

LOUISIANA LIBRARIES

LOUISIANA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION



For New Librarians

Most new librarians will not be lucky enough to be given an amazing budget to plan and build a brand new library where they make every decision from book collection to the flow of the furniture. New librarians are usually handed a set of keys and told to report to work on Monday! Librarians learn a great deal in SLIS programs but becoming a tried and true professional librarian oftentimes means learning as you go. To help the new librarian get started, this article serves as a guide that will break down what needs to be done in 6 simple steps: the 6 Pillars of KNOWledge for New Librarians. A new librarian or library media specialist will need to be self-sufficient and self-seeking when it comes to gaining KNOWledge in order to not only be successful but highly effective.

6 Pillars of KNOWledge for New Librarians

- Know Your Collection.
- Know Your Patrons.
- Know Your Colleagues.
- Know Your Profession.
- Know How To Share.
- Know Your Community.



Know Your Collection

A librarian must know what resources are on the shelves and in the library space in general. Various integral operational information from how many people each room can hold to how old the existing technology is to what project/program materials you have on hand is integral for establishing a foundation for success. In order to best know the collection, any library, but particularly a new librarian, should walk the stacks and know the shelves. Before a librarian can begin to buy new titles, (s)he must first know what already exists within the collection. Consistently and regularly re-evaluating the collection to inform decisions to weed, replenish, and restock is a crucial aspect of librarianship, particularly for those in single librarian facilities/systems. Since librarianship is a field that constantly changes (e.g. popular authors, electronic mediums, databases), collections must do the same. If the collection remains stagnate for too long, it becomes invalid and undesirable, pushing away those the librarian hopes will utilize its resources. The collection must remain current and valid for its intended audience. Researching current trends as well as longstanding community interest are invaluable allocations of effort and time for a new librarian. Furthermore, because of limited budgets and strict ordering guidelines, librarians need to research grant and fundraising opportunities to help build a flush and vital collection!

Know Your Patrons

The building and stewardship of a collection are intimately tied to community awareness. All librarians should know and understand the populations they serve. No matter what type of library or community a librarian serves, knowing the patrons within the community and their educational and entertainment needs remains crucial for creating an appropriate collection. The sooner a new librarian learns this, the sooner he/she can begin to build relationships with patrons and develop a rapport with the community members. In doing so, the new librarian will learn how best to reach the users and serve them as well as what resources they need and want. Building those relationships allows patrons

to feel safe in the library and feel safe opening up to the librarian. This relationship allows the librarian to sort out books and other resources that can best help the patron while giving him/her a place (maybe his/her only place) to belong. The new librarian will quickly realize just how much power he/she holds and how to use that power wisely for the betterment of the community and the library.

Know Your Colleagues

Whether it is a solitary librarian system or there are several librarians working in tandem, familiarity with other librarians in the area, especially colleagues serving similar populations can be critical for a new librarian. Since being a librarian is sometimes a solitary job, it is challenging to work without a mentor or support system, individuals who know the ups and downs of the job. This is why it is critical for solitary librarians to network and meet others, especially other librarians in their area. The new librarian can find confidantes as well as sources for ideas and guidance by establishing relationships within the local, regional, or national librarian community. Some information may only be gleaned via experience, so interactions with established, experienced librarians offer excellent educational opportunities. Of course, a great way to gain that necessary knowledge is to research librarian online resources such as librarian blogs and websites. Gone are the days where personal and professional learning networks only exist in person. There are many amazing librarian communities online that a new librarian can join for little or no cost. A new librarian would be well-served to join these collaborative learning hotspots and enlist in the fun!

Even though a large part of a librarian's job is dealing with patrons, an integral part is also dealing with the adults who live...I mean work... in the building. Building those relationships allows the librarian to know what resources are needed, what topics are important to your location, and what policies need to be followed. It also allows for the librarian to have more opportunities to reach patrons because the more co-workers trust the librarian, the more the library will be used for its intended purpose. Getting to know colleagues and learning the culture of the library will inform the new librarian about not only the library but the profession as a whole.

Know Your Profession

Librarians, as with any profession, must constantly and consistently learn and grow. Researching the new librarian's state library association and joining can be a great first professional step. Attending local, state, and national conferences provides opportunities for both networking and education that can be vital for new or seasoned librarians as well. Not allowing these types of situations to overwhelm the new librarian is essential to being a successful participant. Everyone, even the "big names" running the conferences, started out somewhere, and they will not bite! A new librarian's fresh take on library science is just what everyone is looking for, so a new librarian shouldn't waste that energy by keeping it to him/herself! Once the entry level librarian feels comfortable, volunteering for committees and/or assisting with the innerworkings of conferences provides great educational experiences. From that vantage point, the librarian can see the inside workings of the profession and see how the rules, procedures, standards, and laws that affect his/her career are made. Knowledge of what is going on within the profession and having active voices can make the difference between a job and a fulfilling career. The more a librarian knows about the profession the more he/she will view himself as a professional and become an advocate for librarians everywhere! If the librarian will not advocate for his/her profession, who will?

Know How to Share

Having knowledge is not enough! Librarians must learn how to teach and how to deal professionally with patrons. A librarian must conduct him/herself in a positive way that lets children, teens, and adults alike know that not only does the librarian have the knowledge, he/she is eager to share it and patient enough to walk him/her through the process of acquiring needed resources. Understanding that we are not the keepers of knowledge, but actually the facilitators of knowledge is key!

We must have stellar customer service skills. First impressions are crucial, so treat every interaction like this will be a life-changing event! You honestly never know how you affect those around you through interacting with them. Even if the patron does not seem to appreciate your help in the moment, that is fine. With more experience in this profession, you

will learn that sometimes you are the only positivity in a person's day! And if a positive first impression is made, you may make a life-long patron! So learn how to share your knowledge successfully and positively, and you will be the librarian that patrons feel comfortable asking for help! And isn't that why you choose this profession in the first place?

Know Your Community

The librarian should know the outlook, the mission, the plan, the vision, the limitations, and the makeup of the community he/she is serving. All of this information creates the culture, and with this information, librarians can know where they best fit in the grand scheme of things and can know how to better their community and positively affect the future of the patrons, the library, and the community as a whole. The first way to do this is by knowing the patrons! Next, go to some community events

if possible. Letting patrons see the librarian's face outside of the library can be a great way to establish and underscore the existence of the library and the librarian's place in the community. Visiting other libraries in the area, even if they are not the same type of library, can serve to educate the librarian about the community. Performing these actions helps patrons see the librarian as part of their community (even if he/she does not live there). As the librarian gets to know the community, he/she will get to learn about the patrons, know what to add to the collection, and know the right ways to share knowledge with them.

New librarians have chosen a wonderful profession that can be as fulfilling as they make it! The 6 Pillars of KNOWledge for New Librarians will strengthen the entry-level librarian into an unstoppable professional librarian with awesome, important work ahead of him/her. KNOWledge is their power!

