**Information Outlook Column (Jan/Feb issue)**

**Due Oct. 15, 2012**

**Curb Your Librarian Frustration in 8 Steps**

Well, it’s a New Year with a 13 in it. Any triskaidecaphobics out there? Are you frustrated yet? Is your job driving you crazy already? Your boss? Your customers? Is technological change making you crazy? Keeping up feeling impossible? Feeling like you can’t keep up? Are you thinking too much about quitting, retiring, vacationing, or abandoning your dreams? Do you fantasize your hands around someone's neck?

Now, before you fold your arms and stomp off into the sunset there is something you should know. This is normal. Every professional worth their salt and who has had an ounce of success has been there. If you care, you get frustrated . . . and sometimes angry, demotivated or sad. Worry when you're at the point of "whatevah." Whenever you experience one of those moments (or weeks, months, etc.) you have to spend some time considering your choices and reconnecting to your passion. Passion drives most of us - it's what makes librarians put up with the pay! ;-) Luckily for the world, most of us choose to keep going and making a difference.

My secret, which isn’t really a secret at all, is that I use frustration as a signal. Is it a signal telling me to change course or try a different tactic? Is it a signal that conditions have changed and I haven’t? If I see frustration as a clue to what ails me or my project, then I can use it as a point to take a break and rethink. That always works. Sometimes I change jobs, because I think I am happier building as opposed to managing. Some people are better at managing and it might be time to pass the baton. Sometimes I realize I need to do a check-up or have a meeting. Perhaps I’m not optimizing things to achieve our goals. Overall, it’s a sign that I need to reflect, reconsider and adjust.

And you should too. If no one has told you lately . . . you matter. Librarians matter. Information matters. And we’re all subject to the vagaries of these fast-changing times. Frustration should be a temporary condition.

So, before you throw in the towel, or just wallow in the blues and self-pity, let’s think about how to curb some of that frustration a bit so you can get back to striving for success, innovation, great client interactions, fame and fortune (well maybe not the fortune ... tongue firmly in cheek). Let's move on and make a difference in the world.

Step 1: Stop whining

You are not working in a coal mine. You are not living in poverty. You're not in a war or famine. And you have not been sentenced to life in prison for a crime you did not commit. You are helping people that have information needs professionally. These may be first world problems, but put it in perspective. Feeling sorry for yourself or making things out to be worse than they really are isn’t a good place to stay. You're at some career stage and heading for another. Evolve and grow professionally.

I get it. You want greater respect for your work and some thanks occasionally. You want the recognition you deserve. But sometimes it feels otherwise. But whining about it is not going to make it any better. In fact, it’s only going to make it worse. Stop getting caught up in single issues, a few bad customer sessions or crappy budget days. Stay away from negative people. Avoid those conversations that blame 'them' or blamestorm. If they don't lead to ideastorms, action, and solutions, then they don't help and merely damage the players (and there really are some people who live to be the black hole of the workplace sucking the joy out of life. Avoid them) including you. Dig deep and rediscover the reason that you started out in this field in the first place. Re-find your purpose.

Step 2: Find your purpose

There was a time early on when you chose a career and got excited - even a bit worried too. Would you measure up? You had an idea, acquired a degree and knew a way to help others. You had a dream and a goal. Sure, you thought you might also be able to make some money at it along the way, but it wasn’t originally, and shouldn’t be, just about that. There is a greater purpose behind it. Something you were passionate about. Something so strong that you were willing to put the work into your education and take the risk that you'd get employment. And someone saw your potential and accepted you into the program and someone eventually hired you. Some even mentored you and advised you and provided developmental opportunities in SLA. People trusted you to work on their project or answer their questions.

And now you worry sometimes that you might have lost sight of your purpose. Not on purpose. It just took a backseat as you started to focus other stuff and got lost in the reeds of daily firefighting - e-book issues, library policies, weird users, technological change, or budget cuts. You need to rediscover and reconnect with your purpose. It’s easy to do. To start, just change your focus.

Step 3: Change your focus

If you are frustrated, take a look at where you are focusing your attention. Chances are that it is on some numbers that you don’t control which only track your success or the downside, *or* it's on a minority of the customers or team members that you interact with where the result was not exactly delightful! Librarians often serve hundreds of happy customers every week, but too often we focus on the few poor interactions instead of the well of support from happy customers. Some people are just negative; we don't need to internalize that. When you are overly focused on the numbers you tend to make bad decisions. You may focus on what you can gain from the relationship versus what you can give. It affects the quality of your interactions. It affects what you feel about it. It affects how often you feel good about yourself and your work and it affects your tone and your audience and your customers and your colleagues notice. It can become a downward spiral that few can correct other than yourself. And make no mistake, if you're negative, you end up contributing to the workplace problem culture instead of being part of the solution. The future starts to look dark instead of bright and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If you have to focus on numbers, start by focusing on different numbers - numbers that you have more control over. How often you succeed or how many times you get to do what you love - teaching, coaching, writing, advocating, planning, building, learning, innovating, whatever... It doesn’t mean you should turn a blind eye to the number of suboptimal interactions you're getting - just stop checking in on the negative so often. If you start tracking the good stuff you'll find that you make more time for it and do the ugly stuff more efficiently to make time for the stuff that thrills your passions.

Step 4: Stop checking your stats so often

We’re all guilty of it. You check your circs, your budget performance, your timesheets, your billable hours, your Google Analytics and more. Stop it. Seriously, just schedule it and don't get mired in the stuff. Start measuring what matters instead of what can be counted easily. You are going to drive yourself mad. Riding the rollercoaster of numbers alone is going to get you more and more frustrated. If you're not using stats to drive positive change, then why have them in the first place?

Try checking your stats only once a week and review what needs to be decided. Staring at your stats ten times a day isn’t going to make it better. If your work is good and you love it, it will show and you'll grow over time and be more successful and your animus is positively powerful, so the success will come. You just need to have faith (and no I am not Pollyanna!).

Step 5: Have faith

If you don’t believe that you have something of value to share, something that's needed, then your users and clients aren’t going to either. It comes across in your work and every interpersonal interaction and class you teach. It affects your quality of work too. Do you do enough or do you go above and beyond? Above and beyond performance comes from attitude more than aptitude. You can’t control time, only how you use it. Do you care about your subject matter and are you passionate about it? When you do care, the source of your energy grows. Passion, energy, and motivation come from inside you, not from outside. And you find time for the important, rather than fighting fires.

You need to feel passionate about what you do and where you are can have an impact. Don’t fear asking about your worth. Believing in yourself will get through the hard times. When something is keeping you awake at night, is it because you are unhappy or because you care enough to work on that problem or project because you know it can be done better and that's satisfying? Tip the balance in your favor and, with faith in yourself, you can accomplish your goals.

Step 6: Set realistic goals

Frustration can derive from unrealistic goals. Goals that are too far out of reach for you to get excited about or goals that are too big or fuzzy that you don’t see your own significant contribution. Your goals need to be personally exciting and you need to believe that you can accomplish them with effort, even if there’s a little stretch in them. And they can be in the context of your employer - just find your own significant place in their plan that aligns with your passions and goals too. Take time to talk about them and involve others including those in power positions.

Win a few along the way. Get excited about them. And stay committed. Winning all the time and winning decisively, is a game for fools. Be real.

Step 7: Stay committed

You have come this far. You have a job, and you have users/students/clients. You have a purpose and reasonable goals. See it through. Stay committed to it. Don’t lose sight of your dream. You can win and feel good. Understand that frustration is trying to tell you something. Being committed means giving your best, even when you don’t know what's the best answer or what's the best path. It means being flexible even when it gets tough. And when it does get tough (which it will), look to others for inspiration.

Step 8: Look to others for inspiration

You aren’t the only one who has been here struggling to find motivation and happiness. Wishing gets you nowhere. Doing builds muscle and skills. And once you're there there's more ahead to develop and grow. You are not alone. Use your network. Share. Build your associations - don't just be a quiet member. Learn new things. Take courses. Read. Engage in continuous learning. Have some fun - even if you have to schedule it!

Take your frustration and let it motivate you to have a great professional life. If you do I know you'll succeed in the long term. If you can't then you might eventually have to consider changing to something that will make you truly happy. Just don't take your frustration and personal difficulties in surmounting them forward with you.

 (Hat Tip and footnote for some of the words to Marc Ensign of [*MarcEnsign.com*](http://www.marcensign.com/blog) and [*NotAnotherSEOBlog.com*](http://www.notanotherseoblog.com/) who inspired me with this post: [*http://www.problogger.net/archives/2012/09/16/curb-your-blogging-frustration-in-8-steps/?utm\_source=feedburner&utm\_medium=feed&utm\_campaign=Feed%3A+ProbloggerHelpingBloggersEarnMoney+%28ProBlogger%3A+Helping+Bloggers+Earn+Money%29*](http://www.problogger.net/archives/2012/09/16/curb-your-blogging-frustration-in-8-steps/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+ProbloggerHelpingBloggersEarnMoney+%28ProBlogger%3A+Helping+Bloggers+Earn+Money%29).)

[Stuart – you might want to shorten this URL….!]

*Stephen Abram, MLS is Vice President, Strategic Partnerships and Markets for Gale Cengage Learning. He is a Past President of SLA, the Ontario Library Association and the Canadian Library Association. He is the author of ALA Edition’s* Out Front with Stephen Abram *and* Stephen’s Lighthouse *Blog. Stephen would love to hear from you at* *stephen.abram@gmail.com**.*