

# Information Literacy Advocacy—Woody’s Ten Commandments

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## ABSTRACT

The author focuses on the importance of the role of the advocate for information literacy practitioners who are given the responsibility of introducing information literacy programs and projects into their organizations—whether as a teacher in an educational context, a teacher in a private sector company context, a policy official in a government program context, or in some other context. The article first traces many of the most important events that led to the information literacy concept historically so that the reader will have some background before coming to the “ten commandments,” a term the author uses to embrace the lessons he has learned over the years, which are relevant to an advocate’s role. In this regard, the author places the concept in an international context, pointing out the key role UNESCO has played, in part because he was directly involved in most of those seminal activities as an organizer and facilitator. Each of ten lessons learned is then taken up briefly, not in any particular order, using an informal and easy-to-understand writing style. One important goal of the article is to emphasize that because information literacy is a relatively “new” concept in the formal sense (albeit under many different labels and terms it has been around for a very long time), and because it uses two words —“information” and “literacy”—that are themselves subject to many different and often confusing interpretations, virtually every information literacy practitioner, even professional librarians very familiar with the concept, too often assume that their audiences, constituents, and clients will readily understand the concept. In the author’s view, that is simply not the case, and therefore the added role of becoming an advocate, not just a teacher, is extremely important if the practitioner is to be successful.

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## INTRODUCTION

Let's start by being forthright about what I consider *advocacy* to mean. Certainly not every reader will agree, but I believe advocacy is much like lobbying. That is, the advocate tries to influence a senior person in a position of authority, or some organization or institution, to adopt his/her viewpoints, proposals, policies, values, concepts, ideas, etc.—in this case, information literacy proposals. Sometimes the advocate succeeds, and his/her target audiences are persuaded to accept their arguments, and they then encourage the advocate to proceed, or at least promise to take a neutral stance until they can see more clearly how things turn out. But sometimes the advocate loses, and s/he is unable to influence others to move to his/her position and act in the way the advocate wants them to act. “That’s the breaks,” or to use another old saw, “It’s all in the game!”

By “information literacy advocacy” I mean the actions that one takes to influence decision makers (whether policy makers in governments, business executives in private companies, or administrators in NGOs) to formally, officially, and publicly acknowledge, accept, and act upon proposed information literacy initiatives, in whatever form(s) they may be packaged—as plans, programs, projects, conferences, training workshops, seminars, colloquia, and so forth. Sometimes, one is fortunate to have comrades-in-arms who are empathetic to your side of the argument and are willing to serve as co-conspirators on your advocacy team. But other times, you may be the lone wolf advocate, and will probably, inevitably, feel a bit lonely at times in the role of change agent. Again, those are the breaks, and it’s all in the game.

I was asked in this brief article to summarize some of the key lessons I’ve learned from many years spent advocating information literacy endeavors primarily at the international level. However, the lessons learned herein apply equally to endeavors at the regional and national levels, as well as the various subnational level tiers—institutional, organizational, local community, and interpersonal. Unfortunately, there is no magic bullet that will overcome all kinds of resistance, from whomever and from wherever quarters it may come. But hopefully, some of these lessons I’ve learned may strike a familiar chord and help readers faced with trying to advance information literacy initiatives as a protagonist in their own country or institution or local community.

Limiting my scope in this article to the international level, I’ll begin by reviewing the background of what has happened (key events, milestones, benchmarks) in the last several decades.

## EARLY INFORMATION LITERACY ADVOCACY ANTECEDENTS

Paul Zurkowski, founding president of the U.S. Information Industry Association (IIA), is almost universally credited with coining the term *information literacy*. It was my privilege and pleasure to know Mr. Zurkowski

during the 1970s soon after the association was organized, and I was at the time employed by the association as a consultant to work on various projects. It is important in our context to note that the IIA was a trade and industry association, not a professional or scientific society. Its membership was composed of many of the major print publishers whose names are still among U.S. publishing industry greats—Prentice-Hall, John Wiley & Sons, McGraw-Hill, etc. Mobile and handheld electronic media were just beginning to make inroads, and personal computers at that time were primitive by comparison to today's. Electronic files, as a "core manipulable electronic information entity," were just beginning to be employed. The advent of database producers and database distributors in the 1960s and 1970s offered the association its first major wave of new members after the core founding group of print publishers. But soon the database industry began to splinter and establish its own subgroups with their own corresponding membership associations.

One of the gnawing problems Zurkowski faced was just explaining what "information industry association" meant. "Why," many complained, "don't they admit that the term is really just a new name for what had until then been called a 'publisher's association,' and be done with it!" The word, "information" in the term, these critics claimed, unnecessarily confused the situation because the word was so ambiguous, with so many different meanings, and considered so vague and so abstract, that it hindered more than helped. But Zurkowski persisted in his own advocacy, and slowly, very slowly, over a period of many years, extending into the late 1980s, he gradually was able to win some allies to the view that information was the "coming strategic resource" in a new "Information Age," and would take the place of crops during the Agrarian Age and machines during the Industrial Age. Readers who have reviewed the history of library and information science will be familiar with these arguments.

One strategy Zurkowski employed in his advocacy efforts was to insist that because information products and services, aided and abetted by the exploding ICT technologies, were beginning to multiply a hundred, or a thousand fold, and it therefore was necessary for informed citizens and policy makers to become more "literate" in these information products and services.

In sum, Zurkowski told the author more than once that for the first ten years or so of his using the term "information literacy" in nine cases out of ten he would draw blank stares at the worst, or amused indulgence at the best, in what they perceived was a flight of fancy with words.

### TRANSITION DECADE: 1980–1990

I call this period a "transition decade" because during this time ICT technologies were exploding on the scene with such regularity and drama that it was all everybody could do to just keep up with the newest major ad-

vances cascading year after year. Thus, to pick just one simple example, the earliest and clumsiest word processing machines such as the Lexitron (absolute marvels at the time, but looking back, would be considered clunkers now) were evolving into the earliest PCs, but at that time could do little more than crunch numbers and words like super, but mindless robots. Applications were exploding as well, and every discipline and sector began to launch its own customized information products and services, tailored to their own unique needs and ways of collecting, organizing, summarizing, recording, communicating, and using data and information.

Several key events took place during this decade. For one, the Information Industry Association itself metamorphosed into a kind of association federation with various subdivisions and special interest groups, in order to keep up with the exponential growth of computer-assisted information products and services.

For another, the federal government set up a new policy-level organization to advise the president and the Congress on libraries and information science, called the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS). This body undertook several studies that touched directly upon information literacy, especially as it related to improving the dissemination of government information to the public.

Finally, in 1987 the president of the library community's largest professional organization, the American Library Association, launched a Presidential Task Force on Information Literacy. The task force issued its final report in 1989. Additional information is provided below on the recommendations of this task force.

#### LIBRARIANS, INFORMATION COMPANIES, GOVERNMENT, AND NGOs PARTNER: 1990–2000

The library and information science (LIS) community had always been somewhat of a “polite adversary” to the information industry for various reasons, not the least of which was their advocacy of the idea that information should be a “free good” and therefore any attempt to place a price tag on information products was a bit suspect at best, or downright immoral at worst. To that end, libraries and librarians advocated tirelessly to IIA members, in particular to the print publishers, for cheaper subscription rates for books and serials. To a certain extent this author certainly agrees that some information goods should be considered a public good and at least subsidized with taxpayer funds, especially government information. But much information is subject to proprietary laws, rules, and regulations, such as patents, copyrights, trademarks, etc., not to mention business trade secrets, government national security information, and privacy safeguarded information on citizens. In short, there has been, and always will be a tension between these “free information” public rights on the one hand, and various information protection safeguards on the other hand.

At the same time, at the beginning of this decade, government was very slow to even acknowledge the rapid emergence and proliferation of many different kinds of “information professionals,” each crying out to be formally and officially recognized by the federal government as a separate and distinct entity in the government’s “job bible”—the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*. In short, those incumbents campaigned that if they were ever to realize full career potential, given the risks they took to enter the new ICT (information and communication technology)-assisted fields, and the need for peer recognition, competitive pay and benefits, and so on, the government would have to formally and officially recognize their new position titles. Even in the closely related computer science sphere, for decades official government job titles were based on early 1950s and 1960s state of computer-assisted information handling technologies. For example, “automatic data processing,” or ADP, took decades to make the simple metamorphosis into EDP or “electronic data processing.” Data entry clerks were about as far as the Department of Labor (the high priest of job titles) was prepared to go to update its master job category lists until the early 1980s. Then there was the coining of the term “informatics” to refer to the blending of information and computers. However, as we write these words, this term has lapsed into widespread disfavor, which, again, underscores the career risks being taken by those courageous enough to enter the new ICT field.

At the same time libraries and librarians were increasingly frustrated with trying to keep up with what they called “user education.” That is, training their patrons so that they could efficiently utilize the newer information products and services becoming available. “User education” just didn’t seem to do the trick, and they began to search for a more meaningful term. Ultimately information literacy, in more and more institutions and organizations, began to inherit the terminological mantle of what had been for generations “user education.”

#### THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE ON INFORMATION LITERACY

As mentioned above, the American Library Association president appointed a task force on information literacy in 1987 and it issued a final report in 1989. The task force was charged with investigating the concept of information literacy, not just in the context of librarianship and higher education as might have been expected, but also the relationship of the concept to individuals, business, and citizenship (American Library Association, 1989).

#### THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION (IFID)

At the turn of the twentieth century, government documentalists and library classification experts formed a professional society composed

primarily of government documents specialists who were faced with the enormous task of organizing and managing increasingly voluminous flows of government documents, both into government depositories, documentation centers, libraries, archives, and other information institutions, as well as out of governments to citizens, scientists, the business community, foreign governments, and other audiences. Certainly the members of this society can be said to be in the front ranks of the premier information literates because they were trained in-depth in how information is classified, searched for, retrieved, communicated, stored, archived, or disposed of. Beyond government documentation centers, FID members were also employed as information officers, librarians, archivists, curators, and many other kinds of information professionals, in both the public and private sectors.

#### THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS (IFLA)

Not long after FID was formed, the International Federation for Library Associations and Organizations (IFLA) was formed, composed of librarians from all kinds of libraries, as well as professional library societies, associations, and so forth, in all spheres, academic, national, corporate, special, and so on. IFLA worked closely with FID on international library and information policy matters, and the two for many decades, beginning early in the twentieth century, were the primary accredited library and information INGOs (international nongovernmental organizations) to UNESCO, and participated actively in the affairs of the Programme for General Information (PGI) Council, and, most recently, the Information for All Programme (IFAP).

#### UNESCO RISES TO A LEAD INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION LITERACY ROLE

Largely because of the advocacy efforts of FID, IFLA, and regional LIS organizations such as COMLA, ACURIL, and others, in the late 1990s, UNESCO became increasingly interested in information literacy as a discrete field of its own. Initially concerns for this area were jointly addressed by both the education and the communications and information (C&I) sectors of the UNESCO headquarters staff. But, later, following precedents for assigning lead responsibility for a given area to a single sector instead of splitting it between two or more sectors, lead responsibility was eventually given to the communications and information sector. As the twenty-first century dawned, UNESCO expressed an interest in helping to sponsor and participate in meetings of information literacy experts so that they could formulate plans, policies, programs, and projects that more closely mirrored the realities of what was happening with information literacy around the world.

### THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL IL MEETING OF EXPERTS— WASHINGTON, DC, 2000

The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) and the National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL) invited a UNESCO representative from the communications and information (C&I) sector staff (which was responsible for the information literacy area) to attend a working meeting at NCLIS in its Washington, DC offices in 2000 for the purpose of strategizing approaches to elevating information literacy internationally. The meeting was kept small, perhaps no more than twenty participants, but included an observer from the U.S. State Department. Moreover, from the outset the scope of the meeting was broadened to ensure that it was not perceived as a meeting intended only for librarians and educators, but would also be attended by business people and government policy officials. There was already at least informal agreement among the meeting organizers that information literacy, if it was to be fully appreciated and understood by stakeholders, must reflect the views and inputs of all sectors, all professions, and all disciplines.

One of the major conclusions reached by the conferees was that whatever strategies developed must include a strong component aimed at increasing public awareness of just what information literacy was intended to mean, and how it was intended to apply to all countries, all kinds of institutions, and organizations in both the public and private sectors, and ordinary individuals. I am herein, in this paper, of course calling that information literacy advocacy.

### THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL IL MEETING OF EXPERTS— PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC, 2003

Forty information literacy experts convened in Prague, September 20–23, 2003, at the second international Information Literacy Meeting of Experts. This meeting was organized by the U.S. National Commission on Library and Information Science (NCLIS) and the National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL), with the support of UNESCO, representing twenty-three countries from all of the seven major continents. The format for the three-day meeting was organized around four core “participant teams” representing four major sectors—education and learning, health and wellness, governance and citizenship, and business and economics. Each of the four participant teams, led by a team facilitator, gave presentations, and there followed subgroup breakout sessions where issues were discussed further, and preliminary conclusions and recommendations formulated. Interaction among participants was greatly facilitated through the utilization of a highly skilled organizational development consultant experienced in dealing with diverse and mixed groups of participants representing many different geographic regions, backgrounds, and cultures,

as the Prague group was. Then the breakout groups reported back to the full plenary sessions.

Eventually a Prague Declaration was produced that contained in two pages the major findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the full group. This document was then given wide dissemination among intergovernmental organizations, major international NGOs, and UNESCO member countries. In our context here, that document has been perhaps the most important and widely seen information literacy advocacy tool. It is a very useful technique to capsule, condense, and then promulgate the “consensus views” of experts in meetings of this kind. It has always pleasantly surprised me that professionals are able to come together and produce a single expression of their most important conclusions and recommendation.

The proclamation drafting group, however, should be kept small—perhaps only three or four people, in the interests of minimizing the potential risk of trying to reconcile too many divergent viewpoints. Words and their alternative meanings and potential for different interpretations depending on one’s native language, region, culture, and so on, become extremely important, and more than once this author has spent fifteen or even thirty minutes working through a list of synonyms to find precisely the right word or term that everybody can agree on. That doesn’t mean, however, picking only drafting group members who share exactly the same views. Only that they should be able to harmonize and work together. That is the charge the senior-most organizer should give to them.

#### THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL IL MEETING OF EXPERTS— LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA, 2003

Thanks to the special efforts of the Special Libraries Association, the European Economic Commission, and a public enterprises education and training institution in Slovenia, the third in the series of international IL expert meetings took place in Ljubljana in 2003. While this meeting was attended primarily by representatives from the Balkan stages and from the countries in Eastern and Southern Europe, there were participants from countries outside of those subregions, and therefore the character of this conference was truly international in outlook and meeting content. Once again between thirty and forty experts attended, including high-level staffers from UNESCO’s headquarters in Paris, France.

#### THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL IL MEETING OF EXPERTS— ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT, 2005

Thirty-six experts in information literacy, again drawn from all of the world’s major geographic regions and from a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines, came together at the High-Level Colloquium on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning held at the Bibliotheca Alexan-



drina (BA) in Alexandria, Egypt, November 7–9, 2005. The purpose of the meeting was to share both emerging, as well as tried and tested ideas, approaches, methods, and pilot experiments addressing how information literacy and lifelong learning policies, programs, practices, and tools could help reduce the so-called *digital divide* in all countries of the world, especially in developing countries.

Public policy makers, business and industry executives, teachers and librarians, local community level practitioners, media representatives, and renowned ICT and information literacy experts produced a range of practical and specific recommendations during the course of the meetings. Like the two aforementioned international IL expert meetings that preceded it, the Alexandria colloquium's recommendations were also made available in the form of a "proclamation," again in the form of a "simple" two-page document referred to as the Alexandria Declaration. This document, along with more detailed recommendations, was also, like its predecessors, formally submitted to UNESCO for consideration in formulating future information literacy plans, policies, and program guidance, and was also furnished to the education, ICT, and other appropriate ministries of UNESCO's 195 member states on a selective basis.

Like the Prague and Ljubljana proclamations that preceded it, the Alexandria Declaration became the most important and widely made available information literacy advocacy tool, thanks to UNESCO, IFLA, regional and national LIS societies and associations, and the local media, which picked up the event as a news event. Mass media coverage appeared in several important Cairo newspapers and in at least one case there was a brief television report that mentioned the meeting. This leads to the point that such proclamations should also be accompanied by press releases that touch upon the intended significance and "deeper meaning" of the event itself and the proclamation issued by the participants (not merely regurgitation of the text of the proclamation).

The Alexandria Declaration, including the press release(s), were immediately submitted to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) second stage meeting, which took place the following week in Tunisia, using the vehicle of the IFLA delegation and its delegates who had come to Alexandria for the UNESCO Information Literacy Meeting of Experts and then went on to Tunis for the World Summit. The IFLA pre-meeting at the BA in Alexandria was formally called *Libraries @ The Heart Of The Information Society* and was advertised as a "curtain raiser" to the World Summit in Tunis. Past presidents of IFLA, who were in Alexandria and went on to Tunis, actually utilized some of the content of the Declaration in their formal remarks to the World Summit conferees.

### OTHER MAJOR INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION LITERACY ADVOCACY INITIATIVES—2006 TO THE PRESENT TIME

While the above four meetings were the major international information literacy advocacy meeting initiatives that took place in the six year time-frame 2000–2006, there were some other important regional meetings as well. Notable among these were

- the Colombo, Sri Lanka, Information Literacy Workshop, November 2004;
- the Bangkok, Thailand, Workshop on Information Literacy Education and School Library Services, September 2005;
- the Patiala, India, International Workshop, “Information Skills for Learning: Empowering 8,” October 2005; and
- the Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Regional Meeting of South East Asian Countries and the topics discussed, June 2006.

### WHERE THINGS STAND NOW

Because of UNESCO's highly commendable leadership, information literacy has emerged onto the twenty-first century landscape as a critical skill needed to navigate the global information society. However, there is still considerable disagreement as to its definition, a portfolio of “best IL practices,” the most promising IL research directions, and so on. In short, the concept is far from having become a “settled” discipline (or multidiscipline or cross-discipline, if you prefer). Each major cultural geographic region, even going down to the subregion and the country levels, seems to have its own unique interpretation of how to define and advance the IL idea in the context of its own education and training policies and programs. In short, for the foreseeable future there seems scant hope for universal agreement of how to define the concept, but, on the other hand, some, including this author, would argue that is a good thing!

### WOODY'S TEN INFORMATION LITERACY ADVOCACY COMMANDMENTS

Now we finally come to the ten lessons I have learned working to assist organizers, sponsors, and facilitators for many of the aforementioned international IL initiatives. These ten lessons are listed in no priority of importance or other kind of special order for that matter. I offer them here humbly, with the recognition that some will undoubtedly prove to be inappropriate to the reader's context and needs. Certainly some will not apply to every individual faced with every kind of IL advocacy challenge. But, hopefully, at least a few of them will strike a resonating chord, and readers will see at least some similarities in the situations they are confronting as they cope with their own unique IL advocacy challenges.

*Lesson #1: Patience and Perseverance*

I suppose the first lesson I've learned over the years in fighting information literacy advocacy battles is that patience and perseverance are far more important than a winning personality, the impeccable logic of one's arguments, or outright bribery! Over the long pull very often decision makers need time to adjust their thinking, much less the thinking of their constituencies on whom they must depend for their political and economic livelihood. And I'm not talking about days or weeks or months. I'm talking about years, sometimes even decades, before people change their attitudes and behaviors. And in a few cases real change has taken an entire generation or nearly two generations! Lesson #1 learned: Like everything else in life worth fighting for, be prepared for the long haul, and accept the inevitable short-term setbacks without being discouraged. Take a long breath, relax, and continuously adjust and readjust your tactics and strategies if needed to try new tacks where existing ones have proven futile. Two steps forward, one step back, as they say.

*Lesson #2: Find an In-House Champion*

Another lesson I've learned is that if you are not yourself prepared to serve in the role of champion, finding an in-house champion who can either run interference for you and carry the ball, or at least partner with you as a companion as the battlefronts are encountered, is a good strategy. You're really in luck if you can identify a comrade-in-arms who can become your co-conspirator. So much the better if that person is a respected "old-timer" who enjoys a long-standing respected reputation within your organization. Sometimes it may be a retired "senior statesman." Other times s/he might be a newcomer, but someone who wants to make a name for him/herself and is looking for "an issue" to champion. There is no standard personality or role template for the internal information literacy champion, and you will need to look around you to identify who might be able and willing to pick up a rifle with you and advance on the battlefield. Sometimes they may be in-house, but often they may be retired or located somewhere else, but familiar with, and to, your organization and its history and challenges.

*Lesson #3: Aim for the Top*

Another lesson is to aim for the top if at all possible. While my experience has told me that there is no "one size fits all" strategy or tactic that will fit all countries, cultures, and institutions, etc., going directly to the top executive will sometimes work better than trying to work through associations, societies, and at lower levels of government. For example, in the United States there is a certain fondness for "presidential proclamations," and one of the most popular strategies that advocates of all kinds use to advance their cause is to ask the president of the United States to declare a certain day, week, or month, "Be Kind to Poodles Month," or, more

seriously in our context, “Information Literacy Awareness Month.” That is precisely what happened in late September 2009 in Washington, D.C. President Barack Obama declared the month of October as Information Literacy Awareness Month. At the United Nations they used a similar approach but declared 2003–12 to be the United Nations Literacy Decade. And there is even a United Nations Literacy Day.

*Lesson #4: Link Information Literacy to Specific Long-Standing Goals and Reforms*

Another lesson is to link information literacy to important and long-standing, intractable national or institutional or organizational goals and reforms, rather than attempt to justify the concept purely or largely “in the abstract” or on philosophical grounds. For example, I have seen in some countries that tying information literacy to health and wellness improvement may work better than trying to justify the information literacy concept in more general and abstract terms. Thus, if advocates extol the virtues of health information literacy, or simply health literacy, they may get further along. The same linkage strategy sometimes works by linking information literacy to education and learning, resulting in the lowering of basic illiteracy in general (i.e., improving reading, writing, and numeracy scores and rankings), or to unemployment by linking the concept to growth in jobs and lowering of unemployment and underemployment, or to economic improvements by linking the concept to improved productivity in the labor workforce. If a country is proceeding on many fronts—for example, linking information literacy to governance and citizenship, to business and economic development, to health and wellness, and to education and learning, it will become clear that the common denominator of all of these things is sharpening the skills of people to search for, retrieve, organize, evaluate, and use information for whatever purpose and end-objective they have, and in whatever sector they may be employed.

*Lesson #5: Link to the Twenty-First Century and to the Global Information/Knowledge Society*

Another lesson is to link information literacy to the future—to the twenty-first century, and to the global information and knowledge society, as a new kind of timely skill set that is necessary if people, organizations, and nations are to compete and prosper in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent global information or knowledge society. Most people find it easier to justify or rationalize changes in their attitudes and behaviors if they believe they will be perceived by their colleagues as riding the crest of new technology or other kinds of “waves.” Thus we have global warming, energy conservation, environmental protection, and many other “greening” causes and waves. Ask any parent or grandparent of a child who has grown up with computers and the many kinds of mobile information and communication technologies which are so pervasive today, and they will

tell you how different their own cognitive thinking and learning modalities are now from what they learned as children themselves.

*Lesson #6: Resistance to Change Is “Normal”*

Another lesson I’ve learned is that resistance to change is endemic to all societies, historic ages, and cultures—it is “normal” and inevitable and cannot be waved away with a magic wand. It has been with us since the dawn of man and will be with us to the end. Unless very compelling reasons are advanced to make changes, many if not most people will opt for the status quo nine times out of ten! What I’ve so often heard from higher level executives is that it is often easier for those executives and policy makers to rely on assistants to be their “information experts” than it is to take the time and trouble to sharpen their own personal information literacy skills. That being the case, they often don’t understand, ignore, or reject the argument as to why information literacy should be a problem or a challenge (“just hire a smart librarian or information professional to be your information assistant and, presto, your problem is solved”). They overlook, ignore, or otherwise refuse to believe that not all of us can hire an “information assistant” who is at our beck and call 24/7. The lesson here? Don’t try to fight and win this as a precondition to moving ahead with your information literacy advocacy plans. Instead, consider resistance to change inevitable and learn to live with it as you proceed.

*Lesson #7: Don’t Bite Off More Than You Can Chew*

Another adage that stands us in good stead here is the admonition that you should not bite off more than you can chew. That means don’t be overly ambitious and zealous with respect to the breadth of the scope of your information literacy advocacy efforts, nor to an immutable timetable, by expecting too much progress too soon, nor to minimizing the level, quality, and quantity of the financial, human, and material resources you will need. Partnerships, collaborations, and alliances are the order of the day. Look around you and see where you can find collaborators—donors, sponsors, “sisters,” and “brothers,” and the like. Sometimes help comes from unexpected quarters. And sometimes that help may be in the form of “in kind” rather than tangible and physical resources. Don’t be afraid to share both the expected glory and the credit that will come with success on the one hand, with the work, the burdens, and the costs that enable that success on the other hand.

*Lesson #8: Pilot Test, Experiment, and Compartmentalize*

One lesson I fortunately learned very early is that almost never do things work out the way you’ve initially planned. Inevitably, unforeseen problems and circumstances create barriers, negate initial assumptions, cause shifts in initial budgets and other kinds of preliminary resource allocations (e.g., space, personnel, supplies and equipment, etc.), and other sundry kinds

of grit in the machinery so that your “grand designs” too often end up in the trash bin! The lesson learned here is that it is almost always better to move incrementally and compartmentally in stages, testing assumptions and expectations at each step of the information advocacy planning and implementation process. That means testing for understanding and proactively asking for (nay, demanding) feedback from your audiences, colleagues, constituencies, and clienteles as you move ahead. Small pilot tests along the way are one of the best and cheapest ways I know of to debug, refine, strengthen, and update plans as time passes and new circumstances crop up. Pedagogues know this by training, but most of us have to learn this lesson the hard way. In sum: It’s alright to cut the red ribbon at the beginning, but don’t pop the champagne corks at the start, nor in the middle, nor even when the exit polls are taken but, rather, wait until the very end when the polls are closed and the final votes are tallied!

*Lesson #9: Advocacy Is Not for the Faint of Heart*

Sometimes I run into a person who has become very discouraged and frustrated with trying to advocate information literacy to a target audience. Often I hear things like, “I may not be cut out for this kind of job because I more often than not feel that people either are not listening to me and they’re just being polite to me by listening, or they do understand what I’m trying to say but they fundamentally disagree with the idea but don’t want to completely discourage me.” Or, “I’ve been trying for years to get my supervisors to understand what information literacy is all about, but everything I’ve tried—face-to-face meetings, recommending readings, working through third parties, inviting them to workshops at other sites, and so on—has failed or been so diluted and downsized that we are almost back to where we started from.” Many advocates feel isolated, depressed, and dejected because of their perceived lack of success in moving forward. The point I’m trying to make here is that not everybody fits into the mold of an advocate. Sometimes one’s tolerance for ambiguity and delay and obfuscation is very low. It is not just a case of patience and perseverance that we’ve already touched upon, but rather a question of personality type. In such cases you would do well to quietly try to identify a colleague who might be more appropriate to the task. Don’t be embarrassed. Don’t consider yourself a failure. There are many, many battles to be fought in every workplace, and your forte may well lie in another arena, another direction, or another target.

*Lesson #10: Do Your Homework*

Sometimes people aspiring to become lobbyists or advocates believe that they are virtually born to the role! “You’ve either got it or you’ve not” is their secretly held conviction. Translated, that means they too often believe that it makes no difference which field or sector or area you’re operating in because the subject matter itself is entirely secondary to the skills

involved, and the skills are so generic that they can be applied to gardening or rocket science. As a consequence, they fail or refuse to learn even some of the most basic and fundamental information about their chosen topics. But that can lead to simple embarrassment at the one extreme or downright failure at the other. It's imperative for even information literacy experts who aspire to become advocates to make certain that they are aware of current streams of research and "best practices" so that they can suggest resources and avenues of many hues and stripes, not just a "one size fits all" approach. In short, do your homework. Your target audiences may well be prepared to grill you, if for no other reason than to test your own understanding of the subject matter. If you are not articulate and prepared to share quickly, freely, and in-depth, credible, timely and authentic data and information about what's going on in the information literacy world, you may be perceived as an opportunist or even a charlatan!

Good luck my friends!

## REFERENCES

- American Library Association, Association of College and Research Libraries. (1989, January 10). *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final report*. Retrieved July 30, 2010, from <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrtps/divs/acrl/publications/whitepapers/presidential.cfm>

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