

The Luddite and the Technophile

"I fear the day technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots." Albert Einstein

When we last visited we diverged on the meanings of the sounds and sights of "Breaking the Fourth Wall." Regardless of whether Technophile or Luddite in persona, our roles as library leaders merge, for we must embrace the energy of change among our staffs, or we are doomed to petty autocracy. That would lead to an insular library, which is no library at all.

At the moment I sit in my office, glass walled (doubtlessly glass ceilinged as well) donned in my fez and smoking jacket, staring at the shelf list, so orderly in their staid maple drawers. They exist so unlike my strong-willed, problem-solving staff. This shelf list does not challenge my paradigms, and never suffers from an ailing mother or broken jealousy.

Leadership goals ought not to covet power or to embrace illusions of popularity. In some respects you are an island, like a church pastor or a school principal. This need to be an even-keeled leader was underscored for me recently when I was a judge for a literary competition-and came a fierce debate in which we split hairs on the terms *magician* and *illusionist* and whether, to the layman, the terms were synonyms. Having to moderate a decision, very publicly made, led to a vocalized sever and fevered loss in my "popularity." Such are the winds which blow upon our mettle.

Library leadership demands keen listening skills, and a supervisor must demand or nudge or deftly instruct his or her workers to model such behavior. This is the font of the reference interview and the key to supervision which leads to an employee's growth both as an individual and as a member of the team. When we listen with compassion, the world changes, and does so *sans* technology.

I find that technology can be a great personal distraction to those I observe. As a kind of comptroller for the bureau, I view waste of workplace time as dollar signs, and see that behavior in an insidious light. Once my mind wandered off as a colleague sat in a meeting, his device beneath the table top, pretending to listen as he thumb-texted his sweetheart or drinking buddy. In my escape from reality I became a plundering, swashbuckling pirate and brusquely demanded his phone. He whimpered. I struck his with a yard stick. He complied, and I threw the cranberry-red phone to the floor, and roared with laughter as it splintered into useless pieces.

This is not to say I do not encourage computing innovations in the library. But yes, I have squelched RDIF for self-circulation and for inventory purposes. In defense-the human communication that comes with a circulation clerk is value added to each transaction, and if staff does not touch the books at inventory time, they do not know well our ever changing collection. We are now a hub of 3-D printing, manufacturing watch fobs, door knobs and other sundry trinkets and baubles. We employ virtual reality in all components of children's programming, so when we read Alice... or when we read ...Oz, attendees head straight to Wonderland or to Kansas, in Toto. I have even observed a colleague using the newest virtual meeting software, but sadly, it was an excuse not to go out of his cubicle and speak face-to-face with the documents librarian.

Our role as leader requires us to keep the fourth wall broken. This is our egress to the community

whom we serve; we are the advocates to the civil and civic leaders, to families of all shapes and sizes, and to the taxpayers; we are shepherds to the lowly and indigent, for whom libraries are one of the great hopes for fairness in society. Our leadership must present every reflection with clarity, from looking glass to the latest touch screen tools. Encouraging our employees and patrons to step beyond a librarian's limitations is the challenge that should keep us engaged every single day on the job. With that said, technology can be deceiving in terms of life's lessons and those of the workplace. As leaders we must prod our staffs to focus less on the joys of immediate gratification and more on the long view of strategic planning. Ours is political world, and we are but temporary stewards for these marvelous libraries.

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Leadership is often outside the bounds of technology and its use or disdain. In libraries and in the broader world, a tool is only as good as the craftsperson behind it. Technology should be used to facilitate interactions, not distract, confuse or obfuscate. What is a library unless it is the space that binds together the systems and containers of knowledge for public consumption?

Often, when pressed about my vocation at social functions, I am met with exuberance about the printed and bound container of fiction we know as a book. There I face a conundrum, as I am "not that kind of librarian." Not to say that I do not enjoy reading, or that my taste in literature is anything but refined—it is more a question of container. When people learn that I work with digital materials, databases, and intellectual property, their faces fall.

Contrary to my dinner companions' perception, the value of a novel is not, I believe, in the printed page, but in the ability to build empathy, tolerance, knowledge, experience. We are transported and, if we are lucky, transformed and it is not (generally) based on the container of words, but on the mere fact of their delivery. People often say, "I read a book, well no, I listened to it." As if the auditory representation of those words were less useful or less valuable or morally inferior to the act of reading a written word, as if the poetry of language would be different in large print, or braille, or read aloud, or printed in a magazine digest, or read on a digital reading device. We live in an unbelievably wealthy time in terms of the number and variety of technologies of communication. The most immoral aspect of these various modes of communication is not their deviance from a bound novel, it is the propagation of the seemingly endless continuation of copyright in the interest of a few rights holders, even as copies are produced at a trivial cost. The content of books is the magic, their containment on paper or in bytes is the illusion.

As a teacher, some of the best advice I ever received was a reminder to use technology to facilitate learning, not use learning as an excuse to use technology. Using a piece of technology because it exists or because it is present in the room, without thought or purpose, may serve as more distraction than facilitation. Who among us has not sat in a presentation or class while the human elements were ready, but the slides did not advance, or the screen went blank or the internet went down or a thousand other problems. As a teacher or presenter, remember to let your technology facilitate the information you are



sharing. As professionals, let us strive to be leaders in understanding technology enough to use it only when necessary, only when enriching, or only when it facilitates more than it hinders.

So, maybe the appropriate small talk choice is, “Yeah, I love books, too. What do you do for work?”

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