What Goes Around . . .

Julie Todaro

I waited twenty-five, no, thirty years for certain articles of clothing in my closet to make a comeback. If I had to list them all, there wouldn't be room in *LA&M* , so I'll list those items that have, indeed, reappeared on the fashion scene.

- **Big earrings, especially hoop earrings.** I actually take great glee in answering those questions "Oh, where did you get those great hoops?" and I answer, "I don't remember, I got them in 1973."
- **Lamé.** It started innocently enough with a senior party silver lamé dress in high school and then moved to gold lamé sandals and quickly spread to large gold and silver handbags and tote bags with a short gold jacket thrown in for good measure.
- **Long skirts and boots.** Sometimes cowgirl, sometimes Bohemian, and sometimes just for Chicago winters, but it always works.
- **All in black.** I found a picture of me as a very little girl in a black skirt with a dark green sash and a white top. Clearly even then black clothing felt right. I never wore pastels, only primary colors. One day—finally free to pick my own clothes—I focused on black and never looked back. No matter the weight, no matter the season, it works for me. Oddly enough the general misconception is that—no matter the city, no matter the cab company— the driver says, "Where you from, New York City?"
- **Big sunglasses.** Easy to find in the '60s, slightly harder in the '70s, and impossible in the'80s, larger sunglasses are my comfort zone. All day and into the night, they hide makeup (or lack thereof), sleepless nights, and both interested and disinterested expressions. Forever called "Jackie O" sunglasses, the '90s designer frames offered customers more choices, and now in post-Y2K, (remember that?) they're everywhere.
- **Clothing with rhinestones.** When I couldn't buy sparkly clothing in the stores, I bought a Ronco Rhinestone and Stud Setter and made my own. Never appropriate during the day in earlier decades, I applied rhinestones (with my Stud Setter or by glue) to shirts, jackets, scarves, or basically anything that would stand still. In an odd twist of fate, not only are rhinestones, palettes—and sparkly things in general—everywhere now, but the general thought is one can wear things that glitter—within bounds—throughout the day.

Although I was briefly in style in the late '60s and somewhat for a few years within other decades, hey, I'm now back with a fashion vengeance.

So, it got me to thinking . . . Is the theory of "what goes around, comes around" applicable to management as well? Am I or is anyone else back with a vengeance with old management techniques or issues? Is there anything we have stopped doing, whether deliberately or not, that we're doing again today? What used to work then stopped working and is now back and acceptable?

Getting the Best Applicant Pool

For many years positions were filled in a wide variety of ways. Organizations were more dissimilar than similar in their hiring practices and position descriptions and job ads varied as did interviewing and hiring guidelines. One particular part of the hiring process was and—obviously still is—soliciting applicants. In earlier years, however, hiring managers regularly called other managers to request possible applicant names *and* regularly called potential applicants to encourage them to apply. Specific soliciting of applicants, however, often gave not only the appearance of impropriety, but some applicants felt the positions were promised to them or that they had an inside track or advantage. To level the playing field and to avoid lawsuits from unsuccessful applicants who felt they didn't have a fair shot at open positions, managers, for the most part, quit soliciting applicants directly and: began to identify other managers who could encourage possible candidates to apply; began to participate in leadership programs that prepared short lists of interested applicants; and began to use executive search firms as intermediaries in the hiring process. In the past ten years, significantly smaller applicant pools, fewer people interested in making major moves in a shaky economy, and fewer salary dollars for negotiating with external applicants have prompted managers and administrators to once again directly solicit applicants but with great care *not* to provide undue advantage or show preference to specific candidates.

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Testing When Interviewing

For many years, specific job positions had extensive testing for applicants. In addition, many institutions required testing of applicants for *every* position, and test results were used as qualifying mechanisms along with completion of institutional applications. Along with testing for technology skills sets, other tests included spelling, writing and reading comprehension, problem solving through answering simulation exercises or case method discussions, content knowledge through responding to narrative questions, teaching presentations, and reference quizzes. A variety of factors caused managers and human resources personnel to back away from assessment through testing and quizzes. These factors included the concerns over an equal playing field with standardized tests; the lack of space for secure testing environments; the excessive time taken for testing given the volume of applicants; the growth of general knowledge, thus the need for frequent quiz and test content updates; the growth of workforce technical competencies; and the varyng assessments required for the rapidly changing levels of competency certification.

In recent years, however, managers and HR professionals have been asked to justify their selection of successful applicants and to identify specific, measurable differences between successful and unsuccessful applicants. Given the need to justify, qualify, and quantify hiring choices and the growing availability of reasonably priced Web- and software-based testing resources, institutions are again implementing testing to narrow down and ultimately select the most successful applicants.

Position Descriptions—Competencies and Skills Sets

Position descriptions over the years have gone back and forth from one extreme to the other: from the most general descriptions -to very detailed descriptions that match specific jobs and are sometimes created for specific people. Torn between providing consistency among salary schedules and performance expectations versus having enough specificity to assess complex twenty-first century jobs, managers often do not know which way to turn. Most managers prefer the return to the more detailed descriptions to provide specific, required competencies and skills sets as well as detailed roadmaps for performance expectations.

Caring and Enquiring about an Employee's Health

Good management practice identifies that more successful managers care about their staff members and let their staff members know they care by communicating concern, asking questions, and providing wellness activities and resources. With HIPAA legislation and guidelines and policies, how-ever, questioning employees about their health or their family members' health, discussing employee health with other employees, and gathering and keeping health information records are no longer legal. Managers must now either work around or simply avoid health discussions once considered the sign of a caring and sharing manager. Current and future challenges include providing a safe environment for individuals when health issues cannot be identified or discussed. The so-called "old days" simply aren't coming back.

Closing the Library for Professional Development Day

A grand tradition in library land for many years has been the all-staff day when the library closed to the public for a day for both general and specific training. For several decades, however, higher educational environments, cities and counties, school districts, and patron demand made closing libraries for a complete day during the work week a customer service nightmare. In addition, travel budgets—although typically moderate—were adequate for sending specific staff away to train and learn, and Web-based training made self-directed and individualized training possible. Many administrators now believe that entire groups of staff DO have to come together to discuss vision and values, learn twenty-first-century policies and procedures, and experience active learning as a group for customer service and customer conflict resolution.

Counting and Keeping Statistics

Counting and keeping track has always been a library thing. Typically, hash mark counting of completed activities such as reference questions asked and answered, patrons in and out of the door, and books checked in and out was the major data-gathering process for all types of libraries. Following the quantifying years of the '60s, however, libraries were urged to pull away from counting and instead focus on writing and achieving goals—some of which were achieved by numbers and others by general explanations of work completed. The next years focused on inputs and outputs that included counting but of a different nature, and then in the last five to seven years, counting became paramount again in designing and achieving outcomes. Luckily the only aspect of counting that has not been resurrected is that of everything, all the time. Specific, detailed counting is critical, but valid counting now includes selective but consistent record keeping as well as snapshot counting.

Upward Evaluation

I am sure there are organizations that have participated in

consistent, long-term, and upward evaluation programs, but I have yet to find one. What I have found are organizations that have an upward evaluation process in place but use it infrequently or gather the data but do not use it to improve performance. While I know many organizations value the data gathered and support the upward evaluation process intellectually, few require the process be completed in as consistent a fashion as the regular evaluation process.

Peer Evaluation

Although peer evaluation took off in the '60s, waned in the '70s, and then reappeared when more vertical management structures began to be replaced by team management, peer evaluation is among the hardest aspects of the evaluation process. In addition, peer review evaluation processes are hard to implement and seldom have well-designed forms. The most difficult aspects of peer evaluation are the meaningful evaluations of team product, the team as a group, *and* individuals within a team. As with upward evaluation, most organizations do not offer peer evaluation and of those that do, many do not use the data uniformly.

So what is the lesson here? What goes around often comes back around, but often it has changed and is only a shadow of its former self. So for me, deciding what to wear these days IS easier than deciding what kind of manager to be.

June 3, 2005
Incorporating Outcomes into Library Measurements and Assessment
Presenter: Julie Todaro
MOLO Regional Library Systems, Newcomerstown, OH
Contact: Chris Hopkins (chris@molorls.org)

June 27–28, 2005
Successful Fundraising for Libraries: What Works Now?
Presenter: Joan Flanagan—LAMA
Register by May 20 at www.ala.org/annual
After May 20—Contact: Doll Thorn-Hawkins (dthorn@ala.org) or 1-800-545-2433 x5032

August 5, 2005
Using Marketing to Enhance Library Performance
Presenter: Bill Sannwald
SDLA, Vermillion, SD
Contact: Steve Johnson (skjohnso@usd.edu)

August 19, 2005
Incorporating Outcomes into Library Measurements and Assessment

Presenter: Julie Todaro—Missouri Library Network Corporation, Columbia, MO
Contact: Deb Ehrstein (deb@mlnc.edu)

January 19–20, 2006
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To Build or Not To Build— That is the Question
Presenter: Bill Sannwald
Sponsor: LAMA
San Antonio, TX
Register beginning December 5, 2005 at www.ala.org/midwinter
Contact: Doll Thorn-Hawkins (dthorn@ala.org) or 1-800-545-2433 x5032
Contact: Deb Ehrstein (deb@mlnc.edu)

May 19, 2006
Collaborating, Partnering, Cooperating: The Good, the Bad and the Future
Presenter: Julie Todaro
Utah State Library Association, Salt Lake City, UT
Contact: Debbie Ehrman (dehrman@slcpl.lib.ut.us)

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