

Umbrella 2011: Do Skills and Professionalism Matter?

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Susie Kay

This was the question which was asked at a recent workshop held by Sue Hill and Susie Kay at Umbrella 2011. The answer is somewhat more complex, as there are various aspects which go into being a professional such as reputation, first impressions, how we as individuals behave towards others, our level of work and customer service we might give to people we meet throughout each individual day. This workshop was very interactive and everyone was given the opportunity to think about the question and provide opinions.

Attitude

Reputation

An individual's attitude can affect a range of aspects, one of which is your reputation. You need to provide an honest assessment of your reputation; this is sometimes done using a 360 degree appraisal. This allows you to see how your peers, managers and people you supervise view you: it's about how good you are and how you want to be perceived. Developing and maintaining your reputation will, in turn, help you get results; in a work project, demonstrating your service value and can be used to help drive your career path. There are lots of opportunities to achieve this; engaging with the professional body, being an ambassador for your library, taking part in online discussions. It is vital to remember that your reputation has to be earned in order to assess the effects which you are having on your service. In order to increase and enhance your reputation you need to do it for *you*.

Library Sector in general

Discussion centred on what key library services are. These can include: customer service, training, cataloguing. One person stated that as information professionals "we act as connectors to information for our users – information enablers – we are marriage brokers not stock brokers"

In general, information professionals can be adaptable, flexible. The present climate is very much very much doom and gloom and our services have to be continually justified in order to prove our worth. We therefore have to expand our knowledge on proving evidence of the worth which we provide to the organisation and our users.

johnrdolan John Dolan #ub11 library?- Sue Hill says it's the 'beating heart of your organisation'

Impact
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Trumpet blowing

A good place to start is makes sense to create a list of all your skills, and this does not have to be limited to your 9-5 job, you can also include skills and abilities which you have learnt through hobbies or committee participation. You need to be a “career chameleon”, and be willing to undertake roles which might be outside of your comfort zone. The job titles are also changing – but the skills which we have as “librarians/information professionals” are ones which we can apply to many different roles – they are things which we can do, just called something different.

It is sensible to remember when you are applying for jobs, just what the recruiter wants – so document and deliver this information. During a job interview we should state not “we” do this but “I”: don’t be negative. Part of the process is standing up for yourself – talk about the interesting things first.

Sue stated that it is useful to remember that you are not Tesco supermarket’s value range but its finest range.

Plan B

It is vital to sit down and think about your “plan B”. What would you do if your library or service made you redundant and there were no other library jobs. It was suggested that you should find a quiet place to think and carry out a skills audit, this can include:

- What are you good at
- What is your dream job – what would it look like?
- Sell your skills – look at hobbies and include these
- What could you be good at and what would you like to do.

One key aspect is to be honest with yourself and about the level of your knowledge. If there are some things which you would not want to do remove them from the list or relegate them to the bottom.

Behaviour

In this era of mass and social media it is necessary to think about your reputation, as employers can now find you via facebook, twitter and LinkedIn. Recruitment agencies and companies search these sites to find the right employees for their vacancies. It is useful that we use this media in the right way, as we can also use this media to help find advisers to help shape us and build our reputations and our networks. Therefore it is a good idea to recognise that, how we write and portray ourselves on blogs and twitter can also affect our reputation. It is also practical to think about how you interact with the colleagues you come into contact with during the day, meetings and conferences.

First Impressions are still important! It takes 6-7 seconds to make a first impression after this it is difficult to change impression. This can happen in a wide range of locations, work, pub, by email, social networks. Therefore this can mean that a first impression is being made about you by lots of different people that you come into contact with. Therefore how to do you ensure that you make the right impression and you get a positive outcome. Susie’s comments were that they were all about self-esteem, being flexible, changing the label and open yourself to new potential opportunities.

Character

Information skills can be very individual you need to look at both your own and what you need to make yourself employable. Library folk are very good at only concentrating on their own role, and helping others to develop their skills. It is very easy to make a good impression; this can be done by having marketable skills, services and in everything which we do.

Skills and Competencies

Sue stated that “there are always new skills to learn”, these can be tangible and practical. Your attitude about how you meet these needs is key. The generic skills which are taught at library school are fine in theory but how do you prove that you can put them into practice? In order to do any type of job, you have to have the self-belief that you are capable of carrying out the duties. With soft skills there is no rubber stamp to say that you can do this. It’s all down to you showing that you not only have the subject knowledge but that you have a variety of the soft skills, such as presenting, communication and team work.

A discussion was held about the types of skills which were needed to meet the demands of today’s workforce some members of the workshop had recently recruited and below are some of the skills which they were looking for:

- Accuracy of work
- Communication
- Flexibility
- Can do – forward thinking
- Knowledge of Organisation
- Attitude
- Adaptive
- Passion for job and role
- Winging it
- Delivering
- Translating user needs
- Thinking on feet
- Vision
- Planning
- Managing those around and above
- Thinking ahead

The overarching question of what is professionalism, it was argued that it is not just one aspect but, in Susie’s opinion, three aspects that form this concept; they are Attitude, Behaviour and Character.

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