



They thought I was special enough

One returned librarian's reflections on raising the profile of a special library

It was with a sense of happiness tinged with curiosity that I accepted the position of Library Manager at Epworth Healthcare in late 2009. I knew great roles like this became available only very occasionally, and were highly sought after. I was elated to have been chosen, and knew I could provide information excellence to medicine's best and brightest. But why was I chosen as the new library manager from what must have been a pool of very attractive applicants? I had worked for 15 years in reference, liaison, and information literacy in academic libraries, then 7 years working with a library vendor. I could see the synergies and knew I could do the job; but what did the interview panel see in me?

So that was one of the first questions I asked my line manager – it turned out my vision of the new library service was very impressive! By drawing on my academic library background, I know a library needs to be at the centre of any organisation involved in research and education, and where current information is vital. Of course to me, 'library' means print and online collections, integrated services and liaison across sites, information literate users, proactive customer-oriented staff, and partnerships with our user populations. I also drew on my reference and liaison experience to speak about discoverability and accessibility of information, aligned to information literacy, and critical to user satisfaction.

The surprise to me was not how attractive my vision was, but how attractive and novel my delivery strategy was. The panel was excited by my multi-layered approach to discover needs, plan and implement change, then measure success in our widely differing user populations, remote sites, doctors, nurses, specialists, researchers, etc. I was also conscious of aligning the library to the corporate vision and business model to deliver success – that is, ensuring the library is an integrated element of the wider organisation. These are all approaches, skills, and attitudes I learned as a vendor account manager. If I viewed the hospital and staff as a new account, I could see sectors, influencers, opportunities, weaknesses, threats, strengths, timeframes, deliverables, and hotspots, which informed my strategies. So easy!

So this brief conversation with my manager at the end of my first day was very useful. Now I had my first goals for the coming months, and a tacit approval for a non-traditional approach to raising the library's profile and delivering services. And so to the action...

My first liaison contacts were the educators, a natural alliance for me and the library service. We discussed and are now delivering targeted information literacy sessions embedded in the graduate program. I also made appointments with each of the five site managers to discover what they wanted from their library. I knew this meeting had to benefit each manager, so I demonstrated Pathfinders as a new library service developed in the first quarter of my tenure by the library staff. This has reaped great rewards in the form of regular invitations to demo library web services to groups at each site, as well as 1:1 sessions with specialists and researchers. The library is successfully growing our profile and partnerships with our key user groups.

Once I saw growth in liaison and user activity, I knew the next great leap was needed at a strategic level. So I am now in the process of formulating a Library Advisory Committee which will draw membership from professors, directors,

researchers, and key senior influencers across the hospital to support and advise library services as the organisation grows and evolves. This is a critical step as we will be more transparent and accountable than ever before; we will also be able to plan for change, look for support at the highest level, and, importantly, be involved in information strategic futures to benefit the whole organisation.

So I can reflect on the last eight months with a sense of achievement; all those competencies developed in university libraries and vendor services are now benefitting the patrons of the Epworth Healthcare library. The future holds a new library space, increased staff, new services to new sites and specialisations, and continuous efforts to provide our users with information almost before they ask for it. Never a dull moment in the Epworth Healthcare Library.

One last but essential point – I can say without hesitation and with a great sense of gratitude that all my ideas and activities have been warmly and generously supported by the library staff without whom I would be a blonde blur with Tim Tam accessories! The two experienced and enthusiastic staff I inherited have shown me what great medical librarians will do to deliver quality service. Well done, Di and Marina.

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