



MANAGEMENT NOT THE ONLY CAREER GOAL

What exactly is a career librarian? Everything Rhonda Cotsell read linked it with visible leadership and upwardly mobile management. But, she says, that was not her.

Upwardly mobile management is not me. Not because management and designated leadership roles are unimportant to me, but because each requires personality traits I lack and skills I did not want to dominate my work as a librarian, nor in life. That said, once qualified I knew the librarian I wanted to be, and it would never be just a day job.

Library holdings are physical and digital maps of humanity, discriminating neither by patron nor belief system. They are not just repositories, nor are we just caretakers. We hold immense and subtle power in our skills to measure the past and enrich both present and future.

This power means throughout recorded history libraries have burned, and are burning today. Knowledge is also lost through benign neglect or omission, as cost and space limit retention of mankind's endless recording of itself. But, like the phoenix, libraries resurrect and evolve. There will always be witnesses and record keepers, but only libraries represent an organised, trained and collective effort, based on deeply humanitarian reasons, to keep records.

That is how I experience my profession, and my trajectory has always been 'sideways'. My best work happens as part of a library team, experiencing different libraries.

Advances in information technology smashed open what can be accomplished, shook us all up, but we remained

heading fundamentally in the same direction. My love of systems and how they organise the enormity of human output welcomes what these advances can help us achieve compared with what was possible in the past. But I still love how Dewey and Library of Congress shelving and subject headings are internationally recognisable maps of everything mankind has named.

Writing this column faced me with an 'other self', one which has paralleled and underlined my library career. As a child, my first goal was to write a book. So I looked for a quick definition of 'career' in my wannabe writer-self 1999 op shop Australian pocket dictionary, but again I found 'one's professional etc progress through life', and professional occupation, 'esp. as offering advancement'.

I have faced career tension regularly, but over the years have achieved balance. I am enrolled in the ALIA PD Scheme Health Specialisation now, and I write. After years of internal conflict, I have realised, somewhat uneasily, that I really want to do an in-depth study of writing/reading and healing, despite knowing a Masters in information management could be wiser professionally. Can this translate over into librarianship, I ask myself?

Amongst my leaders are Ranganathan and Doris Lessing. My current manager is also a leader. My writer-self writes here from a lifelong commitment to writing experience; my librarian-self exploring a conflict which lies at the heart of her career.

RHONDA COTSELL
cotsellr@yahoo.com.au