People Profile: Steven Bell

Editor
Christensen suggests, never being in a state of doing nothing. If you think of good ones please share them.

- **Listen/Obsess**: Sounds simple but so often we fail to pay attention to the simplest things. What are patrons complaining about? What mistakes do you see them make on your Website? What student trends are emerging on your campus? Entrepreneurs discover problems and create solutions. It begins by having the antennae positioned to pick up the right signals.

- **Accept Hard Work**: Multiple presenters demonstrated that nothing comes easy for entrepreneurs. Coming up with ideas means implementing them and that requires dealing with budgets, deadlines, more staff and all manner of hurdles. Librarians often fear success more than failure, as success means having to do the real work to make an idea come to fruition.

- **Break a Few Rules**: The entrepreneur’s motto is “It is better to ask for forgiveness than permission.” If not rules, then at least avoid allowing policies to hamper staff creativity and innovation. Too often our new-to-profession colleagues are excited by their LIS education and are eager to try new ideas, only to have senior colleagues construct barriers out of rules and policies. Let’s not let policies and procedures and the fear of setting precedents get in the way of our budding entrepreneurs.

- **Balance Risk and Evolution**: Risk-taking is almost synonymous with entrepreneurship. But not all entrepreneurial endeavors need be risky if it’s evolutionary. For example, starting a text reference service may involve a degree of risk, but as an evolution of past digital reference services this is risk mitigation. The library has experience with this type of technology, and if text reference fails there are existing fallback options. So for your next entrepreneurial venture think evolution.

- **Develop Sticky Ideas**: The practicing entrepreneur, Jon Obermeyer, who delivered the luncheon keynote at the Entrepreneurial Librarians Conference discussed the “elevator pitch.” All entrepreneurs have to effectively communicate their idea in a compelling, convincing way in just 30 seconds; that may be all the time a potential financier will give. Read the book Made to Stick to learn how to construct sticky messages that are simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional, stories — in other words: SUCCESSful. If you can do this you’ll gain the support of your colleagues for your next entrepreneurial idea.

- **Use the Zoom Out Lens**: In times of crisis, according to Jim Collins, author of Good to Great and other leadership books, most workers tend to zoom in on the crisis of the moment. We need to deal with immediate concerns, but real entrepreneurs use their “zoom out” lens to stay focused on two or three years out and contemplate where the organization should head and what it will take to move in that direction. By zooming out we engage our inner entrepreneur as we spot new ideas and technologies on the horizon.

- **Be a Problem Finder**: Designers think of themselves as “problem finders” not problem solvers. That means you need to first immerse yourself in the users’ experience and figure out what’s broken in your library. All entrepreneurial triumphs begin with problem identification. This is a lousy mousetrap, can’t someone make a better one! If library improvement begins with hunting down solutions to attach to unspecific problems then there’s a real problem — a dysfunctional process. Our practicing entrepreneur spoke of a six-step process he and all other entrepreneurs use. Guess what the first step was. Yes. Identify the problem.

### Steven Bell

#### BORN & LIVED: Philadelphia.

**EARLY LIFE**: I’m a lifelong Philadelphia resident.

**FAMILY**: Married with two grown sons (ages 27 and 25).

**EDUCATION**: BA at Temple University, MLS at Drexel University, EdD at University of Pennsylvania.

**FIRST JOB**: Institute for Scientific Information (real first job — cleaning fish tanks as a pet store).

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES**: Focus on academic librarianship; blended librarianship; design and user experience; active in ACRL.

**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE**: Writing, cycling, fitness training and gardening.

**FAVORITE BOOKS**: Mostly business/design books such as The Designtful Company, Making Meaning and Subject to Change, but I do wish for one more Travis McGee novel.

**PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD**: Bloggers who write about their own blog posts at LISNews; over-the-top shameless self promoters.

**PHILOSOPHY**: Better to have too much to do than not enough.

**MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT**: Helping a colleague get an article or presentation accepted — especially their first time.

**GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW**: Develop a robust and fully realized library user experience that makes a difference for community members.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS**: The options for information search and retrieval will expand both in terms of the number of possibilities and devices for capturing content. Librarians will be challenged to compete on a technological level. Over the next five years we need to create library organizations that leverage relationships and the meaning that people derive from them — something we’ve always been good at but must build on and prioritize to remain relevant to our communities. 🌍