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From Corporate Liaison to Academic Liaison – Lessons Learned

There are obvious differences between corporate and academic libraries, though the concepts of patron, customer or client are primarily viewed in the same way. The types of resources and modes of delivery of information are diverse in both areas. However, in my opinion the greatest disparity is principally cosmetic. In the past I have worked in corporate libraries whose space would easily fill a ten by twenty foot storage unit. While the academic library where I currently serve could probably compare its square footage to that of a New York City block. Differences aside, there are parallels in the ways outreach efforts and liaison work is carried out in both settings. At the heart of those efforts lies the goal of achieving continued awareness of the resources or services provided by the library or the librarian. Both types of libraries aspire to be acknowledged as value-

important to be viewed as a purveyor of value. In a corporate environment, individual departments know that their continued existence hinges on how their operations affect the

added resource is the central part of an ongoing struggle for survival. In an academic setting, the library has the established reputation of being an authoritative resource, with collections

and does, as well as the understanding that perceptions can make or break your efforts if not carefully cultivated.

Case in point: For several years I worked as a librarian/information specialist for a major petroleum company whose library was in serious need of an image overhaul. In the past, it was highly regarded as an integral part of the corporation, but over the years something changed. The employees were more likely to patronize the library for recreational purposes instead of using the resources for work-related research. In the hope of changing the way the library was being perceived, our director hired a consultant to assist in the re-evaluation mission and to help restate its goals. The strategy created to move the library forward required the development of a liaison program and an aggressive outreach campaign. Our liaison efforts involved partnering with various divisions within the company. We attended department meetings with the intent of finding out about current projects, looking for signs of what may impact the company in the future. Using that intelligence in order to ensure that resources needed would be available, often before the requests were even made. The outreach campaign consisted of regular open houses, where we did more than just show off our resources. We used the opportunity to demonstrate how the collection and our expertise with a variety of proprietary databases could be valuable components in the research process. The library was able to re-establish itself as a value-added resource, but the liaison program and outreach

and build the case for change. Having the head of a department agree with your need for a new liaison should be more than enough evidence to get the action ratified. If a liaison relationship is not working, it can adversely affect your efforts to provide service to faculty and students. It takes strength and courage to go against the status quo. My advice to liaisons present and future is, if you have a system in place that works, by all means use it to your advantage.