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# Technical Services Departments in the Digital Age: The Four R's of Adapting to New Technology

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# Technical Services Departments in the Digital Age: The Four R's of Adapting to New Technology

by **Leslie Burke** (Account Services Manager, EBSCO Information Services) <lburke@ebSCO.com>

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As technological advances continue to impact the technical services department, technical services managers may find their staff is neither trained nor psychologically ready for these changes. Libraries today are seeing open source integrated library systems, electronic books and journals, shared catalogs and table of contents services, as well as reduction in binding, and outsourcing of services (like authority services), just to name a few. To remain effective in today's quickly changing landscape, managers must reassess, reassign, retrain and re-energize their staff. Many library managers find that their technical services staff is floundering about what they should be doing, that they are ill-prepared to meet these changes and that their unit is no longer functioning at its best. Advances in technology, software and processes have affected all areas of the library and compel us to look at how we utilize staff. Providing an environment of supportive and continual learning is essential to making these assessments and changes.

Since libraries have become much more integrated in their approach to fulfilling tasks which had traditionally been limited to technical services, it is important to look at the whole system and see where changes need to be made. Traditional technical services processes such as binding, periodical check-in and original cataloging have been impacted by the availability of copy cataloging and electronic journals, greatly changing many functions in the department. Reduction in staff size often has meant that there is not a separate serials unit, cataloging unit and acquisitions unit. These functions are overlapping more as the formats for materials are changing. Serials is no longer able to function on its own separate from reference as the new ways of collection development require that serials, acquisitions, and reference work as a team to review resources which may come from an e-journal or a database or a print or newer format, such as streaming video.

Consider a person who knows at least six months in advance that a new technology or process was going to eliminate her job as it currently existed. The wise individual would look at her skills and what needed to be done in the department, rather than waiting for the organization to tell her what she would be doing next. She could be designing her own new job, rather than passively waiting.

What is a library manager to do with employees who no longer fit their functions?

## Reassess — Evaluate Current and Future Job Descriptions

All library unit job descriptions should be

examined to determine if they contain obsolete tasks, or if duties have shifted. What new technologies and responsibilities are identified that are not reflected in these job descriptions? This is also a perfect time to think about how the unit works with other units in the library. This re-evaluation may bring about a re-evaluation of the whole library structure. Gone are the days of the "us" and "them" mentality of technical services and public services. Roles now overlap. Collection development is more of a team process and everyone must contribute for the good of the whole library.

Each employee should be encouraged to take part in this process and efforts should be made to determine their strengths and weaknesses. Are they good writers, good speakers, early adopters of new technologies, good analytical thinkers? What don't they do well? Do they have trouble interacting with the public? Are this person's skills in line with their new duties, or do you need to reorganize? The first method that should be used is to ask what employees like about their current jobs. What do they wish they could avoid? The manager should ask themselves the same questions. If this is hard for employees to do, there are many personality tests out on the market like the **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator** test. **Buckingham**

and **Clifton**, in *Now, Discover Your Strengths*,<sup>1</sup> insist that organizations must determine employees "natural talents and then position and develop each employee so that his or her talents are transformed into bona fide strengths...as it does, this revolutionary organization will be positioned to dramatically outperform its peers."

Only by really looking at employee strengths and weaknesses can one

begin to reorganize so that staff members are utilizing their strength, can achieve their goals and are being used to the best advantage of the library. Department supervisors also need to determine which staff members need to adapt to the changing functions in the organization. They should also examine their own position for possible changes that should be addressed.

Do not assume that the oldest staff member is the least technologically advanced, nor that the youngest is an über-geek. Truly seek to look at each person's functional strengths, not just how well they do their current job, or the job as laid out in the job description. A supervisor can begin to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their staff by doing some

cross-training, by giving an assignment (e.g. writing up a summary of a meeting), or by allowing the employee some self-testing with some of the interactive learning programs that are available, which teach a function and then rate the learning of that function. Paying attention to what the employee enjoys doing and values as part of their job is important.

As serials continue to move to electronic, one needs to lead staff toward the changes of:

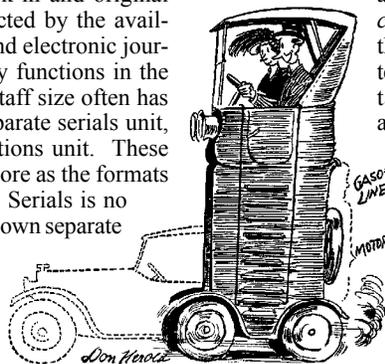
- fewer print claims
  - less binding needed
  - electronic archiving.
- Additionally, there is a need for expanded skills with publishers and vendors to:
- negotiate licenses
  - activate electronic subscriptions
  - monitor access
  - troubleshoot access/trouble logs.

When one is working with a diverse group of people, it can be tricky to make sure that all of the staff is in agreement about the steps needed to achieve organizational goals. The change process is often very similar to the grieving process. Individuals may regret the loss of a task in which they took ownership or particularly enjoyed. Their reaction to the change, like grieving, should be addressed as it occurs.

There are some key things to remember when dealing with various groups. **Fiona Emberton** mentions four basic groups and some suggestions of how to work with them:

- *Grey Tigers – Born 1900-1945* feel that their career contributions should be taken into account. They may not be as open about their feelings as other employees and often prefer more formal communication.
- *Boomers – Born 1946 to 1960/4* also want respect for their experience and should be asked what has been tried before and why something worked or did not work. They are often politically savvy and that can be used to an advantage.
- *Gen Xers – Born 1965 to 1980* like to see the big picture and to be encouraged to try new methods to achieve those goals. They too, deserve respect, but may do things in a non-traditional way and do not usually need micro-managing.
- *Gen Y – Born 1981 to 1999* folks may be on the bleeding edge of your technology window and so they sometimes need to be reined in to use what is available now, with an eye to innovative uses of that technology. They can also be the ones

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to start pulling in those new technologies into the system as the organization is ready for it. These staff members should be encouraged to communicate to the rest of the group what is happening “out there” and provide ideas for how the new technologies may impact the library.<sup>2</sup>

New technical services tasks will include more teamwork and collaboration. These may include researching catalog alternatives, integrating streaming audio/video products, working with an electronic resource management system, contributing to the library staff blog, working with vendors on electronic exchange of information (for authority files, shared cataloging, MARC record loads), and with the reference staff to help identify challenges with electronic journals. Committee work, follow-up skills and meeting skills may need to be developed. Technical services staff may now need to work more closely with reference or collection development staff than they have previously and more people are involved. Learning to “play well with others” is an increasingly important skill.

### Reassign — Play to Your Staff's Strengths

The second task at hand is to reassign current personnel to the new tasks and procedures that have been identified. Reassignment may be the most problematic issue, and this will be the most dependent on organizational structure, human resource processes and possibly union rules and regulations. However, staff duties and assignments should be examined on a fairly regular basis.

When reassigning tasks, there are some important questions that supervisors must ask. What former technical services tasks no longer exist, or have shifted to another department in the library? Should you move staff along with those tasks or train others that are already part of those departments? What are your new staffing needs? What new skills do staff need? These are all important questions that must be asked to effectively incorporate new technologies.

To answer these questions it makes sense to start looking at the various tasks to be done and seeing how best to utilize the staff you have. Perhaps one part of one job should be moved to another person because it makes more sense with a new workflow. Can you teach your “old dogs” new tricks, or can you move these tasks to someone else? Don't assume employees do not want to learn, but some tasks may be best suited to certain skill sets and staff abilities. Conversely, the new technologies, like podcasting, blogging, using wikis, or exploiting the features of **Microsoft Office**, may often be more readily adopted and used by new staff members. This adaptability may give them an opportunity to be brought into the training program to help train those that are not aware of the new technologies or perhaps reticent to learn them on their own.

In addition to improved workflow and pro-

*against the grain*  
**people profile**

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**Leslie D. Burke**

**BORN & LIVED:** Born in St. Paul, MN, moved to Michigan at age four and have lived in Portage, MI and Grand Rapids, MI since.

**EARLY LIFE:** Spent too many days nursing broken arms due to a sense of adventure that was greater than physics apparently allowed.

**FAMILY:** Married (no children) to **Clyde Burke Jr.**

**EDUCATION:** B.A. English from **Grand Rapids Baptist College** (now **Cornerstone University**), AMLS from **University of Michigan School of Information and Library Studies** (now **School of Information**).

**FIRST JOB:** Waitressing at camp; first library job that paid (other than school), serials assistant at **Cornerstone University**.

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** Acquisitions & Serials Librarian at **Western Theological Seminary**, Holland, MI; 11 ½ years as Corporate Librarian at **Amway Corporation**; Account Services Manager at **EBSCO Information Services** since 2000. Member of **SLA** (three-time chapter president of **Western Michigan Chapter** along with other offices). Member of **Michigan Library Association** and served on various roundtables and committees and boards.

**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO:** Travel, shop, read, do logic problems and crosswords.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** Mysteries, thrillers, historical fiction.

**PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD:** I try not to let too many things bother me.

**PHILOSOPHY:** My Dad always says, “Any dead fish can swim downstream,” which to me means that it's important to make an effort, and you don't have to do what everyone else is doing. Don't be afraid to lead.

**MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:** Creating a vital corporate library that was respected and used (until major downsizing eliminated my job).

**GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW:** I hope to be still learning and growing so that my nieces and nephews don't think of me as an old lady, but their cool aunt.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** I see an industry where both content producers/publishers and librarians have figured out a more stable system for electronic content so that publishers are getting paid for their content and librarians are not forced to have to make so many hard choices due to costs and awkward access models (Well, I can hope can't I?). 🐾



ductivity, playing to staff strengths will make them feel important, satisfied and often happier. For example, perhaps you have a staff member who is a good writer but does not have a very good grasp of Web design or creation. Pairing that person with a person with good Web design skills, who may not be a great writer, makes both of these people more useful to the organization.

### Retrain — New Skills for All

After reassessing and reassigning, the third step is to retrain. In this age of minute-to-minute change, new skills are needed:

- More computer skills (including ftp, collaborative work environments, blogging, podcasting, utilizing the features of the ILS system, more use of MS Office suite, etc.)

- Better personal skills (such as networking, teamwork, and the ability to understand the library's mission and internal and external relationships.<sup>3</sup>

**Michael Stephens** of *Young Adult Library Services* says “My new mantra for all librarians is:

1. Learn to learn
2. Adapt to change
3. Scan the horizon.”<sup>3</sup>

For library staff to be effective in dealing with new technologies, they have to be in a continual learning environment. This environment needs to be welcoming, interesting and tolerant of the failures that may occur in the process.

In order for the library staff to be able to

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meet the needs of their users, in *Staffing the Modern Library*, authors **Cohn** and **Kelsey** propose that the library of the electronic age should address these four functions:

1. "Providing access to the content of local resources...either hard copy or as electronic files.
2. Offering gateway or portal access to remote resources.
3. Facilitating off-site electronic access to local and remote resources from users' homes, offices, and schools.
4. Providing access to human assistance in locating information."<sup>4</sup>

Library managers should be preparing their staff to have the skills to be able to provide this environment to the users. Training can be done one-on-one between staff members or in small groups if it makes sense. Vendors are usually willing to come and train staff in their processes and services. The use of interactive and Web-based meetings has been a boon to training of employees as it requires little financial outlay and no travel. Often there are self-paced training modules and tutorials that are available through associations or freely available on the Internet.

The need for communication between units and between staff members can not be understated. **Steve Casburn** of *Gen X Bites Back* says "I think another great thing that one generation can do for the next is for older, experienced librarians to listen to the ideas of younger librarians and not dismiss them out of hand."<sup>5</sup> He continues to state that sometimes older librarians get so caught up in their personal agendas that they forget the library must work as a team.

### Re-energize — Communicate and Motivate

In today's budgetary environment, it is unusual to add new personnel, so it is essential that the organization is retaining and motivating staff and using their skills in the most advantageous manner. **Singer** and **Goodrich** state that employees stay with an employer because:

- "They feel valued: their concerns, ideas, and suggestions are genuinely sought and listened to.
- They enjoy a feeling of connection and that they make a difference.
- They have opportunities for personal and professional growth.
- The work environment promotes continuous learning."<sup>6</sup>

The way organizations treat and train their employees is a big part of employee motivation to learn and grow with the organization. Staff members should be invested in the process to making their organizations better and more adaptable to change. Respecting the needs of the differing groups of employees is one key to making sure that the library can adapt well to the changes it will be facing.

## against the grain people profile

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### Stephanie McConnell

**BORN & LIVED:** Wadena, Minnesota/Minnesota.

**EARLY LIFE:** Moved around a lot. Finally ended up in Scandia, MN, when I was eight. Went to **Scandia Elementary** and then **Forest Lake Senior High**. No businesses in the area, so I put ads in the local store window and worked for people in the area doing odd jobs and gardening. I worked in the library at the senior high school once I was in senior high.

**FAMILY:** Father: **Delbert McConnell**, born and raised in Wadena, MN. Mother: **Mary (Williams) McConnell**, born and raised in Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, England. Brothers: **Danny, Kevin** and **Robin**. Sisters: **Victoria, Roselyn** and **Alicia**.

**EDUCATION:** BA & MA in History from the **University of Wisconsin** — River Falls. MLIS from the **University of Wisconsin** — Milwaukee.

**FIRST JOB:** **Dakota County Library System** in Castle Rock, Colorado.

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** **Dakota County Libraries, Minnesota Department of Education** — **Food and Nutrition Library, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), Thermo King Library, Bemidji State University Library** and **EBSCO, ALA** and the **Minnesota Library Association**. Board member of the **Association of Research Libraries Division of MLA (ARLD), Medical Library Association** and **Wisconsin Library Association**. Presentations at the **Minnesota Library Association** (2006) and **ARLD Day** (2007).

**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO:** Read, travel, spend time with my nieces and nephews.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** *Stones from the River (Hedgi)*, *Pride and Prejudice* and the *Well of Loneliness (Radcliff Hall)*.

**PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD:** Bad grammar.

**PHILOSOPHY:** I think we should all live our own lives and not judge one another. I think we should help others as much as we can.

**MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:** Helping to arrange **ARLD Day**.

**GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW:** Be more involved in national library committees.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** I think we will see increasing amounts of electronic resources in libraries as time goes on and I think we will have to find other ways to evaluate the usefulness of libraries than the number of bodies that come into a library. The use of libraries is up, but since users don't always come to the library, it can be hard to make administrations see that. I think library spaces will change a great deal, with more and more space given over to computers and laptop stations.

I also believe that the need for training and retraining of libraries will continue to grow and change, and be based heavily around technology. 🐻

But what about staff members who do *not* want to adapt to the new technologies? **Mayo** and **Goodrich** in *Staffing: A Guide to Working Smarter*<sup>7</sup> stress the importance of showing the need for the change, creating a "clear, compelling vision," demonstrating improvements quickly, and most importantly, continuously communicating about the changes. Support from top management also needs to be prominent in the communication and in the change process.

When I first became a supervisor, one of my employees gave me the book, *Winnie-the-Pooh on Management*, by **Roger E. Allen**. In talking with Pooh and Owl, the Stranger says:

"Above all, she should leave them alone. Get out of the way and let them

get on with the job. Guide then, help them, but don't sit on them or smother them." Pooh responds: "I sat on Piglet once,...By accident. He didn't much care for it." The Stranger responds: "Few of us like to be hovered over... Not everyone will respond to that [a manager letting the person alone unless they request help], but enough of any manager's people will react favorably so that a very effective operation will be possible. Remember that the manager's objective is for each individual to achieve excellence within the limits of his or her talents and abilities. Once the manager makes it plain that excellence

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is the object, her people will strive for it themselves...as long as the challenge is seen to be achievable.”<sup>8</sup>

Encouraging employees to help shape the new tasks and job functions can help to give them ownership in the process. Giving them the training they need and want will let them know that they are being supported by management to move through these tasks. Encourage some constructive “play” and allow for the occasional failure. People learn when they are allowed to try and even fail in a supportive environment. Allow them to grieve for their old job and to move on to their new duties. Continue to provide a continual learning environment, being mindful that each person adopts change at his own pace.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, today’s technical services department will need to continually reassess workflow to ensure that new technologies and processes have been taken into account. The staff should be regularly reviewed to ensure that new needs are being met and by the person(s) most capable of handling them. Retraining will be an ongoing, interactive and vital part of keeping up with the rapid changes, and giving employees the skills they need to handle not only the technology but the interpersonal relationships is important. Providing the opportunities for employees to play to their strengths and continue to obtain appropriate training will lead to having a staff that is more engaged, more effective and re-energized. 🌸

### Endnotes

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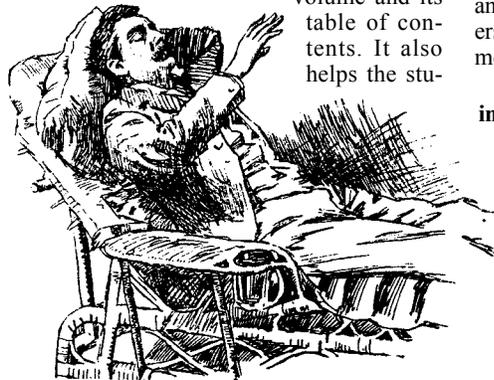
## From the Reference Desk

by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 66 George Street, Charleston, SC 29401; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <[gilsons@cofc.edu](mailto:gilsons@cofc.edu)>

The *Encyclopedia of American Indian History* (2007, 978-1851098170, \$395.00) is a new offering from ABC-CLIO. Edited by **Bruce E. Johansen** and **Barry M. Pritzker**, this four-volume set contains some 450 articles written by nearly 110 contributors. The set is arranged in “thematically organized volumes” as opposed to alphabetically throughout the set. Such an arrangement requires a solid organizational scheme to facilitate access. Consistent with this, each volume has its own article-by-article table of contents and there is an index to the entire set in each volume. In addition, related articles are linked by liberal use of “see also” references.

The first volume starts with six chronological essays that take the reader from pre-contact to the start of the 21st century. Added to these essays are two sections of articles on issues and events in American Indian history. All the parts in this volume work well together. The six initial essays are helpful in setting the issues and events in context, as well as for providing impressive bibliographies, while the remainder of the volume serves to flesh out the individual issues and events. Volume II focuses on culture from specifics like beadwork and sweat lodges to discussions of major Indian cultures like the Mississippian and Natchez. This volume also covers government related topics from agencies like the Bureau of Indian Affairs to laws and court cases like the *Indian Removal Act* and *Worcester v. Georgia*. The main section of the third volume offers biographies of prominent people and coverage of individual groups and organizations. In addition, it also provides over 60 primary source documents ranging from excerpts of **Columbus’** journal to the *Navajo-Hopi land Dispute settlement Act of 1996*. The fourth volume consists of articles on the history of some 200 Indian nations from the Acoma Pueblo of the Southwest to the Lakota of the Great Plains to the Yup’ik of the Arctic.

It is obvious that a great deal of thought has gone into the organization of this set. The advantage of organizing thematically within each volume is that it allows the reader to see the scope of major themes by examining each volume and its table of contents. It also helps the stu-



dent more easily grasp the complexity of these themes.

However, all of this organization is of little use without worthy content and fortunately this *Encyclopedia* has that as well. Topic coverage is comprehensive and the articles are accessible and full of relevant facts. Each entry has a bibliography appropriate in length for the size of the article and the text is visually complimented by numerous B&W photos. Both academic and larger public libraries will want to add it to their collections.

**Routledge** has just released a new, single volume *Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (2007, 978-0700712670, \$225.00) that does scholarly justice to this complex topic. Utilizing the talents of some 115 contributors from universities in Europe and the United States, the *Encyclopedia* provides readers with some 900 separate entries ranging in length from brief definitions of 150 words to far more involved survey articles of up to 5,000 words.

The scope of coverage runs the gamut and contains articles on topics like cosmology and interfaith dialog, along with entries that deal with timely and topical issues, including contemporary media like television and the Internet. In addition, there are articles on subjects ranging from sacred texts and languages to those on philosophy, ethics, theology, myth, politics, and nationalism. The articles are arranged alphabetically with numerous cross references linking related entries. Each article is signed and has a bibliography, some of which are fairly extensive for a single volume encyclopedia. This is especially true for the survey type articles on topics like Pilgrimage, the history of Hindu scholarship, and the Hindu Influence on Western Culture.

These same survey articles are a part of the *Encyclopedia’s* appeal, especially for undergraduates. They offer thorough discussions of broader issues and serve as a helpful introduction to those students less familiar with the complexity of Hinduism. This is not to say that specifics are neglected. There are entries that touch on individual elements of worship and practice, specific deities, influential writers and scholars, and individual traditions and movements.

The editors **Denise Cush**, **Catherine Robinson** and **Michael York** are to be commended for producing a well rounded, scholarly, and accessible reference. As with any good encyclopedia, readers are encouraged “to use this work as a foundation for and a guide to ongoing exploration of the subject.” With its thorough and diverse coverage, most undergraduates will find this volume serving that purpose nicely.

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