

[Download this article in PDF format.](#)

Attention New Librarians and Career Changers

Identifying and Conveying Transferable Skills

By Julie Todaro, Dean of Library Services, Austin Community College, Austin, TX

All too often professionals are both educated for and continue to “train” for and develop competencies (knowledge, skills/abilities, attitudes) specific to one *type* of library or information environment or one *size* of library or information environment. The reality is that library and information professionals should be aware of, and familiar with, all types of libraries and library issues. In addition, in today's workforce, professionals are more often moving among different types of library and information environments to find positions that meet their short term and long-term career needs as well as their personal needs.

Why should all library staff be familiar with issues from all types of libraries? Knowledge of issues and operations in all types of libraries is critical as library and information environments:

- Establish collaborations and partnerships for services and facilities;
- Form consortiums for providing services and resources to patrons;
- Design technology and service systems for diverse types of libraries; and,
- Collaborate for grant design and delivery.

These issues illustrate a greater need for professionals to be able to lead *across* different library and information environments as well as beyond libraries to for-profit and community entities, structures and infrastructures. Therefore librarians, support staff and library managers need to:

- Be knowledgeable about different *types* of libraries;
- Be knowledgeable about different *sizes* of libraries;
- Be familiar with political issues and implications that affect all types and sizes of libraries;
- Be familiar with the leadership similarities and differences inherent in leading different types of libraries; and,
- Be knowledgeable about the specific transferable skills needed to lead in and/or move successfully among these different work environments.

Why bother discussing transferable skills?

As librarians prepare for their first profession position or as they and other library workers prepare for moving up or changing to other environments, they need to assess their competencies (knowledge, skills/abilities and attitudes) and specifically skills *sets* (types and levels of skills and abilities) to articulate in their resume or job interviews and, most importantly, to match to position advertisements and organizations. Clearly, while some competencies are specific to certain types and sizes of libraries, some competencies and skills sets are **transferable** and are valuable to a wide variety of types and sizes of library and information environments.

The concept of identifying and mastering transferable skills is one of the most critical issues for today's professionals in all work environments and career paths. Once primarily an area of concentration and concern for fresh-out-of-school and/or first professional position job seekers, transferable skills are one of the most important elements for today's workplace and job market overall. Why?

- Recent research indicates that professionals, who once typically changed jobs 5 to 7 times in their careers, now may change positions as many as 10 to 13 times during their career. Odds are professionals will move between and/or among work environments.

- The library and information profession—try as it might to establish management and leadership training and pathways—finds itself repeatedly in the position of advertising high level positions and not receiving enough qualified applicants or any applicants at all.
- Library and information professionals may now have a position in one type of library, but due to consortia, partnerships, and collaborations (service, resource, technology and facility) may find that they are working with, managing and/or leading librarians and other library workers in a variety of types and sizes of environments.
- Library and information professionals may now have a position in one type of library, but due to consortia, partnerships, and collaborations (service, resource, technology and facility)—as well as community and political relationships - may find that they are working with, managing and/or leading professionals in for-profit and community environments.

What are transferable skills?

Transferable skills—better named transferable *competencies* as they incorporate not only skills and abilities but knowledge, attitudes and/or personal attributes—can be both general and specific competencies you have acquired during education, experience or other activities that are typically applicable and thus transferable to a different work or career environment. They may cover general work environment competencies as well as specific type or size of library or work environment competencies.

The University of Exeter's (UK) Department for Education and Skills defines transferable skills as

“Those cognitive and personal skills (application of number, communication, information technology, problem-solving, personal skills, working with others and improving own learning and performance) which are central to occupational competence in all sectors and at all levels.” (DEE definition of core skills, <http://newton.ex.ac.uk/handbook/TransferableSkills.html>)

These competencies are seen as those most attractive to employers in future jobs or future job responsibilities you are seeking when you may not—on the surface—be the perfect match for the position or area. Transferable skills are those skills that work—no matter what you are reaching for—because no matter the job or the work environment—these skills are necessary and critical to the success of the operation. The need for the competency to be present in an employee employed by the organization transcends the need for the employee to know *exactly* about all aspects of the organization or work environment.

Besides “transferable skills,” these competency areas are also explained as “key skills,” “core skills,” “soft skills,” “generic skills,” “overarching skills and qualities,” “winning characteristics,” “critical success factors” and “qualities of ideal candidates.”

General categories of transferable skills typically include:

- *Solving problems*
- *Satisfying customers*
- *Communication (oral and written)*
- *Teamwork*
- *Leaderships*
- *Work-ethic traits, such as drive, stamina, effort, self-motivation, diligence, ambition, initiative, reliability, positive attitude toward work*
- *Logic, intelligence, proficiency in field of study*

The four most common areas included in the transferable skills discussion, however, include:

- Communication and presentation skills (oral, written and graphic);
- Teamwork or interpersonal skills (e.g. negotiating, listening, sharing, empathizing);
- Management or organizing and planning skills (including self management skills such as integrity, honesty and ethical behavior); and
- Intellectual and creative skills (such as problem solving and 'thinking outside the box/beyond the square').

No matter what lists are included as critical, employers tend to group transferable skills into the following three categories:

Working With People
Selling

Working With Things
Repairing

Working With Data/Information
Calculating

Training	Assembling parts	Developing databases
Teaching	Designing Operating machinery	Working with spreadsheets
Supervising Organizing	Driving Maintaining equipment	Accounting
Soliciting	Constructing	Writing
Motivating	Building Sketching	Researching
Mediating Advising	Working with Computer-Aided Design (CAD)	Computing
Delegating	Keyboarding Drafting Surveying Troubleshooting	Testing
Entertaining Representing		Filing
Negotiating		Sorting Editing
Translating		Gathering data
		Analyzing
		Budgeting

What are the specific elements of a general list of transferable skills' categories? What might someone indicate is evidence of ability for a transferable skill category?

Communication: the skillful expression, transmission and interpretation of knowledge and ideas.

Speaking effectively

- Presentation skills
- Writing concisely
- Listening attentively
- Expressing ideas
- Facilitating group discussion
- Providing appropriate feedback
- Negotiating
- Perceiving nonverbal messages

Persuading

- Reporting information
- Describing feelings
- Interviewing
- Editing

Research and Planning: the search for specific knowledge and the ability to conceptualize future needs and solutions for meeting those needs.

- Forecasting, predicting
- Creating ideas
- Identifying problems
- Imagining alternatives
- Identifying resources
- Gathering information
- Solving problems
- Setting goals
- Achieving goals
- Extracting important information

- Defining needs
- Analyzing
- Developing and achieving measurable outcomes
- Developing evaluation strategies
- Human Relations: the use of interpersonal skills for resolving conflict, relating to and helping people.
- Developing rapport
- Being Sensitive
- Listening
- Conveying feelings
- Providing support for others
- Motivating
- Sharing credit
- Counseling
- Cooperating

Delegating with respect

- Representing others
- Perceiving feelings, situations

Asserting

- Conflict resolution
- Organization, Management and Leadership: the ability to supervise, direct and guide individuals and groups in the completion of tasks and fulfillment of goals.
- Initiating new ideas
- Handling details
- Coordinating and handling multiple tasks
- Managing groups
- Project Management
- Delegating responsibility
- Teaching
- Coaching
- Counseling
- Promoting change
- Selling ideas or products
- Decision making with others
- Managing conflict
- Work Survival: the day-to-day skills that assist in promoting effective production and work satisfaction.
- Implementing decisions
- Cooperating
- Enforcing policies
- Being punctual
- Managing time

Attending to detail

- Meeting goals
- Enlisting help

Accepting responsibility

- Setting and meeting deadlines
- Organizing
- Making decisions
- Adaptability
- Flexibility

Can transferable skills specific to academic credentials translate to non-academic positions or non-academic careers?

When moving from non-technical educational preparation or experience to technical or non-academic positions, the following transferable skills have been listed as highly sought after and the ones for applicants to illustrate on resumes and in application or promotion packages.

- Learning quickly
- Synthesizing information
- Problem solving
- Dealing with complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty
- Leadership and managerial skills
- Administrative, planning and budgeting skills
- People skills, including persuasion, tact, political savvy, and the ability to motivate and counsel
- Evaluation skills
- Personal qualities such as self-motivation, self-discipline, initiative, creativity, focus, meticulousness, stamina, independence, and humor

What are the “classic” transferable skills?

For decades, Howard Figler has maintained his transferable skills list. Figler skills are considered classic because they typically be found in every position of responsibility or in jobs requiring good judgment and decision-making. Figler's approach to these skills is the competency identification of job responsibilities and organizational functions that are found in most job environments.

Figler's Transferable Skills

- **Supervising**
Direct responsibility for the work of others in a situation in which some accountability is required.
- **Organizing/Managing/Coordinating**
In charge of activities and/or event or function of work environments. Responsibility for bringing together people, resources, and events. Delegating tasks to others.
- **Coping With Deadline Pressure**
Producing quality work required by either internal or external deadlines. Functioning on others' schedules, with standard and accelerated time frames.
- **Speaking**
Formal and informal, prepared and extemporaneous communication, public speaking and presentation, motivation.
- **Writing**
Formal and informal written communication and data design and presentation, technical writing, narrative, descriptive, research.
- **Budget Management**
Responsibility for directly managing or coordinating a budget, financial accountability, fiscal control.
- **Public Relations**
Public relations, publicity, marketing, customer contact/customer service.
- **Negotiating/Arbitrating/Conflict resolution/Conflict Management**
Resolving conflict, solving problems between groups or individuals, representing individuals or group demands on behalf of one constituency to those in positions of power.
- **Interviewing**
Human resources interviewing, investigation/documentation.
- **Instructing/Teaching**
Teaching and learning, training, professional development, instructional design, curriculum & content design

What should be done with information on transferable skills?

Institutions should:

- Assess organizational terms that are most acceptable for competencies in question
- Identify position elements that are transferable skills areas
- Design job ads to match position elements/job descriptions
- Assess and redesign organizational job descriptions to isolate skills areas critical to success

- Design interview questions and applicant assessment to assess evidence of accomplishment
- Determine level of knowledge/experience needed in competency areas in question

Individuals should:

- Use the job description to assess what skills the organization needs that you have which might lead to promotion, position or fulfillment of organizational competencies
- Identify position elements that are transferable skills areas
- Determine level of knowledge/experience you have in competency areas in question
- Write resume position descriptions using these terms consistently under job titles
- Indicate evidence of accomplishment in skills areas in resume entries
- Provide evidence of accomplishment in portfolio, advancement, promotion or application package
- Use skills statements in cover letter
- Discuss skills in response to interview questions

Bibliography

Figler, Howard. *The Complete Job-Search Handbook*, 3rd ed. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1999.

Julie Todaro is Dean of Library Services, Austin (Tex.) Community College.

Volunteer Editors and Columnists Wanted!

ALA-APA is seeking volunteer editors and regular columnists for *Library Worklife: HR E-News for Today's Leaders*. This electronic publication reaches thousands of libraries and library workers each month, delivering high quality content in the following areas:

- Career Advancement
- Certification
- HR Law & Regulation
- HR Practice
- Recruitment
- Salaries & Pay Equity
- Spotlight
- Statistics
- Support Staff
- Maintaining the Work/Life Balance

Volunteer editors would be expected to secure a minimum of four and maximum of six manuscripts/articles for *only one category* of the newsletter per 12-month period. Articles would be relevant to the category and of interest to one or more of the audiences of *Library Worklife: HR* personnel, librarians, support staff, directors, union members, trustees, library school students. Articles are 1,200 words or less and submitted in electronic form via email. Volunteer editors will be listed in the masthead of the newsletter and receive a small stipend.

Prospective columnists should submit a proposal of topics for a minimum of three and a maximum of six columns, to be included in the newsletter at the editor/publisher's discretion over a two-year period.

Articles may be based on news, trends, or research. They may be written in first person or third person (though not in the same article, please). They, depending on the topic, may even be humorous.

The editor/publisher of LW will review all submissions and work with volunteer editors and columnists to schedule their inclusion into the newsletter. Every person who commits to three or more articles per 12-month period will receive a free year's subscription to *Library Worklife*. Contact jgrady@ala.org to volunteer for for more information.