November 1994

Op-Ed / Opinions and Editorials

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Recommended Citation

Montgomery, Jack G. (1994) "Op-Ed / Opinions and Editorials," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 6: Iss. 5, Article 33.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1817>

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Opinions and Editorials

Hey y'all! I am talking to YOU and YOU and YOU. Express your opinion right here. Your ulcers feel better already! — KS

On My Soapbox — by Jack G. Montgomery (Technical Services Librarian, Law Library, University of Missouri-Columbia, MONTGOMERY@law.missouri.edu)

"Stop whining, take pride in yourself, and get to work"

I was at a social gathering of library school students for the purpose of wishing a colleague success with a newly awarded fellowship. As the conversation turned to employment and the future, certain comments began to emerge. They were as follows.

"I don't know what we're all working so hard for; there are no jobs out there worth having; librarianship is dead anyway."

"Well, I need to make at least 30 grand a year or it's just not worth it."

"No one respects us anyway, we're just librarians."

Well, that last one pushed me over the edge and made me really sad. Sadder still, comments of this type tend to continue even after the MLS degree is in hand. So I responded:

"We are the only profession I know of that works as hard at self-sabotage as we do at getting our credentials! Frankly, no one should respect anyone who will not try to respect themselves."

As I used to tell my sales associates: "If you're not here to promote this company and build it and your customer base, you don't need to be here. You're hurting yourself and everyone around you."

My point is simple; we are, whether we admit it or not, engaged in a business enterprise where our daily interactions on the telephone or in person create impressions that impact our image and the image of our institution. Every time we have a successful encounter with a patron, it builds a positive image in the minds of everyone who witnessed the transaction. Conversely, every negative encounter, (and I don't mean unsuccessful) works to create another damaging type of image.

The time to be passive and smug about our profession is long over. You must take an active part in the development of your own and the library's future. If that means extra effort and extra hours, then so be it. The business world has known for a long while that to sit still is to perish.

In short, if you're going to be thought of as valuable, you're going to have to demon-

strate that value every minute of your working day. The world is no longer going to beat a path to your door. You are going to have to

market yourself and your library both on and off the job. If you have a chance to speak or promote the library, even at an informal gathering, you must take it. As to jobs, they are out there. They may not pay much, but you're an unproven commodity. Why should anyone just give you a big salary when you haven't proven a thing in the workplace? You become a librarian each day you work, and experience is the valuable commodity, plus the ability to work with others. As to the money aspect, you knew that this was not a big-bucks field when you got into it. If you didn't bother to find that out, then you are just plain stupid. A colleague recently said to me: "I'm so sick of the whining about salaries within our profession! If you're not happy with your salary or situation, you have three choices: 1) Accept the situation and find your happiness elsewhere; 2) Get out of the situation; 3) Do something to change that situation."

As to option 3, we can do a great deal to affect the way people see us. Each day as I walk out onto the floor I borrow the line from the movie "Beetlejuice" and in a raspy voice I say to myself: "It's Showtime!!!"

"We are the only profession . . . that works as hard at self-sabotage . . ."

" . . . to sit still is to perish."

From that moment forward, I'm committed to the following goals: 1. Provide the best possible service to my patron. This is not my library; it's the patron's. This is an old idea I borrowed from my days in marketing. Did I say marketing? Yep, the dynamics of any commercial or academic enterprise. 2. Present the best image of myself as a professional and promote the institution through my work attitude. I'm certain you find it annoying to go into a store or any other business and be ignored. If I sat myself in a restaurant and no one even greets me within ten minutes, I leave and do not return.

This really involves a willingness to commit yourself to what you do. It isn't important always that you see the fruits of your actions, but simply that you have to put something positive into motion. I think you'll find that such an attitude is contagious, not to everyone, but to those that matter.

Did I change their minds? Probably not; it has become somewhat chic to complain, but it is a very destructive habit we as professionals can no longer afford. I suggest that we take time to look at ourselves, and be proud of what we are; a unique profession unlike any other that

truly holds the intellectual, cultural, and in a sense, the historical future of the world in its

hands. No one can take this heritage from us, if we work to preserve it and no one can denigrate us if we believe in and actively promote ourselves. Please, no more whining. We have too much to do.

Thanks for listening!