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# The Library Movement as the Real Mentor and How Stories Recognizing Good Work Influence Us

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TAMMY WESTERGARD

*The only person who is  
educated is the one who  
has learned how  
to learn—and change.*

—CARL ROGERS,  
American psychologist

Tammy serves as the Director of Libraries for the Jackson County Library District. She holds a BA in Speech Communication from the University of Nevada, Reno and an MLS from the University of North Texas with a Graduate Academic Certificate in Advanced Management. She was inducted into Beta Phi Mu in 2014. She also maintains membership with Association of University Research Parks, the American Library Association and its Public Library Association Unit, the National Summer Learning Association, and serves as the Chair of the Social Responsibility Roundtable for the Oregon Library Association. Her professional focus is on strategic planning that leverages partnerships through shared and complementary policy between institutions. In 2014, Tammy presented during an ALA national conversation about strategic library partnerships between library types and local government, business communities, and community groups. She is also very focused on workforce training and development of the public library as the essential “onramp” for working-age citizens to reframe or gain new marketable skills. Tammy recognizes that mentoring begins at home and is especially thankful for her parents and siblings, her husband of 30 years, three grown children, a large and engaged extended family and many friends and colleagues who continue to inspire her journey.

## Introduction

We are bound by job descriptions, rules, policy, procedure, time-sheets, performance evaluations, change and more ... much more. And so it goes on the first day of a new job, we're in search of someone to guide us through the maze of tacit authority that forms the workplace culture. “The evolution of culture is therefore one of the ways in which a group or organization preserves its integrity and autonomy, differentiates itself from the environment and other groups, and provides itself an identity.” (Schein, 2010).

This paper looks through the lens of the public library and the nature of the public “trenches.” Further, the piece contemplates the role of recognition for good work, and how



stories inspire and share others' journeys of excellence that rarely (if ever) begin with a quest for recognition.

The unintended aim of an individual's professional experience and how one leads by example is studied for impact on informal teaching and influence. Leaders that define a forward-tilting vision of the organization inspire the forward-tilting mission (Schein, 2010).

The focus of this piece on good work, the recognition of good work and mentorship through followship is timely. As a step toward advancing the best practices of supporting aspirational library service, this paper provides insight on how others have successfully implemented solutions to big challenges.

"What ignites the human spirit is when the leaders of our organizations offer us a reason to grow. To really inspire us, we need a challenge that outsizes the resources available. We need a vision of the world that does not yet exist, a reason to come to work," (Sinek, 2014).

## Background

Most public library systems are decentralized throughout communities with scores of businesses, institutions and organizations. Each has an interest in community development and success. Problems can present when success is defined in too many disconnected ways, sacrificing a unified message and aligned purpose.

With one of America's most challenged state economies, many Oregon counties struggle to provide adequate public services. Brene Brown, PhD, a trailblazing thought leader and researcher, talks about the challenges of leading in a culture of never enough. From her 2012 book, *Daring Greatly*, Brown notes, "After doing this work for the past twelve years and watching scarcity ride roughshod over our families, organizations and communities, I'd say the one thing we have in common is that we're sick of feeling afraid. We all want to be brave. We want to dare greatly. We're tired of the national conversation centering on 'What should we fear?' and 'Who should we blame?'"

The never have enough, woe is me mantra is rare from plucky Oregon librarians. Three recent 2015 special elections for library levy increases in Eugene, Washington County, and Sweet Home all passed. Last year, in Jackson County, voters passed a special library district creating stable funds to keep its fifteen libraries open and thriving. Douglas and Josephine Counties are gearing up for 2016 levy measures that will continue to tell the story of library services as a substantial return on taxpayer investment. "Our system demands ongoing affirmation of library services. Emphasizing outcomes enhances our investment value; education drives economic advancement enhancing quality of life," (Gross, 2013). Libraries are fundamentally about the ability to access opportunity to level up skills. "Human beings have thrived for fifty thousand years not because we are driven to serve ourselves, but because we are inspired to serve others," (Sinek, 2014).

Sinek's commentary embodies the work being done now to provide public library services in Josephine and Douglas Counties, despite extreme budget cuts. Under some of the most difficult and heartbreaking circumstances in Oregon, these library leaders are successfully preserving and sustaining the foundation of library services for today's residents, and for future generations. They are walking the talk of perseverance and tenacity, of innovation born from meeting their patrons where they are in a life-long learning journey that requires 21st-century skills in a digital world. "A leader's legacy is only as strong as the foundation they leave behind that allows others to continue to advance the organization," (Sinek, 2014).



## A Base of Solid Experience

The mentors that inspired my journey into the profession include faculty from the University of North Texas (UNT), especially my stellar and unwavering advisor Yvonne Chandler, PhD.

Dr. “C” (as her students call her) has an impressive, hardworking and inspiring story. In 1978 as a graduate of Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia Dr. C. launched into library school. In 1979, she graduated with her Master of Library Science from Atlanta University. By 1995, she had earned her Ph.D. in information science from the University of Michigan. For nearly twenty years Dr. Chandler has dedicated herself to the training and education of librarians. In fact, Dr. C has received over \$4 million in federal grants that have supported students and faculty. She can claim credit for hundreds of librarians working across the United States and abroad who have benefitted from her mentoring, teaching and advisement.

She received the UNT President’s Council Outstanding Teaching Award in 2008 and in 2014 was president of the Texas Library Association (TLA). Among other achievements during her yearlong reign, the delivery of a weeklong library conference for Texas information professionals included over 400 programs and events under Dr. C’s *Lead Out Loud* theme focused on learning, empowerment, advocacy and diversity. The event inspired and mentored over 7,500 attendees—well over 1,000 more than the previous year, (2014, *TLA Cast*). I did not attend the conference, but I feel certain that the experience was a concentrated version of her inspiring, magnetic, pastoral approach to instruction, student advisement and degree planning. As a former student, I can recall class oftentimes felt like a rousing Sunday at church and I absolutely know I got the call to be a librarian of agency and change from Dr. C.

Too, library trustees, public library elected officials and other elected officers, in particular school board members and mayors, can mentor as enlightened and inspired policy makers. My previous relationships with municipal supervisors and mayors, school boards, redevelopment and economic development department leadership and city managers were formative. I learned to see the difference that was extended to the library wish list when their

energy was added to the advancement of public library services and systems. I also learned what happens without such allies. In particular, in Nevada, Supervisor Robin Williamson (who also became a Library Trustee after 12 years as a city supervisor) had the capacity and wherewithal to advance library services from the influence of her position as a trusted and longtime community leader. Her legacy continues years after she retired; that said, progress was not won without difficulty.

When a rare opportunity presented itself for the advancement of a public/private partnership for a city-center development, she built a team within the city’s public service departments that included the office of business development, the city manager and the library. At that time, I worked in the business development office with Joe McCarty, the Director. Above anyone, Joe taught me how



*Old School: All smiles at the California Library Association 2014 meeting in downtown Oakland, Tammy Westergard and UNT’s renown library leader, Yvonne Chandler, PhD pause for a smile and hug.”*



the built environment is purposeful in design and can inspire movement either toward or against community priorities. He really understood the public library as the key civic anchor in any community. In the case of this landmark opportunity, the unintended consequences of elected officials' indecision cost the community the project. The opportunity costs are too big to count, but these were big lessons that fundamentally expanded my understanding of public service. I get why the process matters and why movements do require mentors. This movement did expose real civic truths. Today, community challenges persist and the public library space remains inadequate. Of course the new, current community leaders still wrestle with development problems, but they're working on it. The movement we began has moved the community forward in positive ways, which to some degree I now believe is the way it works. Moving mountains takes a very long time.

The current Jackson County Library District Board is a tremendous positive example of an effective and inspiring elected body. Monica Weyhe, President; Maureen Swift, Vice President; Carol Doty; Susan Kiefer, and Jill Turner Board Members are all first-term elected officials to this new district, formed in May 2014. These leaders were so committed getting a library district passed, that they were also willing to step up, run for office, and assume the weight of responsibility that would and has come with setting up an entirely new govern-

ment. They are not paid elected officials, but for many months the board president works nearly full time and board members easily work twenty or more hours a week on committee assignments, board meeting preparation and community relations.

These officials shoulder the responsibility and invest the time because they believe that the public library is essential to Jackson County's quality of life. These are leaders who are willing to defend the community's right to robust library materials, services and programs because of a fundamental belief that public library services promote access to lifelong learning, enjoyment and civic engagement. They have the demonstrated ability to approach people and problems with an open mind, and have the courage to resist pressures which interfere with the community's democratic right to public library services, places and spaces. I find them an unusually inspiring and hard working elected body.

My most formative mentor has been Sara Jones, MLS, currently



*Team Jackson: Immediately after the JCLD December board meeting library leadership paused for a photo on the dramatic staircase of the system's main branch in Medford. At bottom row #1 Tammy Westergard, MLS, Jackson County Library Director; row #2 Maureen Swift, Vice President; Row #3, l to r, Jill Turner, Board Member; Carol Doty, Board Member; Susan Kiefer, Board Member; Row 4, l to r, Monica Weyhe, Board President; Mark Bartholomew, J.D., Board Legal Council and top Lisa Marston, J.D., Board Administrator.*





Director of County Library Services for Marin County, California. During our work together in northern Nevada, Sara showed me what it meant to understand the mission of the library. My lived experience underpins the *good work as the mentor* theme of this paper. It is with gratitude I share lessons learned.

### Leading by Example

As library director in Nevada, Sara built teams who were free to be committed to the work of implementation. The list of projects envisioned, deployed and assessed are too numerous to name, but suffice it to say Sara is a nationally recognized library leader and Library Services Technology Act (LSTA) grant authority.

Sara's most significant leadership traits relate to integrity and vision, or values-based leadership, (Fernandez, J.E. & Hogan, R.T., 2002). Her interpersonal qualities inspired momentum (despite large obstacles) and spoke to other's requirements, values and feelings.



Sara Jones, MLS, Strategic Planning in Carson City, Nevada.



All smiles: Left, Director of County Library Services for Marin County, California, Sara Jones and Tammy Westergard take a moment to appreciate the view from Sara's office in the Civic Center Library, located on the fourth floor of the Marin County Civic Center Administration Building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

This was particularly important during times of controversy. Through example, I was shown a library vision and mission that set the stage for mentors at every level in the organization. I watched her support team building at many levels creating an environment of interdependence, where no group had complete autonomy. These linkages helped the library implement a vision with a clear sense of purpose.

One example regards her leadership that secured a Broadband Technology Opportunity Program grant (BTOP), with a work program that included as a highlight the opening of a special library branch for business. It was featured in the August 2012 issue of *American Libraries*; writer Bradley Collins in *How Libraries Are a Boon to Small Business*, talks about how information resources are especially important to entrepreneurs at a time when a scarce number of public libraries were focused on business services. In fact the year after Sara moved to take the California post, the library was named *2013 Nevada Broadband Hero*.

The total BTOP grant was \$596,999 and as a team, over about five years, we were able to leverage this tremendous opportunity. In fact, from the seeds of the BTOP grant and subsequent LSTA grants, the system has attained the ability to leverage community access to cutting edge technology that blends opportunity to learn marketable skills for



students already in formal learning environments and those outside of a formal setting who want to level up.

Milton Chen, PhD and co-founder of the George Lucas Educational Foundation notes, “Just as the hybrid gasoline-electric motor has brought innovation to automobiles, turning either/or into both-and thinking can create new approaches to fuel educational performance.”


The Nevada library recently was the first in the nation to offer certified training in advanced manufacturing that has helped patrons “graduate” from the public library and land jobs at Tesla’s advanced manufacturing facility not twenty miles from the library in northern Nevada.

This is fundamentally positioned to explode workforce training because it tells the story of the nature of public libraries and what the role of public libraries mean to the idea of “access.” *Library Journal* covered the story extensively in its March 18, 2014 online issue (Peet, 2015). This story from its foundational beginning, to its legacy conclusion answers one of the “whys” of library work. “It is a fitting role for the library to link learning to earning by offering the MT1 certificate program, resulting in individuals equipped with industry credentials and prepared for jobs in manufacturing,” said Kathleen DeRosear, Executive Director of the Manufacturing Skills Institute of the Nevada program (*Library Journal*, 2014).

Economist Tyler Cowen notes, “If you and your skills are a complement to the computer, your wage and labor market prospects are likely to be cheery. If your skills do not complement the computer, you may want to address that mismatch. Ever more people are starting to fall on one side of the digital divide or the other. That’s *why average is over*” (2013).

### OLA Facilitating Mentorship

Values-based mentors rely on having valid information, making free and informed decisions, have internal commitment and possess compassion. Further, mentors with values-based approaches in essence operate from a foundation of facilitation that can be practiced by anyone in the organization. Successful mentors are successful because of regular involvement with many people deciding how to achieve the organization’s vision, giving people a sense of control. This is the fundamental role and fuel of the Oregon Library Association.

Without recognition we risk lost stories, and with them, their transformative messages. So in this way, good work is the mentor and OLA is an excellent platform to gather and share our stories. Without realizing it, many of us seek guidance from people in our organizations who reflect our own aspirations through the work they are doing. We seek to follow in their direction. The inspiring energy generated from people who *walk their talk* moves mountains. “Real change rarely comes from the front line. It happens from the middle or even the back. Real change happens when someone who cares steps up and takes what feels like a risk. People follow because they want to, not because you can order them to,” (Godin, 2010). The public library develops social and economic fibers that model the idea of opportunity through learning. 

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