

**Life Beyond Libraries:
How a Librarian Became a Life Coach and Other Stories
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Introduction:

Why am I talking about Life Beyond Libraries to a group of people just beginning their library career? I recently read somewhere that most of us in today's working world will make 3 major career shifts during our working life. Many of you have probably already done this, moving into libraries after working several years in other industry areas. And for some of you this will be your first career, from which you will move to another. So hopefully this workshop will spark some ideas within you about how to manage this career and how to ready yourself for the next.

Throughout this workshop I will be sharing parts of my own story, and the stories of some of my former colleagues and managers who have transferred their skills out of, or in some cases into, library work.

Also throughout this workshop I would like to get you started on some of the worksheets I have provided to help you determine a possible path within libraries for you and skills that you could develop further to assist you to move beyond libraries when the time comes. These worksheets are designed to get you thinking about your skills, possible directions for you and the opportunities you currently have available to you. The real aim of this workshop is to help you identify your skills and abilities, to give you some ideas of how working in libraries can help you to enhance these skills and develop different ones and to give you an idea of the possibilities that may be available to you both in and outside of library work.

Finally, I will leave you with tips for career development generously shared with me by my colleagues.

What do I do now?

To begin, I'll tell you a little of what I do now. I am principal consultant and sole proprietor of a business called Time For You – Lifestyle Management that provides a range of lifestyle services at a personal & corporate level. I provide individual personal, professional and corporate coaching, social event planning services, and personal organisation services. I also offer consultancy services to libraries, local government and other corporate bodies.

I officially started my business early in 2002 while I was still working full-time in libraries. Obviously this limited the amount of work I could do use to develop my business, so after some planning and preparation I quit my library work to focus on Time For You. For over a year now I have been fully focused on developing my business, placing the majority of my energies on providing coaching and event planning services to individuals and organisations.

My job as a coach is to facilitate and support significant change in the lives of my clients. These changes could be something they identified themselves or it could be that something that has happened to them to move them toward making changes. Either way, it is my job to help them seek further opportunities to develop through change. It is exciting and rewarding work – I get to see people motivated and achieving, reaching their potential

Planning social events is also something that I love and I have recently combined my coaching and social event planning services to develop a program called The Wedding Coach™ – designed to support couples through their transition to marriage and to assist them with organising their wedding.

I continue to be excited about entering this whole new career– but it did take a while for me to decide to set out on my own. It was a scary decision to quit a full-time, well-paying senior library position to go to a more erratic ‘find your own work’ situation. I made sure I did some planning and training before I left, and had some experience to back up my business plan.

Although what I’m doing now seems very different from library work the skills I currently use are skills I developed through my work in libraries. I’ll be outlining my experience in libraries and showing you the similarities and differences so you get the idea.

My Library Experiences:

I worked in libraries for 15 years, working in a variety of positions in public libraries. I chose public libraries initially because firstly, that was the job I got. At that time in my life any job in a library would have done – I was studying to be a Library Technician at Sydney TAFE and all I really wanted was to get to work. Luckily for me I found that I really liked public libraries for the variety of work and contact with the variety of people across the course of my day. I stayed in public libraries because I enjoyed them so much. I got to meet and assist a range of different people from diverse backgrounds and age groups. This is one of the joys of public library work.

So, I started working in a library in Sydney in December of 1987 before moving to Adelaide about 5 years later. To give you some idea of how libraries have changed in that time - the library where I started was just introducing their automated computer system in the year that I left. Through most of the time I worked for them we were using a card catalogue and manual circulation system.

Throughout my library career I have worked at all levels within the public library system, from being a library assistant, to Library Technician and middle management positions to Team Leader and senior management positions, including a stint as Acting Library Manager.

I also worked in just about every area of public libraries that you could think of including:

- Technical Services – including processing and repairs, as well as cataloguing and data entry.
- Collection Development duties
- Housebound
- Overdues
- Inter-Library Loans
- Children's services were great fun
- Community information
- Toy library – including cataloguing of toys
- Running branch libraries – sometimes supervising others, sometimes as a “one woman show” – depending on the size of the library.
- System administration
- Programs and marketing of the library service
- Circulation services were where I really discovered my library ‘niche’. The circulation services team that I headed up at the Tea Tree Gully Library consisted of about 30 people – it taught me a lot about human resource management issues and about coaching people to deliver the best customer service they can.
- And, of course, throughout the whole time, there was the mandatory desk requirements, including circulation and reference and my daily stint at shelving and shelf-checking

I've worked in small libraries and large libraries and enjoyed both, learning different things from each. The small libraries are great because you literally get to do everything, giving you great daily variety, and you learn a lot about prioritising your tasks. The large libraries are great because you get to specialise in a particular area. My speciality became circulation services.

Being involved with several Circulation Teams, I learned a lot about various approaches to customer service delivery, training staff in systems and processes, supporting them to learn and change as new technologies and processes were introduced and the utilisation of human resources for the most effective services provision without removing compassion for the people involved.

I tried a lot of different things during my library career, and working in public libraries gave me the opportunity to do this. What assisted me with my development was my curiosity, wanting to try new and different things, to learn about and be involved in the wider political scene of the organisation. But really the common theme for me was dealing with change. I worked through a huge change in the library industry with first seeing the introduction of library management systems and later the introduction of the Internet into common usage as a library resource. The introduction of Enterprise Bargaining into the industrial relations scene also had an impact on dealing with change in the libraries I worked for. And in my local political scene was a huge amalgamation of local councils, and again, another big change was my experience with moving a library to a new location. And there were numerous small changes throughout this time as well – staffing changes, rostering

changes, new processes and systems, changes to service desk design and the introduction of new collections (including videos, CDs, and DVDs). Each of these came with their own set of challenges for dealing with change.

Dealing with change, and assisting others to deal with change was a huge part of my library career and my experience in this area allows to me help my current clients to implement change in their lives.

How did I make the move?

So, after 15 years of library work and moving up to hold senior positions in libraries I decided that I'd like to try something different that was utilising these great skills I had developed and still find as rewarding as my contribution to libraries. I employed my own Life Coach and during a period of about 3 months we explored different career options for me, including what having my own business might mean. She assisted me to recognise the depth and breadth of my skills and knowledge and articulate what I really liked and what I really wanted. After 12 weeks I had registered my business name and shortly afterwards I completed an Intensive Coach Training program.

I realised I had been coaching for a long time in my work roles, and also in my personal life. The training program I undertook enhanced those skills I already had. I feel that this role I have now aligns with my purpose in life and it gives me great satisfaction and a real buzz to work with people through change, and to see them grow personally and professionally, become more confident and comfortable with who they are and where they are going.

I find many similarities between life coaching and library work: the support through change, the research I need to do for my clients - finding information to suit the individual circumstances and needs, the provision of great customer service, applying problem solving skills and the conversations I have with clients are very similar to a reference interview so I utilise those skills as well. I have made what is a significant career shift, but I am still utilising skills I developed from library work.

Stories from colleagues

In preparation for this talk I spoke to a few people who I have had the pleasure of working with in my library career over the years. Some are former colleagues and some are former managers of mine - people who have worked at various different levels within libraries. They were kind enough to share part of their stories with me and I can share some of these with you. Unfortunately we don't have time for me to share with you everything they told me during their interviews, but I will summarise their stories and later share with you their career development tips.

Not everyone who works in libraries goes on to run a business. Each of them is doing something different.

Cheryl Jordan was a Library Technician who worked in several different roles in libraries, including a stint as Library Manager of large library service. Cheryl took an opportunity that arose out of the Local Government amalgamations

that took place in South Australia a few years ago to move firstly into a corporate role that involved benchmarking, performance measurement, writing policies (this was significant as it was a 'new' organisation after amalgamation of 3 different councils) and providing input into corporate projects. She then moved into an Internal Communications role. In this role she was involved in developing an intranet, regular newsletters and the organisation's website. She then moved to a role in the Attorney-General's Department that was Communications Co-ordinator for the Justice Portfolio, a 'new' role that she had to develop, with the focus on internal communications. She had to consider the diversity of business within a portfolio that covers 11 000 people, with agencies that need to be separate for various reasons. She was again involved with intranet and web development and she also developed a communications strategies and a communications manual. She is currently taking a sabbatical and studying Creative and Professional Communication. She also has been doing some freelance consulting work which has come to her through the many people and agencies that she has had contact with.

Geoff Stempel is one of my former managers, who is still involved in libraries and has expanded his role. He is now Manager Libraries and Arts for the City of Onkaparinga. This means that, as well as managing the largest public library service in South Australia, he is also managing the largest Arts team and the Community Information Centre for that council area. Geoff has a great deal of management experience and he is utilising his outstanding management skills and his ability to read and interpret the political landscape to assist him in managing these different but related areas, and in playing an advocacy role for his teams within the organisation.

Vicki Radford was my manager at the Tea Tree Gully Library and she also is still managing the library and has been doing so for about 9 years. Vicki is different in that she manages one of the largest libraries in SA yet has no library specific qualifications. What she does have are well-developed people management skills and excellent planning skills, among many other talents, developed through management positions held in other areas including Community Development. Her leadership skills and management expertise complement the technical library specific skills of the Team Leaders who work with her to move the library service forward. Vicki transferred her skills gained in other areas to apply them into the library environment.

My friend and former colleague, Mary Anne McIntosh, had the courage and tenacity to move onto something new after spending approximately 17 years as a library assistant. She now works as a Personal Assistant for an Environmental Services team at a local council. Environmental Services takes care of things like: parking infringements, bushfire prevention, animal management/dogs, stormwater issues/pollution and environmental health – including immunisation services, insanitary conditions on properties, vermin, and swimming pools. This role seems quite different from her library role, yet she uses skills and knowledge gained from her library work to assist her in delivering services in her current role.

Beth Davidson-Park worked for approximately 16 years in libraries, at different libraries and in different roles. She is now General Manager for City Services utilising her management and leadership skills in this role. City Services is the service delivery arm of the City and includes Libraries and Community Services, Waste and Recycling, Infrastructure, Parks and Recreation. She has approximately 300 staff working throughout her department, performing tasks as diverse as mowing lawns, issuing library books, and planning roads and footpaths.

What are the skills they developed that they are still using?

In talking with each one of these I found that some common themes regarding skills development kept recurring. These are skills that are transferable across a range of very different roles. I would like to share these skills with you now. If you choose to focus on skills development in these areas, you will find you have a range of skills that you can utilise in any job you might have the opportunity to undertake throughout your career.

Common skills identified:

- Customer service – this is a skill that can easily be developed in any library environment as every library is servicing it's customers. Some have quite specific customers, and others have a very diverse range of users. Either way, you are developing your customer service skills
- Managing people, managing teams – many libraries utilise teams of people to ensure delivery of their services. You can develop the ability to work with quite diverse groups of people and manage them for outcomes. With managing any group of people the issue of managing change will eventually surface, so you will get some invaluable experience in this area also
- Financial management – managing a budget is something that many non-library workers don't realise librarians do! Get some experience at this and you have a great opportunity to challenge the 'librarian' stereotype
- Self & time management – involving setting and implementing priorities in your daily, weekly, monthly and yearly tasks. You will also get experience with managing conflicting priorities – another great skill to develop
- Leadership skills
- Research skills
- Information management – all organisations need to manage their information to some degree. You may have the opportunity to use these skills that you have been trained in to assist an organisation in managing their information really well
- Communication skills and networking skills – sharing ideas and information with each other is something that librarians and library workers do really well and is something that is missing from many other organisations and industries. Here are some skills where you can really show the benefits of networking.
- Ability to see the larger context of yourself and others place in the organisation – know where you fit in, and others fit in, so that you can best determine how to benefit the aims of your organisation.

I will be sharing with you, towards the end of this presentation some of the tips these people had for your career development. Whether you want to move

beyond libraries or not, following some of these tips will help you develop and retain marketable skills.

Career Assessment – What are my good qualities? And what are my skills?

This is the first of 5 worksheets provided for this workshop. I would like you to start your inventory of skills that you currently have and your qualities. Remember that your skills are not just skills that you use at work, of you are good at cooking then put that down – you never know when this skill can come in handy during your career development. For instance, you may be asked to focus on collection development in the cooking area of your library! Apart from that, it's good for you to acknowledge the skills you have outside of your working life, as these are just as valuable and help create you as a unique person. It helps to raise your self-esteem, which in turn helps you deal positively with others.

And qualities are the things that you possess that make you the person you are, and can be things that are attractive about you to other people. For instance, having a cheerful disposition can make you an excellent person to have on the frontline customer service positions, etc.

Career Achievement Review

This is the second worksheet. Regularly reviewing your achievements will help you to identify the new skills you are developing and is an excellent habit to have. It is ideal to be able to review your achievements at least once or twice a year. Sometimes you may wish to do this more frequently. A tip for doing this to remind you of your achievements before you forget is to include in the back of your yearly diary/calendar a sheet of note paper entitled "Achievements". As you achieve goals throughout the year (you could even put aside a day each week or month in your calendar for a quick 'achievement review' – it should only take a few minutes), note them on this sheet. That way when you get to the end of the year you have an easily accessible list of achievements to add to your resume.

The point of this worksheet is for you to really prioritise what you feel is the **best thing** you have done. You'll notice that the questions are career oriented but don't ignore achievements you might like to acknowledge from outside of work – you might be surprised at how these impact on your career. Achievements that help you to relax or learn something new boost your confidence or your ability to cope and this can also assist your career.

After you've finished filling in the boxes, flip over to the next page and see how you go answering these questions, during some reflective time. Particularly have a look at the one that says "What advice would you give someone who was just starting in their first job?" Your current position may not be your first job, but some of the advice you might still consider taking your own advice!

Career Assessment – Likes and Dislikes

This is the third worksheet. As I mentioned, I initially employed a Life Coach when I realised I wanted to do something different with my career. One of the things we covered together was looking at my career and identifying the things I liked about the jobs I had held, and the things I didn't like quite so much. This was important because it really helped me to identify the things I would most like from any future job I might hold. I originally started in libraries because Mum told me that I would love library work because I loved reading so much! Mum, of course, was right, I certainly did enjoy my work in libraries and I did work in libraries where books were a major feature and I did love that aspect. But I found I loved a whole lot more about my work than just the books, as I'm sure you will all find as you move through your careers. It was these other things that I loved that made me feel the urge to move on.

What I found was that, although I did enjoy being around the books in the public library world, what I enjoyed most was working with the people – helping them learn and grow (both staff and patrons), and helping them enjoy themselves, and establishing order for people, tasks and information. So what I do now is I help people learn and grow through my coaching, I help them enjoy themselves by planning social events for them, and I help them establish order in their lives through providing personal organisation services.

I would like you now to identify 2 of the jobs/positions that you have held – start with the very first one, even if it was working at the local fast food place or supermarket after school and look at the things you liked and the things you didn't like and the skills you needed to develop, or have to do that job really well. Also note the current or most recent job you have held, even if that is fulfilling home duties. Note how this feeds into identifying your skills as well – you may discover some that you didn't come to mind when you tried to identify your skills and you can now take the opportunity to add some more skills to your list.

If you are completing this sheet from the website, you now have more time and can identify all the jobs you have ever held to look at your likes and dislikes regarding your career so far.

Exploring Career Options

This is the worksheet where you really need to think outside the square. Now, I realise most of you are probably not thinking of moving beyond libraries right now. But this can assist you to open up more options for you in your life. If you currently don't have a job, or are still studying, it's possible that it might be a while before you can get work in a library so have a think about doing something different for a while.

Also, you will eventually be going into positions where you will need to supervise and support the career development of other staff. You can use these ideas to help them move beyond libraries, and open up their minds to the different options available to them. And when you are ready to move on, you may wish to use a similar exercise to assist you with direction.

Along the top row of the grid note some of your skills and qualities that you identified – one in each box. Then down the left hand row note the things you enjoy, the stuff you are really passionate about and interested in – again one in each box. Then where each skill meets up with something you enjoy on the grid note down a job that involves both. Don't worry if it's something you think you'll never do – this is a brainstorm to help you expand your mind to possibilities. So, for instance, if you are good at writing and enjoy cooking you might write a cookbook! Or, if you are outgoing and enjoy networking & meeting people you might decide to run an introduction agency!!

Opportunities – how do you recognise them?

Throughout my library career I was able to take advantage of opportunities as they presented themselves that allowed me to further develop professionally. I was also in the fortunate position of having managers who encouraged me to develop in this way and gave me opportunities to be involved. Some of the opportunities I was able to take were:

- Process Improvement Project – being involved with this helped me to develop the ability to implement a change process, and to review processes to assess them for efficiency. It also involved learning how to support people to make changes in their working lives.
- The amalgamation of the council I was working for with 2 other neighbouring councils was a huge change process involving a diverse range of issues, people and processes. We somehow had to move toward working together to continue to provide the public we served with great service.
- The introduction of the Internet into public library services saw me participating in some of the first public Internet training in South Australian public libraries. This allowed me to develop my own research skills on this great new tool, and to pass my knowledge onto others so that they felt supported in trying this new way of research.
- I reviewed several rostering practices for 2 very different and very complex library services – several times. Rostering is not something I was ever taught in my studies of libraries, yet the rosters for libraries of more than about 10 staff can be significant. Any large library usually has quite complex rosters and someone has to do them. Being involved with rosters taught me some great problem solving skills and some great people management skills.
- In my work at the Tea Tree Gully Library I had the fantastic opportunity of assisting with designing a whole new library including contributing to the design of a new circulation desk, introducing a new approach to customer service for the staff at that library, and developing a set of processes required for working within a new library building. Then the actual moving of the library itself and all the different aspects alongside that. This was a huge change and supporting staff through that change was mammoth task. Luckily I didn't have to do it on my own – the manager and team leaders at the library, and many more of the staff involved supported each other in making this happen.

There are more, but you can see how each opportunity assisted my career development. Sometimes opportunities are easy to find and to take advantage of. Sometimes we are too close to them to recognise them. The **Current and Upcoming Opportunities** worksheet is to help you identify possible opportunities in your life and work. Make a commitment to do something about these opportunities when you get back to work – do it as soon as possible before you lose motivation. Initiate some action within your first week of getting back to work.

Tips for career development

This workshop has not just been about moving beyond libraries, but also about developing professionally within libraries. Hopefully listening to me today and completing some of these worksheets has started you thinking about possible career development opportunities and the range of skills you already have and can develop further to assist you in this career and help you move onto the next.

I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues who I interviewed for this workshop: Cheryl Jordan, Geoff Stempel, Mary Anne McIntosh, Vicki Radford and Beth Davidson-Park. They took time out from busy schedules to share their stories and advice with me, so that I could share this with you.

I'm going to leave you with these tips for your career development so generously shared with me by these colleagues:

- Be curious – if you are interested in the world beyond your own job description people will notice it and begin to offer you more opportunities
- Look for opportunities to diversify your skills. Even different roles in libraries develop different sets of expertise for you.
- Consider cross-organisational projects – you have some good skills to offer the rest of your organisation and this is the opportunity for you to be an excellent representative of your library and libraries generally. Great P.R. that challenges the stereotype, and in turn you will develop some more great skills and knowledge
- Develop self-awareness – know your weaknesses and strengths.
- Get support to develop your strengths and minimise your weaknesses - get advice and use mentors
- Be open to sharing with others
- Be prepared to work above your own level and outside your 'core' duties – give them more than they ask for! When the opportunity for promotion comes up your manager will know you can do it already, making you less of a risk and more likely to get the position.
- Set goals and work toward them
- Remain passionate – regularly review your motivation and commitment and how you can retain it. Be aware that you can become stale without realising it – even if you feel comfortable and happy where you are. Change jobs if you feel you are no longer making a difference and remember that by trying different things you discover what you love.