercise:

Look for documentation that covers the point of time you're in, and the next three months out, for last year, and, if possible, 2-3 years ago. This might be found in annual reports, management meeting notes, public newsletters, a media scrapbook, or web pages from archive.org. Write down key activities for each month.

Plan ahead for the next three months. Compare the past with your recent experiences and see if you can add any lessons learned that would make the activities smoother next time around.

This will do two things. It will remind you of good techniques. And it will foster confidence that problems can be overcome, and that opportunities can be seen after you begin a course of action. In other words, not wasting 20-20 hindsight, but fostering a can-do attitude. ▪

If any argument was needed to make writing part of the discipline of good librarianship, it's here. The hundred benefits are broken out by categories such as stress reduction, problem solving, enhancing intuition and creativity.

Academic Library Student Staff: Factors to Consider for Your Training Program

**Clarisa Rosario-DeGroate, Circulation and Student Staff Coordinator
Kaplan Family Library and Learning Center, MSMC**

There is no such thing as perfection in the implementation of a student staff training program, and the reasons are simple: everyone has their own learning style and the tools with which we develop our staff are constantly updating. As a result, training leaders are burdened with an overflow of ideas, one-size-fits-all strategies, and a structure that represents the tools rather than the needs of the trainees. How, then, do we make training flexible, representative of our communities, and relevant? Some considerations for creating a student staff training program include knowing how the students learn, making sure training is well-communicated with everyone involved, and continued evaluation and modification.

Ensuring that these core elements happen requires some planning. For example, at the academic library where I train student staff, I ask them during onboarding about their familiarity and experience with technology, their preferred communication style, and what their previous work experiences were. With that information, plans can be made for anticipated

accommodations, especially regarding the presentation of training materials. Next, I communicate the general expectations of their assignment and build a foundation for the expectations. I'm always looking for feedback, because sometimes things go wrong. For example, once I made an entire website dedicated to training and development materials (full of eye-catching graphic designs and informative videos) - only to realize it did not get students "trained". This online format appealed to about one third of my workforce - the rest of the employees either did not take the time to go through it despite it being assigned to them, or they quickly forgot even the most basic procedures.

One cannot assume this issue was caused by lack of interest. It's more likely this happened because there was no in-person meeting to interact with their peers, no accountability of their supervisors in the room to ensure the content was understood and clarified, and there was no ability to ask immediate clarifying questions.

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Academic Factors

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Admittedly the website was created as a response to the pandemic which made large group meetings unfeasible. However, it would have been beneficial for me to solicit feedback on learning with a website, revamping the program after group meetings were reinstated, or having student assistance putting the site together. This leads me into the next factor to be aware of, which is the ability for the training program to have the flexibility to apply to new groups of people, while also keeping its continued evolution possible. In an academic library, new students cycle in and out frequently, making it imperative to receive student feedback as often as possible.

How is this accomplished? First, we can ask our students early what their goals are. How can the training reach them as individuals supporting what they wish to accomplish, and helping them see the true value of employment? Furthermore, it would be ideal for the training program to allow for occasional tweaking, which might mean having online resources that can easily be updated and checking in with students periodically: this should be reviewed as often as necessary. Seasoned students can act as peer mentoring for newer students, and may also make suggestions for content upgrades and visual design.

Finally, training must be part of the greater communication schema that exists between coworkers and departments. Some excellent tips provided by Sheri Crawford Hamilton, COO at Cardone Training Technologies, Inc., include the following:

- taking into consideration another's point of view (others may not receive the information as you intend it to be understood)
- communicating in multiple ways (don't let an email prevent you from following up in person)
- consider others who also need the information
- check for understanding (having your trainee verify what you just explained and asking them what their next steps are so you know that they know what you want to happen)

With planning and communication, a desire to receive feedback, and a flexible program, student workers will thrive in your training program. All it takes is a dedicated leader to put all of the pieces in motion and focus on the best outcomes for both the student trainees and the institution. ■