

TWO NEW GRADS SHARE THEIR MUNDANE BUT SUCCESSFUL LEARNING JOURNEY

ABSTRACT

We've all heard advice for new grads about getting out there:

- doing your placement in the USA
- moving to another city for work
- swapping jobs with someone in the UK
- volunteering in Tonga for a year

These are all exciting options and would most certainly boost your career prospects. However, what if your family situation requires you to stay in your home town, bring in a regular reasonable wage, and simply “be there” for them? We are both in this situation – and there are many like us.

The question then is – how are we, and people like us, going to grow our career?

What do we suggest?

- Involve yourself in professional organisations
- Put your hand up at work for those “special projects”
- Engage with social media
- Read – set aside time each week for professional reading
- Write – for professional journals
- Start a research project
- Attend conferences/seminars
- Mentor – be mentored, and mentor others
- Be brave, speak up at meetings

As new graduates, we will relate how we have progressed our careers despite the demands of our family situations.

PAPER

We have both been to many conferences and listened to wonderful exciting stories about New Grads and how they have ‘taken a chance’ and progressed their careers in fearless ways. To take their career to the next level, they have quit their low level jobs, or moved to another state or country, or taken volunteer positions in an exotic or interesting location to gain some valuable and soul-enriching experience. These experiences will be the dinner party conversation highlight for years to come. We absolutely love hearing these kinds of inspirational stories: we leave the sessions feeling uplifted and encouraged, proud of our profession, eager to also make our mark.

And then we go home to our families – the mortgage, the electricity bills, the doctor’s appointments, the taxi-ing to specialist appointments and sporting events, the school lunches and mountains of washing. Reality sets in. Our situations, while different, are similar in that we both have families we need to care and provide for. Neither of us is able to move away from our home town – even temporarily, and we need to bring in a reasonable wage. Does this mean that we’re unable to advance our career? Are we stuck where we are now? We don’t think so.

Our presentation will cover a 10 point action plan which we have used to progress our careers despite the demands of our family situations. We imagine that many graduates share similar back-stories, and our goal is to offer effective advice on progressing your career in the library industry without risking your relationships, your sanity, or your credit rating.

We both graduated just last year from Charles Sturt University. The graduation ceremony was wonderful: we felt very special and clever, and our families were immensely proud of us. Of course this feeling of elation went to our heads, and we felt as though the world was at our feet: librarian positions would be ours for the taking!! Of course, in the real world, it doesn’t quite happen like that. We needed to adjust our mindsets.

1. Get rid of your sense of entitlement

As excited as you may be about achieving your degree, the reality is that it is not your secret key to an exciting or managerial librarian position. Library professionals arrive at their career from a variety of backgrounds and experience. You as a new graduate may find yourself surrounded by people with far more qualifications or experience than you – or both. Others may be fairly new to the library industry but possess desirable skills from other industries. Whatever the situation, you’ll be the new kid on the block, and despite your shiny new degree, you may need to start small, prove your worth, and gain respect along the way. Try to view this as an opportunity rather than a setback: you’ll be gaining valuable experience and knowledge along the way. We have both been able to interview for librarian positions but have missed out due to lack of “real life” experience. We will discuss how to tackle your lack of “demonstrated experience” as a librarian further on.

Essentially, be proud of your achievement, but be aware that in reality, it is the first step in your career as a librarian: be ready now to put your head down, accept the challenges, work hard, and earn your place in the industry.

2. Embrace your profession

Other professionals such as teachers, nurses, chefs, etc., live their vocation: their career defines them. They join the relevant associations and organisations, and keep up to date with industry standards and developments. If you want to work in the library industry, make a mental commitment to it. BE a library professional: it’s not a nine-to-five job. The library professionals we know are passionate people, dedicated to information management and

copyright issues. They rail against censorship and rejoice when students learn information literacy skills. Librarianship is a fabulous profession: well respected in the broad community. Regardless of the stereotypical jokes about bespectacled, bun-wearing shooshers, people actually love librarians. Be proud to be part of the profession.

3. Join and use ALIA

ALIA is your professional association. As we mentioned before, joining a professional organisation is an automatic step for other professionals. If you have made the mental commitment to your library career, the next step is to actually join ALIA. Don't forget that your membership fee is tax deductible and that ALIA now offer monthly payments.

The benefits of joining ALIA are spelled out on the website and in the kit that you'll receive as a new member. So how do you use your membership?

a. Website

First port of call is the website where, as a member, you'll have access to members' only areas. You'll have the latest industry information about job vacancies, trends, further education and PD events.

b. PD scheme and PD events

The ALIA PD scheme offers you the tools to continue your training and education in a considered and measurable fashion. Working through the career development kit with a mentor will highlight your strengths and weaknesses. Participating in the scheme for a year will earn you the recognition as a "certified professional", thus demonstrating your passion and commitment to your career development to employers.

Attending PD events not only provides you with training and information, they are great networking opportunities. Networking – even for introverts – is a crucial part of advancing any career. Quite often, you'll hear about upcoming positions, and sometimes these positions are filled without being advertised publicly. Furthermore, if your name is known in the industry, your resume will catch the eye of recruiters. Of course, you'll need the skills and attributes to score the job, but often, getting noticed can be the difficult part of the process. Networking also gives you the opportunity to show your personality in a less formal atmosphere than at an interview: the chance to sparkle!

c. eLists

Subscribing to the ALIA email lists provides you with both information and a forum for professional discussion, and is another avenue to getting your name known in the industry.

You can subscribe to as many eLists as you like, depending on your circumstances or interests.

d. Join a committee

Joining an ALIA sub-committee can be both fun and rewarding. It's another way to connect with other library professionals, to be involved with library events, and to give back to your industry. We have both joined the ALIA Qld group. We attend regular meetings, and have helped to organise a Trivia Night. We're getting to know people in the industry, and they are getting to know us. We're able to demonstrate our work ethic, our skills and our personal traits away from a work environment.

e. Write or speak

If you're feeling very brave, write an article for Incite or speak at a conference – you don't have to be an ALIA member to do this, but this is another example of how ALIA provides a solid platform for career and personal development. Who would have thought that two introverted new grads could write and deliver a paper at the foremost library conference in Australia? ALIA has given us the chance.

4. Find a buddy or mentor (or 2 or 3 or 4)

The ALIA PD scheme recommends that you find a mentor to guide your career development. Whether you join the scheme or not, this is sound advice. Remember that you are not alone – you are surrounded by experienced individuals who can give reliable advice. Furthermore, librarians love to share knowledge – it's in our DNA. Unfortunately, we can be a little introverted about asking for it. Be bold – ask a work colleague you admire to mentor you.

You could also consider someone who thinks entirely differently to you. It's nice to be mentored by someone who is similar to you: you're in a comfort zone. Step out of that zone and talk to someone who will challenge your current way of looking at your career – you never know where it might take you.

Fellow graduates or even current students can also be your mentors. Everyone's study journey is different, and they have quite likely learned something that you haven't. We have certainly found this to be the case. We have arrived at the same point, but have travelled from entirely different directions, bringing different perspectives and ideas.

5. BE a buddy or mentor

As focused as you are on developing your own career, there are benefits to helping someone else with theirs. You can be a great assistance to students still studying: offer to proof read assignments, offer study tips, or simply be a sympathetic ear when the demands of study seem all too much – we've all been there! We actually learn a lot by teaching – explaining concepts or ideas to others forces us to examine them ourselves.

In the workplace, you can help those in lower positions: share PD experiences or interesting articles you have read – be generous about what you can learn. Take an interest in their career aspirations and help them where you can. Remember, if you find yourself managing them one day, you'll already have established a good relationship.

6. Put your hand up for those extra tasks

In our experience, when working as a supervisor or managing projects, we appreciate staff that have a positive and willing attitude. You may not have all the answers or experience, but if you are willing to help and to put your hand up for extra projects, your enthusiastic attitude will be noticed. The opposite is also true - negative attitudes, laziness, and a lack of willingness to participate in projects will also be noticed. So learn to say yes! For example, I'm looking for volunteers to help me with this project, any takers? Yes, me! Who is willing to engage in a PD skills audit? I am, yes! Are you willing to work early for me tomorrow? Yes! You get the idea.

Of course it may not always be convenient for you to say yes, particularly if you are inundated with work and family commitments, but saying yes the majority of times will result in benefits. You will learn new skills, have excellent experiences to put on your resume and talk about at job interviews, and best of all, you will have a reputation as a team player who exudes positivity. Your managers will love you.

Stretch yourself and be bold. Volunteer to be on committees - conference and ALIA committees are excellent examples. You will learn new skills, meet great people, and become a familiar name in the industry. Offer to speak at staff meetings and development days - we have. Speaking at smaller events can be nerve-racking, but they build up your confidence and provide you with public speaking skills, especially if your buddy can be in the audience nodding and smiling encouragingly!

Does all this advice mean we are confident extroverts? Not at all! We are both classic introverts. If we waited until we felt confident we would never have done anything. We believe in being balanced though. If you have a fear of public speaking, offering to speak at the next ALIA conference may bring on a panic attack. Therefore, take small steps. If you want to speak at a conference one day speak up in your team meetings first. Once you feel comfortable with that, offer to speak at staff training days. The point is to take the first step. We love and recommend the book 'Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway' by Susan Jeffers. Get one out at your local library. To progress in your career and to build your name professionally it is important to go outside your comfort zone. Our next goal is to conduct a research project.

7. Continue your education

We are passionate about professional development and education. A piece of advice we try to live by is to learn something new every day. Follow professionals you admire on Twitter. Read industry related blogs. Read Incite. Just spending five to ten minutes a day doing these things can help you to learn new skills, be inspired, start new projects, and keep your finger on the pulse of your profession.

Workplaces don't have a lot of funding for professional development, but also the family budget doesn't always stretch to include regular attendance at PD events. Therefore, enrol in free events. There are a number of great courses provided by MOOCs and being online, you'll be able to complete them around your family needs. Ask your team mates to teach you the skills you want to learn. Read professionally via the ALIA website. Your state library may provide free events that you can attend. Create your own PD day at work. Talk to your manager and mentor about your professional development plan. They will have practical, sound advice for you on what you should learn and work on.

Last but not least, never say never about further study. Look at what is available in post graduate qualifications or start your degree. Start your masters or PhD. Further study is definitely on our agenda for the future – we just need to talk to our families about it!

8. TALK to people

Talk to your manager – make them aware of your ambitions. Never make the assumption that because you are newly qualified your manager will know what you want in your career. Practical experience is important when looking for employment, so ask for higher duty experience in your current role, no matter how small you may consider it. When people go on leave you may be able to take over their duties. Are you prepared to get the experience without getting paid for it?

Talk to people on social media – an online presence is mandatory. Let your followers know about your qualifications, experience and ambitions. Keep your profile on LinkedIn up-to-date. Potential employers do check. It may be obvious, but in the heat of the moment we may forget - what you say and put online stays online. Drunken selfies are not a good look if you are trying to exude a professional online presence. Get your work mates or friends to check your profile online or to proof read what you contribute. Google your name to see what comes up.

Talk up at meetings – be brave, speak up. You know what is going to be covered in the meeting so prepare some thoughtful comments. Speak about research you conducted on the agenda item before the meeting. Get yourself noticed, don't just sit by passively. Even if someone 'steals' your idea and speaks up first, back them up, enlarge on the idea and be on their team to make it happen.

9. Be aware of how transferable your skills are to jobs in places other than traditional libraries

Don't make the assumption that because you haven't worked in a library before, or in higher duties, that you don't have anything to write on your resume. There are a lot of transferrable skills that are vital for the library profession. List all your skills, no matter how trivial and include your work experience. The following skills are highly desirable in the library and information industry and are transferable from and to other industries:

- Communication skills
- Interpersonal and team work skills
- Project management
- Professional development – engaging in and creating
- Time management
- Technology
- Teaching

Excellent customer service skills are highly valued and library people are highly skilled conducting reference interviews. Library work IS customer service. We have worked in retail and have received positive feedback from our managers in regards to our customer service. Write about how you received customer service awards or other good recognition in your previous jobs on your resume. Have you kept a retail job for any length of time? Then you must have good customer service skills.

Your potential manager will be looking for people who can fit into an already established team. Don't focus on just your technical skills or knowledge – your ability to get on with people is valued more highly than you might imagine. Are you a pleasant person to be around? Do you get on well with people? Have you managed a soccer team or smoothed over a tricky situation? You have great interpersonal and team skills.

Once you have your library and information qualification don't limit yourself to a "library job" – try using different job search teams such as "information officer", "research officer", "metadata analyst". Library skills are pretty awesome and will be valued by any organisation, no matter what the job.

10. Carry yourself professionally

If you want to be taken seriously and to be seen as a professional keep in mind that your behaviour and appearance are important. Dress for the job you want. If you want to be a librarian, dress professionally. If you want to be a team leader don't dress casually. Keep the denim and midriff tops for the weekend.

In regards to your behaviour and speech:

- Leave the F bombs at home
- Use humour sparingly – it can be an ice breaker, but can equally be irritating and distracting – especially if you're not as funny as you think you are
- Be always mindful of client and workplace confidentiality

Your attitude is everything: good or bad, your attitude will be noticed by management, by your colleagues and by your customers. Make sure that when your attitude is noted, it's for the right reasons: not just for the fact that you get the job done adequately; anyone with the right training can do that. Your attitude is conveyed in the way you dress, the way you carry yourself and the way you interact with your colleagues and clients. When you arrive at work, be ready to perform to the standard you set yourself and to the standard your managers expect and your profession deserves.

The ten points we've covered here are actions that we have found to be helpful in our careers and accommodating of our personal situations. It's not a one size fits all scenario; we hope that you can take at least a couple of suggestions from here to help you on your way. These suggestions sprang to life from our own personal mantras:

- Don't wait for something happen – do it!
- Be willing to take on new challenges
- Don't wait for that comfy feeling before diving in
- Work with change – it's not always a bad thing

You might not get a job in libraries overnight, but you can make a name for yourself and contribute to the profession that you are passionate about. Your enthusiasm and hard effort will pay off.