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Change and Connections: Passion and Organizational Change

Lynn Baird

Librarians are change agents, working in an environment that requires us to be both leading and chasing change. We lead change when we create programs to meet our institutional needs based upon our knowledge of our students and faculty, available resources, and our awareness of the potential for what might be. We chase change when institutional priorities shift suddenly, in response to external forces such as funding or politics, or as a result of leadership transitions. Change can be invigorating for us as it keeps the creative juices flowing. Conversely, it can be exhausting when we feel as though we have lost control of the direction of the institution or if change is not perceived as a process that will enhance the future. Change that happens to us can deplete us, robbing us of our original professional passion that brought us to the field, unless we are permitted to participate in its implementation. Leadership can be the determining factor in our relationship to change. Leadership provides the context for transforming an organization and establishes how individuals can be involved in the process.

Much has been written about change and leadership. Most articles refer to the role of the leader as the change element. In this article, two authors have been selected for closer inspection because of the interrelationship of their ideas on the topic of leadership based upon a different premise: the responsibility of the individual in the change process. Margaret Wheatley explores organizational change through a scientific lens (Wheatley, 1999). Wheatley muses about the conditions needed to enable people to approach change with a sense of wonder and curiosity, open to transformation within the chaos of organizational storms. She suggests that people, to address change successfully, need to be connected to three things: the fundamental identity of the organization, new information, and to relationships anywhere in the system. Steven J. Bell takes a slightly different approach in his article, "A Passion for Academic Librarianship: Find it, Keep it, Sustain it—a Reflective Inquiry" (Bell, 2003). Bell assumes our connection to organizational mission and our access to new information. He focuses specifically on Wheatley's third element, the relationships, and how those relationships fuel our excitement for our work.

Bell identifies professional passion as the quality that gives our professional lives meaning, a “by-product of doing something you really enjoy” (Bell, 2003). Wheatley might describe this as the organic side of organizations, operating with intrinsic rewards. Bell recognizes that we come into the profession because we have somehow identified with the core values of librarianship, a teaching and learning environment that is a vital part of the tripartite goals of academia: teaching, research, and service. Bell posits that our link to this calling is dependent upon our relationships--how we relate to others within and outside of our profession. His foundation of what he calls the Four Frames of Passion, a model of librarians and their professional circles, rests upon these connections.

The Four Frames of Passion (Student, Faculty, Community, and Self) describe different relationships that librarians experience in the broad academic community, extending from local institutions to the “global and virtual networks in which we operate” (Bell, 2003). How we interact is key to developing and sustaining professional passion, and Bell’s goal in his article is “to help each academic librarian gain a unique perspective on ‘why we do it’ so that he or she may avoid falling victim to a lack of passion” (Bell, 2003). Wheatley notes the need for interaction as well, commenting on how relationships increased workers’ productivity and intrinsic rewards.

Bell’s model includes the Student Frame, the Faculty Frame, the Community Frame, and the Self Frame. Students are at the core; they are our primary teaching contact. Students require the most intensive interaction with the library, and we maintain relationships with them through contacts in the library, on campus, and in the community. “Interaction with students of any age is a primary benefit of the educational environment for it keeps us in a youthful state of mind where we can constantly learn and prosper from intellectual challenges” (Bell, 2003). Bell does not directly speak to the question of the librarian who is in a position that does not have regular interaction with the student, such as the technical services librarian. For the non-public service librarians, student interaction may be limited to employment experiences or outside experiences such as lectures or committees or other community activities. This is not to diminish the contributions made by the technical services librarians but to provide a reminder that they must be active in seeking out the opportunity to connect to the Student Frame of their professional passion.

Faculty-librarian relationships provide another key to passion. Librarians gain much by connecting with faculty, and Bell suggests we seek ways to facilitate the teaching experience using our technological tools. Getting beyond the physical walls of the library is an important element in working with the faculty; teaching and research balanced with personal lives does not permit many faculty members the opportunity for exploring different approaches librarians might offer. Faculty are also much more likely to seek our expertise if they have an established personal relationship with us, such as

those that might be formed in campus committees. Librarians need to remain ever vigilant of the need to reach out to our faculty partners. Doing so benefits both the librarian and the faculty member.

Bell's Community Frame focuses on the internal (employees of the academic institution) and external (academic library colleagues in the profession at large) communities. He exhorts us to commit to the academic, to the professional, and to the life communities as they nourish and fuel our professional passion. Writing and sharing ideas generate new ways of thinking and more fully inform our practice. Exploring practice through thoughtful inquiry within a scholarly circle generates intellectual energy. Our colleagues who share our passion also feed our passion. Making a commitment to building the communities enriches both the community and the individual.

Finally, we need to turn attention to our Self. Bell encourages us to stay "in shape," keeping our professional focus: read the journals, attend conferences, participate in listservs, and then to reach beyond our profession to enlighten ourselves. We can integrate knowledge of other disciplines into practice, learning more about points of intersection. Principles of learning, for example, have direct effects upon our effectiveness with patrons. By keeping ourselves professionally "fit," we can better explore the world around us. It is also true that, like a regimen of physical activity, the more you participate and practice, the more energy you have to commit to the Self as a source of passion.

Bell opines that keeping up (staying informed of relevant trends and technologies) leads to innovation, which in turn leads to contributions beyond the self. As Wheatley describes it,

. . . real change happens in personal behaviors, or at larger scale in entire organizations, only when we take time to discover this sense of what's worthy of our shared attention. We don't accept an organizational redesign because a leader tells us it is necessary. We choose to accept it if, and only if, we see how this new design enables us to contribute more to what we've defined as meaningful (Wheatley, 1999, 149).

Bell's Four Frames of Passion echo themes presented in Wheatley's work: human capacity for change and commitment are based on relationships, a connection to new information, and the link to institutional mission. To sustain this passion, in Bell's view, librarians must take opportunities to contemplate our core values and reflect on our purpose. Wheatley refers to this as the need for self-reference in the change process and the human need for meaning. Leadership must come from the core to be authentic. It is impossible for us to be passionate about something we don't value.

Professional risk-taking is Bell's description of what Wheatley would say is necessary for keeping the organization open, for keeping it slightly off-balance. By participating in risk-taking, we stay in a state of non-equilibrium, acting in an open exchange with the world, changing and growing. The act of staying safe is one that limits potential. To offer our best to our institution is a professional responsibility.

These examples of leadership provide new lenses for reflecting on our daily practice. The call for renewal, reflection, risk, and relationships are clear paths to follow to recommit to the profession. We are responsible for the future. By making a decision to participate in the creation of the future, we are choosing to assume a leadership role. Leading change need not be a top-down process. Engaged librarians can and should contribute significantly to the organization regardless of their institutional position.

We live in a world of change. By reflecting on our relationships and rediscovering our passion, we will find the courage to be curious. This courage enables us to creatively lead from a place where we are grounded and guided by principles. We will lead our organizations to anticipate change. We can confidently and fearlessly approach the world with wonder and seek out the future.

Notes

1. Wheatley, M.J. (1999). *Leadership and the New Science*, 2nd ed. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
2. Bell, S.J. (2003) "A Passion for Academic Librarianship: Find it, Keep it, Sustain it-a Reflective Inquiry," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 3.4: 633-642.
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/portal_libraries_and_the_academy/v003/3.4bell.html

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http://southernlibrarianship.icaap.org/content/v06n01/baird_101.htm.