



**Library Worklife:**  
HR E-News for Today's Leaders.  
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for all library workers

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## The Visible Library Worker: What Can You Do to Become More Visible? (v1n4, April 2004)

By Judith Siess, BA, MA, MSLIS

Begin by asking what value you provide to the library and its customers. I think it is important to think about the people who come into the library as customers, not patrons. Customers of public and school, and some academic, libraries have prepaid for their services-with their tax, and tuition, dollars. All customers pay for your services with their time.

What do your customers want? They don't want a book, or a journal article. They don't even want information. What they want is answers; they want their problems solved. What can you do to make sure that they go away satisfied?

What does your management want? Look past the library director and ask what the Board or Mayor or CEO or Superintendent wants the library-and its workers-to be and do. After all, they are the ones that ultimately decide if there will be a library, who will work in it, and what the workers will be paid. Make sure that they know what you do. Let them know in terms they can understand, that is, in dollars and cents. Show how you saved the school system \$10,000 by choosing system A instead of system B. Tell them that the business information service you provided helped the city attract 15 new businesses that generated \$100,000 in new tax revenues.

### **Be a library advocate.**

Most library workers, librarians and support staff, do not feel comfortable acting as advocates for themselves. You need to tell people how wonderful you are. Go to the local media: newspapers, radio, and television. Have you ever thought of writing an article for the newspaper on how the library can help your town's citizens? Collect success stories and testimonials from happy customers. Offer to be the subject of an interview in the paper or on radio or television. This will help to show the public how important you are to the smooth operation of the library. You might also even consider running for local office. Of course you must make sure to follow library policy on such matters.

### **Appearances matter.**

We all know about the library worker stereotype. Determine what is appropriate for your own situation and library setting. Some libraries are very casual or have different dress expectations for different staff levels. Does what you wear affect the way you are perceived by your customers? I've seen a lot of discussion on the electronic lists about tattoos and piercings. You can be a professional and still express your own personality. Since appearances matter, moderation, good taste, neatness and cleanliness will make you look like the professional you are.

### **Keep learning.**

The fast pace of change in modern society, in technology and in the subject matter of our libraries

means you must constantly relearn your job. You keep up with a combination of formal education, on-the-job training, and personal professional development. Check to see if your employer or profession rewards or requires continuing education. You may have professional benefits that are paid by your employer, at least in part. It is up to you to determine your own CE needs, arrange for workshops or classes, and perhaps even pay for it yourself. Ask your institution's computer department or consult the Web for courses from major software vendors. Don't forget training offered at a very low cost by library associations and library automation and database vendors. If all else fails, consult a book.

### **Get out of the library.**

In the twenty-first century, hierarchy is out, and teams and networking are in. Working in teams improves the image of the library and its staff. Take every opportunity to work with others, especially people outside the library. You can promote the library (and yourself) by subtly showing how you can add value to the team's work by providing timely information.

### **Speak up.**

Often you will have an impromptu opportunity to market your library, such as finding yourself in the elevator with someone you want to impress. Have a prepared "elevator speech" that has a beginning (to introduce yourself), a middle (the pitch), and an end (to request action, such as a meeting). Start with a provocative statement or question such as "Did you know that 40 percent of an executive's time is spent looking for information?" or "Did you know that the library has 17 different stock guides?" Although your time is limited, don't speak too fast. Practice your speech until it feels natural and comfortable. A "thirty-second commercial" is similar to the "elevator speech" but is designed to tell a stranger who you are and what value you can bring him or her. You might say, "I am the circulation assistant at Plain City Public Library. I make sure that the book you want is on the shelf or on its way to you." You might even add, "What book can I find for you today?"

### **Sell the Invisible.**

But far and away the most important way to market yourself and your library is to provide outstanding service. Harry Beckwith wrote a book called *Selling the Invisible: A Field Guide to Modern Marketing*. The invisible is service. Modern marketing is all about the customer. In the past, customer service wasn't a major issue in libraries because it didn't have to be. They came to us when they needed us-or so we thought. Today our customers have choices in the acquisition of information, and the library may not be their first choice.

Who is the library's biggest competitor? It is not the Internet, or Barnes and Noble, or amazon.com. The library's biggest and most dangerous competitor is simply doing without. They can decide that they just don't need that book or piece of information enough to warrant the hassle of going to the library.

What is good customer service? It is whatever the customer thinks it is. No matter how good a job you think you're doing, if the customer isn't happy, the service isn't good enough. Our customers may not even know good service when they see it. I've found that people either expect very little of the library and its workers or they expect too much (like instant answers). Is a satisfied customer enough? Not according to Beckwith. Satisfied is the least customers expect. You want "surprised and delighted" customers.

It is the library workers who are the primary service providers in a library, not the library managers. You are the face of the library. You may be the only people that the customer meets. You must be neat, cheerful, helpful and knowledgeable. The best way to assure that your library-and your job-survive is to provide over-the-top, outstanding, and unexpectedly great service and products. You can be invisible no more.

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*Judith Siess is President, Information Bridges International, Inc., Editor/Publisher of The*

One-Person Library: A Newsletter for Librarians and Management, *author of four books, including The Visible Librarian: Asserting Your Value With Marketing and Advocacy, ALA Editions, 2003.*

## Good News! Successful Reclassification at the Huntington Beach Public Library (v1n11, November 2004)

*Julie Bixby is an Accounting Technician II at Huntington Beach Public Library (HBPL). She shared the story of how she found herself with more responsibilities after a colleague retired. She worked with her library's director and the Human Resources department to reclassify her position.*

**LW:** Please describe what you do.

**JB:** I was just promoted/reclassified into Accounting Tech II from Library Processing Clerk. I'm in Acquisitions. I place the book orders that are submitted by the librarians. I receive the books, do "preprocessing" work (title page notations, place the book on the appropriate cart), and prepare the invoices for payment. I monitor and receive standing orders, and monitor all book expenditures. My new, additional duties involve preparing requisitions for the running of the library—maintenance and supply purchases—and preparing those invoices for payment also. And keeping track of the library budget, making sure accounts aren't overspent.

**LW:** How many other people in your library share the same duties and responsibilities?

**JB:** There is one other Acquisitions person who was also just promoted/reclassified to Account Tech II. She orders and receives media materials (videos, CDs) that are selected by others. She receives books and magazines. She also works on preparing requisitions and invoices for payment.

**LW:** How long have you been there? How long have you been working in libraries?

**JB:** I started part-time in 1984 working the children's desk at HBPL. Then in 1990 a full-time position opened up in Acquisitions, and I've been there ever since. I also did part-time interlibrary loan for one year at the UC Irvine Biomedical library.

**LW:** What do you like about working in libraries?

**JB:** Knowing that my work is helping others. I don't directly help patrons, since I'm not on the front lines manning a public desk, but books are what a library is all about.

**LW:** What do you like least about working in libraries?

**JB:** The stereotype that everyone who works in a library is a librarian. It's hard for me to explain to people what my job is without them assuming I'm a librarian.

**LW:** Describe the conditions that led you to receive a higher classification.

**JB:** Two years ago, my immediate supervisor retired. The supervisor did all the maintenance and supply ordering, and monitoring of the library budget. When she retired another person was brought in part-time to do that job. That worked for 18 months, until the part-timer found a full-time job elsewhere. The director had a choice, he could either find a new person to do that job, or he could ask the city for a reclassification study for my Acquisitions co-worker and me.

**LW:** When did this occur? Over what time period?

**JB:** In May 2004 the director asked for the study, and in September 2004 the reclassification/promotion was granted.

**LW:** Who else was affected?

**JB:** My Acquisitions cohort. We work in concert, really, like a team.

**LW:** What was the process that made the change happen?

**JB:** The director requesting a reclass study by HR. We filled out a PDQ (personnel description questionnaire), and met once with a HR rep. The rep then studied our existing classification, the classification of the vacated position, and looked at other classifications within the city. She looked at the list of duties performed and figured out what class was the best fit.

**LW:** Who were your champions?

**JB:** The director. He knew we were capable of the extra work, but he wanted to ensure we were compensated for it.

**LW:** Is yours a union environment?

**JB:** Yes. In fact, as part of a contract a few years ago, the entire city underwent a reclassification study. The result of that study for me was the same salary with a change in job title from "Library Clerk Senior" to "Library Processing Clerk." Real morale killer, that.

**LW:** Tell us about your new classification.

**JB:** I am an Accounting Technician II. There are other Accounting Tech IIs in other city departments. This is the first time that class has been assigned at the library. The class of the part-timer was Library Specialist, which is actually a fraction lower in salary range than Accounting Tech II.

**LW:** What benefits do you now receive as a result of the change?

**JB:** It's a higher salary range, so for the next two years we will get raises, moving up steps in the new classification.

**LW:** How do you feel about the new classification?

**JB:** It's mixed. On the one hand, I've felt for years that my work was more complicated than was being recognized, so it's nice to finally get recognition. This is more work, but it's also more pay. On the other hand, there's no "library" in the title, which makes me feel a little odd.

**LW:** What would you recommend to others who are seeking reclassification?

**JB:** You need a champion from a supervisor. That's the way it works, at least here.

**LW:** What would you recommend to library administrators who are seeking reclassification on behalf of their staff?

**JB:** The great thing about this reclassification was the director keeping our spirits up. He'd tell us, "I know they're still working on it," which was encouraging for us, but wasn't just lip service because he did keep in regular communication with HR.

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This interview is based on Julie's comments on the electronic discussion list [Libsup-1](#).

## **Journal Yourself to Success! (v3n5, May 2006)**

**By Laurie Marotta**

*Editor's Note: We thank Catherine Hakala-Ausperk, Deputy Director of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library, our first Volunteer Editor, for finding excellent writers. Interested in becoming a volunteer editor? Contact [jgrady@ala.org](mailto:jgrady@ala.org).*

Professional development has a place for every employee at any level in any organization. Keeping your own professional development going is *so* important in today's job market, where expected skills, knowledge and abilities can change so quickly. And, whether you are a new grad in your first job or at the top of your career ladder, the need for continued development is imperative.

Keep in mind that development opportunities can be acquired not only through formal training but also through your work experiences. The best career development environment is one where the employee is the driver, the supervisor is the coach and the human resources/organization provides the support system. In this structure, all three parties contribute and all three parties benefit from the employee's development. If your organization does not employ a human resources or training specialist, you will have to take even greater responsibility in seeing that your learning continues. A good supervisor can be your advocate and support your learning activities.

But often, we forget to stand back, take a good look at ourselves and assess our own growth and opportunities. The acquisition of new skills is important, but our ability to articulate how we used these skills in the workplace is even greater. True development comes from actual work experience; including paying attention to our failures and successes. In order to capture your development and be able to talk about it, you should be keeping a record of your experiences. Some Career Specialists call this "journaling."

In keeping this record, you can see your work experiences, continually re-set goals and measure your progress. In your journal, you should track completed assignments, work experiences, projects, learning opportunities and new skills acquired. You should also be recording advice and suggestions you may be receiving from mentors and coaches. In an article by Randall S. Hansen titled "[Using a Career Journal to Further Your Career Development and Empower Your Job-Search](#)," he lists some of the benefits from keeping a journal. Here are just a few:

- Increased awareness that can build self-confidence
- Broader perspective that you can bring to your future and your job
- Clarity of thought
- Stronger sense of self

Your journal can be a quick inventory-type list or an extensive diary with more detail. You more or less are keeping your very own progress report. I find it to be an emotional event for me to look my journal. It's fun, educational and satisfying for me to see my work experiences and identify the successes and failures. In keeping a journal you too may find that you will be much better at visualizing and then capitalizing on your past experiences. That is truly professional development.

Bottom line, developing yourself through journaling can allow you to gain influence in and increase your value to the organization. It will lead toward a high level of service and performance.

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*Laurie Marotta is Human Resources Coordinator for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library, Ohio.*

We would love to have your [feedback](#) on these articles!

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