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A CALL TO ACTION

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Information Resources: A Tool for Knowledge Management Session
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Enough of the tired cliché "Information is power", we all know that. We need to go beyond that. We, the transportation information specialists and managers, need to demonstrate that we know how to use the information, that we know how to trade it and exchange it, and that we can affect deep changes if given the proper tools to disseminate it.

I would like to make a Call to Action to transportation related information specialists, managers, and individuals, as well as government agencies, international organizations, and corporations - to all of us dealing with information as users or producers at the local, national, regional, and hemispheric level.

First, let me call the information specialist to action. It is a call to create and/or expand our networks and communities, not in the physical sense, but in the human and professional context. A call for all of us to be proactive, for us to take the initiative, not to wait for big internal or external "sponsors" or approval or blessings from "upstairs", but to find efficient ways to develop innovative ways to provide access and exchange information. We need to see our information centers as a local asset while at the same time developing them to become part of a global interconnected network.

A call to document and publish what your information center is doing, whether it is through an e-mail, written report, or oral presentation to people within our organizations or around the world. A call to distribute and disseminate information on our efforts, both successes and failures, to help our colleagues learn from our experiences - to be open to share our knowledge and resources. Through sharing, we will learn more and we will be able to better serve our organizations.

After living in Latin America for more than fourteen years, I developed a strong interest in the training of my Latin American colleagues. I would like to call upon government and international organizations to review and upgrade their commitment to the training of information specialists from developing countries. It should be noted that U.S. librarians must also be included since we also

need it! Big meetings such as ours this week are fine to chart courses, review objectives, develop contacts, and reaffirm our commitment to our stated goals. But the staff in the trenches, the ones that will need to somehow put into practice our policies and try to reach our goals, need to be better trained. We need to provide more hands-on, focused and regional training sessions rather than global, theoretical meetings. We need to ask these specialists what knowledge they need to do the job we are asking them to do and them send someone over there to give it to them.

I would like to call on Asian information specialists and organizations to explore ways to develop joint programs to share information and knowledge with Western countries. I feel this is one of the few places left in the world where our transportation information community is lacking a strong contact base.

As information specialists, we must seize the initiative and make the telephone call, send the email, connect with colleagues and practitioners from near and far when searching for information. Do not give up just because you do not have the information in-house or could not find it on the World Wide Web. There is very little risk in contacting people, but the rewards can be great, as my experience in Panama taught me. The same can be said for the practitioners: contact your colleagues from across town or across the world and then let your information specialist know what you found and how you did it. Share your resources!

One fundamental step to accelerate information exchange is obviously the use of technology: computers, high-speed connections, access to the WWW, etc. And one of the first things an information specialist should do is to automate your information center catalogue. Without having your bibliographic information converted into bits and bytes, access to your data will remain highly localized and somewhat restricted. If already automated, mount it on the web and increase its accessibility. Next, include content specific links or resources that would add value to your web site and will provide benefits to your organization. Think of including high-value content that is not duplicated anywhere. Do not go for the "boutique" effect, where you

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have a web page full of pretty things to look at, but nothing of substance. Make sure you have solid content, then advertise! Let your organization and the world know what you have done and how they can benefit from it.

Our world demands for us, the information professionals of the twenty-first century, to think and behave like CEOs, and our information centers to be like corporations. Like any good CEO, we must be totally aware of how we fit in our business world and within our organization. We must know what our strengths and weaknesses are, how to best manage our resources to enhance our capital, and among all other things, how to promote our "company" or information center to maintain and increase our customer base. The old boring days of filing and photocopying are over. To succeed, we must improve ourselves, we must think out of the box. We must strive to be creative and dynamic, either by generating our own new ideas or by "borrowing" them from successful organizations and applying them to our own settings.

Another point very dear to me is that we must seek and develop mutually benefiting partnerships with larger and/ or smaller organizations in town or across the globe. We have to realize that perhaps some of the data you consider basic may be of value to someone else and that they may be willing to trade for something you may want. Or perhaps we both have the same problem and if we unite, we can solve it. The key word is partnership; we all need to contribute.

As information professionals:
- We need to commit ourselves to be the best information specialists we can be and provide the best services we can in the most efficient and accurate way.
- We need to think and work outside the box.
- We must become analyzers, interpreters, and managers of knowledge not bystanders or clerks.
- We must challenge ourselves, our information centers, and our parent organizations to provide better services and explore new ones.
- And finally, we have to deliver on our promises.

Now, I would like to talk a little about the part managers and organizations play in my call to action.

Managers and organizations need to reward talent; make sure your information specialists are well paid. For the most part, we all love our jobs but we also need to eat. You need to nourish and support your specialists and centers. Like all human beings, we need to know that we and our contributions to the organization are appreciated and valued. We would like to be treated as partners. You need to

give us the opportunity to take risks; as a matter of fact, every one of us should be taking risks every day. As the former Texas Governor, Ann Richards once said, "If your are not willing to risk your being everyday, then you are not committed to change that flies in the face of the establishment". Yes, it is scary and yes, sometimes you lose and it hurts. But, if you are not willing to put yourself on the line once in a while, life becomes boring. We must look at risks as opportunities for growth and development.

Managers, you need to realize that your best hope to access information in the digital age is through your local information center- not the World Wide Web and, for most cases, not your college textbooks! Your center, most likely, has the know-how and the contacts to get you the information. You need to realize that most information professionals are born searchers and have had years practicing and honing this skill. Searching comes naturally to most of us; engineers and managers are generally not born searchers. We need each other to do our jobs and to make a living. You need to trust us.

Another important obligation for managers, which I mentioned earlier, is the responsibility to provide adequate training for your information center staff. Without training or exposure to new ideas and methods, we can not perform at our best. Think of us as knives: when brand new, we are shiny and sharp, but after years of heavy use and neglect, we become dull and rusty. But, if periodically sharpened, we can provide you with years of very good service. Training sharpens our minds, and sharpened minds will provide you with better services.

Managers should also look into mentoring their information specialists- taking them under their wings, teaching them about the organization. Don't just relegate them to their corner of the world and forget about them. Mentoring, sharing, confiding with your librarian about your job and organization will help us better position our information centers and anticipate organizational needs, thus improving efficiency.

We need you, the manager, to be our champion in the organization. You have to speak up for your information center with people at the highest levels. If we are doing something well, you have to let the higher ups know. You need to be our public relations man or women.

I also encourage all managers to have a vision for your information center. What would you like the center to be, to do, and develop? What services should we be providing that would impact the bottom line? You must know what you want. Share this vision with your information professionals. Talk about how to make it come true and then gather the resources to make it happen.

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Organizations, you need, and should demand access to, more local and international information. If your information center is not meeting your information needs, you need to figure out why and take the necessary steps to correct this. Be advised, information infrastructure and human capital will not be cheap and the more you want, the more it will cost. So be prepared to pay or do without. But, the bottom line is that you should demand more from your libraries. You should challenge us to do better.

Organizations may also want to support the development of working groups or associations of information professionals at the local, regional, continental or hemispheric level in order to develop a more coordinated approach to information exchange. I encourage you to look at and study the Nordic and Baltic Road Directory Librarians Group as a model of a working regional "consortium" as an example of small, regional, international group of librarians working for a common good.

Another model to consider is the one I am quite proud: the Transportation Division of the Special Libraries Association - a group of about 200 librarians, mostly from the U.S. and Canada, with a strong commitment to international contacts and development. I encourage you to contact us, subscribe to our electronic list, visit our Web page, come to our annual meetings, and help us get stronger and explore ways we can work and develop information exchange programs together.

Some projects I would recommend for development by information centers, either individually or in groups, would include:

- Explore cooperative agreements to establish an efficient and economic interlibrary loan/ document delivery service among local or regional information centers, thus providing cheap and reliable access to journal articles and books.
- Produce a union list of journals received by regional institutions and post it on a central web site.
- Develop a union catalog to search online catalogs from several institutions, simultaneously, giving everyone the ability to search across frontiers and time zones.
- Establish collection development policies at the national or regional level so that books or journals are bought by single institutions willing to make them available to others within the "consortium", thus avoiding duplication and saving money.
- Harmonize cataloguing procedures and standards to facilitate efficient transfer of bibliographic data.
- Develop digital projects, such as the scan-

ning of table of contents of unique, worthwhile journals and making them available on the net.
- Explore possibilities of joining TRIS, CEDEX or any other bibliographic utility to index unique journals.

You may have other ideas and I encourage you to develop your own, but would like to stress the need to keep it simple, be realistic and flexible, and continue pushing the envelope. I would like to stress the need to talk, communicate with people - the need to ask, trade and negotiate. You need to develop these skills and put them into practice if you want to move ahead.

So what if your information specialist is not working out after training, nurturing and support? It happens, so, it is better to say goodbye and strive for excellence in your professionals than to continue living with mediocrity. Always be on the lookout for good information specialists. If need be, go ahead and recruit a new one from an organization with a proven successful information center.

Now, if we put all this together we can see that our call to action fits in very well with the knowledge management theme we have been discussing at our meeting for the last couple of days. Let's very briefly explore how information specialists and information centers fit into some knowledge management concepts.

Knowledge management can be defined in several ways, but the definition I would like to use today is: knowledge management is the process to create and share knowledge across an organization to optimize the use of judgment in the attainment of the organization's mission and goals. It is applied to increase effectiveness, responsiveness and produce shorter time cycles.

In order to manage knowledge, we need the technological and human sides. On the technology side, we need computers, networks, high-speed connections, etc. We also need specialized software, databases, search engines, etc. On the human side, we need the engineers, managers, and information specialists.

Knowledge management requires a huge investment in technology, fancy databases, and computers. However, you cannot invest in technology alone and expect a good product. You have to invest in people, especially in the training of your information center staff. Not just training on how to use technology, but training for the development of knowledge processing skills, such as analysis, reasoning and deduction, as well as technical "information" training such as cataloguing, reference, web page design, etc. We need to realize that education in a learning organization is continuous.

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Knowledge management stresses the need to be proactive, something we information specialists realize we must be. Also, key factors in the transfer of knowledge are commitment, training, and support - all mentioned above as requirements for managers and organizations to develop good information centers and specialists.

Some knowledge management requirements that fit in very well into our organization's information centers are:

- The creation of knowledge repositories. Organizations need to create, develop, and support information centers, as well as online catalogs, information tools, and resources such as databases, web portals, search engines, etc.
- Improving access and transfer of knowledge. Organizations need to do this not only by improving their software and hardware but also by creating a network of knowledgeable individuals - information specialists fully trained and knowledgeable of what is going on in the organization and in the transportation business.
- Enhancing the knowledge environment. This is achieved by developing an organizational culture or environment that encourages the creation and transfer of knowledge and having the information center become a pivotal part in this transfer.
- Managing knowledge as an asset. Organizations should value their information center collection, Web pages, links, etc., but must also value what is in the heads of their information specialists. The organization must consider the information specialist as a valuable player needed for the overall success of the organization.

Knowledge management must come from above in an organization; it cannot grow and flourish at the information center level. We need the organizational commitment and resources for the information center to do its part. By the same token, knowledge management requires the leadership and professional skills of highly motivated professionals at all levels of the organization; it cannot just be one individual in one department, but a concerted effort throughout. We all need to do our part in the transfer of knowledge, especially information professionals.

Another important concept for knowledge management is that of trust. Trust among individuals is something that develops through time and by working together. The most important way to give and gain trust is by meeting face to face. No matter how many emails, voice mail messages, or videoconferences you receive or attend, we will still need the human connection to develop it. Thus the need for information specialists to be part of research groups, to be present at meetings, to be part of the organizational team. If we do not gain this trust, we will never be effective, we will never become an effective part of the team.

Another way to develop trust is to encourage your information specialist to participate and grow in professional ogranizations at the local, regional or international levels. It is at these organizational meetings where contacts and the possibility of working on projects with other information specialists arise. This not only benefits the librarian, but also the organization.

When trust is established, we have more than a network (connected people who acknowledge their connection) but a community, which implies that its members will act in certain ways to help one another. One of our goals these last few days, in my opinion, was to participate in the building of networks and in the very important process of nurturing and strengthening our transportation information community. Your information specialist should be a key component of this great and growing community of ours. Thus, I encourage each one of us, and our organizations, to continue working towards the development of a larger and stronger global transportation exchange network to support our community.

Our goal as information professionals, users and producers is to create a globally wired transportation information community. After meeting so many information specialists and managers from all over the world during the last few days, I feel confident that we are on our way to reach this goal. We have the human resources to achieve it and I encourage everyone to try a little harder; to work a little faster; to be a little smarter in our own information centers to assure that we all do our part to bring this about.

This is my call to action to all of you.

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