

Positions of Transition

Why do some librarians switch careers? (part one of two)

by Mary Pergander

In one of my columns last year, I sought librarians who had successfully transitioned to other careers (*AL*, June/July 2006, p. 92). I received many thoughtful responses, including some that were incredulous.

For example, a librarian from Texas told me, "Just after completing my last library science class . . . I talked with a group of fellow students about their future plans. One person . . . had decided not to become a librarian. I could not believe that a person would complete the degree program knowing that [he] did not want to become a librarian."

From time to time, though, and for varying reasons, librarians choose to use their skills and knowledge in other fields. Some do this immediately after attaining their degrees. Others wait many years before doing so, like Sylvia Dresser of Deerfield, Illinois. "I hold an MLS degree granted in 1974," said Dresser. "I worked in libraries until 1998, and then bailed—now [I] am working as [a nonlibrary] association executive. I describe myself as a librarian who is no longer employed in a library."

MARY PERGANDER is director of Deerfield (Ill.) Public Library. Send comments or questions to working@ala.org.



What does experience as a librarian add to career-transition success?

What does experience as a librarian add to career-transition success? Aggie Fritz worked in several library settings before going back for a master's in counseling psychology. "I have been working as an addiction therapist . . . in Spokane, Washington, for 15 years," said Fritz. "My library background gives added dimension to my counseling. I already had years of experience of listening for the question behind the question when

doing reference work. . . . I find leading groups a piece of cake after years of doing storytime. All of that came out of my library experience."

Staying near home

Some have redirected their careers closer to their roots. For example, Jim Robertson has followed a more direct path to his new role in University Web Services at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. As he tells it, "I was a reference librarian for about four years, director of the Architecture Library for about five years, and then assistant university librarian for the last five years."

Robertson continued, "This past summer our university created a new office of University Web Services to bring together the management of our university's public websites under one

department. . . . I am now the director of that office . . . and I report directly to our university president."

What made this transition easier? "The technical skills, the management skills, the leadership skills, the information services skills, the web services skills, the enterprise-level software-systems management skills, and the creative entrepreneurship skills I developed during these years prepared me for this new opportunity."

Next month: more personal stories of successful transitions. ■

WORKING WISDOM

Is an alternative career for you? To explore this further, you might want to take a look at G. Kim Dority's *Rethinking Information Work: A Career Guide for Librarians and Other Information Professionals* (Libraries Unlimited, 2006). Dority has taught a class on this topic at the University of Denver for several years, and her book is part professional insight, part workbook, and part description of alternative careers.

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