**Library Evangelist by Mark Thompson**

Teachers teach, doctors doctor, and bakers bake, but what do librarians do? They don’t library. Most surveys point to the fact that people who work in libraries are considered “keepers of the book.” And OCLC studies show that the average user considers libraries mainly as places where “you go to find books.” But a book is an object, not a service. As today’s dynamic learning landscape keeps changing, librarians need to focus less on establishing collections or providing access to electronic information and more on teaching and coaching. There’s lots of talking going on in the library.

Yes, you can talk in the library. The most rewarding comments received on library surveys point to the people connection. Users appreciated how someone helped them find a critical bit of data; or how they helped solve a problem; or how they learned something new; or how their questions were welcomed. Where else can you go today and get to ask any question under the sun and have someone spend time with you? And where else can you just walk up to the professional on duty without an appointment and without cost?

Unfortunately, there are many in the library profession who still undervalue this problem solving skill and even dismiss the possibility that every librarian, whatever their function, needs to connect with users. Some in the profession still come to their jobs with a habit of circumspection. Some focus on the illusion that they are already too busy, that they provide everything needed for someone to use the resources on their own, that “we are not here to handhold.” But these are masks for the reluctance on their part to turnaround the entire dynamic in a library toward providing service.

After thirty years as a librarian, I see the continued demand for the librarian as someone who negotiates. The librarian negotiates available resources to provide collections; they negotiate with the virtual space, officials, and experts to bring the right information to bear on any given situation. The best librarians own the problem a user brings. The librarian translates needs into action. A librarian sees that the user leaves smarter and more skilled than they came in.

Our navigation and investigation skills continue to vastly surpass those of most people who enter the library. We need to value this skill more highly, and to sell our talents to our municipalities, states, schools, and corporations. Otherwise, we might see the role of librarians diminish. In addition, we need to promote our teaching, the information literacy efforts, that help others build strong research skills.

We owe it to ourselves to move beyond the desks and shelves and stand out front. To greet and meet everyone that comes in to use our libraries. Yes, to evangelize. Not to wait for users to come to us. Not to prepare for any “just in case” situation. But to advocate for users and to evangelize the talents and experience of the staff we have. We can act proactively and intervene, yes, and even interrupt our users to guide them to success. Who are you as a librarian today? Can you find a book, use a database, decipher a question, or do you solve people’s problems and guide them to expand their own skills?