

Career Issues, Part 2

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You have achieved success if you have lived well, laughed often, and loved much.

—Anonymous

Try not to become a man of success, but rather to become a man of value. He is considered successful in our day who gets more out of life than he puts in. But a man of value will give more than he receives.

—Albert Einstein¹

In 1996, *The Pretender* premiered on television. It was a complicated show about a man named Jarod who had been abducted as a boy to live in a mysterious and dehumanizing place called the “Centre.” Realizing his brilliance was being misused, Jarod escapes and must avoid recapture by changing identity and career frequently. Each week opened with Jarod trying to right a wrong by infiltrating some organization and becoming a doctor, firefighter, lawyer, Marine, ranger, EMT, or other professional to accomplish his goal. In addition to the pathos of a man trying to find the parents he hadn’t seen since he was very young, and recovering from growing up in a horrendous environment, a compelling aspect of the show was his being able to switch jobs at will and to be great at each one. Has the job served its purpose or become tedious? Move on, find a fantastic position right away, and become super successful! Would that we could all be like Jarod!

Television shows can make anything look possible, but in reality most jobs aren’t begging for applicants, and it is not common to be able to just move from one career to another without some effort, education, and preparation. Unlike Jarod, a “genius who has the ability to ‘become anyone he wants to be,’” we can’t get a new career in the blink of an eye.² However, the skills that make for good librarians allow for career reinvigoration, reinvention, rearrangement, and, sometimes, a shift to a new career. A number of resources can provide guidance in these processes.

“Change the changeable, accept the unchangeable, and remove yourself from the unacceptable.”

In the first chapter of Pace’s *The Career Fix-It Book*, she has the readers take a serious look at their work lives to

“review all of your notions about career and bring them out for ‘airing’ to determine if they still are true for you.”³ This is done through a series of exercises. The format of short text and exercises is continued in subsequent chapters. The discussion walks the reader through “fantasy” jobs, a current job appraisal, job fine-tuning, and even a job overhaul. At the conclusion readers should have a pretty good understanding of their own jobs, themselves, and some ideas of what to do about their particular situations. The 150 pages can be a very fast read, but if you take the appropriate time to give the exercises serious consideration, you’ll gain more. Do a chapter a day and see where it takes you.

The subtitle of Smith’s *Pedestals, Parapets, and Pits: The Joys, Challenges, and Failures of Professional Life* tells it all. The author defines pedestals “as a metaphor for the glories of professional life. When you are successful, when events around you seem to be humming, when people seem to value what you do and seek you out, you feel the joys of a successful professional life.”⁴ Parapets represent the times when there is change for the worse and the situation at work is uncomfortable and challenging. Pits represent “professional life in jeopardy.”⁵ Chapter topics include communication, leadership, planning, diversity, apathy, aggression, envy, egoism, anger, and much more. In a sense, the chapters cover the deadly sins of the workplace. For example, one chapter concerns ambition and aggression. The first is important to success, but when it moves into the second, it enters the realm of the pit aspect of work. Different attitudes are discussed including anger, ignorance, impatience, and rudeness.

This useful book is an aid in honest consideration of self and those around you in the workplace. It is well written and entertaining. While the subject of career advancement and its opposite are very serious subjects, Smith includes appropriate humor to make the book both informative and enjoyable. The humorous drawings alone are worth the time invested in reading the book. To quote a section in the epilogue: “Becoming a successful profes-



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sional involves integrating knowledge and understanding opportunities, challenges, and failures, and organizing and characterizing the meanings of these concepts and their effects in your professional life.”⁶ This is highly recommended to be read cover to cover and revisited frequently for the splash of reality and clarity it will provide.

In *I Don't Know What I Want But I Know It's Not This*, Jensen states that in addition to the issue of money, work provides “stimulation, freedom, challenge, independence, and emotional fulfillment. It has also given me the opportunity to make a difference to others.”⁷ Unfortunately, many people are not happy or satisfied with their work environments. Whether for reasons of not liking the job, the people, or just not being fulfilled or challenged, many want some change. They want meaning or something new, don't want to be victimized or feel plateaued, but do want to be on their own, or want to semi-retire. Each of these ideas is explored in depth.

Previous to these chapters, Jensen provides a number of self-assessment exercises to help readers clarify their self-perceptions. Subsequent chapters use additional assessments, mini case studies, and clear steps to address the particular career concern. Each chapter has a three-section format: assessment, exploring roadblocks and opportunities, and action plans.

Possibly the most applicable chapter for many is “Bored and Plateaued”; for another group, “One Toe in the Retirement Pool” might be most appropriate. Toward the end of the book is an important chapter on “The Ten Keys to Success,” based on the author's observations. Explaining the keys' importance, she states “Time and again, it is apparent that those individuals who exhibit these ten keys and use them most productively are consistently the more successful and well-liked individuals overall.”⁸ The ten keys are: curiosity, decisiveness, perseverance, empathy, flexibility, follow-through, humor, intelligence, optimism, and respect . . . and each is explored in a page or two. The author concludes the book with “Finding work that is satisfying, gratifying, and fulfilling will change your life.”⁹ Read it.

“Determination gives you the resolve to keep going in spite of the roadblocks that lay before you.”

Ryan's *What to Do with the Rest of Your Life* is written for the business person, but librarians can learn from what she has to say.¹⁰ The book has three sections. The first deals with self-evaluation of skills and consideration of ideal jobs and lifestyles; the second discusses a new job or business; and the third looks at ways to improve your position in your current job. While the business aspects may not seem relevant, many librarians have developed full-time or secondary jobs as information providers or consultants, so it may have broader appeal than initially apparent. The writing style is very breezy, with the now-routine bulleted points and charts to walk the reader through the concepts. For many this

will be a book to skim, because sections will not have close relevance to their careers. However, for their upbeat attitude and advice, a fast review of the first several chapters and the conclusion are well worth the time spent.

Contrasting with the reactive behaviors of “fight, flight, or freeze,” “flourish” is a proactive action. It entails effective, efficient self-reliance. Interest in your workplace and job is also part of the picture. The Salmons's book, *The Mid-Career Tune Up*, reviews behaviors that allow you to flourish.¹¹ These include recognizing the realities about your current job; balancing multiple demands; cultivating communication skills; working on relationships; achieving conflict resolution and problem solving; finding innovative solutions; being adaptable, responsible, and moral; and staying current. The focus is really more on revitalization than on necessary changes. A very useful topic is the career maintenance schedule in the last chapter.

Griffiths uses a different format to present his information on career change.¹² Most chapters of *Do What You Love for the Rest of Your Life* begin with a very short personal story that illustrates a point about career reinvention. The rest of the chapters discuss those issues in detail, with plans. Issues covered include fear, finances, family, and a number of aspects of self-analysis. Quotes are used both to begin and end each chapter, and whether by a famous author, a philosopher, or one of the subjects of the personal stories, may be very thought provoking. This title is not essential but very interesting.

Another look at renewal is *How to Be Happy at Work*, a book “for anyone who needs a change in his or her work life.”¹³ The book is divided into three parts that cover career choices, career security, and the path to happiness. Topics covered include ethics and personal life issues. Especially interesting are the chapters on work balance and “Having Fun at Work.”

Everyone wants a job that pays well, is secure, has high satisfaction, and leaves time for a personal life. For some this may require a new job, but Pollan and Levine state “In fact, you may not need to find a new job at all.”¹⁴ The basic premise of *Fire Your Boss* is “the essential first step in winning the job of your dreams is to fire your boss . . . and hire yourself. In other words, you need to stop letting your boss, or your company, or anyone else for that matter, dictate the course of your work life, and take charge of your own present and future.”¹⁵ Control of your life and your job is yours.

Taking control is really about attitude, setting goals, and having a personal work plan. These are reasons the process does not necessarily require a new job, just a different way of approaching the one you have. The author argues that it is healthy to put your personal life ahead of work, to consider your job as distinct from a career, that job security is related to how much you do for your boss, and that money does indeed matter. Steps in this process include writing your own job description, researching jobs like yours in other organizations, giving yourself a perfor-

mance review, considering alternate pathways, and writing all of this down. “Writing everything down not only offers a chance to refine your thoughts, but also gives you a map you’ll be able to refer to in the future.”¹⁶ An example of this exercise is in the book.

“Why Do You Work?” is an interesting short section that might open your eyes. The chapter discusses networking, financial reasons, leaving the job, and a case study of the process. The reasons listed include power, respect, security, travel, opportunity to serve or to meet people, expression, and for money. Reflecting on the reasons for working provides valuable insight for the planning process. Later chapters cover networking and financial issues, and how to actually leave a job. Several case studies are included. This is an interesting if somewhat disturbing book because of its blunt focus on jobs and bosses. Maybe because librarians are in a service profession with high ethical goals, the book doesn’t seem a great match for them. Some might find it useful; some may find it interesting; a few might find it practical—it’s worth a look for its perspective and the reasons for working section.

Second Acts is written by the same authors as *Fire Your Boss*.¹⁷ The basic premise is that second or new lives are not only possible but may be highly recommended for some. A series of self-evaluation exercises comprise the first section of the book, while the second discusses what is needed to overcome barriers to change. The third provides practical steps to help you reinvent your new life (or, lives, since this process can be repeated more than once). The book has many mini case studies. As with the previous book, it isn’t of great benefit for many but for those looking to reinvent their career, it is provocative reading. Especially beneficial are the exercises. They help to focus on career and various important aspects of your life.

“Never become so much of an expert that you stop gaining expertise. View life as a continuous learning experience.”

Sanborn and Ricci are career coaches whose *Seasons of Your Career* considers that there are different cycles or seasons that occur during a lifetime.¹⁸ They might provide explanation for some job discomfort that can be felt periodically. Recognizing, understanding, and acting on the idea of career cycles can lead to a more successful career. Using calendar analogies, career spring is seen as the time of research and exploration, “laying the groundwork for job success to come”; summer is being at or near the top of career success; autumn is the crossroads where excitement is gone and goals are lacking; finally, winter is career’s end.¹⁹ However, it can also be the time to prepare for spring and the career cycle to begin again.

Subsequent chapters introduce the importance of the way one thinks about one’s career, self-evaluation, and career goals. Each of these chapters includes exercises to encourage critical self-evaluation. A chapter on the role

of positive attitude precedes the season-discussion chapters. These rules include “get rid of anything in your life that doesn’t bring you happiness”; be patient; keep the right company; remember that abundance is important and doesn’t necessarily mean money; handle stress; think originally; resolve conflicts; walk the high road; make time for yourself; have faith; laugh; think of others; and be a role model.²⁰ The book is very personal with an emphasis on the inner person. The authors conclude the book with “There is a place for you in the grand scheme of the universe. Your job is to follow your heart’s wisdom to find that place, and then to use your own special talents to brighten the lives of others. Your responsibility is to listen carefully, act wisely, and hold up the lantern for others to follow.”²¹ They might have been speaking of careers in general but it seems like a wonderfully clear and succinct description of the library profession. Excellent and fast reading to put on the must-read list.

Based on the *Wall Street Journal*’s career site, Koen and Lee’s *Career Choice, Change and Challenge* uses a question-and-answer format to explore many career interests.²² The book is divided into three sections. “Stretching Your Career Imagination” looks at personal interests and values, different career paths, and change. The job-search section provides proactive advice for a productive, focused search, and the “Long Run: Keeping Your Career Vital” discusses keeping the new career moving successfully forward. Short checklists and bibliographies end each chapter. Worth a scan for topics of interest.

Ninety days to a new career is the central point of *Fearless Career Change*.²³ In it, Stein tells readers how to identify roadblocks and move their new careers forward to success. While the focus is strongly on business, the sections on overcoming fear, strategic education, and goals are definitely worth a look.

Kanchier writes that career change can force “you to step out of the well-worn groove of your life and confront yourself in some basic ways.”²⁴ The theme of the book, *Dare to Change Your Job and Your Life*, is about questers, described as people who “have a high need for job involvement and for other vital work rewards such as challenge, self-fulfillment, a sense of achievement, and opportunities for growth.”²⁵ They are energetic, flexible, self-reliant, and take risks. They tend to be problem solvers, independent, and have a balanced work and leisure life. The book uses a number of examples to move readers through the process of becoming questers and developing jobs or careers right for them. The chapter “Rate Your Job Satisfaction” is especially informative. While more recent books on careers stress career evolution, this one takes an enticing proactive attitude and is worth reading and giving it serious consideration. As she concludes, “Life is a challenge, meet it. Life is an opportunity, take it. Life is an adventure, dare it!”²⁶ The book is inspiring and useful. It is interesting to see how much the characteristics reviewed in this book will remind you of the best in your colleagues.

While very business-oriented, the ninth edition of *Change Your Job, Change Your Life* has some very useful information for the librarian.²⁷ The preface can inspire readers to take the steps necessary to improve their career situations. Part 2, "Develop Powerful Career and Re-Careering Skills" is definitely worth reading. It covers identification of skills and interests, development of a career objective, résumés, networking, and negotiations.

Managing Career Transitions by Hayes is geared toward the person retooling or reeducating for new careers.²⁸ In the library world it might be most useful to people transitioning from paraprofessional to professional status, or moving to another specialty within the profession. Very practical, very upbeat, it is highly recommended. It provides more information than many of the other books for the target audience.

As the library workforce ages, and also with the closure of so many special libraries, Cummings's *How to Find a Job after 50* can be very useful.²⁹ Whether for reasons of job loss or the desire for job change, the practical advice is worth reading. The book discusses topics such as leaving the old job, the job search, beginning anew, part-time work, self-employment, and networking. Even if there is no new job in your near future, the slightly more mature librarian might appreciate reading the chapter "The Value of Older Workers." Whereas the media always discusses the importance of the youth culture, it is nice to read about the reliability, work ethics, and experiences of the more mature!

"Expect the best, plan for the worst, and prepare to be surprised."

There are a number of articles that provide specific insight into topics. Lewis looks at the role of ever-changing technology and mid-career librarians. The article concludes "It appears that technology has had little 'bad' effect on the mid-career librarian. Rather, it has made for changes in what is expected of a mid-career librarian."³⁰

Another interesting article from *Library Trends* looks at plateauing in our profession from a positive viewpoint. Montgomery notes that there are three types of plateauing: structural (reaching the highest level possible in the organization); content (reaching the highest level of work and there is nothing new to learn); and life ("psychological state that is characterized by a feeling of being obliged to honor commitments made in the past to which one may no longer feel a sense of attachment . . . and that the future holds nothing but an unchanged extension of the present."³¹) Plateauing is common in librarianship, often because librarians like and become comfortable with the types of work they are doing. While plateauing can be seen as a negative in many fields, it can have a very different, positive role in a career. This perspective is especially helpful toward understanding how to support and encourage the plateaued, but happy employee.

Whether you need to change career paths, reinvent the job you have, re-energize your job, or gain support for staying right where you are, there are a number of resources to turn to for help. While it might seem glamorous to move on or up, it needs to be the right choice for the individual. And when that choice is taken away by closures, downsizing, or other changes, these resources are available to assist in career reinventions. Success is defined differently by different people. The opening quotes make success an intangible concept with philosophical underpinnings. The only person who can really judge a person's success is that person. Doing a job well, enjoying that job, and having it be part of a full life is a success. There is no pretending involved, no hunting for something more. We can reinvent ourselves as often as we want as long as that reinvention allows us to live, laugh, and love others.

Author's Note: All italicized headings are quotes by Denis Waitley taken from Quoteopia!, www.quoteopia.com/famous.php?quotesby=deniswaitley (accessed Mar. 30, 2007).

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