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# Information Outlook, October 2007

Special Libraries Association

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# information outlook

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SPECIAL LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION

MANAGEMENT

## HOW TO HIRE WITHOUT REGRET

MEMBER PROFILE

## IT'S ONE BIG CIRCUS

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE SPECIAL LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION



Cover photo from a scene from Varekai, now on tour. Photo by Tomas Muscionico. © Cirque du Soleil


# information outlook

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***Publisher, Editor in Chief:*** John T. Adams III (jadams@sla.org)

***Columnists:***
Stephen Abram
Lesley Ellen Harris
Janice R. Lachance
John R. Latham
Debbie Schachter
Carolyn J. Sosnowski
Rebecca B. Vargha

***Layout & Design:*** Bussolati, www.bussolati.com

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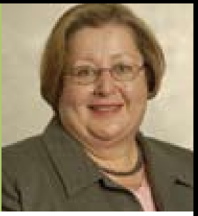
# SLA Is Looking Ahead To Future Of the Profession

**Approaching centennial provides an opportunity to celebrate yesterday—and plan for tomorrow.**



BY JANICE R. LACHANCE, SLA CEO

In 2009, SLA will celebrate its centennial. This is an extraordinary accomplishment for any organization, and it deserves to be recognized and honored in a special way. To prepare for the yearlong celebration, a Centennial Commission has been created and is already planning events and activities to commemorate this significant milestone. It will, no doubt, be a memorable year.

As we reflect on the past and acknowledge the contributions of those whose efforts and dedication to SLA and to the profession have delivered us to this moment in the association's history, it also seems natural and right for us to focus a significant amount of our critical thinking and creative talents on assessing what lies ahead for SLA. It is this alchemy—this mixture of appreciation for successes of the past and curiosity and passion for the future—that makes anniversaries and celebrations very special and extremely important.

As SLA prepares to enter its second century of service, it does so amidst sweeping technological change that is not only reshaping the information industry but also redefining the world in which we live. How will these changes affect librarians and information professionals generally, and what will these changes mean for your career, and for your professional association?

To help answer these questions, SLA has begun a far-reaching and thorough examination of the information profession and of the roles librarians, info pros, and your association will play in the future. We are working with a team of respected communications and research professionals led by the international consulting firm, Fleishman-Hillard, supported by futurist Andy Hines of Social Technologies and the information analytics firm, Outsell Inc. The project, which will rely heavily on primary and secondary research, will help librarians and info pros align their knowledge, experience, and skills with the evolving expectations of the organizations of tomorrow, while ensuring that SLA continues to provide you with the right tools and valuable services you must have to be successful.

Employing a four-step methodology, Fleishman-Hillard—which has extensive experience advising organizations such as AARP, the Association of Fundraising Executives and the U.S. Library of Congress on their branding, positioning, and marketing communications—will work with us to identify and understand SLA's core purpose, ethos and value. After refining our current position in the marketplace or identifying a new position that is relevant, differentiated, and deliverable based upon sound scientific research, we will be able to create a framework for discussing the association and the profession in a single, persuasive voice.

## Broad Study

There is no pre-determined outcome for the project. It is a wide-ranging inquiry about the future of the profession, the results of which will provide the SLA with valuable insights concerning its strategic direction. The only outcome that matters is one that serves the best interests of members. For that reason, we will listen carefully to the results of the research that our consultants will deliver in the months ahead. And we will listen to you.

Throughout this process, which we plan to complete by the middle of next year, we will encourage your input and ask your opinions. We will keep you up to date on our progress through our numerous communications channels, including the SLA Web site, and we will seek your feedback along the way. The alignment project also will be a primary topic of discussion at the 2008 Leadership Summit in Louisville, Kentucky, this January.

This is unquestionably an ambitious effort, but one we know will be successful. It will give SLA and the librarians and information professionals it serves the advantage of a glimpse over the next rise. It will help us map the landscape of the future and better understand our place in it. And, it will set us on a course that ensures that the significant value of librarians and information professionals is effectively communicated, clearly understood, and never in doubt. **SLA**

# SLA to FTC: Don't Take Shortsighted Approach to Internet Neutrality

**SLA has called on the U.S. Federal Trade Commission to reconsider its decision to abandon Internet neutrality.**

In a letter to FTC Chairman Deborah Platt Majoras, SLA called the commission's June 2007 report, *Broadband Connectivity Competition Policy,* shortsighted, and the FTC's decision a threat to an open, robust, and independent Internet. SLA urged the FTC to take another look at the Internet neutrality issue.

The 170-page report accepted many of the arguments made by cable operators and telephone companies that government intervention was unjustified because competitive forces were producing many consumer benefits, including content innovations and network investment by access providers.

"The FTC has adopted the view that because the Internet is operating well today, there is no regulatory need to protect it tomorrow," said Janice R. Lachance, SLA's chief executive officer. "The commission has taken the logic behind the saying, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it,' and has turned it completely on its head by seeming to suggest, 'If it ain't broke, don't protect it.' Do we really want to roll the dice when it comes to the public's continued open-access to Internet applications and content? SLA thinks the answer is 'No.'"

The FTC report, which does not carry the force of law, is intended to guide policy on "Internet connectivity in general and network neutrality in particular, as developed from meetings between the FTC Internet Access Task Force, various interested parties, and the FTC staff's independent research." The report contains a number of "suggested guiding principles" for future policy creation.

In a June 2007 statement, Majoras said, "this report recommends that policy makers proceed with caution in the evolving dynamic industry of broadband Internet access, which generally is moving toward more—not less—competition." She continued, "In the absence of significant market failure or demonstrated consumer harm, policy makers should be particularly hesitant to enact new regulation in this area."

Lachance, a member of the U.S. delegation to the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society, and a participant in the United Nations' Internet Governance Forum, is actively involved in efforts in the United States and internationally to ensure the Internet continues to remain independent and open in order to meet the needs of information professionals, librarians, their customers and the public.

"I understand the need for policymakers to be cautious about taking action on every possible problem the country faces," said Lachance. "If, however, the government had waited until our national wilderness areas had been blighted before protecting these scenic treasures, what would have been the point? The Internet may be a treasure of a completely different kind, but it merits our protection so as to ensure it remains open and accessible to all who can benefit from it," she said.

## IMLS Calls For Museum Grant Applications

The Institute of Museum and Library Services will accept grant applications for the agency's fiscal year 2008 Museums for America program through November 1.

Through the program, the Institute provides support for "essential and worthy" projects that help museums further their missions, achieve their goals, and provide value to their communities. Museums for America grants benefit museums of all sizes and types, in all parts of the country.

This year's guidelines have been modified to make the application process quicker and more user-friendly. The grant categories have been clarified to underscore the goal of the program: to build the capacity of museums to serve the public. The three categories of Museums for America activities include:

1. Engaging Communities (education, exhibition, and interpretation).
2. Building Institutional Capacity (management, policy, and training).
3. Collections Stewardship.

Through these new, broad

"The [Federal Trade Commission] has taken the logic behind the saying, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it,' and has turned it completely on its head by seeming to suggest, 'If it ain't broke, don't protect it,' said Janice R. Lachance, SLA's chief executive officer.

categories, the grants will provide funds for the full range of museum programs and activities, including digitization, staff training, research, exhibitions, educational programs, community partnerships and collections management.

Applicants are required to demonstrate that proposed grant activities are clearly linked to the institution's strategic plan and enhance the museum's ties and value to its community. Applicants must show that the activities are an investment in the museum's long-term capacity.

Application guidelines and instructions are available at www.imls.gov/applicants/grants/forAmerica.shtm. The Institute will only accept applications submitted through Grants.gov, the federal government's online application system. Applicants using Grants.gov must register with Grants.gov before submitting their application. Applicants who are not already registered should allow at least two weeks to complete this one-time process. For information on registration, visit www.imls.gov/applicants/grantsgov/checklist.shtm.

Questions about the MFA program may be directed to Sandra Narva, senior program officer, (202) 653-4634, snarva@imls.gov, or Steve Shwartzman, senior program officer, (202) 653-4641, sshwartzman@imls.gov.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 122,000 libraries and 17,500 museums.

Its mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The Institute works at the national level and in coordination with state and local organizations to sustain heritage, culture, and knowledge; enhance learning and innovation; and support professional development. To learn more about the Institute, see www.imls.gov.

## Study: Fair Use Boosts U.S. Economy

A new Computer and Communications Industry Association report links fair use and other copyright exemptions that libraries use to economic growth in the U.S.

Long a central issue for libraries, fair use allows for the lawful usage of copyrighted works without the prior permission of the rights holder, under certain conditions. The study confirms the economic benefits of fields like librarianship that rely on fair use.

The report concluded that libraries need the ability to preserve, store and provide access to information addressed by copyright exemptions and limitations like fair use, first sale, preservation and replacement, and interlibrary loan. In turn, libraries' use of Internet search engines, software and other networked information spur the growth of telecommunications, software and Internet service providers and Web portal industries.

For more information on the study, see http://www.ccianet.org. **SLA**

The report concluded that libraries need the ability to preserve, store and provide access to information addressed by copyright exemptions and limitations like fair use, first sale, preservation and replacement, and interlibrary loan.

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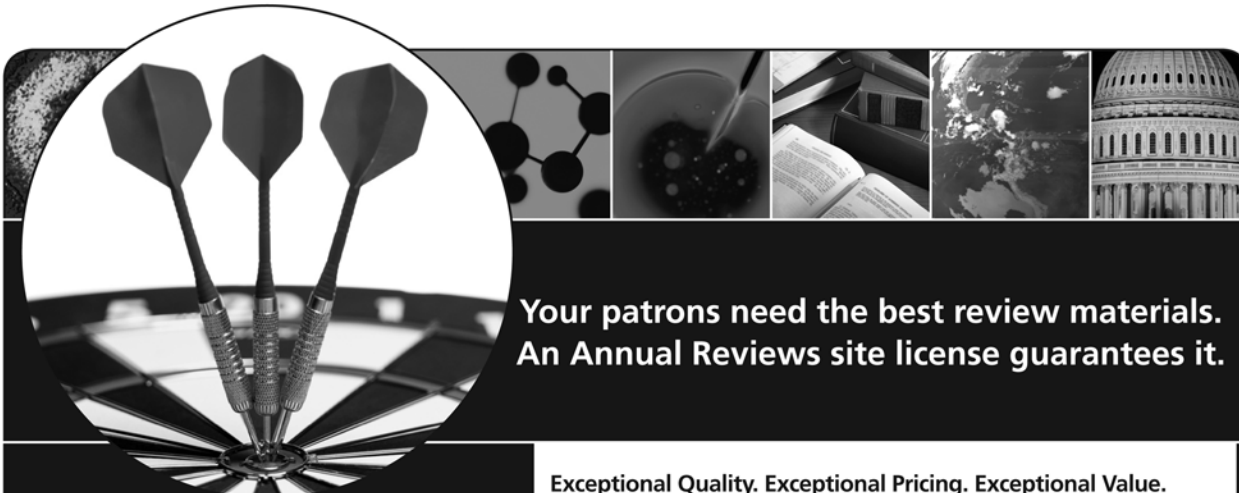


# If Numbers Never Tell a Lie, This Site Points to Many Truths

**And if you're interested in art, here's a collection of 13,000 images of Picasso's works.**

BY CAROLYN J. SOSNOWSKI, MLIS

## Statistics Resources

**www.statisticsresources.info**

No matter what your industry, statistics are ubiquitous. This "information blog," which is updated fairly frequently, lists almost 100 sources for them. Although most of the sites are government-run, speaker and author Marcus Zillman includes other types of sites, too. There are links to figures on health, population characteristics, economics, transportation, education, government, information technology, and business, as well as links to other statistics meta-sites. Zillman has created similar "Subject Tracer" sites for many other topics as well, including the Internet, agriculture, ecommerce, people-finding, grants, journalism, and genealogy.

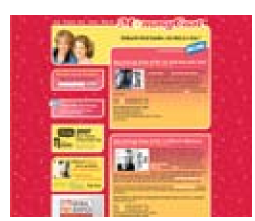
## On-line Picasso Project

**http://picasso.tamu.edu/picasso**

I don't know much about modern art, but I know an extensive and fascinating digital archive when I see one. Although there aren't any "about this site" notes to provide background for visitors, it's clear that the site would be a great starting place for casual and serious researchers alike. In addition to more than 13,000 unique images of Picasso works (many with notes and additional commentary), biographical and professional information about Picasso is interspersed with descriptions of world events. The art can be viewed by collection (say, if you wanted to know which pieces were in a particular museum) and by year. Other site features: search tools for each section, side-by-side art comparison, and timelines for the work.

## MommyCast

**http://mommycast.com**



Sometimes, content is right under your nose. I was listening to an episode of this podcast while I was writing this month's column and thought many members would find MommyCast of interest. It's not just for mothers, but any parent who wants to connect with other parents and get information on childrearing topics. There's an archive of almost 250 shows from these two mothers (with seven children between them, ages two to 15) on education, birth order, technology, adoption, and even research study results. In addition to the conversational format of the show, the hosts, Paige and Gretchen, also interview professionals like doctors and dieticians for expert advice. Subscribe to the show in your RSS reader or through iTunes to keep up with the more than weekly programs.

## The Book Design Review

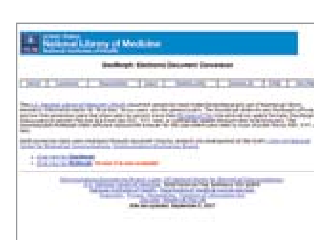
**http://nytimesbooks.blogspot.com**

There are thousands of sites out there devoted to book covers and jackets. You can rate them, discuss them, design them yourself. Read about the art, the colors, the types…and realize how many elements and decisions go into this very important marketing tool. Get new Book Design Review content via RSS and e-mail. You might also want to visit CoverBoom at coverboom.com and Covers at www.covers.fwis.com. Sometimes the covers are better than the books themselves.

## Miscellany...

Need to convert a file to a different format? In addition to Zamzar, which I mentioned in the August column, you may want to check out KoolWIRE (for PDFs) and NLM's DocMorph (50 formats), two other free file conversion services.

Visit **www.koolwire.com** (above) and **http://docmorph.nlm.nih.gov/docmorph.**



# How to Hire Without Regret

BY JULIE SCHEIN AND BELINDA DELISSER

INTERVIEWING JOB CANDIDATES CORRECTLY WILL (ALMOST) ENSURE HIRING THE CORRECT CANDIDATE.

Hiring the right person for the job is crucial to the operation of your library. Regrettable hiring decisions can be costly mistakes in terms of negative impact on morale and management time as well as reduced productivity and the potential for litigation if a decision is challenged as discriminatory or in violation of federal or state regulations.

This paper is intended to be a best-practice overview for hiring for any position in a special library. It will help you do it legally and will allow you to evaluate multiple candidates equitably. The processes explained here can be applied to all levels, clerk to director. The paper touches on all the steps in the hiring process, but the focus is on interviewing and preparation for interviewing.

## CRITICAL ELEMENTS

First, it is important to understand how interviewing relates to the entire hiring process. Below are the nine critical steps that we have gleaned from a combination of experience and best-practice research. The areas where the library manager must be most involved are the job analysis, the actual interview, and the final evaluation. Human resources (HR) typically takes on several of the remaining steps. HR refers to either an in-house department or an outside service.

### Pre-interview

1. Conduct a job analysis. Be very clear about the job responsibilities, expectations and the organization's culture. Effective interviewing is not possible without a thorough understanding of the position. (Library manager)
2. Recruit and pre-screen applicants. Human resources cannot conduct its part without step number one. (HR)
3. Do your homework. Plan an effective, structured interview process. (Library manager)
   a. Become familiar with established hiring processes and procedures.
   b. Read candidates' resumes before the interview.
   c. Choose or prepare testing tools as appropriate.
   d. Determine major questions to ask each candidate. Review for legally inappropriate questions.
   e. Prepare evaluation criteria that will predict an effective job fit.

**Interview**
4. Conduct the interview. (Library manager)

**Post-interview**
5. Check references. (Library manager or HR)
6. Conduct background check. (HR)
7. Evaluate candidates. (Library manager)
8. Make job offer. (Library manager or HR)

**Entire Process**
9. Be consistent and as unbiased as possible at every step. (Library manager and HR)

## Pre-Interview

Librarians do not usually buy equipment or choose a vendor without preparation. Why not take a little preparation time to stay out of legal trouble and increase your odds of hiring without regret? You could save your organization a lot of time, money, and frustration.

There are basically two types of interviews: structured and unstructured. Structured interviews require preparation. That means having a set of questions you follow with each candidate; a scoring or rating method of some sort to compare candidates (very important if you conduct more than one interview per day); and avoidance of biased opinions. The traditional, unstructured interview is more like a conversation than an interview and has no plan, no strategy and no prepared questions. This format has only a 15 percent to 25 percent chance of accurately predicting job performance.

The more focused and structured interview, one based on a specific strategy and prepared questions related to a job analysis, has an 80 percent-plus probability of accuracy. We highly recommend structured over unstructured for the following reasons:

- It articulates what the organization perceives as critical behavior and core competencies required for the specific job.
- It facilitates the evaluation process—which is especially important if there are multiple interviewers.
- It lends legal validity to the interview process which an unstructured, conversational interview may not have.

Unprepared interviewers are more open to biases and are more likely to hire someone most like himself or herself or to make impulsive conclusions and generalizations based on assumed characteristics. Below are the most important preparation steps.

**Figure 1: Sample Job Analysis Form**

**Position title:**

**Directly reports to:**

**Number of direct reports:** Full-time: Part-time:

**Job overview:**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Required** | | | | |
| **Top 5 major duties and responsibilities** | **Skills or competencies required** | **Years experience for each** | **Personal traits for each** | **Education** |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| **Desired** | | | | |
| **Next 3 major duties and responsibilities** | **Skills or competencies desired** | **Years experience for each** | **Personal traits for each** | **Education** |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

## Preparatory Steps

**Work with HR.** Check with your HR department for organization-recommended processes and procedures in the hiring process. Your job is to ensure that enterprise-wide policies can be applied appropriately to your library position. HR may want to handle several of the steps. This is good, but you should be sure, at a minimum, that the person to whom the position reports interviews the candidates.

**Conduct a job analysis.** Know why you want to hire someone. Clearly defining performance expectation criteria for success on the job is crucial to best-practice interviewing. Even if HR generally does the recruiting and pre-screening, you have to be able to communicate exactly what you need in terms of knowledge, skills, experience, education and personality. You also need to be able to list the criteria—both tangible and intangible—that you believe will insure a candidate's ability to be happy and effective as an employee in the position. The job description is an excellent start, but make sure it is current and accurate.

You will want to focus on the critical expectations of the job—choose about five to eight, not the whole list of duties. You also want to look at performance expectations for each of the key responsibilities and what competencies are required. If possible, talk with incumbents or observe people in the job.

Alternatively, you may have the incumbent list major job-related functions, skills and knowledge required for successful performance. Be sure that the immediate supervisor has input as well. Become thoroughly familiar with the job requirements and specifications. Be prepared to discuss the most positive and negative aspects of the job. Also be able to describe a typical day on the job. Figure 1 is an example of a job analysis form.

**Recruit candidates.** This step includes locating sources of potential employees, posting and advertising the position and taking applications. The more precise and complete your job analysis is, the easier this step will be, especially if HR or a recruiting firm does it. Make sure HR is aware of the various resources that you, as a librarian, have for posting jobs such as the SLA career center or national online career centers.

**Pre-screen candidates.** Often, the HR department performs pre-screening. For them to do their job well, you must provide them with a clearly defined job description—what is *required* and what is *desired* for the candidate to be a successful match. Resumes and/or applications should be reviewed to ensure the candidates meet the minimum requirements.

Whether or not someone else does the pre-screening, you should personally review resumes ahead of time. Reading them in front of candidates appears very unprofessional. You do not want to spend the entire interview reviewing a candidate's work history.

When reviewing resumes, learn to read "between the lines." Applicants are not always completely honest. In fact, "*Fortune* magazine reports that 66 percent of all job applicants stretch the truth on their resumes. Candidates 'forget' to list jobs from which they were fired, they adjust employment dates, or they embellish job responsibilities."[1]

If you have a large number of applicants from which to choose, you may want to use telephone interviews to eliminate those that barely meet minimum requirements. This can save a lot of time. HR may also help with preliminary telephone interviews.

One technique for pre-screening is to provide applicants with a "Skills Self-Ranking Form" in which each applicant is asked to rate their level of expertise on each of the skills you determine critical for the job.

**The traditional, unstructured interview is more like a conversation than an interview and has no plan, no strategy and no prepared questions. This format has only a 15 percent to 25 percent chance of accurately predicting job performance.**

**Prepare a schedule.** Set a schedule and follow it. Allot the same amount of time for each person, even if you do not use it.

**Create a scoring system.** The best way to create an effective, objective evaluation process is to develop a consistent method of measuring how well each candidate meets each of your predetermined critical criteria. A popular one uses a 1-3-5-point scale where 5 is outstanding, 3 is acceptable, and 1 is unacceptable. Some people prefer to use a matrix to visually compare candidates. You may need to weight answers to the most critical criteria.

- Using the list of critical criteria developed in the job analysis, plan what measurements you will use to evaluate the candidates and what answers to questions you believe will predict their ability to meet or exceed performance standards that are necessary for the specific job. Define *required* versus *desired* criteria. Creating a scoring guide may take extra time upfront, but the time spent can pay off by lending increased reliability and validity to both interview and test questions.
- Create benchmarks for what is outstanding, acceptable or unacceptable. Use high performers to determine what is exceptional or outstanding. If time permits and it is applicable, conduct a pilot study with incumbents to test the questions. Drop questions that everyone gets right or wrong.
- For resumes, you can assign scores based on education, years of experience using each area of knowledge, or other criteria.
- For interview questions, answers can be scored if you know the responses you believe will predict a successful job match. For example, "Describe how you have handled (or would handle) a situation where you are covering the reference desk or hot line and everyone is asking for their information at the same time." Two things you expect the candidate to cover are negotiating a turnaround time that is acceptable to both the candidate and patron and being courteous.
- For test questions, the correct answers are more obvious.

**Structure the interview plans.** Before the interview begins, determine the interview process to be used.

- Become familiar with the legalities of interview questions.
- All questions should relate to the job and the applicant's ability to perform on the job. Questions involving personal information not related to the job are usually prohibited. Check with your HR department for organization-specific standards.
- Prepare a list of questions in advance that are designed for consistency. Asking each candidate the same questions, preferably in the same order, will make your job of analyzing the results a lot easier.
- Determine appropriate testing tools based on job requirements.
- Decide on the interview team. It is better to use an interview panel or

at least two interviewers, depending upon the level of the job.
- Use an interview team if the position level is high enough. If you choose this method, make sure it is organized. Divide up questions among the team—maybe have each team member cover a different line of questioning, such as education and skills vs. actual past experience.

**Develop interview questions.** The main purpose of the interview is to elicit information that, when combined with test results, references, and background checks will predict how well the candidate will perform on the job and fit into the organization's culture. Structure your questions to get the most information from the candidates. Be careful not to spend too much time —no more than a couple of minutes—on questions like "tell me about yourself." You also will not get very far if the applicant responds to all of your questions with "yes" or "no" answers. Open-ended questions serve this purpose well. Rather than ask, "Have you ever done ______ in your previous job(s)?" say "Tell me about an occasion when you _____."

Be sure you know beforehand what responses you are looking for. A person who is a detail-oriented, steady worker will respond very differently than one who is outgoing, enthusiastic, or competitive. Use of your job analysis and evaluation criteria can make a tremendous difference here.

Two major types of questions are behavior-based and situational, and both can easily be open-ended questions. The difference between the two is that behavior-based is founded on past events and situational is based on a hypothetical event in the future. It is best to have more behavior-based questions because candidates have an opportunity to describe what actually happened, is harder for them to "fake" and easier to give more details. You should have a few situational questions as well to see how adaptable the candidate is. You might need to use situational questions if the candidate

# WHAT TO ASK A JOB CANDIDATE

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

These relate to the candidate's resume and general information about the candidate's education, career goals, and ability to show up and perform the job. These questions should take only five to 10 minutes. Examples:
- Why are you applying for this job?
- If we had two openings, one part-time and one full-time, which would you prefer?
- The job hours are from ___ to ____. Is there any reason why this might be a problem for you?
- What courses—either school or continuing education—have you taken recently that you think would be most applicable to this job?

## DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

If applicable, determine how and why the applicant left his or her last job. You may not want to start with a direct question like "Why did you leave your job?" because it might be too threatening. You could lead into it with a transition from a comment about the last job to "…and then you left this position?" If you get a brief answer like "I resigned," then you need to clarify by being more direct. Try to determine if the candidate left voluntarily or was asked to leave. What was the candidate's relationship with his or her supervisor and co-workers at the time of leaving? You may even want to ask, "If we contacted your immediate supervisor, what might he or she say about your reason for leaving?"

## CHARACTER-BASED QUESTIONS

These questions are used to predict how well the applicant will fit in the organization's culture and be happy as an employee. Here are a few traits that may apply and examples of questions for each one:

### Flexibility

- Describe a past work situation in which you experienced some changes in how you did your job. How did you handle it and what was the result?
- Tell me about a past work experience where you finished a task or stayed with a job you really did not like. How did you handle it and what was the result? (This question also addresses commitment and ownership of the job)

### Multi-tasking, Planning and Organizing

- Give me an example of a time when you had multiple tasks to complete within deadlines. How did you approach this challenge? How did it turn out?
- When have you had to respond to more than one person at the same time? Which job was that and what tasks were involved? How did you handle the tasks and relate back to those people? How did it end up?
- You have been on vacation for two weeks, you return to your desk and your inbox is full, you have 100 emails and your voice mailbox is full. What do you do?

### Maturity/Self-Awareness/Dependability

- What do you consider your top three accomplishments in your current or last job?
- Tell me about a couple of situations in which your work was criticized. I would be interested to know how you corrected your work in one of those situations.
- When you are looking for a job, what are the three most important things to you?

### Motivation

- What is your professional goal? Has that goal changed in the last couple of years and if so, how? Did you achieve your last goal?
- How do you determine what makes up your top priorities in performing your job?
- What would your last boss or co-worker say if I asked them to describe you?

### Coping Skills

- Describe a situation on the job where you had to handle a rude, difficult, or unhappy customer. I am interested in

how you handled this and what the result was.
- Tell me about a job situation that was very frustrating to you. What made it so frustrating? How did you handle it and what was the result?

### Teamwork
- Relate to me a situation in your current or last job where you were part of a team or team project. What was your contribution to the team and what were the results?
- Give me an example of a past situation on the job where you had to sell your ideas to other team members who were of peers and people who held higher positions. How did that work out? Why do you think it resulted in success/failure?

## SKILLS BASED QUESTIONS
These questions identify skills, knowledge, and abilities:

### Attention to Detail
- Describe a past situation when you were responsible for the details of something. What was it and how did you make sure it was accurate and complete? What was the result?

### Research
- Have you ever had to answer a research question in a subject area outside of your core industry knowledge? If so, what steps did you take to answer the question? What sources did you use?
- Regarding information resources, what are your favorites and/or what do you use most often?

### Customer Service
- Suppose a library user calls, is apparently having a bad day and is taking it out on you by demanding that you give him what he needs within the hour. How might you handle this situation? (This type of questioning is not ideal because it is not based on facts. Be careful how you use information gathered using this method.)
- Give me an example of a time when you had two or more people asking for information at the same time—each of whom said they needed it yesterday. How did you handle it, and what was the result?

### Cataloging
- If appropriate for the job, you can ask the candidate for examples of his/her work.
- Let's say you are cataloging new material and one comes across your desk in a foreign language you are only barely familiar with. How would you go about cataloging this work?

### Supervisory
- Did you ever supervise anyone? If so, how many part-time or full-time individuals? For how long?
- What were your supervisory responsibilities? Hire/fire; evaluate; train; discipline; scheduling.
- If you had to fire someone, what did you do to prepare for it? Would you do it differently next time? If so, how?

## ROLE-PLAYING
More involved than the question-and-answer format, role-playing can be used for either behavioral or situational questions. When using the role-playing technique:
- Give candidate a moment to read or think about the scenario so he/she can get into character.
- Make sure candidate clearly understands the scenario.
- Allow candidate to ask questions before starting.
- Debrief candidate afterward by asking how he/she thought she did and how might she do it differently.
- Conclude the exercise in a positive way

### Example of a role-play exercise:
- Set up a scenario in which the applicant is pretending to be answering the reference hot line. The Patron calls and says, "I want information about the automobile industry. I need anything you can find by tomorrow." (It is now 3:30 p.m.) You may choose to make the patron belligerent, depending upon what specifically you want to learn about the candidate.

In this example, look for the applicant to address as many of the following as possible:
- Negotiate time frame.
- Set parameters: high-level, general vs. details in specific areas; geographic areas; specific components of the industry (e.g. new/used car sales or aftermarket sales)
- Ask how the information will be used.
- Determine format needed (data dump, bibliography, summarized or analyzed information).
- Clarify delivery method (e.g. email or hard copy).

has no experience in the particular area you are addressing. Here is an example of the difference:

- Behavior-based—Describe how you typically go about learning a new skill needed on your job.
- Situational—If you found out that you had to learn a new skill, how would you do it? What is the first thing you would do?

The more interviewing you do, the easier it becomes to uncover very useful information. For example, you may notice things like "I did _______" rather than "we did _______". You can learn their specific role on a team project rather than what the team accomplished. You can gently lead them through the process of telling you the situation, what they did and what were the results. The sidebar "What To Ask a Job Candidate" includes some sample questions.

**Understand the legal considerations.** Learn what questions are acceptable and how to avoid any questioning that may get you or your organization into legal trouble. In general, questions should relate directly to the open position, and personal questions are almost always out of order. A table listing questions you can't legally ask in a job interview is online with the complete article at www.sla.org/pdfs/sla2007/scheininterviewing.pdf.

**Plan for testing.** Once you have identified the skills, knowledge and abilities necessary for the individual job and its component functions, you can determine which elements can or should be tested. You might choose three or four tests or exercises based on the position. Test scores are an estimate of predicted job performance and provide impartial data to be used in conjunction with other information collected from the interview process.

This step is particularly important for the support staff and technical positions. Testing trainability, as well as specific skills, is very important in this age of ever-changing technology. Tests, for example, can measure attentiveness to details and ability to follow instructions. This is particularly useful if a person has not had experience doing exactly what is required on the job.

When designing test instruments, you should:

- Provide clear indicators of skills and ability, based on relationship between test performance and job performance.
- Make sure the tests have consistent and clear instructions.
- Represent sample activities of the job.

When reviewing resumes, learn to read "between the lines." Applicants are not always completely honest.

### The Testing Process

**Work with HR.** Check with your Human Resources Department for any policies or guidelines.

**Develop test instruments.** Once HR approves testing (if necessary), develop or use tests specific to the position, covering knowledge/skills necessary for the job (see Appendices 1 and 2 and "job analysis" for examples).

- Review and validate the test instrument; HR or acknowledged experts can help. Tests should be reliable, accurate, and easy enough to be properly interpreted, avoiding unfair discrimination to any protected group or individual. Tests cannot have any adverse effects on any protected groups, such as minorities.
- Keep it short enough not to waste your time or the candidate's or cause the candidate any unnecessary anxiety.
- Develop instructions and expectations in a clear, concise and consistent manner, preferably both written and oral. Exercises should be easy to understand and be simple enough not to overwhelm the candidate.

**Administer tests.** Be consistent with environment, instructions, and time. Try not to cause any more anxiety to candidates than necessary. You might refer to these instruments as "exercises" rather than tests to put candidates more at ease.

**Analyze test results**. Make sure your analyses take the following points into consideration:

- Criteria for scoring/evaluating should be set in advance. Pass/fail? Minimum score? Relativity to other applicants?
- If a series of tests is given (based on functions), you may need to weigh each one according to its applicability to the job.
- Results should be used as one element of evaluation in conjunction with the complete interview process.

**Do not discriminate.** Tests must be evaluated in terms of their validity and legal defensibility. "Alternative testing procedures should be considered whenever there is doubt about the validity of the test or if the test appears to screen out members of protected classes"[2] (for example, ask for examples of work if applicable).

For examples of paraprofessional and researcher tests see the complete article at www.sla.org/pdfs/sla2007/scheininterviewing.pdf.

In addition to tests for specific skills, knowledge and abilities, you might also:

- Ask for work samples, for example, a research paper to evaluate writing style as well as resources used.
- Use tryouts where applicable. A tryout is used in a situation where the applicant can actually spend a short time doing part of the job such as cataloging or filing.

## THE INTERVIEW

Using the right interview techniques is essential if you want to hire without

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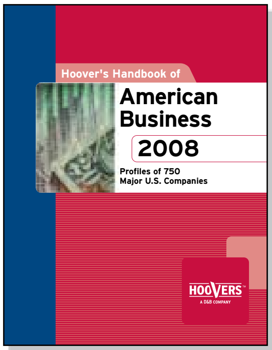


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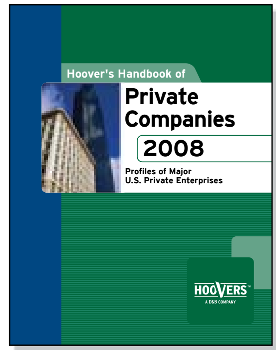


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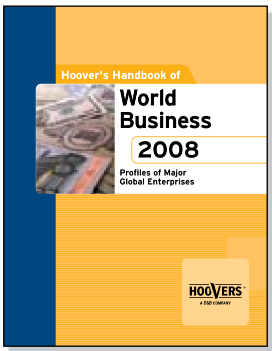


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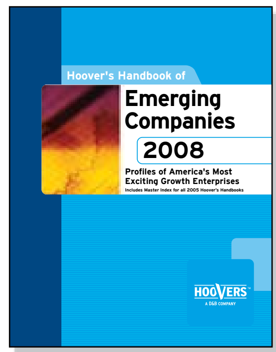


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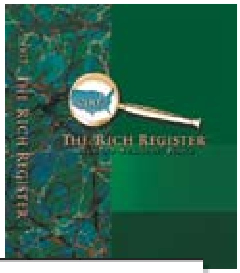


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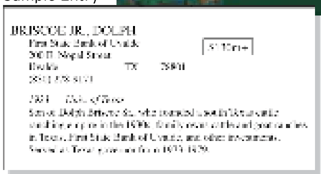

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regrets. Some techniques apply to certain types of jobs more than others. The purpose of the interview is to learn as much about the candidates as possible so you can successfully match the candidates' skills, knowledge and abilities with the job and the organization. In general, research and experience tells us that the behavior-based interviewing is more likely to result in successful hires. Assume you are properly prepared with your job analysis, structured interview process, pre-determined criteria, testing, rating methodology. You have also scheduled several prime candidates. Now comes the part that some people may find the most difficult: the interview!

From the *Denver Business Journal*: "Dell Still, author of 'High Impact Hiring' and president of Management Development Systems in Dana Point, California., [says] most job failures can be prevented by looking beyond the resumes and references and concentrating instead on identifying a candidate's work habits. 'Eighty-five percent of all job failures have to do with a lack of appropriate work habits, not technical skills,' said Still. 'Technical skills are very easy to identify. On the other hand, how the person does the job and what kind of habits they bring in is in many cases more important to identify than technical skills.'"[3] A high percentage of bad hiring decisions could have been avoided with better interview techniques.

## The Interview Process

Stay on schedule. Respect the candidates and their time, as you would expect them to do for you. Try to stay on schedule and always follow up with candidates.

**Greet the applicant.** Make the candidates feel as comfortable and at ease as possible. You are selling your organization while interviewing the candidates. The more comfortable they are, the more information you are likely to get from them.

- Establish rapport and introduce the hiring process. Start with friendly conversation to put the candidate at ease.
- Try not to form any judgments at the early stage when candidates are most nervous.
- Make sure the candidate has completed any required forms.

**Gather information.** The purpose of the interview is to predict the candidate's ability to be successful in the open position.

- Administer tests if applicable. The point at which you do this step is not a make or break issue, so do what is best for your circumstances.
- Conduct the interview using open-ended questions so the applicant can provide more detailed information.
- Ask only job-related questions. Be objective; don't judge simply on appearance, body language and intuition. Impressions are helpful, but they cannot replace effective interview techniques and questions.

- Be a good listener; do more listening than talking. This is a key to effective interviewing.
- Ask one question at a time. Give applicants time to comfortably answer before going on to the next question.
- Watch the applicant's body language and facial expressions for unspoken clues.
- Maintain eye contact as much as possible. If you take too many notes, you give the candidate clues about what is important. Tip: Create a scoring system ahead of time, use your own shorthand for notes, and then write more complete information immediately after the interview while it is fresh on your mind. Do not let the candidate see your matrix.
- Take brief notes during the interview and summarize them as soon after the interview as possible. Immediately after each interview, complete your evaluation matrix or other scoring system you devised beforehand.
- Use a rating guide, such as a form with a check-off for Meeting, Exceeding or Failing, to have the ability or characteristics pre-determined to predict success in the specific job.

**Provide information.** Make sure to do the following during the interview:

- Describe the job and the organization.
- Answer questions and ask applicant if they have anything to add—but *do not allow the candidate to dominate the interview.*

**End the interview.** Toward the end of interview process, let the applicant know what to expect next and when a decision will be made. You may also find these types of questions helpful:

- Do you have anything you want to tell me that we have not covered that you think would apply to this job?
- Do you have salary range requirements?
- If we were to offer you the job, when could you start?

## POST-INTERVIEW

Having done your pre-interview homework, you must use the information you have gathered wisely. You should be able to determine how well your candidates' competencies match the job. Keep in mind that if you stretch out this step too long, you may lose your best candidates. Choose your first, second and maybe even third preferences because you don't know what might surface during reference and background checks or between the interview and the job offer.

Even though this paper focuses on interviewing, making the right hiring decision includes other key pieces of information such as checking the candidate's background and references. The library manager should do the job of evaluating the candidates. Using the tools and techniques outlined in this paper should make the job easier.

To evaluate the candidates, use the information gathered and your pre-established method of evaluation. You can quantify interview results along with test scores and even resume scores.

Resumes are scored by counting the number of requirements (5 for example) for the job and giving each candidate a score based on how many of the requirements are listed (e.g. 3 of 5). Be as objective as possible. Evaluation should be based on behavior as well as skills, knowledge and abilities.

Make the job offer. It is preferable to do this in writing to ensure everyone clearly understands the details—what is expected, start date, etc. This is more professional and gives the applicant the message that he or she is valued by the organization from the beginning. HR often handles this.

Follow-up with unsuccessful candidates. In most cases, HR will perform this task.

### LAST WORDS

While the task of interviewing may not be simple or easy, following a structured format using tools and techniques outlined here insures a much better chance of hiring without regret. When you hit your target and get the best candidate for the job you get:

- Higher employee morale.
- Increased productivity.
- Less time spent on performance issues.
- Reduced potential for litigation.
- Avoidance of the high cost of employee turnover.

In summary, hiring the right person is essential to the success of your library. Following each step and developing a hiring plan for each position becomes easier with practice. You will find the extra effort made to hire the right person will be a lot easier than dealing with the aftermath of hiring the wrong person, not to mention the time and cost associated with the mistake. The potential employee should be a good fit, not only for the position being considered, but also for the work environment, company culture and management style of the supervising librarian. **SLA**


**Endnotes**

1 Fleming Ford. "Working Smarter: Common Hiring Mistakes — and How to Avoid Them." Omnia Group (May 2000), http://nma1.us/manage/2000-05/Workingsmart.htm.

2 Richard E. Rubin. *Hiring Library Employees, A How-to-do-it Manual*. (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 1993).

3 Marlene Siering. "Hire the Best: Interview Techniques Can Separate Prime Candidates from 'Wannabes.'" *The Denver Business Journal* (November 14, 1997), http://www.bizjournals.com/denver/stories/1997/11/17/smallb2.html.



**JULIE SCHEIN, MLS**, is vice president and **BELINDA DELISSER** is recruiting director at the Cadence Group in Atlanta. The article was written for the 2007 SLA Contributed Papers program. Details—and full texts of the papers—are online at www.sla.org/content/Events/conference/ac2007/conference/papers.cfm.

# It's One Big

FOR RESEARCH SUPERVISOR LOUISE GUY, WORKING AT THE CIRQUE DU SOLEIL IS A FINE COMBINATION OF BUSINESS AND THE ARTS.

**BY FORREST GLENN SPENCER**

**Louise Guy**

**Joined SLA:** 1999

**Job:** Supervisor, Center for Research and Documentation

**Employer:** Cirque du Soleil

**Experience:** 12 years

**Education:** Bachelor's in Arts and Sciences and master's in Library and Information Science

**First job:** Assistant Librarian

**Biggest challenge:** To mobilize work teams in contexts of rapid change.

Guy Laliberté is the founder of Cirque du Soleil, the internationally renowned billion-dollar entertainment corporation. Nearly 25 years ago, Laliberte was a Montreal street performer who had the opportunity to utilize a $1.3 million public grant to develop a show that would participate in Quebec City's 450th anniversary celebrations in 1984 throughout the province. The result was Cirque du Soleil—and it was to be unlike any other circus the world had known.

But what sets Cirque apart from other circuses are the individual touring shows that possess their own themes and stories, craftily designed and planned to precise detail, whether it's sets, costumes, music, or movements of the performer.

One show, Kooza, is the story of a melancholy loner in search of his place in the world while addressing themes of fear, identity, recognition, and power. Dralion is the fusion of ancient Chinese circus tradition and the avant-garde that explores the quest for harmony between humans and nature. Corteo is the story of a clown who pictures his own funeral, a festive event that plunges the audience into a theatrical world of fun, comedy, and spontaneity in a mysterious space between heaven and earth.

Each individual show has its own team, creators who form the concepts and work with the performers and technical crew to breathe life into them.

The Montreal-based circus has become not only a branded entertainment entity but also an institution with its own distinctive performance quality and artistic vocabulary infused from folk stories, cultural identities, and the best aspects of the arts. Today, 3,800

# Circus

people, including 1,000 artists from more than 40 countries are part of the enterprise. A 32,000-square-foot facility in Montreal's Saint-Michel District serves as the international headquarters that allows more than 1,600 hundred staff members to work side by side in one central complex, which includes: administration offices; The Studio, which houses three acrobatic training rooms and a dance studio; The Ateliers, where most of the costumes and props are produced; and a residence that provides temporary housing to artists during performance training.

### Louise Guy's Show

Located between The Studio and The Ateliers is Cirque du Soleil's Center for Research and Documentation, or CRD. This is SLA member Louise Guy's show. As supervisor, her job is to oversee the development of an integrated document and information management service with a dual mandate: to feed the creative teams and to preserve the corporate memory. Guy, a French-speaking Canadian who earned her MLIS from the University of Montreal in 1996, has been with Cirque du Soleil June 2001.

"The Center was created in 1992 to mainly manage the AV material produced for television and to make internal copies on request. At that time, this unit was not involved in the creation process. But its mandate was important since AV material is vital for Cirque and its creation teams because no words can truly described what has to be experienced during training or a representation. Artists work with those videotapes regularly to push their performance further; you can innovate by looking at those tapes and review the acts. It's the principal or main witness

A scene from Kooza, now on tour. Photo by Olivier Samson Arcand. © Cirque du Soleil

of performances that may not be produced live anymore."

Just before Guy joined Cirque du Soleil, a consultant had assessed the documentation center and recommended that it stop providing internal AV reproduction services and start pushing information into the creation teams. Another recommendation was to hire a professional librarian. "And that's how I came on board," Guy said. Her first task was to implement an integrated information service including research services, records management, and archives preservation.

Today, Guy supervises a team of six employees that offers research services, develops a physical and electronic library dedicated to the creative teams, and supports activities related to records management, conservation, and archive dissemination.

"Right now my role also involves implementing several knowledge databases and overseeing its updating thanks to the contributions of an internal network of researchers and documentalists working in the various divisions of the company," Guy said. "It's a service offer often seen in private companies. So, I integrated services and regrouped all the different functions related to library and record management."

Each Cirque show is created in Montreal by teams of conceptual designers, art directors, performance directors, artists, and various sub-teams within each unit. Guy and her staff circulate the information in their collection among the different teams.

"Last year we started building a new database to allow users a more convenient access to the library catalog as well as the archives collection. The purpose of this database is to pool all the sources of inspiration into one tool."

One of her assignments was to regroup the different collections used by various departments. "That's how we built our collection over the last five years," Guy said. "We regrouped the different materials that had been put together by different teams. Regrouping all those books and media materials—the pool of information— was very, very interesting. Our collections include books and media materials on architecture, design, dance, theater, contemporary arts, textiles, and anthropology because our shows' themes touch different cultures.

"Circus in general has its own tradition; but at the Cirque, we try to regroup and or add multiple disciplinary approaches to synergize the creation process. Every time we add a new collection, we have to capture the relationship between the information sources and the usage. That's what I tell my team: It's not the amount of information sources that is important—it's to understand how creation teams use the information to create new shows. That's how we can be closer to the creation process." The CRD's library collection, by the way, has more than 20,000 items.

The CRD team also collects and maintains the archives, such as the

> "Our collections include books and media materials on architecture, design, dance, theater, contemporary arts, textiles, and anthropology because our shows' themes touch different cultures."

collection of souvenir programs. "I have developed a good relationship with the marketing team. This allows us access to a copy of each souvenir program in hardcopy and digital format," Guy said.

"Last year we started building a new database to allow users a more convenient access to the library catalog as well as the archives collection. The purpose of this database is to pool all the sources of inspiration into one tool. This project shifted along the way to be included in a broader knowledge management initiative.

"In 2006, the newly created Knowledge Management Direction put together a multidisciplinary team to deliver this project. A new position called memorist was included in the team to work closely with the creation teams. The memorist and I collaborate to identify the documents to be retained as soon as they are created—only documents valuable to the corporate memory will be accessible through knowledge database. The items selected include documents explaining the show creator's intentions, how show characters move, why they move that way, and so forth. We try to capture a lot of information during the every stage of creation process to capture the essence of the show and ensure the show quality and integrity over the years."

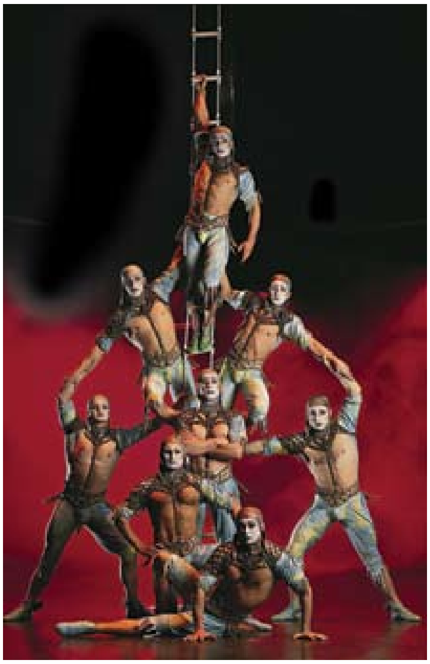
## The Goal

Guy's goal is to make the material accessible to the teams on a local network after the development process of a show. "We are very careful to keep the creation team's intimacy and privacy while they're creating, and we don't want to jeopardize originality by sharing information with other teams. We're sensitive to privacy requirements and we do not want to jeopardize the relationship we have built during the years. We'll be able to retrieve the information produced by each team once a new show goes live but not before. After the creation phase we can take all the documents related to the show, publish them and share them with other Cirque du Soleil units." Set designers, choreographers, costume designers, artist coaches, talent scouts, and others use the information.

"We are also in touch with their researcher when they have one," Guy said. "There's a big research community at Cirque du Soleil, so we collaborate with this group. We have a community of practice that allows us to exchange our projects and tips and review different projects. It's good to have this opportunity, which also allows us to communicate information about the implementation of the knowledge database and other initiatives. The CRD personnel always validate whether the material provided to the researchers and the creators was useful. I think it's stimulating and gratifying for the CRD personnel to know that their work was useful and appreciated.

"It's also important to know when the material was not useful. Initially the users were reluctant to tell us when the information provided was not relevant. But we were able to convince them that it was the only way we could get better and improve. I also use an audit in a more formal way by meeting directly with different users. My goal is to acquire knowledge about the user requirements, promote our services, and align the CRD with the emerging needs of creation teams.

"I'm curious to know when the information is needed in the creative process. What are their primary information sources? Was CRD part of them? Were they satisfied using each source? If not, why? It's important to know why they came to us. How is our information



**From top: A scene from Mystère at Treasure Island in Las Vegas. © Cirque du Soleil; a scene from Nouba the Walt Disney World Resort, in Orlando, Florida, © The Walt Disney Company; a scene from Alegria, now on tour. Photo by Al Seib. © Cirque du Soleil.**

## "I remember the first time I visited a corporate information center when I was still at the university. It was a cool discovery for me. I'm trying to do the same thing with the students."

different from what they have from the other sources?

"We validated what we expected; people are often using the CRD as a second level of support when they were unable to find what they were looking for. Consequently, the level of difficulty tends to be increased proportionally."

Guy says her goal is to position CRD as an initial source of information for the researchers and other teams. The implementation of the new knowledge database will certainly help to reach that goal. "To have been integrated in the Knowledge Management and Information Technologies Service is a great opportunity for me to learn how to manage information in new ways and work in close collaboration with other specialists, like knowledge architects and business analysts. Cirque du Soleil innovates by mixing different cultures and art disciplines. This strategy can apply to our domain and, as information professionals, we certainly gain know-how when we have the chance to be part of a multidisciplinary team."

Guy's career has been a steady progression built upon a combination of the arts and business. Part of what attracted her to the information profession was working in the corporate world.

"When I started my master's in 1994, I was already working for the City of Montreal Public Library as an assistant librarian," she said. "So I started my master's at the University of Montreal. There, I discovered the corporate world. It was very interesting to me. All the courses that I chose were related to information management, automated document managing, and research of information in specialized domains. The corporate world gives me the chance to explore and develop my skills in all these areas. It's also important for me as a professional to be part of the Cirque vision, whose mission is to recreate beauty in every show. I'm part of this mission. It's very challenging for me."

Two years after earning her MLIS, she landed a job as librarian with Artexte Information Center, an institution that specializes in Canadian contemporary art. As head of Artexte's documentation center, she supervised a team of up to eight people.

"The team included documentalists, indexers, project heads, and interns," Guy said. "My duties included coordinating document processing, developing the center's collections by maintaining partnerships with the main publishers in the field, managing the computer network, ensuring the creation, updating, and dissemination of the organization's bibliographic and multimedia databases—both Internet and intranet."

The consultant who recommended hiring a professional librarian at Cirque du Soleil gave Guy's name to the human resources department at Cirque du Soleil. "At that time my profile was interesting because I had crossed over in many territories. I was able to manage a team, information technologies, and information related to art. I like working in those areas, especially when they are intertwined. But overall, I like the kind of information we manage at Cirque du Soleil and the perspective of offering views on the complexity of the creation process. I don't know if I would be so invested in a domain not related to the arts."

Guy joined SLA in 1999. She recalled reading copies of *Information Outlook* back then. "The articles and content were very helpful for me," she said. Guy said she regrets that she does not have the time to be part of the different divisions. "What I'm trying to do is network with other services that are based in Montreal region, that share the goals in different sectors of our industry and are integrated services."

One of the activities she manages biennially is to invite LIS students from the University of Montreal to see her operation at Cirque du Soleil. "I remember the first time I visited a corporate information center when I was still at the university. It was a cool discovery for me. I'm trying to do the same thing with the students and explain to them how I work, what our activities are. It's great to share my experience with the students. It's very refreshing for me also.

"I like working in a collaborative forum," she added. "What I'm trying to do is bring the user closer to the information, even if that means the users pursue their own information. My task is to help the users fast track the information they need. Not to do the research for them. I think it's a great challenge and I would like to develop in this capacity. At Cirque, I want to focus CRD activities rather than expanding the team. The information needs are increasing but we can't grow forever; it's rather the information accessibility that must grow. Our task is to promote user self-reliance and to direct the user through the multiplicity of sources that are available." **SLA**

**FORREST GLENN SPENCER** is a Virginia-based information retrieval consultant, public relations distributor, and writer. He can be reached at fgspencer@gmail.com.

# Invasion of the

BY CYBÈLE ELAINE WERTS

We've all heard the phrase "the medium is the message," in which case you really should be listening to this article, not reading it. The reason that I say this is because the little story I'm going to tell you is about a series of podcasts I developed on using technology for training and collaboration.

## A Podcast?

Is that like in the movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*?

If you still wonder what a podcast is, don't feel bad. Not that long ago, I didn't know either, but I learn fast and so will you. You probably do know what "pod people" are, though, from the movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. With a little artistic license, you could say that podcasts aren't all that different. Podcasts are simply audio recordings that we download off the Internet. Back in the olden days, we called them songs or vocal recordings, and listened to them on cassettes or records. But now, since the Internet pod people got a hold of them, they come in little "pods" that you can download directly to your computer or your iPod (or other digital devices).

But wait, I'm jumping into the techno geek talk and getting ahead of myself. Instead, let me tell you a little bit about how this project got started and why it might be important (and maybe even fun) to you as an info pro.

For a long time technology seemed to be only for people who worked in the computer department. But these days, most tools of technology are easily accessible to people who don't have a background in programming. More importantly, we've come to understand that technology is a critical tool in our arsenal of ways to share information. So while in the past we might have thought first of traditional ways of searching out and then sharing information in our jobs, now we can explore new ways of doing this through a wide variety of technological options.

As researchers and information professionals, we can no longer see ourselves as sources alone; we must take the next step to learn the methods of effective communication of what we know. Technology is the leading edge of effective communication.

A while back, my officemates and I at the Northeast Regional Resource

# Podcasts

Center started working with a consultant named Larry Edelman, a senior instructor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Colorado who specializes in helping early childhood specialists integrate technology into their work. Larry prepared a series of teleconferences and webinars for some of our clients to help them become comfortable with how various technologies could be used to share information and training.

It used to be that people attended seminars or workshops to get this information, but with travel as expensive as it is, technology offers options that can often be more effective than in-person training. In addition to the lower cost, participants can review the material when it suits them, watching it repeatedly and learning at their own pace. One of the technologies Larry recommended was podcasts. I became enamored of them, particularly because they are so portable—you can listen to them on the road, while you're jogging, or almost anywhere else.

## The Petting Zoo

As part of our work, we put together what's called a "Technology Petting Zoo" for the workgroup, so they could try out a number of the technologies, including podcasts, online surveys, webinars, and so on. I got the idea for the Petting Zoo from a recent issue of *Information Outlook* (Stephen Abram. "15 Minutes a Day: A Personal Learning Management Strategy." February 2007). I immediately realized its potential, not just as an accessible way to introduce new ideas to our clients, but also to brand the activity with an appealing title that would take some of the fear out of technology.

But our goal wasn't to teach our group how to make a podcast or to sell members on any particular technology. Our hope was to help them see how various technologies could be used in a training or professional development environment to effectively share information. Besides the ones I mentioned earlier, these technologies include digital photography, PowerPoint to Flash conversion, RSS, social networks such as bulletin boards and listservs, videocasts, and more.

As Larry suggests, “Our goal is not to eliminate our tried-and-true methods of sharing information, such as conducting face-to-face classroom training sessions or disseminating printed materials. But we do want to avoid using methods that don’t sufficiently meet the needs of our changing world, including changes in our economy, our workforce, family life, and new demands for how quickly and comprehensively we require information.

“We don’t want to avoid conducting live face-to-face training sessions regardless of the particular need for information and performance support. Our aim should be to carefully consider what method of communication will best fit the broad context of the learners, the objectives, the available funding. And the advent of new digitalizing, computing, storage, and communication capacities opens up a world of new options.”

I reminded the group that just because I’m a technophile didn’t mean I thought they should use technology because it was cool. In fact, because of my background in educational technology, I know that the content sometimes even tells us that technology is not the way to go. You can see in the table on the opposite page some good ideas and some not-so-good ideas for each of those technologies.

For example, offering an online evaluation survey in Survey Monkey provides us with instant survey data and frees us from many of the validity and reliability problems of having to enter handwritten data. In another example, we shared some training through an online webinar that we archived with sound, meaning that participants could visit the training module as many times as they needed to review the information. This is something that simply is not possible with an in-person workshop, and as you can imagine the costs are far less.

Alice Ridgeway, one of our Connecticut liaisons, explains how this worked out for her when she hosted a webinar recently using our Horizon Wimba software: “We have 38 programs and finding one day and time that works for everyone was impossible. It was a great comfort to those who could not attend to hear that they wouldn’t miss a thing because the information would be available later. The most valuable part of a presentation is the spontaneous questions and answers. Capturing those in an archive is fantastic!”

On the other hand, of course, you wouldn’t want to create a podcast for a statistics class, or a videocast on how to read Braille. So it’s important to consider your content first, and then choose a tool that will best convey that content.

## Podcasts

Let’s take a little closer look at podcasts, one of my favorite topics. While there is a bounty of articles about how to make a podcast, there isn’t actually very much information about why you might want to, what the broader process is in making one, or even what you might use one for. And while making a podcast is fun, having a product with no audience doesn’t do much for anyone.

To help explain how this process works for our clients, here’s how I learned to develop our podcasts on behalf of the Northeast Regional Resource Center. I was the client, starting out with essentially no knowledge or skills in this area—and learning from scratch not just how to create a product, but also to make one that successfully reached my audience. The process also applies to videocasts, webinars, or any number of other technologies—take your pick. The idea is to look at this story as a process of integrating one tool into our toolbox and the cycles of learning that went into it.

One of the things I came to understand is that learning how to develop effective podcasts is like learning many things; it is a developmental process in which we learn by doing it over time. And that’s okay. As long as you know that up front, you’ll be prepared for the natural unfurling of it all.

Larry offers some tips for the learning process: “It’s easier, and more fun, to learn how to use new technologies for communication when we adopt a few helpful strategies: recruit someone who knows more than you to coach or guide you and provide gentle feedback on your initial attempts; start with baby steps—make your first attempts small and manageable; focus your content on something engaging to you, something

**As researchers and information professionals, we can no longer see ourselves as sources alone; we must take the next step to learn the methods of effective communication of what we know. Technology is the leading edge of effective communication.**

## WHICH TECHNOLOGY WORKS FOR YOUR PROJECT?

| TECHNOLOGY | SUITABLE FOR… | LESS SUITABLE FOR… |
|---|---|---|
| Digital Photography | Things that change, such as children at different ages or stages of development. Digital cameras can catch these at little or no cost. | Situations in which cameras and photographers can be intrusive and affect the people being photographed. Select your projects carefully. |
| Online Surveys | A large number of participants who have access to a computer and e-mail; surveys in which anonymous reporting is desirable; surveys that require immediate access to data and results. | Surveys that are primarily qualitative or have only a few questions or a few respondents. |
| Podcasts | Short, informative presentations, discussions with experts, etc. | Information that includes a large number of Web links, statistics, or numbers, or information that is better presented visually. |
| PowerPoint to Flash Conversion | A range of software products such as Articulate and Captivate turn PowerPoint files into Flash movies with narration and or music that can be viewed on the internet. It can be a quick and easy option for developing Web-based learning modules. | PowerPoint can be overused and tedious with too much text and clip art; making it into an ersatz “movie” won’t improve a bad presentation. Some software conversion applications are expensive. |
| RSS | Letting others know about new articles, podcasts, or updates to other content on a Web site. | Content areas that aren’t updated frequently; readers will lose interest if it’s clear that your Web site is stale or out of date. |
| Social Networks (Bulletin Boards and Listservs) | Best for groups who are techno-savvy and used to communicating through e-mail and Internet formats, and do not need face-to-face contact; especially good for busy people who want contact on their own schedule; usually require a committed moderator to succeed. | Often die out if moderators are inactive for long periods. |
| Telephone Conferencing | In combination with e-mail and Web links can work as an effective low-tech solution replacing a webinar. | Limited in scope and technological ability. |
| Videocasts | Demonstrations that are primarily visual and short presentations; watching a presenter adds engagement. | Not as useful for processes that are focused on particular senses that don’t demonstrate well visually, such as touch or hearing. |
| Webinars/ Webcasts | Online training and demonstrations of applications, Web tours and other kinds of computer-based training. Entry-level products are free and easy to use. | Technological support from IT staff usually needed for higher end products. |
| Wikis | Perfect for collaboration by a large number of experts on one subject. | Not as much of a training tool, more for collaboration of ideas; can attract inexpert contributors, so wikis generally require a moderator. |

**I reminded the group that just because I'm a technophile didn't mean I thought they should use technology because it was cool.**

that you, and hopefully others, will be able to use and benefit from. And it's important to expect that you will make, and learn from, many mistakes; don't take it too seriously."

### My First Podcasts

I started with a goal to make a few podcasts on podcasting, what it is, and how to use it in the training and collaboration environment. I figured that as long as I was going to learn about the technology, I'd teach what I learned, and all I had to do was keep one step ahead of my students. So off I went buy a Roland Edirol R-09 MP3 Recorder, which Larry had recommended. Of course, you could also use a standard microphone and record directly to your computer, but I like the portability as well as the professional sound quality of the Edirol. My next step was to research and write the text of the podcasts. If you'd like to hear the results, read the transcripts, or check out the resources, the links for this series, "Exploring the Tools of Internet Technology: A Series of Podcasts for Trainers & Educators," are included in the accompanying sidebar.

At this point I was not yet ready or trained to use editing software so I recorded the podcasts several times until they were as near perfect as they were going to get, and that was that. I uploaded them to our Web site and asked some colleagues, including Larry, for feedback. This process took me about a month from purchasing the Edirol, writing the text, recording, uploading, and announcing the podcasts. Then…

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Exploring the Tools of Internet Technology: A Series of Podcasts for Trainers & Educators**
**www.rrfcnetwork.org/content/view/418/47/**
This series of podcasts by NERRC information specialist Cybèle Elaine Werts is about using technology in education. It was written as part of a series on using technology for training, but of course the information is useful for just about anyone working in education. It covers podcasts, videocasts, webinars, and other ways to share information more effectively.

**Larry Edelman, Department of Pediatrics, University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center**
edelman.larry@tchden.org
Larry Edelman's podcast on how to do a podcast – 5.5 minutes long.
**www.rrfcnetwork.org/images/stories/NERRC/MP3Files/edelmanpodcastfornerrc.mp3**

**How to Make a Podcast by Susie Ridgeway for *Digital Trends Magazine***
**http://reviews.digitaltrends.com/guide31.html**

**Creating Podcasts Using Your PC**
**www.windowsdevcenter.com/pub/a/windows/2005/04/05/create_podcasts_with_pc.html**

**7 Ways Non-Profits Can Use Podcasts**
**www.netsquared.org/blog/britt-bravo/7-ways-nonprofits-can-use-podcasts**

**Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators: What Makes a Good Podcast?**
**http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/pdf/**
This is an Adobe Acrobat form that Kathy Schrock developed to evaluate podcasts. I thought it looked very useful to help you evaluate your podcast.

**GarageBand Podcast Studio**
**www.garageband.com/podcast**
Free recording, mixing, and publishing; record by phone or upload audio files; mix recordings with podcast-ready tracks.

**PRODUCTS**

**Roland Edirol External MP3 Recorder**
**www.rolandus.com/products/productdetails.aspx?ObjectId=757**
You can record a podcast using a regular microphone and your computer, but this high-end, portable MP3 recorder includes many helpful features.

**Audacity Sound Editing Software**
**http://audacity.sourceforge.net/**
Audacity is one of several free and easy to use sound editing applications. By editing podcasts, you can add music, fades—and cut out normal coughs, stutters, other quirks of speaking.

**If you just look at all the scary techno-talk here, it might seem intimidating. I don't want that to be the feeling that you get from this article.**

the comments started rolling in. The good part was that people liked them because I dealt with the "why" of these various topics, not so much the "how." The downside was that I discovered I have some odd quirks in my speech, e.g., I smack my lips rather more often than I'd like. How embarrassing!

I realized that I needed to learn how to use audio editing software to clear up all the mistakes in my reading, because the truth is – you can read a text many times through, as I did, and there will always be mistakes—not to mention I desperately needed erase any evidence of lip smacking. I also wanted to add a basic introduction as well as some introductory music so they sounded a bit more polished. I decided to download Audacity, which is a popular and free audio editing application that I knew was easy to learn and use. I also found a friend who was familiar with this software to spend an evening showing me the ropes, which helped a lot, as I'm not big on reading manuals.

To introduce music into the podcasts, I downloaded iTunes, which translates the songs on a compact disk into MP3s, a format you can import into your podcast as introductory or closing music. You can also download music from various Web sites. You'll want to be careful here about copyright issues—using royalty- or copyright-free music or creating your own. Training myself on these products, adding music, and editing out all my quirky mistakes took another month or so—not continuous time, but working around my other projects.

The next step after posting these more professional versions was to add Really Simple Syndication, or RSS, to the Web site so that visitors would be automatically notified when new podcasts were available. Was I finally all done then? In a way… and, in a way not. There are always more podcasts to write and post. But there are also more things to do with my podcasts, such as posting them to various podcast catalogues like iTunes. And so the process continues.

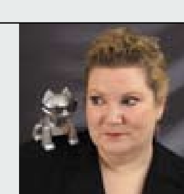
**You wouldn't want to create a podcast for a statistics class, or a videocast on how to read Braille.**

If you just look at all the scary techno-talk here, it might seem intimidating. I don't want that to be the feeling that you get from this article. In truth, it took me a few months to learn these things, and I did so slowly at my own pace. At each step in the process I chose whether I wanted to move on and make my product more sophisticated or not, and there is no requirement that you do so.

What's important is that you find your own balance of comfort in learning and growing with whatever technology and content you choose to learn. Most important, remember it is a long-term cyclical process that will continue to repeat, so consider your learning continuous. Alice Ridgway agrees with that in her travels amongst the technological set, saying, "Uploading a PowerPoint was a piece of cake, but I really needed to share my screen with the participants so I had to practice that a few times. When I was asked to "push-out" a link to a survey…well, after it was explained, it went off without a hitch."

What's important is that you go slowly and not get overwhelmed by your awareness that there is a next phase. And when you're ready for the next phase, you'll know it and you'll take that step. In fact, if you find yourself talking a little techno geek-ese, there are only two possibilities: either you're definitely ready for the next step in technological integration into your work, or you've been taken over by the pod people. **SLA**

**CYBÈLE ELAINE WERTS** is an information specialist for learning innovations at WestEd, a research, development, and service education agency. She can be reached at cwerts@wested.org. Her personal Web site is www.supertechnogirl.com. WestEd's Web site is www.wested.org.



# CALL FOR PAPERS

# SLA – Seattle 2008: "Breaking Rules – Building Bridges"

## SLA Contributed Papers: An opportunity to share your knowledge!

Have you broken the rules of the status quo to make improvements in your workplace?
Have you reached out and "built bridges" to another organization to improve your service?
Have you learned valuable lessons that could help other information professionals?
If so, here is your opportunity to engage in scholarship and share that knowledge with your peers.

SLA is now accepting proposals for papers to be presented at its Annual Conference and INFO EXPO June 15-18, 2008, in Seattle, with the theme "Breaking Rules – Building Bridges." Accepted papers will also be published on the SLA Web site.

Every SLA member is eligible to apply. The proposals will be evaluated by a panel of SLA members in a blind review, with the strongest selected for development into full papers due May 1, 2008. In addition, this year, the paper that best demonstrates the theme of the conference will receive an award at the annual business meeting.

Topics of the papers should be related to library science, information management, research or other issues related to customer service, technology, or administration in special libraries. Proposals will be judged on their relevance to the conference theme "Breaking Rules – Building Bridges" or to the SLA tag line "Connecting People and Information," as well on the strength of the idea, quality of writing, and potential member interest.

### MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCEPTANCE

In addition to the quality and relevance of the proposed paper, it must meet these requirements:

- At least one author is a member of SLA.
- At least one author commits to present the paper at the annual conference.
- The proposal has been received by the deadline.
- The paper has not been published in or submitted to any other publication or conference planning group.
- The author (and any co-authors) must be willing to sign a copyright assignment that will permit SLA to use the paper in various formats.

### SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND SPECIFICATIONS

For examples of papers from SLA's 2007 Annual Conference in Denver, see *www.sla.org/content/Events/conference/ac2007/conference/papers.cfm*. Full guidelines, including formatting instructions, are online at *www.sla.org/seattle2008/callforpapers.*

### DEADLINES

**December 14, 2007** – Proposal due. Submit an abstract of your paper via e-mail to *brandy.king@childrens.harvard.edu.* Abstracts should be 250-300 words in length, or roughly one page in 12-point text.

**January 31, 2008** – Notification. Twelve to 15 proposals will be chosen and all applicants will be notified of a decision.

**May 1, 2008** – Paper due. Authors submit their completed paper and copyright assignment to SLA.

**June 15-18, 2008** – Conference presentation. Authors will deliver a 15-minute presentation of their papers (along with three to four other authors) during a 90-minute Contributed Papers Session.

**We look forward to your submissions and to hearing how you have broken rules and built bridges in the information profession!**

# The Future of Reference in Special Libraries Is What Information Pros Can Make It

**If we sit and do nothing, we'll be like the frog in the pot: We won't know we're cooked until it's too late to jump.**

**BY STEPHEN ABRAM**

Many years ago, the esteemed Barbara Quint offered her estimate that Google answered as many reference queries in a half-hour as all the reference librarians in the world did in seven years.

I suspect that ratio is quite different now, and not for the better! From that insight, I was aware that reference had to be the place to watch for change and innovation in libraries. That's a major shift.

Please be clear that I differentiate reference questions from the deeper research support that is our stock in trade. Reference questions usually result in answers that are mere facts, the ones that answer the questions that start with who, what, where, or when. Research support—and dare I say the more important questions—starts with how or why. The search engine folks do find it much easier to deal with the reference end of the continuum while we library types excel at the research end—with our personal service, deeper interviews, and professional levels of metadata.

However, you can see that reference work is changing, and our core users don't always know when their question is simple or more complicated. In olden times, in the last century, we helped them determine this through the reference interview. How can we capture the high value questions when simple reference has moved to the Web?

Generally, our reference stats are down. This is not the case with our research requests, training activities, and one-on-one contact with clients. Intranet and Web site hits—from nearly any measurement data point—are way up. Are we getting the value we need or is the illusion of "good enough" answers taking over?

Reference and research services, the front lines of library service, are dealing with a less predictable future. The asynchronous, asymmetrical threats facing us are very real hydra monsters with many possible tangents, all of them having some truth. The fate of reference has come into clearer focus in the Web 2.0/Library 2.0 discussions, even debates. Either way, the tone has moved from understanding and learning the technology to one of understanding end-user behaviors in context. The tone has moved from serving libraries' management needs and the library workers' preferences to one where the end user's needs trump librarian's insights and personal search preferences.

A plethora of new ethnographic end-user research—from usability through personas, and from hit analyses to behavioral studies—has focused on workplace needs, scholarly behavior, learning styles and entertainment uses. It demonstrates a material shift in the library firmament.

After almost 20 years of working on the infrastructure of libraries—servers, intranets, Web sites, wireless, broadband, access, security, viruses, etc.—we have reached a tipping point. In 2007, we are seeing the real action in our world of libraries move from the back office to the front room. We're moving from a technology-centric strategy to one where the real needs of our clients must predominate. Aligning technology with user behaviors is no longer sufficient for success. We need to understand and understand deeply the role of the library in our end users' lives, work, research, and play. This is critical to our long-term success, and failure is not an option.

## Bricks, Clicks, and Tricks

To capture market share, and more importantly end-user mindshare, we must now prioritize our long-term and short-term strategies on serving the real customer (and not just the internal needs of library workers). For instance the online public access catalog, or OPAC, doesn't suck for library workers. It was built to meet our specific needs. When we moved an internal tool to make it accessible to the "public," we did a good thing.

The unintended consequence of OPACs was that we learned, and have now acknowledged, that end users have different needs and processes for discovery and navigation than library workers. Rats! It would have been so much easier if it had worked out differently. We shouldn't feel too bad. Retail operations like Amazon learned very quickly that people behave differently online than they do in physical stores, online learning is different from physical classrooms, and online communication in all its formats is different from the simple telephone or face-to-face conversation.

We have adapted well to some of the changes in recent times. Now we are challenged to put our services, especially reference services, into our users' spaces. Such major innovations and trends as e-learning, mobile devices, instant messaging, online worlds, social networks, etc., are putting the basics of our human spaces into flux.

**Info Rights Will Return in November**

Lesley Ellen Harris, the author of Info Rights, is taking a break for the October issue. Her column will be back next month.

And we're seeing resistance to these changes from many of our colleagues. Can we change and invent a new paradigm? Remember, the dinosaurs didn't go extinct because the climate changed. They disappeared because they couldn't adapt to the changes happening around them!

What does all this mean to reference? We have a new suite of 2.0 tools, focused on human needs and relationships that are changing the dynamics of our marketplace. This is a good thing since libraries have always been about service and personal relationships with our users. Now we just have to reintroduce ourselves into every aspect of the virtual world. That means rethinking our professional development agenda, investing our technology decisions in ones that meet the needs of the end user, and retraining an entire segment of librarianship to adapt to a fundamental new reality.

What are the possible scenarios for the future of reference? Here are a few that I can imagine off the top of my noggin:

### 1. Status Quo: A Recipe for Fossilization

This is the disaster scenario. Suppose we don't evolve fast enough. Most of us know the story of the frog in the boiling water. Will we be blind to the overall changes and allow ad-driven search results to dominate the important question space? Will there be no event, no transformational experience, that shocks us out of complacency? Will we ignore the Web 2.0 opportunity to revitalize distance user relationships?

### 2. Information Commons

In this scenario, we find the energy and insight to blend our bricks-clicks-and-tricks strategies. We combine the in-person and facility strengths of the library experience with a seamless and balanced image for our contribution to the improvement of questions and research results. Can we partner with all providers in the information space to create a one-stop solution? Can we attain this goal for a segment of special library users like R&D users or higher-education students?

### 3. Learning Commons

E-learning is a major trend in the corporate and academic spaces. In this environment, the learners have their major relationship with the learning space at the lesson level. Most libraries are organized at the enterprise or institutional level. There's a vast distance between the library and the learner if we don't put reference services at the lesson level in such systems as Blackboard. Can we partner with the e-learning developers and offer context sensitive help in such courses?

### 4. Embedded Librarians

In this scenario, we find ourselves at the table. We go on rounds at hospitals, visit the labs, and attend major unit and departmental meetings—both virtually and physically. We are truly partners and valued members of each critical team in our organization's mandate. We not only design intranets that mirror each team's needs but offer personalized service customized to each team member.

### 5. The Remote Librarian

This scenario depends on an understanding of the potential for personal devices—laptops, smart phones, PDAs—to dominate as THE device. When they do, if they don't already in your environment, we'll see every user as a distance user and every user can potentially have all the information they may require in their pocket. Can we be there too? Such emerging service technologies like micro-blogging, Twitter, text messaging, and digital phones with advanced Web features are great opportunities to be at the point of every user's need.

### 6. Shoulder to Shoulder: Personal Skills Training

We have to acknowledge that the librarian's role in passing on information literacy skills is a key focus of reference work. Whether it's in classrooms, individually, or online, we make a difference in every reference interview transaction by passing on skills, resources, and knowledge. Will the day emerge when this is our primary role? In an information economy or knowledge economy, who holds the keys to this key activity?

### 7. Meet My Avatar

Gartner Group estimates that 80 percent of Internet users will be using an avatar as part of their Web presence within five years. I don't know if I agree with this timeline, but I do agree that such virtual worlds as There.com, Second Life, and Active Worlds are fascinating to explore and learn from. With millions of users already and 80 hours of reference desk staffing in Second Life already, some are already learning what this scenario might evolve into.

### 8. Extreme Reference: Emergency Librarian

I love this scenario since it acknowledges that librarians make a difference. We have SLA members researching IEDs and saving the lives of soldiers; we have members in hospitals who answer life-saving questions every day; members who are involved in disaster recovery—oil

**STEPHEN ABRAM,** MLS, is vice president, innovation, for SirsiDynix, chief strategist for the SirsiDynix Institute, and the president-elect of SLA. He is an SLA Fellow, the past president of the Ontario Library Association, and the past president of the Canadian Library Association. In June 2003, he was awarded SLA's John Cotton Dana Award. This column contains his personal perspectives and does not necessarily represent the opinions or positions of SirsiDynix. His blog is Stephen's Lighthouse, http://stephensligthouse.sirsidynix.com. You may contact him at stephen.abram@sirsidynix.com.

spills, drugs, Katrina/Rita, avian flu, killer bees, honey bee die offs, and global warming. How do we highlight this scenario as critically important to survival and success?

None of the above scenarios is likely to come into being on its own, but they could form the basis for a continuing debate in our world of libraries. The good news is that we have options! The great news is that there is no single scenario that can or will work for everyone or every specialized type of library work. Our profession is complex. Our markets are complex. And our users are infinitely complex. We have a window of opportunity for extreme success right now. We don't know how long that window will remain open. Those of us who prepare for an emerging new world balance of personal service—virtual, in-person and computer-mediated—will be better prepared than those who wait and see. It's a new renaissance in libraries. Hurray! **SLA**



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# The New Secrets to Success: Change, Leadership, and Expertise

**Making change work for you, stepping up to leadership roles, and ensuring you know what you're talking about will advance your career.**

BY DEBBIE SCHACHTER

It is well accepted today that to be successful over the course of our careers, info pros must exhibit a broad range of traits, including developing expertise, demonstrating a keen business acumen, thriving with the continuous changes that occur in the profession. The challenges of the ever-shifting professional landscape in which special libraries exist means that the information professional needs to shape-shift over time—to meet others' expectations as well as their own. Rather than focusing solely on management and industry trends, we need to target personal development, to be ready for the changes in the organization or in the profession.

Special librarians hold a somewhat unique role in organizations, and we should take advantage of the expertise and advice of others, within and outside the organization, if we are to succeed in our profession. The special librarian, whether a new grad, a developing leader, or an experienced manager, holds a balancing role within the larger organization. Also, due to the nature of special libraries, we are as different from each other as the organizations and industries in which we work. Where we are the same, though, is in our need to manage and drive change, to develop our leadership skills through understanding what makes good employees, and to develop an expertise that is valued by our organization and our profession.

## Making Change Work

Regardless of the special library environment, information professionals can expect a great deal of change over their professional lifetime, even if we are fortunate enough to work for the same library/organization for that entire career. Some industries see much more change than others do, but technology, economic instability, competition, management trends, etc. will all affect our work and our professional lives.

Being aware of your personal capacity for change is one of the most important factors in being able to manage—and even seek out—change. Self-directed change is generally the most successful, but all change is stressful, whether we are driving it or not. Recognizing the need for continuous change seems to be a requirement for success today. Change helps us to develop professional traits, such as in learning leadership skills, management abilities, and expertise as information professionals. Change helps us to reassess the past and past practices and better evaluate successes. It engenders a reaction that can help us succeed, or creates a situation that dramatically alters the course of our career, whether we want it to or not. How we deal with those changes is entirely personal in nature.

One of the best ways to develop in your career is to take the initiative when others are resistant to change. Carrol Lunau, writing for *Feliciter* magazine, suggests taking on special projects or help to lead initiatives that will have a significant effect on the organization. This will help to establish you as a change leader, and will help you to achieve positive recognition from your manager. In the past, the ability to be effective in a highly volatile work environment was not the norm, but now we do not have that luxury: "Perhaps the difference today is that we all require these qualities; they are no longer optional assets."[1] Creating a good base of professional knowledge, skills, and abilities is the best way to weather change. If we are always seeking self-improvement, we will be better able to deal with change that has a negative impact upon our professional career, and help us to see new opportunities out of the destruction of the old, or to be able to benefit from those changing opportunities as they arise.

## Being a Good Follower

One way to increase your ability to manage or moderate change is to consciously develop your leadership skills—and leadership skills actually develop through followership. In fact, to become a good leader you first must learn what it is to be an effective follower.

Larry Bossidy saw the need to identify what leaders should expect from their direct reports, as he felt there wasn't much literature on this topic.[2] The important takeaway from his piece is that you need to

One of the best ways to develop in your career is to take the initiative when others are resistant to change.

Expertise is developed over time, and almost anyone can become an expert in some field. However, developing expertise involves a significant commitment of time and effort.

be aware of and responsive to what your superior expects of you, and provide that. Bossidy's list of quality traits reads as a list of best practices from a performance management worksheet, but in essence, it focuses on the need for employees to show creativity, initiative, and collaboration—and to work effectively through proactive behaviors.

It is clear that the ability to drive and manage change, and to keep your eye on the ultimate goal, is much of what your leader expects of you. As the business environment changes, how you direct your work and that of your department must change. Your boss expects you to be at the forefront of driving these strategic changes, and keeping him/her informed about what actions you are taking and why.

## Becoming an Expert

Along the path of your career, you will undoubtedly strive to become recognized as an expert in some specific area. The unvarnished truth is that expertise is developed over time, and almost anyone can become an expert in some field. The downside is, however, is that developing expertise involves a significant commitment of time and effort.

In a recent *Harvard Business Review* article, the authors dispel the myth that prodigies are born and that individuals appear out of nowhere to become experts in their particular field. What the authors have determined is that individuals described as experts (whether in sports, business, or any other field) become so through a lot of hard work, practice, and study. "The development of genuine expertise requires struggle, sacrifice, and honest, often painful self-assessment. There are no shortcuts."[3]

The authors describe the type of study and expertise development as something called "deliberate practice" which "entails considerable, specific, and sustained effort to do something you can't do well – or even at all…it is only by working at what you can't do that you turn into the expert you want to become."[4]

Carrol Lunau concurs with the need to undertake this type of deliberate practice. She sees this as the need for professionals to take advantage of different work opportunities in a variety of areas or different organizations, take on writing of articles for professional publications, start a blog, speak at conferences, and more. Underlying all of this, throughout your career, is the need for a variety of mentors and teachers to help you to develop our expertise, and to learn from others who are experts in their own right.

Regardless of the field, it seems clear that professionals today need to undertake deliberate activities to be effective and successful in their field. For special librarians, the news is the same: get involved, be a good follower, manage change, develop your areas of expertise. This is the recipe for success in the 21st century. **SLA**

Self-directed change is generally the most successful.

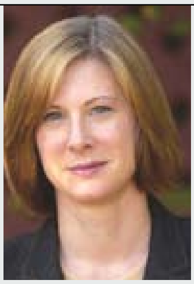
**Endnotes**

1 Carrol Lunau. "Have challenges for the new professional changed? perspectives from the far end of the career spectrum." *Feliciter*, 53(2), 1997, p.82.

2 Larry Bossidy. "What your leader expects of you, and what you should expect in return." *Harvard Business Review*, 85(4), April 2007, p.58.

3 K. Anders Ericsson, Michael J. Prietula, and Edward T. Cokely. "The making of an expert." *Harvard Business Review*, 85(7/8), Jul/Aug 2007, p. 116.

4 Ibid, p.118.



**DEBBIE SCHACHTER** has a master's degree in library science and a master's degree in business administration. She is the associate executive director of the Jewish Family Service Agency in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she is responsible for financial management, human resources, database and IT systems, and grant application management. Schachter has more than 15 years' experience in management and supervision, technology planning and support, in a variety of nonprofit and for-profit settings. She can be reached at dschachter@jfsa.ca.

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IEEE
Merrillville, Indiana
*www.i-society.org/*

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Internet Librarian International
Information Today
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*www.internet-librarian.com/index.shtml*

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University of Alcalá and Ionian University
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*www.mtsr.ionio.gr*

**18-25**
American Society for Information Science and Technology Annual Meeting
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
*www.asis.org/Conferences/AM07/am07cfp.html*

**20-22**
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Common Ground
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*http://b07.cgpublisher.com*

**22-24**
Third Rizal Library International Conference
Ateneo de Manila University
Quezon City, Philippines
*http://rizal.lib.admu.edu.ph/2007conf/index.htm*

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*www.dcif.de/en*

**28-31**
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ACM SIGART
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IFLA
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Internet Librarian
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*www.nngroup.com/events/barcelona/agenda.html*

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Worldwide Business Research
London
*www.wbr.co.uk/FIMAeurope/index.html*

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KMWorld and Intranets
Information Today
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*www.katina.info/conference*

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*gilbaneboston.com*

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*http://icadl2007.vista.gov.vn*

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*www.dcc.ac.uk/events/dcc-2007*

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# Practicing the Fine Art Of Paying Attention

**With all the distractions at work these days, it's important to focus on the person we're talking to.**

BY JOHN R. LATHAM

Listening rocks.

No, I am not suggesting that we start talking to our igneous friends, although there are times in these frenzied days when it might seem rather appealing. Talking to oak trees in Windsor Great Park certainly did no good to that British monarch who lost some colonies in North America a few centuries ago. I am using rock in its current vernacular definition of cool. Listening is cool.

In this age of multitasking we often forget that giving someone your undivided attention is a good habit to acquire. I have referred previously in this column to our lack of communication skills, so if that is the case, listening becomes even more difficult. Communication goes both ways: sending and receiving; writing and reading; talking and listening. Listening in the business world comes in different ways: listening to staff, listening to management, and listening to customers. Some of the aspects of listening are so obvious that it seems odd to mention them, but I know that they have either been forgotten, or are no longer considered important—and are worth repeating.

## Staff

Listening to staff is important because communication is a vital part of a successful team building and staff morale. Always maintain eye contact because, apart from being disrespectful, looking all around when talking to someone gives the impression that you are not interested in what they have to say, which may mean that the important issue that should be raised is left unsaid. Look at it as if you are conducting a reference interview where on has to listen hard in order to wheedle out what is really being requested.

Through eye contact you can establish if there is a deeper meaning to a question being asked. This may require you to have your colleague take a chair, shut your office door and, believe it or not, turn your PDA to silent mode. If you are awaiting an urgent message, explain that you may have to open this one, but otherwise you are all ears. Put your phone on "do not disturb" or mute, and ask if the blinds need adjusting to eliminate glare. You want to create a comfortable atmosphere in which to communicate.

Concentrate on the message, ignoring the style in which it may be presented. Rambling on or being short and abrupt may not be your ideal style; but if this really is an issue, it can be dealt with at a separate meeting. Don't forget to ask if there is anything else your colleague wishes to discuss.

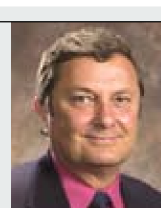
## Management

Listening to management requires different techniques. If he or she is not a good communicator and is talking at you rather than to you, it requires a lot of concentration. Always try to engage them in conversation, and make sure that you confirm with them that you have heard their comments or instructions correctly. Senior management invariably thinks that they are busier than you, so you may need to interject and ask if this is a good time for them in their busy schedule, and that you are more than happy to come back later. This is a not-too-subtle way of saying that he or she is not giving you full attention, but it often works as the last thing they want is to reschedule.

## Customers

Listening to customers is the bread and butter of customer service, and is becoming more difficult as face-to-face contact becomes rarer. To listening we need to add reading because communication is dominated by e-mail. Just as it is easy not to listen well, so it is easy not to read well. How often does one read the beginning of an e-mail, and give a quick and correct response while missing the deeper implications of the request. Our customers may well accept what we give them because they are too busy to address their request in more detail. Face to face, it is easier to establish what is required, which makes it all the more important to carefully read all written requests and seek clarification if necessary. If you do not have a system for customer feedback nor conduct regular user surveys, you may never know there is a problem.

It may be stating the obvious but listening is still cool. **SLA**



**JOHN R. LATHAM** is the director of the SLA Information Center. He can be reached at jlatham@sla.org.
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