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Information Outlook, January/February 2015

Special Libraries Association

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE SPECIAL LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION

HIRING LIBRARIANS AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS

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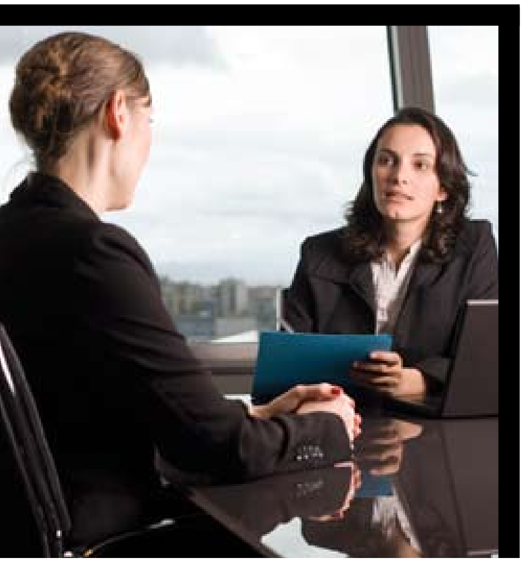
THE MAGAZINE OF THE SPECIAL LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION



AMC CONTRACT · SEARCH COMMITTEE

AMC Hired to Manage Staff Operations

In keeping with its decision of August 2015 to engage an association management company (AMC) to lead staff and support operations at headquarters, the SLA Board of Directors announced that it has reached an agreement with MCI USA (formerly Coulter), a leading AMC based in Northern Virginia, to assume staff leadership and management duties beginning March 1.

In an e-mail message on February 10, President Tom Rink assured SLA members they would experience no interruptions or reductions in service.

"Although transitioning to an AMC may seem disruptive at a time when we are finalizing our conference arrangements, laying the foundation for our Pooled Resources Initiative, and preparing to roll out our new online community, SLA Connect, it will actually *ensure* that you continue to receive the services you expect and deserve," he wrote. "Calls to SLA will use the same phone number, and beginning March 1 will be answered by a live voice, not an automated phone attendant. E-mail addresses will remain the same as well, as will the URL for the SLA Website. In short, your day-to-day member experience will not change."

Under the agreement, three current SLA staff will continue serving the association, with targeted assistance from MCI USA support staff. A focus of their efforts will be implementing the Road Map for SLA's Future, which the board approved in July 2015. MCI USA leaders have "mapped" the goals and objectives of the Road Map into four strategic priority areas—engagement, knowledge management, partnerships, and success—and developed a staffing structure to support these areas.

Erin Fuller, MCI USA's president of Association Management & Consulting and a certified association executive, will serve as SLA's transition executive until a permanent executive director is hired.

Call Issued for Search Committee to Hire New Executive Director

SLA members are being encouraged to volunteer to help MCI USA, the association management company that will be overseeing SLA's staff and operations, hire a new executive director.

In an e-mail message on February 23, President Tom Rink issued a call for approximately five SLA members to serve on a Search Committee. The committee members will perform the following tasks:

- Developing an interview timeline and protocol;
- Identifying additional resources to share with candidates;
- Identifying a firm date for in-person interviews;
- Participating (either virtually or in person) in the interviews; and
- Ranking the candidates after the interviews.

Search Committee members will serve from March 15-April 30 and be expected to contribute approximately 10-20 hours of their time to committee duties. Committee members are not required to travel to the Washington, D.C., area for the interviews—they may participate remotely using a video conferencing program such as Skype—but any expenses related to their participation in the interviews will be their responsibility.

SLA members interested in serving on the Search Committee must contact Rink and provide their name, organization, title, mailing address, e-mail address, phone number, and SLA membership details. They must also briefly answer the following questions:

1. Have you previously participated in a senior-level search process?
2. Have you ever participated in a search process outside the library or information field?
3. Why are you interested in serving on this committee?

"The selection of a new executive director of SLA is the next step in moving us forward to a stronger future, and I encourage all of you with an interest in this process to volunteer," Rink wrote. "Remember, the deadline to respond is March 1, so please reply as soon as possible." **SLA**

FOSTERING TALENT · COPYRIGHT ENFORCEMENT

CEOs Say Fostering Talent is Top Priority for 2016

A slowing global economy and growing concerns about the availability of talent are prompting many business leaders to focus on improving their internal capabilities this year, according to a survey by the Conference Board.

More than 600 executives from across the globe were asked how they plan to respond to six key business challenges consistently identified as core concerns in previous years: human capital, corporate brand and reputation, operational excellence, innovation and digitalization, regulation and risk, and sustainability. The survey responses revealed that CEOs have shifted their thinking on human capital in recent years, from a belief that talent is readily available in the marketplace to an emphasis on internal development and engagement. The responses also showed that human capital is closely connected to operational excellence and brand/reputation responsibility.

"Deep-seated anxieties about talent and human capital pervade this year's survey results," said Rebecca Ray, Ph.D., a co-author of the report and executive vice president for knowledge organization at the Conference Board. "From their hot-button issues for 2016 to their long-term strategies in multiple business areas, CEOs are wide awake to the risks posed by rapidly changing skill requirements, on one hand, and a historic slowdown in working-age population growth on the other."

The executives were also asked which "hot-button issues" are likely to demand enhanced vigilance and tactical responses in 2016. They identified the following concerns:

1) The failure to attract and/or retain top talent;

2) The need to develop next-generation leaders;

3) Slowing growth in emerging economies;

4) New global competition; and

5) Volatility in cash flow.

To address these risks, the executives said they are making organizational capability their top priority for 2016. Specifically, they plan to use engagement, inclusion, and continual improvement as building blocks for high-performing cultures that can support growth and spur innovation amid widespread uncertainty.

For more information about the survey results, visit http://www.conference-board.org/press/pressdetail.cfm?pressid=6656.

Creative Industries Seek Better International Copyright Enforcement

A group representing individuals and organizations that produce creative works—including music, films and television shows, video games, and books and other printed materials—called on the U.S. Government to leverage trade agreements and other trade tools to combat acts, practices, and policies that hamper their ability to deliver their content to audiences overseas.

The International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA), in a brief submitted to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), noted that creative industries generate more than $1 trillion of economic output and account for nearly 5.5 million U.S. jobs. But because these industries depend on vigorous and consistent enforcement of copyright laws for their survival, they are especially vulnerable to what the IIPA calls "unfair competition from those who engage in infringement on a commercial scale as a high-profit, low-risk enterprise."

In its brief, the IIPA calls on the USTR to use its influence and existing trade and copyright agreements to engender greater international respect for copyright protection and broader enforcement of existing copyright laws. In particular, the IIPA asks the USTR to designate Ukraine as a Priority Foreign Country—meaning that it needs to be investigated for IP abuses and, if found in violation of U.S. trade laws, subjected to sanctions—and recommends that it place six other countries (Chile, China, India, Russia, Thailand, and Vietnam) on its Priority Watch List.

The IIPA submitted its brief as part of an annual review, required by Congress, of the global state of intellectual property rights protection and enforcement. The U.S. Government uses the review and resulting report (known as a "Special 301" Report because it is mandated by Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974) to guide its efforts on these issues and improve the intellectual property rights environment for authors, brand owners, and inventors around the world.

"The U.S. Trade Representative's Special 301 Review initiates a crucial annual dialogue on markets that have unfulfilled potential for U.S. creative products, and highlights the changes needed in the legal and enforcement structures in those countries to permit fair and expanding marketplaces both online and offline," said IIPA Counsel Steven J. Metalitz. "This week's signing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a timely reminder of the valuable role our government plays in promoting U.S. economic interests abroad, and of the need to seek enforceable commitments from key trading partners to remove impediments to legitimate marketplaces."

To learn more, visit http://www.iipa.com/pressreleases/2016spec301pressrelease.pdf. **SLA**

Asking the Right Questions When Hiring

INTERVIEWS ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOB CANDIDATES TO REVEAL THEIR INNER SELVES, BUT HIRING MANAGERS MUST ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS TO ELICIT SUCH RESPONSES.

BY MARJORIE M.K. HLAVA

How do you find good people to hire? What do you look for in new employees? What kinds of interview questions do you ask?

I am asked these questions frequently by attendees at industry meetings or by clients seeking to build an in-house database or taxonomy or implement a cutting-edge search program. They want to know what kinds of questions they can ask in an interview, how they can find good people to hire, and what kinds of qualities they should look for in a job applicant.

Finding excellent employees is both an art and a science, as is retaining them. The most dangerous and risky thing organizations do is hire people—it is a corporate gamble.

At Access Innovations, we have devised a list of questions to ask potential employees. The questions are designed to give us a good indication of what kinds of people the interviewees are. In this article, I will discuss these questions, describe the kinds of responses we look for, and explain what we can discern from the responses we receive.

The Pre-interview Process

The first and most obvious step in the hiring process is to look over the résumé. Does it list the skills and education you are looking for? Does it show longevity at a previous job? Three to five years in one position is a good indicator of stability and also means the applicant is a seasoned worker.

We also look for gaps in employment. For example, if a résumé shows no job for a two-year period, we want to know the cause. Could the applicant have been raising a child, or moving to a new city or state? Was the applicant in prison? (Yes, we have had more than one felon apply, and in some cases we hired them.) Find out what those gaps represent—they will tell you a lot about the candidate.

If the résumé looks promising, we ask the applicant to come in, fill out an application, and take some tests. Completing an application ensures that all of our basic questions are answered if they are not covered in the résumé. We ask people to fill out the application by hand, because a hand-written application gives us an indication of neatness and legibility. Although neatness in handwriting is not a major factor in our hiring decisions, we want to see what shortcuts people use when completing the application. Résumés may be attached and referenced in the application.

We require all potential employees to take spelling and proofreading tests at the time of application. The spelling test consists of words taken from the Gregg's shorthand list of the 200 most

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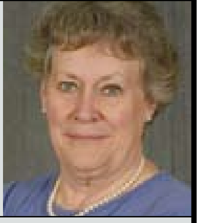

frequently misspelled words. We are looking for people who are attentive to detail and have good technical writing skills. If they can't spell or spot spelling errors, chances are their eye for detail is not as keen as we would prefer. For us, details are crucial to creating a quality product.

The final test we administer is a typing test—on an IBM Selectric typewriter. We don't really care how fast someone can type; we care how they react to the machine. Many people (especially younger applicants) have never used a typewriter. Some applicants have even refused to take the typing test, since they are applying for a professional position.

An applicant's performance on the tests, and the manner in which he or she treats the people administering the tests, go a long way toward determining whether the hiring process proceeds to an interview. If people refuse to take the tests, we consider them uncooperative and not good candidates for employment. (Note to younger readers: When applying for a job, pay attention to your manners with the people conducting the initial intake. These folks are part of the hiring team and often have considerable influence.)

The most dangerous and risky thing organizations do is hire people—it is a corporate gamble.

The Interview Process

At the beginning of the interview, we outline the procedure to be followed: reviewing the application, asking leading questions (and we say up front that the questions are "leading"), describing the job, and, finally, allowing the applicant to ask questions. We do not tell an applicant about the job at the beginning because people will often couch their answers in ways they think will best suit the position. More than once, however, we have interviewed a person with one position in mind, only to find he or she is a much better fit for another position.

We start our interviews with potential employees by asking them questions about their previous jobs and encouraging them to talk about themselves. This phase of the interview gives us a good indication of a candidate's job history and what he or she thinks is important about a job. Generally speaking, if what an applicant thinks is important compares favorably with what we think is important, odds are good that this is a potential employee.

After ensuring that the application and résumé leave no gaps or questions about experience, we commence asking questions, as follows:

Define "professional." It is our feeling that a professional can be from any walk of life. A piece a paper does not make someone professional—you can be as professional a dogcatcher or garbage collector as you can a president, librarian, or chemist. Every line of work has its own aspects of professionalism.

At Access Innovations, we are looking for people who are motivated to get the job done no matter what it takes. We give interviewees a hypothetical job problem and ask them to suggest possible solutions. This gives us an idea of their approach to solving problems. One hypothetical situation we like to present is this:

It is 3:30 p.m., and your boss comes to you with a rush job that he says he needs first thing in the morning. The building is locked at 5:00 p.m. and you are not allowed to stay past that time. You expect this assignment to take you at least four hours to complete. What do you do?

This question gives us a clear idea of whether the applicant is a professional. Some librarians get caught up in the "professional speak" they learned in library school. I want people who will behave and think in a professional manner.

Define "quality." This question gives us a very good idea of what people value in themselves and in others. We are looking not only for their definition of quality but also for an idea of what they think is important in creating a product or delivering a service.

Describe your best boss and your worst boss. The reason for asking this question is to identify the qualities that interviewees value in others and themselves. (If an applicant has no previous work experience, we substitute a teacher or some other authority figure for a boss.) Often, in asking about best/worst boss situations, we get interesting insights into an applicant's strengths and weaknesses in previous job assignments.

We ask interviewees to describe their best boss first—and we ask twice. Interviewees who lead with descriptions of their worst boss may hold a generally negative outlook. We want positive people.

What would you like to be doing in 5 years? This is a good follow-up to the previous question, because sometimes people are merely looking for a part-time job until they finish school (which is fine) and sometimes they are looking for a career-oriented job. This question will give you a good idea of their aspirations—whether they are looking to move up into a managerial slot, want to be in the trenches working with real data, or see this as an interim step to an entirely different career.

Body language is as important a response to this question as the actual answer. Some people have a very clear-cut idea of what they want to do, while some do not. Depending on the position you are seeking to fill, that may or may not be important.

What do you do when you get angry? The answer to this question will give us an indication of how clearly candidates assess themselves. We don't really care what they do when they get angry—we care how well they know themselves.

An interesting angle here is to see whether a candidate thinks he or she handles anger differently at work than at home. It is equally important to know whether a candidate is the type of person who goes away and sulks or who throws a "fit" in the office every time things don't go his or her way. In the end, it doesn't really matter whether candidates have a bad temper, only whether they can handle their temper.

Describe your best job and your worst job. We don't want to know which job it was, just what made it the best or worst job you ever had. The job characteristics that candidates outline in their responses generally reflect what they find most and least important in people and in work. How well do we measure up against these characteristics?

Describe an emergency situation in which you were involved and how you reacted. Applicants often ask us whether this question refers to an emergency situation at work. We tell them that's part of the question—we want to know what they consider an emergency and how they behave under that level of pressure. If an applicant tells us her boss came to her at 4:30 with a rush job and she had just broken a fingernail and her boyfriend was coming at 5:00 to pick her up, and she considered that an emergency, she probably is not a good candidate for us.

How fast do you type? We don't ask *whether* they type, but *how fast* they type. True, we already know how fast they type, because they took the typing test. What we are really looking for here are their reactions to the question, not a number.

Nowadays, nearly everyone, from the CEO to the receptionist, sits at a computer keyboard. If we are hiring for a higher-level position such as a librarian, a programmer, a technical writer, or a manager, and an applicant responds that he or she doesn't type and is interviewing for a "professional" job, I do not want to have that person on my team. However, if candidates say they are not very good typists, I am fine with that. My concern is that people be willing to perform basic office tasks.

What would be an ideal job for you? We, of course, are interested in learning whether the job they are applying for is the ideal job in their eyes. More than that, however, we are interested in what kinds of things they value in a job—good people to work with, mental challenges, an ideal geographic location, and so forth. These preferences will generally come out when they respond to this question. You can also frequently tell from their answers whether applicants are trying to say what they think you want to hear or are actually telling you something about themselves.

Do you have any questions? We always provide job candidates with an opportunity to ask us questions, and we answer in as straightforward a fashion as possible. If they want to change any of their earlier answers, they can do so at this point.

Concluding the Interview

Now that the candidates have drawn a good picture of themselves, we describe the position. We do this toward the end of the interview because we want to obtain the candidates' unbiased opinions of themselves. Describing the job early in the interview might change the applicants' answers to the questions we pose.

To conclude the interview, we ask a rather straightforward question: Why should we hire you? Most people blanch a little bit at this question, so we indicate that this is the time for their sales pitch. It is their opportunity to tell us about the qualities they have (especially those they weren't able to discuss earlier in the interview) that would be of interest to us as potential employers. After they respond, the interview is concluded.

Following the interview, we always check at least three references. Generally, we start with the people listed on the résumé, but we do not confine our checks to only those people. The references on the résumé are for the individual; we also try to find people who have worked with or for the applicant to get a well-rounded idea of what he or she is really like. If we uncovered any possible problems during the interview, we try to probe a bit to see how serious they are.

So far, this approach has worked very well for us. In fact, many of our employees remember the questions they were asked during their interview and ask their fellow team members how they answered the questions!

I know that many other people within the information industry use very similar questions and practices to hire their employees. We do have other questions we ask, but these will give you a strong indication of how we approach the hiring process. I encourage you to use these questions or variations of them. **SLA**

Hiring Librarians and Ensuring their Early Success

HIRING A NEW LIBRARIAN IS BOTH A CHALLENGE AND AN OPPORTUNITY, AND IT TESTS THE PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS OF THE SUPERVISOR.

BY KATHEL DUNN, PHD

Hiring a librarian is an opportunity to bring a fresh perspective to your staff, add new skills to your team, and utilize the technical, project management, and overall "get things done" abilities of the new hire in accomplishing the work of the library. For the hiring manager, hiring requires planning, a thorough understanding of the hard and soft skills needed for the position, and a commitment to devoting time to orient and mentor the new hire in the first months (if not the first year) of employment.

Planning to Hire

Hiring to fill an open position is an opportunity to think thoroughly about the skills and characteristics needed for the position and articulate those skills and characteristics to everyone involved in the search process. If you are the hiring manager, make sure that other staff are aware—and, if there is a search committee, that they are aware—of the kinds of skills you want.

Having a conversation with the other staff and the search committee about the skills needed for the position will help reveal any misconceptions, especially among the staff. For example, if you're hiring someone with social media skills because you want to turn social media duties over to the new person, does everyone on the team know that? Or did an existing staff person think she would be able to turn some unwanted tasks over to the new person and begin leading the library's social media efforts? Perhaps the previous holder of the position managed the reference desk schedule, so scheduling and organizational skills mattered a great deal; your intention may be to shift scheduling to someone else on the team and hire a leader-coach to develop subject-specific skills with librarians who work with researchers.

Staff who participate in the hiring process need to know the purpose and responsibilities of the new position so they can successfully participate in reviewing applications and meeting candidates. The hiring process can also serve as a succession planning tool for staff, provided you engage them in planning discussions early in the process. Staff may be able to develop themselves professionally for new opportunities if they know the direction in which the library is heading and the positions that will likely result.

Advance planning can also reduce biases in your hiring and provide a clear rationale for hiring a particular candidate. For example, say you want X, Y, and Z skills in a candidate, but members of the search committee are leaning toward a candidate with X and Y skills only, even though the candidate pool contains someone who has X, Y, and Z skills. As the hiring manager, you can choose the X-Y-Z candidate, but you'll know why you are doing so.

KATHEL DUNN is associate fellowship coordinator at the National Library of Medicine (NLM) in Bethesda, Md. She can be reached at dunnk@mail.nlm.nih.gov. The opinions expressed in this article are her own and not those of the NLM or the National Institutes of Health.

Wanted: Hard and Soft Skills

Today's librarians typically need a wide range of "hard" skills in areas such as digitization, instructional design, outreach, programming, Website usability, Web design, user services, systems, cataloging, metadata, and data management. The challenge in the hiring process is to determine whether the applicants actually possess these and other necessary skills for the job.

The key to addressing this challenge is to encourage applicants to be as specific and descriptive about their skills as possible, both in their written materials—their résumé and cover letter—and in their interviews. Ask them to describe in depth *how* they do what they do and *why* they do what they do. Asking applicants about their depth of experience and the "why" of their current job will help you discover skills in the modest and unmask the glib.

The "soft" skills desired in an employee can be harder to identify in an interview, but it is possible to do so. These skills—being a team player, helping others succeed, sharing knowledge with others, and accepting criticism—are critical to an employee's success.

One way to discover whether applicants possess the requisite soft skills is to make sure they do the majority of the speaking during the interview. If, as a hiring manager, you often find yourself doing a lot of the talking, ask an applicant to walk you through his or her résumé, one position at a time. Your job as a hiring manager is to ask the follow-on questions: Why did you take this position? What did you do in that job? I see you did X and Y; tell me more about them. What did you like about the position? What was challenging about it? Why did you leave the position? Why did you take the next position? Asking candidates to speak again and again about their work experience can reveal a lot about how they work.

After the Hiring

As the hiring manager and supervisor, you play a significant role in your new hire's success and particularly in shaping his or her first few months on the job. You can use that time to implement an orientation program, observe your new hire, and address any potential difficulties he or she is encountering.

The orientation plan is entirely in your hands. You will want to give the new hire a copy of the employee handbook, set up computer passwords, and arrange introductory lunches with colleagues or a welcome breakfast for the department or all library staff. Where possible, arrange one-on-one meetings with others in his or her cohort—department heads, fellow librarians, or key users of the library—to allow the new employee to make connections. Ask someone to serve as a "buddy" or mentor for the first few days, as a new employee might find it easier to ask a peer for help rather than ask his or her supervisor.

Early in your new employee's tenure is the best time to make your expectations (and those of your organization) clear. Is punctuality critical? Is it necessary to submit work for review? If so, state it up front: "Punctuality is really important here; you need to arrive right on time. Also, any public-facing document must be reviewed before it's posted. It's what we do here, even for light updates to the Website."

Early in your new employee's tenure is the best time to make your expectations (and those of your organization) clear.

The first few months are also a good time to directly observe your new employee at work. In the first few days, ask the new employee to show you how to find and open the files to which he or she should have access. Just ask, "Can you show me how to access the shared drive? Not to offend you, but sometimes new staff don't have their computers set up as they should, and I've found it's best to check." Or ask, "Can you show me how to make an appointment in Outlook using the scheduling assistant?" Questions like these are easiest to ask during the first few days of employment; later on, such requests can seem more intrusive and have a "gotcha" feel to them.

The first few months also present an opportunity to observe whether the new employee is connecting with other colleagues—not necessarily making friends, but establishing a professional network within the library and beyond. You should also use this time to review the new employee's work and correct any problems. Direct observation of a new employee is easier for both you and the employee during the first few weeks than it is after several months. It's also one of the easiest times for a new employee to accept critiques of his or her work.

When Things Go Wrong

Some of the potential problems with a new employee are obvious, including tardiness and absenteeism, difficulty meeting deadlines and completing work, and trouble working well or communicating with others. Other challenges are a little more nuanced and can leave a hiring manager puzzling over what to do next. If your instinct is telling you that something is wrong, you're probably right.

Some trouble signs to watch for are "enthusiastic disconnects" between the responsibilities of the position and the interests and activities of the new employee, mismatches between the skills required to perform the job and the skill set of the new employee, and a new employee who doesn't display any enthusiasm for his or her work. New employees who display enthusiastic disconnects are often smart and fun to be around and bring a lot of energy to the workplace, but their energy is often

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misplaced. These disconnects can take many forms, including the following:

- **An inability to describe his or her work.** The employee may be very enthusiastic and able to talk at length about the newest technology or changes in the field, but if you don't recognize what she or he is talking about, it's a sign that something is not quite right.
- **Proposing ideas that are not within the scope of the organization.** For example, if you work for a private institution and the new employee wants to establish programming for the public, that's a real disconnect that needs to be explored.
- **Proposing the use of technology that the organization has decided not to use.** There is nothing wrong with proposing new ideas, but when a new employee persists in advocating technology after being told it will not be used, this suggests a similar disconnect.

The remedy for enthusiastic disconnects is time—your time. Sit down with the new employee, tell him or her about the priorities for the library, then ask the employee to tell you the key things you said. It may take multiple conversations to align the employee's thinking with yours, but this is an effort you want to make to ensure everyone on your team is going in the same direction.

The skills mismatch is a challenge that also is remedied with time: time spent learning, time providing additional mentoring (by you as a supervisor or by a knowledgeable colleague), and time spent on projects and assignments that stretch the new employee.

The challenge posed by an employee who displays no enthusiasm for any of the work at hand is particularly troubling. The remedy here is similar to that used with an over-enthusiastic employee: conversation and exploration. If you can, find out what is really going on with the employee and where his or her interests lie.

If All Else Fails

No matter the challenge, if time, conversation, coaching, and alternatives do not yield changes, the next step is to disconnect the employee from the position. That step is most likely not one that either you as the supervisor or the employee wants to take. Using a well-planned and well-executed hiring process, followed by a solid onboarding program, is your best hedge against such an outcome. SLA

10 Questions: Elizabeth Greenfield

HER FLEXIBILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO LEARN NEW THINGS HAVE HELPED BETH GREENFIELD NAVIGATE A CAREER PATH THAT HAS ENCOMPASSED THE PUBLISHING, EDUCATIONAL, LEGAL, AND LIBRARY SCIENCE WORLDS.

BY STUART HALES

Beth Greenfield had always wanted to be a lawyer, so a couple of years after graduating from college, she applied to law school. And although she worked only briefly as an attorney after earning her law degree, she found positions that drew upon her legal knowledge, and her career seemed set.

Then, one day, she presented a continuing legal education program to a group of law librarians.

"It had never occurred to me to go to graduate school to study library and information science, but I was bowled over by what these people knew," she says. "The librarians—what they knew, what they could find, what they could do—just knocked me over. I was so impressed with them that I said to myself, I want to be able to do what they do."

Nearly 20 years and an MLIS degree later, Beth is still convinced she made the right decision to change careers, even though she—like many other legal librarians—is feeling the effects of cutbacks and layoffs at law firms. Since being laid off in 2012, she's been working on contract assignments (primarily with law firms) and providing independent legal research and library management services. But aside from saving more money while she was working in full-time jobs, she wouldn't do anything differently.

"I had a good progression going. I would just be sure to heed my own advice and continue to be adaptable and flexible, and always be ready to learn and volunteer or take on extra work or get involved in company or office activities to show that you're part of the team."

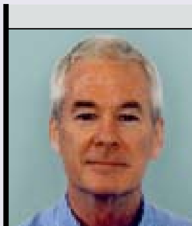
Information Outlook spoke to Beth recently about her career, the lessons she's learned working from home, and the stops on her local "library tour" of Northern New Jersey.

Not long after earning an undergraduate degree in political science and sociology, you went to law school and then, 15 years later, went back to school for your MLIS degree. What prompted you to take this path?

By the time I finished college, I was kind of tired of the whole educational scene and just wanted to go experience the "real world." So I took two years off after college and worked in map publishing.

After a while, I applied to law school. I had always known I wanted to be a lawyer. I really have no idea why—it was just something that appealed to me.

In 1994, I was working at Matthew Bender, a legal publisher, and the company underwent a corporate reorganiza-



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tion. They reduced their size from about 1,800 employees to about 700, and I eventually lost my job.

I went to work at an organization called Practicing Law Institute, which is the oldest and largest independent producer of continuing legal education programs. I was what's called a program attorney. I was responsible for certain subject areas—I would put together the CLE programs, find people to chair the programs, help find the other speakers, edit the written materials that accompany the presentations, and so on.

One of PLI's programs was for law librarians. When I left PLI, I went out on my own and started working on a consultant basis for an organization that was then called Counsel Connect. I was working from home, presenting online CLE programs, and the first one I did was for law librarians.

It had never occurred to me to go to graduate school to study library and information science, but I was bowled over by what these people knew. This was in 1996, when a commercially viable graphical browser had fairly recently become available. The librarians—what they knew, what they could find, what they could do—just knocked me over.

I was so impressed with them that I said to myself, I want to be able to do what they do. I thought, I can take a course here and a course there, or I can get a recognized, credible degree that will give me the credentials to pursue whatever I want to do with this. That's when I decided to apply to Rutgers University to get an MLIS.

I really wanted to be able to do what those law librarians did, to know what they knew. They totally inspired me. They weren't like the librarians I knew in law school and college, largely because I went to law school and college before there were commercially available browsers. And very few academics were using the Internet, and certainly students weren't, at least as far as I knew.

I was just so impressed with them and their ability to research the hell out of anything and find information. So I decided that was what I was going to do.

Beth Greenfield

When did SLA come into the picture, and why did you join?

When I joined Latham & Watkins as an information resources manager in 2005, the firm paid for my SLA membership. So I said, OK, if it's free to me, I'll take it. *(laughs)*

I had already been a member of AALL, the American Association of Law Libraries, for several years on my own. But when I went to Latham and they told me that senior managers were entitled to two professional memberships, I took AALL, of course, and also SLA because I wanted exposure to the broader environment of librarians and library managers.

My life has been very law-oriented; SLA has introduced me to people in other fields, which has been very helpful. And I've maintained my SLA membership since leaving Latham without anyone else paying for it, so obviously I've found significant value in it.

Let's go back to your time at Matthew Bender. You graduated from law school and practiced law for a year or so, then joined Matthew Bender as a legal editor and worked there for almost 10 years. Why did you make the switch to the editorial world, and what did you learn from working in that field?

After law school, I worked for about a year in a plaintiff's personal injury trial firm. To make money—because clients' lawyers get paid on a contingency basis—you have to be able to try cases, take depositions, settle cases, and so forth. And the unfortunate truth is that I wasn't of much use to them because I failed the bar exam on my first attempt, so I couldn't go out and do the things that bring money into a clients' firm.

Eventually I did pass the exam, and once you pass it, nobody—well, almost nobody—cares that you failed it the first time. *(laughs)* But since I wasn't admitted to the bar when I wanted to be a practicing attorney, it was difficult to find a job as a lawyer.

While I was awaiting the results of my second try at the bar exam, a friend of my husband—who, by the way, I had met in my first legal research class; how appropriate is that for a future law librarian?—suggested that I apply for a position at Matthew Bender, where she was working. I took her advice, got a job, and ended up staying there for nine years. I've always loved the research/writing/editorial process, and apparently I was pretty good at it, because they promoted me. I ran the international division, and I especially enjoyed the contact with authors from all around the world and getting to know a little bit about other legal systems.

After you earned your MLIS, you worked as a librarian for law firms. Did you enjoy those jobs, and did you see yourself finishing your career as a law firm librarian?

I got my first job through a wonderful woman at a local temp agency who, even though I was only about halfway through my MLIS degree, was able to get me a job at the New York office of a gigantic international law firm. That was my first experience at the reference desk, in 2000.

I figured working as a librarian at law firms would be my career path. That's what I thought; that's what I hoped. I loved working at those firms and the relationships I developed with what I called *my clients*—I don't like the term *patrons*. I loved getting to know them, learning what they were interested in, providing them with stuff they didn't even know they needed, anticipating their needs. I just really, really enjoyed that. And I thought that, years and years down the road, that would be where I finished my career.

In 2012, Latham & Watkins closed the office in which you were working, and you lost your job. Since then you've been working on contract assignments, primarily with law firms, and providing independent legal research and library management services. What are the key lessons you've learned from being on your own?

The key lessons I've learned are that, first, you should save money until it hurts, because you never know what's going to happen.

A second lesson is that, because I would love to get back to the law firm world but know that it may not happen, I must always be ready for change. That means I must be adaptable, be ready to learn new platforms and new resources, and be teachable, not resistant. The world is not standing still for me.

I've encountered too many librarians—and maybe it's an age thing, or maybe it's career fatigue—who say, I know what I need to know, I don't need to learn about the latest new thing. And I think that's a big mistake. I like a job where I'm learning something new every day. Being adaptable and being willing to learn are two very, very important characteristics of being ready for change.

A third major point is that there is a new normal, which is that an awful lot of our work can be done remotely. When I was at Latham & Watkins—heck, when I was at all of my jobs—I did work for people in offices around the world. I could be sitting at my desk at any of the firms where I worked and get a call or an e-mail from our office in, say, Moscow or Tokyo, because when it was after hours there, it was business hours here, and we could help them.

We had a group e-mail list at one of the firms where I worked, and when a question was sent to the list, whoever got to it first would take care of it, regardless of location. And one of the firms I did contract work for has a piece of software where requesters enter their request along with client and billing information, and whoever gets it first—it comes up in a queue—takes it, regardless of where they are. You don't pick and choose; you just take the next one that comes along.

Beth at Coit Tower in Pioneer Park, during a visit to San Francisco.

The point is, be prepared for the possibility that, in the future, you may not be needed physically where you are now. The fact is that I can do my work from here in Northern New Jersey or from Buenos Aires. It doesn't matter where I am.

As further evidence of the new normal, there is a movement going on to consolidate back office operations in lower-cost geographic locations. I'm not going to name names, but an organization where I interviewed is working with several law firms to consolidate their library operations in a city in a rural state where the cost of living is much, much lower than in major or even second-tier cities. Subject to privilege, confidentiality, and privacy regulations, the people would be employed by their individual firms' libraries, but working in a common setting. So I might be sitting next to someone from one law firm and across from someone with another law firm. Why pay for a library in the New York office or the Los Angeles office when the work can be done in a back office in a rural state?

This is happening in other fields as well. It's happening in accounting; it's happening in marketing. You don't need to physically be in a big office and take up expensive square footage when that space can be occupied by fee earners. And yes, I know that many firms bill for their librarians' time, but that time can be spent and billed from anywhere.

This is something that I think people need to be aware of, because everyone is trying to cut costs. And I should add that I know of at least a couple of major law firms that have also moved at least some of their attorneys to these

Beth and her family enjoy the Christmas holiday together.

rural locations for the same reasons. So the lawyers shouldn't think they're immune!

When you say this is the "new normal" for law librarians, are you saying you think this is a permanent change?

I have sort of a two-part answer for this. Back in the mid-1990s, a major law firm based in Chicago fired their entire library staff and outsourced it to a company that provides technical, reference, and research services. If I remember correctly, within three years they had rehired their library staff and gone back to having their own people on their own premises.

But that was 20 years ago; since then, we've had the Great Recession. I think now, once you move an entire department out, it's hard to bring them back, especially after you've reallocated the space and seen the benefit to the bottom line. As a result, I don't see it going backward. I see working remotely, consolidating services in one physical location, as a growing trend.

I do think, though, that the lawyers in the firms enjoy establishing relationships with the librarians. At the firm I mentioned that has the request software, I sometimes would get a call from someone saying, "I'm about to enter a request. Will you please take it when you see it appear on the list?" They wanted *me* to do it—we had a relationship.

I used to do what I called "drive bys" when I was with the firms I worked for. After I got to know people and their needs and their personalities, I would walk down the hall and I'd pop my head in and say, "I know you're working on a big case. If there's anything I can do for you, if you need anything, let me know." Attorneys are under a lot of time pressure because they bill by the hour, and they really appreciated that.

Obviously, you can't do that from a remote location, but you can still build relationships by phone. And the desire to build relationships is never going to end—human-to-human contact can be really important to understanding your users' needs. But the physical location with the physical face-to-face relationships is going to change because of this new normal of consolidating and relocating services. I just don't see it going back to the way it was before.

Given this new normal and all of the things you've learned and experienced over the past 15 years, what would you do differently if you were graduating from library school today?

As I said earlier, on a personal note, I would save a whole lot more money! *(laughs)* I don't care how much or how little money I made, I would save as much money as I possibly could. The world is changing, and you never know what's going to happen and when you're going to need that money.

But aside from that, I don't know that I would change much that I've done. I had a good progression going. I would just be sure to heed my own advice and continue to be adaptable and flexible, and always be ready to learn and volunteer or take on extra work or get involved in company or office activities to show that you're part of the team.

In your ideal world, what happens next for you? Do you get a call from a law firm asking you to be their law librarian? Do you continue to work from home? Do you win the Powerball drawing?

In my perfect dream world, I would be a full-time employee of a law firm as a research librarian. I'd also gladly be a manager again. And in my perfect dream world, I'd do it by working from home, although I enjoy the person-to-person relationship building so much that I'm not sure I would give up working onsite entirely, or even mostly.

When I worked for PricewaterhouseCoopers, it was a remote position, and it was a beautiful thing. My hours were 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and I could get up at 7:30 in the morning and be at work at 8:00. And I wasn't one of those "sitting around in my pajamas" kind of telecommuters—I made a point of dressing appropriately and behaving in a businesslike manner, even though there was nobody around to see me. It's all about attitude, but in the end, working from home was really enjoyable for me.

Ultimately, I would really love to be a full-time employee again. If that doesn't work out, I plan to continue to look for more individual research clients. I have some, not enough to live on yet, but I'd like to develop it further.

You've done a lot of writing, especially book reviews. Have you ever thought of writing a book yourself, and if so, what would you write about?

When I was in graduate school, I wrote a paper about the information-gathering behavior of legal professionals, because of course I'm going to write about lawyers, right? That paper was really interesting to research. I got in touch with some of the really big-name librarians in the field, and they were all so giving of their knowledge. They shared copies of their writings and took phone calls from me—further evidence of the helping, sharing nature of librarians.

My graduate school advisor at the time said she thought this would make a great book, because there isn't one on this subject. There are books about the information-gathering behavior of lots of other professions, but at that time there wasn't much on lawyers. I really had to piece together a lot of stuff.

Anyway, she thought it would make a great book, and maybe it would, but it seemed to me like it would be an awful lot of work for something that would sell maybe 15 copies. So I've never really given a book much thought.

I've really enjoyed writing the articles I've written. For the most recent one I wrote, on career transitions for *Spectrum*, the magazine of AALL, I got the idea in April 2012 when I was unemployed. I was thinking, there aren't any law firms that seem to be hiring—I wonder if a college or a law school would consider hiring me. So I thought, maybe I'll post something to law-lib, which is a listserv for law librarians. And then I said, no, I could write an article about this.

My idea was approved in May, and then I started a new job in June. The deadline for my article was in September, and I was working 40 hours a week, and all of a sudden it didn't seem like such a great idea. *(laughs)* I had to do all this research and write the article on top of working 40 hours a week, and I thought, maybe I could have timed this better!

It's hard work writing a decent-length article, but it's really enjoyable. A book—I don't know if I could do that. So I've never really given it further thought.

You've lived most of your life in New York and the New Jersey suburbs of New York. If some librarians were visiting you for the weekend and the New York Public Library was closed, where would you take them?

The first place I would take them is the Newark Public Library. When people think of Newark, they think—well, let's just say Newark doesn't have a great reputation. But it has an outstanding public library, with an amazing collection focusing on New Jersey. They have a newspaper collection stored on film that goes back to the 1770s, and they have unusual stuff you're not going to find anywhere else. They also have wonderful librarians who are really, really helpful and knowledgeable. Their business, science and technology center is also really outstanding, with information on basically anything you can think of in those categories. Physically, it's not a large library, but it's a beautiful library. So I would definitely start there.

My next stop would be at my undergraduate alma mater, Drew University, in Madison, New Jersey. Recently, there was an article in *The New York Times* about how a rare *King James Bible*, first edition, was discovered at Drew just lying in a box on the shelf. Drew was started as a Methodist seminary, so they have this huge collection of Methodist-related materials, and they found a 1611 *King James Bible*. How it was hidden away at Drew all these years, I have no idea.

This Bible is considered a buried treasure because it's what's called a "he" Bible. In the middle of the first printing, a typo was discovered in the Book of Ruth where someone was referred to as "he" when it should have been "she." Of the fewer than 200 first editions known to have survived, most are "she" copies. There are very few "he" Bibles.

The third library I would take them to is at another of my alma maters, the Alexander Library at Rutgers University, which by my standards is huge. It has an amazing collection of government documents, including original documents of the British legal system, which I wrote a paper about when I was in graduate school. It's not a particularly beautiful library—it's a public institution, and it's not funded as well as it should be. But it has tremendous collections, including rare books. So those are the three I would start with.

At the risk of sounding mushy, I think any library is worth visiting. This may be because libraries are in my blood—my uncle was the director of a branch of the Baltimore Public Library, and my mother, until her death last year, was the volunteer treasurer of the public library in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. Libraries are where learning and knowledge are shared, so I think they're all worth visiting and preserving. **SLA**