

person to leave for another library, resulting in increased job stability. This increased stability could lead to raises, bonuses, or other job benefits being offered to the essential librarian. Perhaps the essential librarian will have the opportunity to attend more conferences. How can you become an essential librarian at your library? Simply follow the six steps outlined below: find a mentor, read the literature, collaborate, adapt, become a leader, and be persistent.

Find a Mentor

Finding a mentor is the first step to becoming an essential librarian. When a librarian first begins working at a new library, it is important to learn the ropes. This can be accomplished by obtaining a mentor, sitting in on meetings, or observing a more experienced librarian. Finding a mentor and shadowing can occur in a variety of positions. According to the American Library Association's Round Table on Mentoring (NMRT), a mentor is a person who provides guidance and support to a developing professional. (NMRT, n.d., para. 4. Moore, Miller, Pitchford, and Jeng (2008) discuss the two kinds of mentors: formal and informal (p. 77). Moore et al. (2008) state that formal mentors are matched with mentees based on program parameters, while informal mentors can be found through personal connections that focus on building relationships between the mentor and mentee (p. 77).

At one of my previous, part-time positions, I did not have a mentor and needed to learn things on my own. I learned things at a slower pace than if I had a mentor to assist in my learning. As a result, I did not know what was expected of me when creating bibliographic instruction sessions. Had I had stayed in this position, I would have looked for an unofficial mentor to assist me in learning.

According to Moore et al. (2008), multiple mentors are needed for each individual since one person is unlikely to be able to act as the only support for that individual (p. 78). I found this to be the case and describe my journey of being a mentor at the University of South Carolina Upstate. In August 2009, when I began my position as the Evening Public Services Librarian, I was assigned a librarian mentor who brought me up to speed on university policies and culture. In addition to this formal mentor relationship, my office neighbor turned into an informal mentor to me because I felt free to ask her questions as they popped into my head. She is the Coordinator of Reference and a wonderful role model librarian. I have learned a great deal about how to become a good librarian and really use my librarian skills to the best of my ability. With the assistance of my mentor and role model, I was able to learn the ropes

Asking for a mentor can be a great way to learn the ropes at a new library. Librarians love to help people. If you ask, you will likely find a willing mentor, whether it is official or unofficial. If you do not feel comfortable asking a colleague, join one of the various library associations or listservs. Gieskes (2010) discusses the benefits of mentoring, where new librarians find mentors available online, which is convenient and does not require travel (p. 147).

On [ALA Connect](#), I was able to request mentorship in some of the areas of librarianship in which I was less familiar. In addition, I participated in the ALA NMRT Mentor Program. The ALA Connect mentor and NMRT mentor relationships have given me valuable insight into the profession of librarianship as a whole, as well as specific advice to assist with my current position.

during your

area. While all librarians work in the same profession, areas of expertise can vary. If you are an academic or special librarian, you may have specific areas of expertise, such as the social sciences or humanities. For the sake of this paper, I will focus on librarians in general since most readers have this profession in common. The thing I remember hearing over and over in library school was the importance of keeping up with the literature, in other words, reading library journals and other sources of library information. I tend to read the literature that has to do with my current projects. Keeping up with the literature does not have to be as daunting as it seemed in library school.

I have found that e-mail is my preferred mode of keeping up with library literature.

American Libraries Direct, which provides me with weekly library news and technology news, also subscribes to library listservs, such as the Information Literacy Instruction listserv through ALA. Reading the articles, summaries, posts, and emails help me keep up with emerging technologies, best practices, and other things happening in libraries around the world.

There are many mediums of accessing relevant library literature, whether through RSS feeds, Twitter, Facebook, academic journals, *American Libraries Direct*, or library-related blogs. I find sources that provide you with recent information written by scholars of the profession and review them on a regular basis. Keeping up with the literature will allow the essential librarian to come up with creative solutions and keep you up to speed with what is occurring at other libraries.

To help keep up with the literature, I have recently begun reading *CHOICE Reviews* on a monthly basis. I focus on my collection management areas. This has helped me learn about some

great resources to improve our collection. If you don't regularly read *CHOICE Reviews*, I

research skills. I worked with four other librarians to create the Foundation for Information Literacy (FIL) quiz that is administered to transfer students to assess their information literacy skills. We completed pilots in 2010 and 2011 and based on the success of the program we have chosen to continue it. This project strengthened my potential for being a leader in my library and provided me with assessment experience.

I recommend joining a library committee or similar group at your institution to work as a team. Library committees can help provide confidence to new librarians and hone library skills. Assuming the position of project leader or joining departmental committees can reveal your strengths as a librarian and

specialized positions and needs for specialization within libraries, there is also a great need for generalization as the quote suggests.

Another caveat to this discussion is that of hybrid positions. Schultz

issues as I will discuss in the next section. Because of my expertise in plagiarism and metadata, I am becoming an essential librarian in these areas. People have questions, they know they can approach me and rely upon me to have an answer. Find your niche and areas of expertise.

Subject librarians and liaisons are specialized essential personnel in academic libraries; we become subject experts, thus allowing us to better help our patrons. Feldmann (2006) suggests that subject librarians have in-depth subject knowledge, teaching skills, people skills, and negotiating skills; talents that are valuable and could continue to be essential in the foreseeable future (para. 2). The same idea is true for public libraries. Some positions focus on outreach, teen services, or other specializations. Sometimes school or special librarians are the only librarians at their library, but they still need to specialize and generalize in order to fulfill the needs of their patrons. As a result, the need for specialization and generalization is great in all types of libraries. At the smaller libraries, one librarian can try out almost every aspect of librarianship as Newhouse (2006) did at the Metropolitan State University, St. Paul (p. 35-36). If you are at a larger library, you will have an easier time specializing in a few areas of librarianship. Whether you are at a small or large (or medium) library, it is important to both specialize and generalize to fully explore and utilize your strengths as a librarian.

Become a Leader

To become an essential librarian at your library you will need to assume leadership roles. One of the most highly sought after qualifications I saw repeatedly when applying for jobs was good leadership skills, including initiative, innovation, being proactive, and being results oriented. Managers look highly upon librarians who can lead when the need arises. According to DeLong (2009), leadership is not just a matter of position or authority; it should occur at

multiple levels within an organization (p. 445). In other words, all librarians should strive to be

leaders regardless of your current position or title (Cromer 2009) states that skills will enhance and the profession as a whole (888).

wait to be asked to lead. Create your own opportunities to lead in addition to jumping at the opportunity to lead when it is offered. My first example of taking on a leadership role was while I was attending library school and a technology competency requirement was introduced. My class was the first group of students who were required to pass the technology competency requirement. Unfortunately, there was no way for us to learn the material the technology competency

holding the workshop. This semester we have held 21 student plagiarism prevention workshops so far. Faculty members appreciate this option to introduce students to plagiarism and how to avoid it. By offering these workshops, my colleague and I have fulfilled a need of our institution and become more essential to our library. Even if you do not see yourself as a leader, take on a leadership role if an opportunity or need arises.

Be Persistent

The last important characteristic I want to touch on is that of persistence. This characteristic reminds me of the little engine that could. He kept chugging along, until he made it over the big mountain. As a librarian, you will reach your own mountains that to be climbed. I traverse hills every day as a librarian, whether it is a depth reference question, or the request for a faculty plagiarism workshop. You will need to be persistent to be an essential librarian.

One of the worst things that can happen to a librarian is burnout. Burnout is hard on everyone—the librarian going through it, library patrons, and colleagues. I asked some experienced librarians how they avoid burnout, and the most prevalent suggestion was to change focus every so often. In other words, after specializing in one or two areas, change your focus and try specializing in other areas. To be an essential librarian, you will need to go the distance. If you start getting restless, focus on something new. Caputo (1991) wrote an insightful book titled *Stress and Burnout in Library Service*.

Special Libraries Association, or the Association of College and Research Libraries Conference, depending on your area of interest.

(1991) recommends exercise she suggests a brief walk during your lunch break as one method to avoid burnout. (p. 28) Some librarians at USC Upstate regularly take short walks during their lunch breaks. Morning exercise makes me enthusiastic and motivated for my day at work. On days that I do not exercise before work, I am a little drowsy and generally not as productive. Even 20 minutes of exercise can make a big difference to your day. Along with the exercise Caputo (1991) also discusses the importance of nutrition and eating healthily. (p. 128) If your library is anything like mine, you know that fruits usually take up more room than the rest of the food combined. I love dessert and snacking, but eating an apple as a snack instead can improve my productivity.

Pergande (2006) looked at long-term librarians who never went through burnout who still enjoy being a librarian. Pergande (2006) states reenergize every week and stresses that keeping the job new and fresh is one of the ways of avoiding burnout. (p. 79). In this case, change is good it is important that we keep up with technological change and other changes or risk being rather than become overwhelmed by it. Take a webinar on a topic that is confusing to you, for example This can be a helpful way to make transition and also ensure that you remain essential to your place of employment

Conclusion

My involvement at the USC Upstate Library has had a snowball effect becoming an essential librarian by following the six steps of finding a mentor, reading the literature, collaborating, adapting, becoming a leader, and persistence. At the beginning of your career and

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throughout, you will want to find a mentor and read literature to grow in your knowledge of library issues and trends to prepare you for the other steps in becoming an essential librarian. As the job advertisements in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* suggest, collaboration, adaptation, and leadership skills are three important qualities.

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