As We Go to Press and into 2006 . . . What's on My Mind?

Julie Todaro

At any given time there are many issues in local, state, and national news and also in library news. These are issues that, given their relationship to our own personal lives, we pay varying degrees of attention to. For administrators and managers, however, issues take on a new and expanded meaning, as we need to consistently assess whether their content relates to our umbrella institutions, institutional partners, our own library or department or area, or—obviously and most importantly—our employees. Often a seemingly unrelated issue is, in fact, related to what we do in some way; if not in the concrete, than in the abstract.

In reflecting on 2005, I thought I would review the entire year to note issues and relationships, but I was somewhat surprised to see that the majority of the issues I identified as important had happened in a very short period of time. Often I find I barely have the skills to cope with this rampant change—what must it be like for our employees?

Therefore, let's take a look at recent events and how they affect what we do and how we might relate that to our processes or our employees.

Testing for Hiring

Recently, several electronic discussion lists have carried debates on a variety of testing and assessment instruments and their use in human resources. The discussions have bounced around among those in favor of testing and assessment, those opposed, those uncertain, and those who list both appropriate and inappropriate situations for using testing and assessment results. As the discussions have progressed, several comments have caused great concern. List contributors have outlined both uses and requests for Web addresses and subscription information for personality, ethics, and values tests, the results of which are or will be used to hire or—as one might speculate—*not* to hire. Additional concerns have surfaced as list contributors expressed surprise that requirements for training or certification are needed of test administrators, while others have indicated they use tests for hiring and that no one in their organization is licensed or certified to administer these.

Although this is not always the case with tests, many tests do, in fact, require certain standards, including initial and ongoing certification, for use.

What's the answer here? I'm not sure of all the answers but I know that:

- Just because someone calls a test a test doesn't necessarily mean that the test is scientific.
- Many tests require administration by certified individuals under specific and controlled circumstances, and results are often scored by outside scorers. Using results from tests administered in un- or noncontrolled situations may put some organizations at risk for legal action by those not interviewed or those interviewed and not hired, or even those interviewed and hired but placed in a certain way such as on a pay scale or at a level or in a certain job function or location.
- Assessment and results can be interpreted in a wide variety of ways, and a cookie-cutter approach to scoring and decision making isn't appropriate.
- In general, legality of tests and assessments for such things as hiring and placement needs to be investigated entity by entity and situation by situation. One answer will *not* serve all environments.
- There is considerable research on performance variances on standardized tests; therefore, managers need to educate themselves or their human resources departments on what tests assess what areas.
- Using tests that propose to test or assess values, ethics, and personality absolutely call into question an organization's (articulated or unarticulated) hiring goals. That is, are they used to hire people with similar values, ethics, and personality; to discover and blend an array of employees whose diverse attributes complement each other; or to avoid characteristics predetermined as unacceptable for the organization?

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The bottom line is that testing is an important and critical tool and, when used carefully and appropriately, a valuable tool in a number of human resource situations. Not to intimate that electronic list discussions took testing lightly, but testing is not a parlor game and should be used with great care. Managers must do a great deal of research into what their hiring needs and goals are, and then find the best pathways to get there.

Unlearning

I love this word, which like many other words, has a variety of definitions. The most frequently used definitions include discussion of processes used by individuals to seek ways to break out of patterns of thought—both popular and unpopular. In addition, unlearning is often used by those seeking to explore ways to change workplace behavior. Definitions also include the application of critical thinking to standard processes. Some of these definitions sound like the so-called retooling discussions held by managers and employees as they moved organizations into more technologically driven, twenty-first-century processes that often dictate a need for employees to shift paradigms—for example, as print circulation moves to online circulation.

How do I, as a manager, like to use unlearning? First of all, the word itself is good. It conveys that it's okay to change the way one has learned to do something, such as perform a job function or complete a task. Unlearning communicates that new is coming, and that learning new will take place alongside setting aside older paradigms or ways of doing things. Using the word *unlearning* can assist managers, trainers, and learners by showing them they must differentiate among learning situations that build on things known; completely new areas of learning that dictate users setting aside everything they know; and, finally, the situation in which employees must explore what they do, set those steps aside, and replace them with a new approach.

Intelligent Design . . .

Really isn't. But it isn't the first time the issue has come up, nor (I would guess) will it be the last time. No matter what you believe, the most important thing about a new topic, a new phrase, or a spin on an old topic is that we must approach issues or beliefs with as much research and assessment as possible, whether it is our own belief system or not. I am reminded of a time when I lived in another state and was a library educator. There had been a dramatic increase in censorship attempts directed at libraries in that state, and I was asked to come on a radio show to discuss censorship and intellectual freedom. I had great concern because it was a call-in show and I, as an information professional, decided to brush up on not only articulating my personal beliefs and the beliefs proposed

by my profession, but also on the views of my opposition. I did major research on:

- Statistics for that state, and how they compared nationally.
- The nature of the issue for that state alone . . . what was important?
- The tenor of the issue expressed by a wide variety of people in the state and listening area . . . how did they feel about things?
- The names and belief systems of those who, I imagined, might be opposed to my philosophy.
- Who were the leaders of the opposition? What had they specifically said?

All too often we speak up and state our business, just knowing our own business. The second most important thing—almost more important than knowing about and articulating one's own information—is knowing specifically and intimately about those who think differently than we do. Hey wait—292 words later, I could have just said . . . knowledge *is* power.

What Substitutes for Appropriate?

We all know outsourcing isn't new, and we all know that libraries and librarians outsource in a variety of ways and have for some time. We also know, work with, and coexist with a variety of commercial and proprietary business models. So what's new about outsourcing and why include in this list?

Several situations in the news have come up that set our bells to ringing, because often outsource decisions are:

- reported on and touted prior to changes being assessed as to the quality of delivery, or plans put in place for ongoing assessment;
- reported on and touted prior to changes being assessed for meeting customer needs;
- made without consulting customers in the first place . . . not for approval necessarily, but, for example, for needs assessments;
- made and implemented with reliance on neighboring environments without ever consulting those environments;
- made without considering any accrediting agencies for either the primary institution *or* accrediting agencies of the neighboring environments;
- made with little or no marketing changes to staff or to customers; and
- made without assessing effects of changes made on contractual agreements with vendors, partnerships, and so on.

That being said, can reference services in toto be outsourced? The question in and of itself would show the ignorance of those asking the question. Reference isn't just reference, it's an integrated service, and the real assessment questions would be:

- Will the new service integrate classroom faculty, their curricula, and the research process?
- Will the new service be able to articulate the nuances of an institution's faculty expertise into the student's answer?
- Will the new service select materials at all? Or those that fulfill the curricula and overall mission of the library?
- Will the new service match curriculum issues to assignments? Provide selective dissemination for faculty for their teaching or for their research and publication?
- Will the new service be allowed to access the institution's online subscriptions? Probably not, as the new service or business isn't in the institution, and therefore, contractually speaking, not able to access online subscriptions.
- Who will provide information literacy instruction for your students now? It comes out of reference or is typically integrated with reference.
- Will surrounding institutions say, "That's okay, we'll take all your students?" or "We'll select books for your faculty, staff, and students now." They shouldn't, unless you are willing to pay them a significant fee and unless they are willing to provide a significant service for your new students.
- Who will provide the new service with your institution's unique information, which is so critical? Open, closed? Cancelled classes? New courses? Problem assignments? Unique titles needed?

Media Miscommunication

I know that we don't have *more* tragedies than we used to, rather we give so much media attention to those tragedies that we do have, it just seems like more, God help us. The Sago mine disaster, admittedly not the most tragic mining disaster in history in terms of loss of life, was most tragic for so many reasons. One should argue that the loss of life is always the most tragic, but to layer on top of it false information, the time delay for correcting false information, and—the worst for me—the release and frequent readings of last words and letters found with the bodies of the miners—could it get worse? Well, yes, and although we can't possibly imagine what it was like to be there as a miner or a family member, as a manager, I watched the media circus with fascination and with great concern.

I am fascinated by what grows up around a tragedy. This includes the actual situation, the lore, the humor, the exploitation, and, of course, the heroism. I can remember one of my first realizations of the power of the tragedy and what is around it, came when I first saw *The Big Carnival*, a wonderful 1951 movie starring Kirk Douglas as a reporter who covered a story of a man trapped in a mine. Unbelievably, an actual and metaphoric carnival grew up around the mine as workers struggled to free the man. Also unbelievably, Douglas assists in the *delay* of the man's rescue to expand his own reporting credentials of a major story and—most unbelievable of all—due to his interest in the miner's wife. Life imitating art happens more and more often, and the CNN coverage of the Sago mine story was exceptional. An exhausted reporter (who shall remain nameless) that I haven't really thought much of before this did an excellent job of at least *trying* to find the truth or a reasonable facsimile. When the first man came running down the road to say, "They're alive," the reporter immediately began asking "Who told you that?" "How do you know this?" "Is this a fact?" "Who verified this?" Only after the reporter heard church bells and then verified "who" had told the messenger, did he begin to report it, but frankly, both he and his other female reporter at another location, kept asking questions like are you *sure*? Has anyone *seen* anything? I was even more impressed (in hindsight) that they continued to say "It is reported . . ." and asked such questions as "Why is it that there is only one man and only one ambulance so far?" "Can it be that all of the other men are perfectly all right and are not being taken to a hospital but to the church?!" Clearly they were jubilant but also very cautious. So, what should a manager take away from this?

I have always tried to question what I hear—allegations, reports on issues, and so on and this kind of situation makes me resolve to work harder on this. Asking for clarification is what a manager's job really is. When someone comes with information or questions or clarifications or decisions needed, our job is to ask questions first, verify facts, seek opinions, and make a decision. No matter how long I've been at this, I constantly have to remind myself—even though it sounds true, or even though the source is always correct—to ask the right questions early on in the process. Oh, the heartache it saves.

Rights of Employees

Is it enough for me to say, "Managers have rights, too!"? Probably not. I'm sure it depends on where we are in the organization or, as some put it, what dog we are in the dogsled ride. But all too often I see managers' rights and managers' due processes violated as much as employees' rights and employees' due processes have been in the past. It is important that in processes that focus on rights, managers articulate what the rights are of all parties in a situation. If someone is complaining about his or her manager, she has rights, but so does the manager, and those rights should be spelled out as well.

New Math

For those of you who haven't added in a few years, the new political math shows us that 65 percent of a school's services equals 100 percent of that school's instruction in many states in this fair country. What's a school to do? Apparently in those 65-percent states, a school must spend that 65 percent on only those curriculum elements that are based on federal definitions, defined as instruction, or earn students credits. These include, if you haven't figured it out already, standard classroom curriculum as well as areas such as athletics, but not school libraries. What does this mean? It means that the concept of campus-based or site-based management is smoke and mirrors as legislative dictates force administrators to spend a significant amount of money only on specific areas. In some states it guarantees that, given the available funding, school libraries don't get much, or even *any,* money; in other states, school libraries will see significantly reduced funding. Clearly, nurses, counselors, non-credit-offering personnel, services, and centers such as librarians and libraries are in real danger. So as managers, keep your eyes open, involve your constituents in the debate to get them working for you, stock up on and use relevant data, demand assessment of new practices put in place, and speak out.

Whatever You Do, Don't Read

In a bizarre twist, a company trying to sell to librarians, teachers, and libraries in general has mounted an advertising campaign discouraging their market and not to read, but instead to use their product and listen. Now who in their right mind would be encouraged in our markets and our business to purchase a product designed to discourage our main message? To make matters worse, their marketing is a take-off of ALA's READ campaign to read. One has to wonder, who do they think their market is? What research was done to target a group and design a message? Managers should make a decision as to the message and the result. Enough said.

Stunning Development

What's in a name? Stun gun? Stun pen? A weapon by any other name should work as well. It's not often that an elaborate yet ill-conceived plot is designed to steal materials from a library. But I guess we're coming into our own as we appear to be the target of a plan that four (apparently weak, Quentin Tarantino–fan) boys put together to steal items by attacking and subduing a librarian and making off with rare materials.

The attorney for the thieves chose not to argue insanity (or idiocy or mediocrity) it seems, but instead chose to quibble over the nature and size of the weapon, and how that nature and size dictates how bad the crime was and what level of prosecution and punishment should take place. Gee, a stun pen isn't as bad as a stun gun, therefore, your honor, my clients should do less time. Forget the terror of being attacked, being attacked by more than one person, being attacked with a weapon, having something pulled over your face and being tied up–the size of the weapon is all that matters.

Since there is a message in all of these issues for managers, this issue can be described as a continuing education one. Library staff and ancillary staff, such as umbrella administration and security, to name just a few areas, must be educated to realize that they work in potentially difficult, if not downright dangerous, situations. Public building are public buildings, and staff need to be wary, careful, vigilant, trained in self-defense, trained in conflict handling, and protected as much as humanly possible in public environments by library and umbrella institution organizations.

Don't Change a Hair for Me

And speaking of public buildings, do we have the right to ask patrons to conform to standards of public hygiene? Or can we ask patrons to move from one space to another? In a way, it's similar to the old story of yelling fire in a public building or taking a swing at someone–is it my right? Or do group rights or another individual's rights outweigh the rights of one person?

Managers make decisions for individuals and groups every day. We seek to provide depth and breadth, and to serve the masses as well as specialize for individuals. Yet in the majority of environments, the lack of money available makes it impossible to specialize for all that is needed or requested. For many of us, the reality is we don't have the space or furniture or resources or service or staff to provide personalized environments. Should we set or uphold standards for comfort, safety, and security? Should we listen to and act on complaints from patrons (or employees) about other patrons? Should we be held responsible for an appropriate environment for our staff to work in and deal with how patrons affect that working environment? The answers to these questions are all "yes," and twenty-first-century managers must be balanced in their policies, procedures, and all interactions with employees and patrons to ensure that the rights of the individual do not override the rights of the whole.