



Geraldine Barkworth

Coaching and Training



Bernadette Rosbrook

Lights On Librarian

Bibliotherapy: heal your soul @ the library

Bernadette Rosbrook caused a bit of a stir at the 2004 ALIA Biennial on the Gold Coast with her presentation 'Lights On Librarians'. She is a regular reader of this column and, as a relatively new graduate, was surprised to be asked to contribute. Bernadette talks with the **life coach for library professionals, Geraldine Barkworth**, about deciding what's right for you and the value of recognising when it's time to change direction.

What currently makes you 'light up'? What are you passionate about?

What I have been thinking about a lot lately is the possibility that there is something out there - work, a career, a role - that will sustain me. By that, I mean a job that I can settle in to and find continually challenging, interesting and rewarding.

I've worked in many roles over the past few years. That's not a bad thing. But it's too easy to put a spin on it and say, "Look at all this diverse experience I've had". The truth is, dissatisfaction is the other side of the coin. I've moved around a lot because I've been dissatisfied and restless, and I had come to accept this was par for the course - that I would have to keep moving in order to stay interested.

The realisation that that does not have to be the case - that it is possible to be settled and calm while still being interested, engaged, extended is very exciting to me.

Why is it important you settle into something now?

Because I deserve to. I can't see why I can't feel both peaceful and challenged in my career - the two aren't diametrically opposed. I used to think there was something wrong with me - 'I keep changing jobs' - but I've realised it's more important to me to trust my feelings - they're a great barometer of what's right for me. I just haven't found what I'm looking for.

And what are you looking for?

A role where I can deal with people's most immediate needs in a very practical way. I'm going to study psychology next.

Can you still divide librarians and others into 'lights on' (passionate and engaged) and 'lights off' (lost motivation and interest)? What else have you observed or learned since taking this approach to the profession in 2004?

Yes, I can - in the sense that there are those individuals out there who do amazing work. They are extremely motivated, offer a fantastic service and achieve remarkable results.

However, I would now say that the whole lights on/off thing is a lot more complex than I thought. I have a lot more respect now for librarians who stay in their jobs for the long haul. There is something that keeps them there. Even if they have become bored or even disillusioned. I think now, that they wouldn't keep fronting up for work every day unless they were getting something out of it, at some level. These people are keeping the libraries running.

I'm a bit ashamed now that I considered everyone who wasn't passionate and engaged a 'lights-off' librarian. What motivates people with regard to their working life is not always clear to the casual observer.

As a relatively new graduate, which skills do you see as most valued by employers?

I think it's communication skills in general and interpersonal skills in particular. If you can speak confidently, listen well, engage with others and basically 'get along' with people, you draw a lot of positive attention to yourself. In fact, you really seem to stand out. I don't know if that's just in the library profession. I don't think it is - I think good communication skills are attractive to employers across the board.

In terms of other skills - the ability to write well is always very highly regarded. And the willingness and ability to tackle projects.

On the whole, how well do librarians as a profession, communicate?

In the areas I've worked (academic reference and special libraries), very well. I've met some new graduates who really put themselves out there and some long-term librarians who are actively applying for new grants and projects. And special librarians are a really self-motivated bunch.

Would you like to see a continuing series of interviews in *inCite*?

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inCite@alia.org.au.

Is there a communication divide within the profession?

Yes! There's the more process-driven group who don't want to interact with clients and there's the group who love dealing with people.

Isn't that a divide common to all professions?

Well, I think the library profession is a bit different. It's still a profession where you have the option of hiding from the rest of the world – you can still get away with being a librarian and be a bad communicator. You can't do that so easily in, say, law and medicine.

How long do you think that situation could last?

As information becomes easier and easier for the general public to access, it's going to be the librarians with good communication skills who get the jobs. There will be less need for the middle person doing process driven tasks. The LIS profession will no longer offer a place to hide.

Why did you decide to join the library profession?

Well this sounds a bit 'non-PC', but I thought it would be a relatively safe job: that is, it would offer a nurturing environment, especially for someone with a strong English Lit background like me. I've always been an ideas person and, I have to admit, a bit of a control freak. I like helping people and I thought it was a profession with a future in this information age; all those things helped me decide on the LIS profession. After 3 years of changing jobs out of a sense of dissatisfaction, I've decided to look elsewhere - perhaps a role blending librarianship with something else.

What is it you are looking for?

I know that I want to do a lot more with my life than what I'm currently doing. I have noticed, that I am far more gripped with hearing colleagues' personal stories than with redesigning the information desk. I've thought about a career in staff development, but that seems more about IR laws and training in customer service and OH&S. I also realise that being a people manager would give me more of a direct sense of helping people, but a manager ends up primarily managing things, not people.

Have you noticed a central theme to your life? What gives your life meaning and purpose?

I have always tried to do things that I love. For example, my first year out of school, I started a combined Law/Accountancy

degree. I hated it. So I changed to Arts and studied English, which I loved and stayed with for many years.

And I've made other changes like that throughout my life - I've left jobs, turned down jobs, dropped courses, studied new courses based on my instincts. It sounds fickle and irresponsible, but it's not. It's never easy to change direction. It involves a lot of soul searching and uncertainty and can be very painful. But I believe you have to be true to yourself. If you lie to yourself you end up miserable.

In relation to what gives my life meaning and purpose - family and friends. And the belief that it is possible to grow and develop as a person throughout a lifetime.

How do you want to grow and develop as a person?

By continually learning who I am - my real self - by being aware of the things that really matter to me; the things I love doing. I always want to have the energy and commitment to help others.

Do libraries have a role here?

Yes. For one thing, libraries offer a wide range of reading material (not just the narrow commercially driven range of top seller lists), where you can read other peoples' stories. Bibliotherapy - reading books as a form of therapy, not just self help, but reading other peoples' stories as fiction or non-fiction - is a powerful form of healing and freely available to everyone.

Why don't you become a bibliotherapist - surely that's a perfect blend of librarianship and psychology?

Perhaps there could be role there...

What kind of future would you like to see for libraries?

I'd like to see them as approachable places - people are still scared by librarians - I've seen it in both special and academic libraries. I'd like libraries to be seen as beautiful places, physically reflecting the important value of what they contain - the ideas, the striving, the creativity; a bastion of our civilization.

You have a background in research, public speaking, and communication – how much have they contributed to your employability as a librarian?

Following on - communication skills are highly valued. But I don't think that any sort of specific experience that you present to an employer is as impressive as how you come across as a person. Of course, experience and skills are important. But they mean little if you can't convey

to a prospective employer that you're motivated, reliable and confident. Not confident that you know everything and will be able to eat up all challenges. But confident that you'll be able to find your way in a job by asking the right questions, working well with other people, being resilient and so on.

If you could have more of one thing, what would it be?

Well-being. By that I mean good health and peacefulness.

How are you bringing more of that good health and peacefulness into your life?

By doing practical things like walking for 30-50 minutes three or four times a week. I listen to classical music as I walk and just by doing it regularly, I've become aware of its value to me. There are more important things in my life than a spotless house.

As a regular reader of this column, what have you gained from reading Librarians on the edge each month?

I got a sense of excitement; each interview felt like a real-life case study. I got some really good practical tips on librarianship. And it really brought home to me the importance of professional development.

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This is the last interview Geraldine will write for her 2006 series, *Librarians On The Edge*. She continues to provide confidential coaching and workshops for library professionals wanting to build inner strength, life balance and public speaking confidence. You are welcome to subscribe to her free ezine for LIS professionals, *Great Expectations*, on info@geraldinebarkworth.com or 02-6685 1917.

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