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Making the Transition from Private Business to Business Librarian

After spending over twenty years in the private sector, I decided to go in a different direction.

to contact me anytime, and I (we) will try to respond in a timely manner." I am fortunate to be in an environment that is focused on serving the needs of the customers—whether students, faculty, staff, or the public.

These statements are by no means an attempt to denigrate other business librarians who may not possess an MBA, but I feel having one can make a difference when dealing with schools who have expanded the business programs to include entrepreneurial studies; high-tech startups coming from engineering, medical, and technology schools; and community outreach programs for a number of venues, both for profit and non-profit. It is these schools with strong, business-oriented programs that would most likely benefit from the enhanced skills of a business librarian with an MBA or equivalent business experience.

Lessons Learned

The common ground between the academic and private sector is SERVICE!

In the private sector working in the steel industry, I was constantly learning about my product line and new products, as well as understanding my customer's business and all the intricacies of making many different grades of steel. It was of vital importance that I make correct recommendations regarding the use of products. A mistake could be not only financially costly, but life threatening. This is not dissimilar to what I do now; my success as a business librarian is contingent upon my ongoing product knowledge and the ability to articulate this knowledge, so that the patron understands how to use or retrieve data from the available resources. If I am incorrect, it will cost a patron or team loss of critical time, which may have an adverse effect on the project, the grade, or the credibility/reputation of the librarians.

We have a unique program at the Ross Business School called MAP (Multi-Discipline Action Program). This is a program in which companies all over the world pay UMICH (Ross) a fee for student services. In return, student teams work on an assigned project for a company, which is time sensitive, entails travel for weeks, and culminates in a presentation to both the company and faculty for a grade. This is a mandatory program for all Ross MBA students, and it is a high-stress situation for both the teams and the assigned librarians. We all have between 12 and 16 teams, and the time period (approximately 8 weeks) is anything but dull!

Having been in an environment that required me to be available 24/7, this is really something I enjoy! My experiences in the steel industry taught me to not only be knowledgeable and service oriented, but to be able to think outside the box when necessary!

An example of this is when something goes awry in the middle of an industrial project (as it always does!). This could include materials being damaged, not enough material to complete a project (and no time to order more), or an incident at the steel mill, such as: an explosion, loss of power, or flooding. Under these circumstances, it becomes necessary to improvise, adapt, and overcome. There is little time to sit down and analyze. No one wants to hear excuses, just solutions! This is the pinnacle of good service—to deliver under the gun!

