April 1995

You Gotta Go To School For That?: The Inquisition, School Boards, and Other Happy Groups

Jared Seay
College of Charleston

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Recommended Citation

Seay, Jared (1995) "You Gotta Go To School For That?: The Inquisition, School Boards, and Other Happy Groups," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, Article 29.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1741>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

You Gotta Go to School for That?

The Inquisition, Review Boards, and Other Happy Groups by Jerry Seay (College of Charleston)

Having to defend yourself before people who have the power of life and death over you is one thing. Having to defend yourself to a committee that has the power of promotion or not over you is certainly much worse.

So it was that I found myself in this unenviable position a few weeks ago as I came up for my third year review. Now, it is an unexplainable fact that in academia it is just not enough to do a good job. One must "prove" that one is doing a good job by producing what is known in the ivory tower circles as a "packet." In this packet one must cram as much proof as possible for one's being allowed to exist.

What makes a good packet? My friend and fellow third-year-review victim "Wild" Bill tells me the best packet is one heavy enough to prop open a spring-loaded door. I tend to agree. Though, I might add that it also helps to have a fancy gray cover, lots of eye catching, yet professional-looking documents, and a letter of recommendation from Mother Teresa.

I prepared my packet with sufficient weight and turned it in to the greater powers. I was ready to go before the board. I had always imagined "going before the board" to mean sitting in a steel chair under a bright light while stern looking people in black suits fired off-the-wall questions at me from behind a long heavy table. As it turned out, the experience was only slightly less terrorizing than this.

Now, the actual individual people who were to be on this review board are real nice folks who pay taxes, play with dogs, and pat babies on the head. In fact, with the exception of one, they were all librarians whom I worked with every day. The fact that I was to be among friends should have caused me great comfort. But, as I opened the door to the "great hall" and saw 18 eyes staring at me I realized the truth. I was not in a room full of librarian friends. I was in the presence of a cold, well-oiled machine of inquiry designed to permeate, dissect, and lay bare all my activities for the past three years. I swallowed hard, sat down, and looked straight into the stern face of the inquisition.

Actually, they all had fixed grins on their faces like they were either stifling a laugh or were trying to hide something. Like maybe the fact they thought my

packet was stupid and it was time to dump me in the street. Paranoia was beginning to grip me already.

Then Katina fired the first question: "So, tell us about your accomplishments." Of course, my mind was totally blank.

The only accomplishment I could remember was taking a shower that morning without drowning.

"Uh, I'm sure I've done something," I managed to stammer. Boy, that sounded great. Why don't I just tell them that the whole Ten Commandments was really my idea and be done with it. Desperately searching for something to say, I remembered that I had given a bunch of lectures in the library. I said as much.

"What kind of lectures?" asked Katina. I reached in my brain and grabbed the first thing I found. "I believe it was for the business department." Mistake.

Little did I know that the only person there who was not a librarian was a business professor. "Oh really?" she said with a bit of excitement. "When? Who?" Obviously I could really score some points right now if I could get my brain in gear.

"Uh, I think it was . . . in the past sometime." Brilliant. Change subject. "Maybe it was a history lecture though." No score.

Katina, seeing my white knuckles, pasty face and obvious lack of mental faculties, asked, "Didn't you publish a lot of in-house publications to better serve our patrons' informational needs?"

I took the bait. "Yes! Why yes I did!" Bingo. Thank you. Oh thank you.

I noticed that half of the people were nodding off and Katina was doing almost all of the talking. Both of these were good signs. It meant that I was wearing them down faster than they were wearing me down, and that at any second Katina could say something quotable that I could use in my next *Against the Grain* article. Then came the question I had been waiting for. "So, how do you see your future here at the library?" At last, a question I could sink my teeth into. Switch to grand statesman cutting-edge mode. I leaned back in my chair.

"Esteemed colleagues," I began. "I see a library brimming with technological innovation; a library where ease of use for patrons is realized in the form of multime-

dia workstations, colorful computer information kiosks, and soft-talking automated audiovisual point-of-use instructions." Patriotic music began to swell in the background as I continued. "Yes, I see a library where staff and patrons work together happily in a care-free, properly vented and air-conditioned environment where printers are a thing of the past, and all information is downloaded into an easily digestible, noiseless, and ink bladder free form."

Everyone was awake by now. "I want to help bring this library dragging and kicking into the shining light of the technology of the 21st century! I want to stay on the cutting edge of library technological change no matter what the effort. It will not be easy I know. For whet one is on the cutting edge of anything, one will get a little bloody." I paused to take in the shocked stares. "And I for one, ladies and gentlemen, am willing to shed my blood for my profession!"

I could sense Oscar nominations flooding in.

Okay, so I didn't say exactly all those words out loud. But, that was the gist of it — with perhaps a little less drama. Then came the final question that an interviewee always dreads. It is somehow worse than the "tell us what you believe your weaknesses are" question.

"Well, do you have any questions you would like to ask us?"

What could one possibly ask a panel of nine people who just spent the last hour grilling your brains? Was this as much fun for you as it was for me? What are you doing after the inquisition? Do you think the fall of the Roman Empire was more a result of socio-economic failure in the political infrastructure, external cultural population migrations, or just a bad hair day?

I played it safe and pulled a Perry Mason. "No further questions."

I even heard some of *them* sigh in relief. ☺