

Taking Charge of your LIS Career: Personal Strategies, Institutional Programs, Strong Libraries
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Planning Your Personal Development

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Abstract:

Professionals today are faced with an ever-changing environment that includes new information, new technology, and even new types of patrons on a daily basis. To maintain skills after completing a professional degree means creating and following a personal development plan. This paper outlines some of the self-learning opportunities available to librarians beginning with the more traditional and moving into newer methods including those that can be used by librarians working in isolation. In addition suggestions are provided for those who wish to teach others how to create their personal learning networks. Covering these topics in depth is impossible in a conference paper so an appended bibliography offers suggestions for those interested in more detailed information. Although the paper is written from a US perspective many of the resources mentioned are available online, via library databases, and through interlibrary loan.

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Keywords: Librarians, Continuing Professional Development, Personal learning networks, Trainers

Introduction

Most graduates from library and information science programs (LIS) discover the need for continuing professional development immediately after they enter the workforce if they have not recognized it when they were asked a question they could not answer at a reference interview. Because this is rarely addressed in formal academic programs new professionals may not be certain how to begin creating a professional development plan for themselves. The premise of this paper is that *all* professionals need to remain current and to grow by participating in professional development. One very effective way is to build a personal learning network (PLN). Harlan defines a PLN as “Put simply, it is the people with whom

you surround yourself, the tools you use, and the resources you rely on to introduce yourself to new ideas and best practices. It is a network that encourages learning and personal growth.” (Harlan 2009, 1)

The material covered by this paper describes methods to use to build a learning network, beginning with the more traditional, such as professional reading and attending workshops and conferences, and moving into newer innovative opportunities that are expanding daily through technologies like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), online courses, and webinars. The last section provides suggestions for when one is responsible for helping others plan their learning networks and are serving as a trainer rather than as a participant.

Information contained within this paper can be supplemented by a Google search, and the bibliography at the end will be useful for continuing reading. However, the very first step in this process is to determine what it is that the recent graduate or professional wants to learn about *right now*. Is the library bringing in a new technology for staff and patrons that you will need to master quickly? Does the director want you to learn about self-publishing because patrons are clamoring for help? Are you preparing for a job interview for which knowledge of budgeting and accounting, something seldom taught in library and information science (LIS) programs, is critical? What interesting courses were available during your LIS degree but with no time to take them ?

When you are establishing a plan for professional development, you will need a goal for self-directed learning. For the purposes of this paper, examples will be given as if the learning goal was to learn about self-publishing in order to assist patrons with questions about it. Deciding on a best method depends upon a personal learning style. Do you learn better by reading a paragraph, listening to an explanation, or seeing a picture?

Other factors related to personal learning experiences in this paper have been tested by Terrill (2014). She reports the results of a study of the roles played by six distinct information sources (journal articles, conferences, electronic discussion lists, blogs, microblogs, and social networking sites) in the continuing education of catalogers. Results of her assessment of numbers of users by demographics, age, and gender matched to your demographic, age, and gender might provide a suggestion for a first choice of method.

The “Isolated” Professional

The isolated professional can be defined informally as someone who has chosen to work from home or from an atypical physical location (for example a coffee shop). However, isolated professionals also can be school librarians who are the only information professionals in their building, rural librarians who oversee a small library with a limited staff, or those who manage a small special library.

While librarians who work in large systems are likely to have some form of learning update or professional development through the library itself, often available either in the library or one of its branches, this is not the case for librarians working at home or at smaller sites. Nevertheless, professional development is critical to keeping up with trends, remaining current, and learning how to use new technologies, and these activities need not be costly.

Opportunities for isolated librarians come through a wide variety of sources, beginning with structured reading of professional periodicals. These publications review trends and issues within the profession as well as research being conducted on topics relevant to library work. An often overlooked opportunity comes when you write for a periodical to share a successful program idea or the results of a study you have conducted. Discovery about self-publishing begins with a database search for articles in journals to uncover the most recent information. Books about self-publishing are available both from the library as well as through purchase or eBook, which could then be shared with patrons or borrowed through interlibrary loan.

One learning experience is that of writing an article or even writing a book, sharing your knowledge about a subject with others. If you have colleagues who are willing to share their knowledge on a particular topic, you might collect chapters and produce a contributed volume. You might be able to put the information you have learned about self-publishing into a pamphlet to give to interested patrons.

The essentially traditional model of education is defined as attending an educational institution, so if you live in the vicinity of a community college or a university, these institutions may offer opportunities to increase your skills, especially with respect to technology, by allowing you to work with new kinds of equipment. Although these classes are usually fee-based, they offer credit or a certificate of some kind to acknowledge your participation if such recognition is needed.

Many isolated professionals are able to attend professional association meetings. The added value of face-to-face experiences is the opportunity to network with colleagues and, through casual conversations, solve problems or discover new trends and issues, even find a way to collaborate on a project.

Workshops and institutes are offered by agencies such as those provided in the US by the state library in each state to help individuals working in small libraries improve their skills. The US federal government offers a competitive process for library and information science programs or other organizations to apply for funding to conduct these workshops. Sometimes these carry a stipend for the day or even accommodation expenses if the program is a week.

Local, state, national, and international professional associations hold their conferences on a regular basis and offer workshops and conference programming for their members. Most associations provide information for registering for the conference, accommodation information, and the programs that will be offered, so you need not be a member to find out what you can learn should you plan to attend. Here you will find persons in positions similar to your own and the networking that happens between the programs may be better than what one learns in a session. Some associations offer special programs, for example for leadership such as the Texas Library Association's "Tall Texans," designed to assist outstanding members develop and expand their leadership skills, something that is critical in our profession. Becoming more actively involved in any association adds to your personal learning network, and being a part of one or more of the committees or the governing boards places you on the cutting edge of what is happening within the profession.

If financial support is limited, you may only be able to attend state and infrequent national association meetings, but opportunities are becoming more and more available to "attend" conferences, institutes, and programs virtually. Doing so can expand your participation in both the actual programming and in joining committees. Usually it is easier to get funding for

attending a meeting when you are directly involved in the work of the association or if you are making a presentation at the conference. It is also easier to make a presentation at a local or state meeting where the programming is dependent upon members offering the sessions. As you begin to grow your audience and you write for periodicals, your “fame” will spread and may ideally lead to national speaking opportunities.

Moving into the international arena may mean using your vacation time and personal savings. Unless your institution is able to provide funding, you will be responsible for the costs incurred in attending conferences at changing locations around the world. However international conferences can help you increase your understanding of the similarities and differences beyond the libraries and other information agencies in any country. Traveling abroad also provides you with the opportunity to learn firsthand about the food, customs, culture, landscape, weather, and of the country you visit far beyond what you can read about or view on television.

Technology for the Learner

Many learning opportunities are available via the Internet. For example Ted Talks (available at <http://www.ted.com/talks>) provides 1,900 talks on a wide variety of topics guaranteed to stir your curiosity. Talks can be sorted by newest, by subject, by descriptors such as “informative” or “fascinating,” or by speakers, all in alphabetical order.

“Wiki” (from the Hawaiian word meaning “quick”) and best known through the Wikipedia site contains an updated powerhouse of information. Wikis foster collaboration among users and one learning step is to click on “edit page” and add information to an existing Wiki. A Wiki may be private, such as those developed by teachers for use with their classrooms, and you will need to observe the protocol to become a “member.” A Google search can provide links to any number of Wiki sites.

Blogs are started and maintained by experts in a particular area and their information is cutting edge. You can begin a search for a blog in one of two ways -- using Google to search for a blog on a topic such as self-publishing or using Google to locate an expert whom you know can be helpful. If you just find an expert by searching Google, you can look up the authority of the writer with a Google search or on Facebook or Instagram. It is easy to tell when these experts are keeping their blogs up-to-date by the frequency of postings of new information.

Microblogs such as Twitter and Tumblr are available within the social media realm and often offer “it just happened” posts. Joining Twitter (<https://twitter.com/signup>) allows you to write short, 140 character “tweets.” If you are not “registered” you can only read tweets, but registering allows you to write tweets. Twitter is a double-edged sword because it provides some 227,000,000 blogs and allows you and others to post content using multimedia. The Tumblr microblogging platform (<https://www.tumblr.com>) and social media website is now owned by Yahoo. The downside of microblogs is the potential takeover of your time. Joining can happen in only a few seconds, but the number of responses to your tweets rises rapidly as your followers increase.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are available through Google searches, either directly <http://www.mooclab.club/threads/20-facts-about-elearning-infographic.3741>) or through joining the social network LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/20-facts-about-eLearning-Infographic>). For LIS programs, these are relatively recent course offerings from both San Jose State University and Syracuse University. They are heavily subscribed and may or may not be interactive. They may extend over a short or longer period of time. As mentioned above, David Lanke recently offered a MOOC on self-publishing.

Social Networks include Facebook, Instagram, Google and LinkedIn and all require joining their respective network. Doing so opens the door to locating long lost friends; but the reverse is that you can be found by anyone who accesses those networks. They have the same pitfall as the microblog. With no restrictions on the numbers of postings, it can seem that some people do nothing else but spend hours on these social networks. However, they do offer an opportunity to learn from persons whose names you have researched and whom you consider to be experts.

Some technology-based experiences may have a fee. However, any experience outside your home or library will incur some cost. If you are going to a local meeting, lecture, or training session, you must still get there and this will involve the cost of transportation. If you have to pay for parking, another cost is added. Compare these potential costs to the fee charged for the online offering or the webinar.

Some online courses may be free, such as the open courses from Harvard and MIT, and Dalhousie with its Brown Bag Lunch series. These provide opportunities to hone skills in areas of need. Most university-based courses may offer continuing education credit and the tuition may be less than they charge for their degree -granting offerings -- but they will not be free.

A webinar may be free or it may also be fee-based such as those webinars being sponsored by organizations or companies who wish to generate revenue. These are usually “advertised” on a wide variety of lists and one finds them as a member of the list. Some webinars are offered over several weeks and may have certificates that can help with fulfilling requirements for the workplace. While other types of librarians use webinars to keep current, many school librarians are expected to do some form of formal, certified training maintain their teaching credentials. The credit offered will be as valuable as the acceptance of that “credit” by their workplace.

From Learner to Trainer

Persons who develop expertise in any area of our profession should feel obligated to share that knowledge in whenever ways possible. To help others develop their own personal learning networks you can introduce them to the methods described above. Hints for ways to do this are provided below. Preparing such events takes time and may involve other costs that are not readily considered at first glance. Appendix A charts planning needs and possible costs.

Helping others to become readers can be as simple as making suggestions of items to read by providing citations to articles on a topic of interest. Forwarding an entire article would be most helpful but may generate copyright problems. When encouraging others to write for a

journal, they must have the name of the person to whom to send the article and some indication of what the journal editor is seeking. Even though this beginning information is helpful, coaching a group through the process requires adequate time to help the group create and modify their articles to make them truly of interest for publication.

Writing professional books is the final part of this learning event. You can meet book publishers at professional conferences and learn what topics they are most interested in adding to their catalogs. You can also get catalogs from major LIS publishers and ask participants to compare what each company has published. If one topic is missing, that publisher might welcome a proposal from one of your participants.

Since the theme of the learning experience discussed in this paper has been “self-published book” it is fitting that as a trainer you introduce the learner to self-publishing. Amazon (www.amazon.com) has added the self-publishing of books to its many other offerings. Going online to their site allows a potential author to click on CreateSpace.com and begin the process of writing a book. Templates are there to assign author and title, create a cover, and even provide an ISBN. Other companies offer assistance but the budding author needs to analyze the charges being assessed very carefully. The self-publishing process can become very costly if a great deal of “assistance” is provided.

As a trainer, you may also teach in a college or university. Professors often teach courses and then accept assignments as trainers based upon their expertise: David Lankes from Syracuse offers self-publishing as a topic both for his MOOC and his blog. Many colleges and universities welcome someone to teach a special course that might appeal to degree students or for continuing professional education. If you are discussing this potential opportunity with your participants, they will need to know the application process, the time involvement, and the stipend they will receive.

Institute and sponsored workshops are provided by government agencies at both the state and national level because they are costly to offer. Opportunities to make a proposal to an agency, especially at the federal level, are published in places where other projects are listed. Because many state libraries are looking for things that are needed for all the librarians in their state, they might welcome a day-long workshop on an evolving topic. You would need to provide for your participants the titles of workshops funded by the state library within the past two or three years and the name of the person to whom to send the proposal. Costs that may be anticipated are hinted in Appendix A.

Traditionally, professional development has been a major activity of any professional association. As a trainer, you can provide information about the process of joining such an association and the benefits of becoming actively involved. Sharing information with those you are assisting, about how much it costs to become a member of the association and what opportunities exist for mentoring, can be very helpful, as is information about who in the association has the ability to appoint members to various committees. As a trainer you may have the ability to provide introductions to association leadership and also submit recommendations for appointments.

The smaller the organization, the easier it should be to become active. Knowing the gatekeeper, that person who in medieval times was in charge of the city gates or now is someone who controls something, or helping a mentee discover this person, is the quickest way to move into the committee structure of an association. In a large international

association such as the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), this process becomes easier when you attend pre-conferences and the main meeting. At this conference, you will have an opportunity to meet face-to-face with others who can suggest how you can become active in a section. They can even explain the structure of the organization itself, although most of this information is found on the IFLA website.

For many people, one of the greatest challenges is to get a message out to an audience. Beginning in the early grades, the human who feels shy builds a resistance to presenting to any audience. If your assignment is to help persons with their personal learning goals to make a presentation, the process can be daunting. Donovan (2014) prepares the reader to give a Ted Talk and Baldoni (2014) offers suggestions for looking like a speaker. Other books are available to help write a speech and present it, but they will need to start practicing with you. While Ted Talks do not presently feature a speaker on our theme topic, self-publishing books, it could be used by your audience for a YouTube presentation.

One opening technique is to ask member of the group to interview their neighbors and then introduce that person to the group. At that point, they have made a presentation to a group, and the trainer can build from there, moving into giving longer presentations. Allowing everyone to present is not easily done in a large face-to-face group because of the time needed. Providing an opportunity for each person to videotape their lecture allows for a critique by the trainer and the speaker outside the actual presentation, and some comments could even be given after the workshop has ended.

Most people with any access to technology have learned about Wikipedia, and that is the easiest way to demonstrate a wiki to your audience. Some in the audience may already be familiar with a particular wiki and could share it. It is little more difficult to help people establish their own wiki. A wiki can be created and used to store resources within a library. Teehan (2010, 15) says that “Setting up a Wiki is a simple process,” and her book is a quick guide to doing just that, although this book is now three years old and the URLs may need to be updated. In helping others create a wiki, trainers will need to decide how elaborate will it be, who will be accessing the wiki, what they will be providing in the content, and in what formats. The trainer also needs to help them decide where to host the Wiki: one suggestion is to use Wiki-MoodleDocs (https://docs.moodle.org/24/3n/Using_Wiki) and follow the instructions at “creating”. Once a wiki is set up, a user will click the link and reach newwikipage.png.

Helping participants in training to find a blog will introduce them to leaders in the profession. If participants are recent LIS graduates they might want to see if any authors of their textbooks have a blog or they could look at the authors of some articles or other books with which they are familiar. Participants can look up a topic such as self-publishing and do the Google search test for information about the author to help them assess the expertise of their person. Because David Lankes has a blog on self-publishing and is a recognized expert, he could be used as an example for searching. If the purpose of your training session is to build a blog, that will take a little more time.

Because a blog is a web page, it will be necessary to explain how to create a blog. Try building a personal website using WordPress.com, an easy to use free platform. Goodman (2014) has provided an excellent guide to help build the site for a blog. It is immediately available once you sign up, easy to set up, and has a content management system (CMS) to help manage all the content including text, images, and audio or video files. Users can also be

managed so that additions to your blog are under your control. However this platform does have its problems, as Goodman notes.

Another form of a blog that has been popular in basic education is podcasting. A recognized expert in this field, Fontichiaro (2008; 2013) used podcasting in her elementary school, and now, as a university faculty member, shares her experiences with her students there because it encourages active learning.

Some warning needs to be given to participants about the microblogs such as Twitter or Tumblr. This has been covered above in the paper, but the ease of joining is simple compared to using the sites. Allowing an audience to join Twitter or Tumblr will be very fast. Getting them back to the other demonstrations you might be planning may take somewhat longer.

While participating in a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) is simply a matter of joining and attending, and interacting if it is interactive, creating a MOOC is not for the faint of heart. Typically MOOCs are offered by skilled instructors who spend a great deal of time preparing for the presentation. During the presentation timeline they must be available electronically for their participants. David Lankes recently hosted a MOOC “Publish or Perish, From Monk to MOOCs” and has a blog on the same subject (quartzsyr.edu/blog/?p=6100); in Fall 2014 Sue Alman of San Jose State University offered “The Emerging Future: Technology, Issues, and Trends”.

Several platforms now exist that allow anyone to create a MOOC for both paying and non-paying students, but it is important to look carefully to find the one that best fits your needs. These include the following:

- Canvas Network is a free platform if you have access to course development using the Canvas Learning Management System (<https://www.canvas.net/pages/offer-a-course>). (This service is not available to anyone who has commercial motives.)
- <http://mooconewsandreviews.com/building-your-own-online-class-how-to-choose-the-mooc-platform/>
- <http://universityofreddit.com/class/67829/how-to-make-a-mooc> (This is a MOOC on how to effectively create a MOOC).

Offering a training session on use of social networks perhaps should begin with a warning about the lack of longevity with almost any social network, because some fade away. Five years ago, MySpace was perhaps the most active social network on this planet. Certainly Facebook and LinkedIn remain strong, but a new entry on the market could result in users moving away from any network.

Further very strong warnings relate to problems associated with social networking, including online predators, those who become cyberbullies, spyware and viruses, and the chances of becoming a victim of identity theft. Posting an identity on Facebook allows anyone looking for you to find you. This may be the long lost friend who moved away your second year in high school, and you are delighted to reconnect. It can also be person you didn't take to some event and it wasn't a happy occasion. Course participants' Google searches of their own names may also surprise and might even alarm them when they find just how many pictures of them are there for the world to see. The information available is gathered from events where they may not have realized it would arrive on the web.

Moving from face-to-face to online instruction is not simply translating course notes into the classroom management system in place at the institution offering the course. Otter suggests, “Typically, a course development project can require three months to one year: however, the time necessary will vary by the competency of the faculty member in designing online instruction and by the academic discipline of the course” (Otter 2012, 21). Some instructors meet with their students at a regularly assigned time slot and offer lectures and conversations with students who may be signed in from all over the globe. Others may post readings, audio, and video content. These options are available through the class management system where the course is being hosted.

Webinars, usually shorter than quarter or semester courses, have the added challenge of sometimes being offered by instructors in studios with no audience. For some, this is a difficult situation because they need the reaction of their audience to simplify a concept or even to see if there is any interest in the topic. If participants are expected to plan a webinar, an opportunity to be video-taped and reviewed for discussion either by the group or just by the instructor is essential. It might be possible that the audience could develop a Webinar to share the information they have gained about self-publishing for the patrons in their library.

When developing training opportunities for others in one of the many opportunities offered in a personal learning network, the course must use good instructional design. Two books, by Wiggins and McTighe (2012) and by Loertscher, Koechlin, and Zwaan (2011) would be useful in developing courses and in helping course participants develop their own.

In Conclusion

No matter how you begin or continue to develop your personal learning network, how successful you are in achieving your goal is totally up to you. Your personal learning network will give you information through reading blogs and tweets and attending webinars and other courses. You can add your knowledge to these events, and in this way help others.

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Appendix A

Time and Cost Commitment for Training Opportunities

Program	Staff Time	Expenses for participants	Speakers to be hired	Use of Time #	Online or Social Media	Site	Cost ##	Factors Beyond Staff
Reading Suggestions	X			#	Wiki or Blog		\$	
Writing	X	Fee?		###	Yes		\$	
Wiki	X			#	Yes		\$\$	Upkeep
Blog	X			#	Yes		\$\$	
Microblog	X			#	Yes			
MOOC	X		Yes	#####	Yes			
Facebook et al	X			#				
Formal Courses		Tuition		#####			\$\$\$	Facility Techs
Workshop Institute		Fee? housing	Yes	#####			\$\$\$	Facility Techs
Professional Associations		Dues		#####			\$\$\$	Facility
Speaking		Registration		#####			\$\$\$	Facility

+ = one hour ++ half day +++one day ++++one week or more

\$ = 100 or less \$\$ = 101 - \$500 \$\$\$ = \$500+