

Info Tech Column
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Preparing for Change: Technologically and Economically by Stephen Abram

If you've been living under a rock, you're lucky in a way! I was only half connected to the news about the fundamental economic changes affecting our lives as I travelled through Europe, Australia and New Zealand in late August and early September. Consequently, I found myself thrown into it big time when I returned home through New York and Long Island - ground zero of the financial meltdown. Like you I am awestruck by the sheer dimensions of these changes. I was also humbled by the good hearts of the folks I met there at meetings and over lunch and their sincere caring for each other through SLA and as friends and colleagues. As always, my SLA colleagues continue to impress.

Unfortunately, last January I made note of this coming economic eventuality in my opening remarks at my presidential inauguration in Louisville as did our CEO, Janice Lachance. The potential for an economic downturn that would negatively have an impact on our members and SLA was writ fairly large on the wall. I wish I had been wrong but many of us have been through these economic cycles before. They're difficult and they're upsetting. I still recall personally losing jobs during the downturns of the 70's and 80's. I know from personal experience how hard this is. Then again, it's an ill wind that doesn't bring some good. Two things to remember if you're being affected by this downturn:

1. Losing your job as a result of an economic downturn, due to bankruptcies, stock market breakdowns or other financial issues has nothing to do with your value as a person or your value as a librarian. You are still a good and worthwhile person and a valuable professional. I know sometimes it doesn't feel that way but it's true.
2. At times like these you will know others who are going through these disruptions. They need your support and friendship. Don't neglect them. Send them a note. Let them know if you can help and that you care. SLA can provide a good structure for supporting our colleagues. Friendships and professional relationships trump economics every time.

So, whether you're weathering the storm, fear more disruption or you're actively looking for a new position for whatever reason, there are number of things you can do to be prepared. There are always opportunities in any economy, no matter how difficult. I hope I don't sound like too much of a Boy Scout or Pollyanna, but there's nothing wrong with hoping for the best with a positive attitude and preparing for the worst. So here are a dozen ideas for using technology to enhance your career and marketability:

***Don't let your current employer reduce your value to your next employer.
Keep your professional skills and memberships up to date!***

1. Keep involved in SLA and keep your membership in good grace. First it looks good to many employers on a résumé. Employers want involved professionals. If you're unemployed, we have a special membership rate to tide you over. SLA is relevant for every stage of your career.
2. Use the services of SLA – you've already paid for them! There is a ton of value using your member ID and password on the SLA website. You have access to the SLA Career Center, the SLA Innovation Lab to learn or orient yourself to new software, the SLA 23 Things learning initiative to train yourself for a 2.0 world, the 1,000+ eBooks on leadership, management and KM to read up on your soft skills, the free weekly business bestseller summaries to keep up-to-date, the SLA Information Center's special pages on topical issues; the RSS feeds from NewsGator and Factiva on current professional issues, the special websites, blogs and discussion lists from other divisions and chapters, and more. There's a lot more there. Don't neglect to look and take advantage of the great things you paid for already! You'll be much better prepared for any interview.
3. Of course, it should go without saying that you should always have your CV or résumé up-to-date but sometimes we forget until that's urgent. Probably no one is completely safe in this environment so think back. What articles have you written lately? What speeches have you given? What projects have you lead? What committees did you participate in? What skills have you added? Spend an evening getting this into good shape so you have it at hand. You can always customize it for purpose later and your memory is better when you're not under too much emotional stress. Now make sure you have your résumé stored someplace where it's safe and not just on a PC or server that may become inaccessible. It's the same for examples of your work. Do you have sample screenshots of intranets or webpages you've designed? How about sample reports of your work? Articles, blog postings, reviews? Within the bounds of your ethics and contract, make sure you have a good portfolio ready. You may need proofs someday. Are these stored somewhere safe at home or have you e-mailed them to your personal web-based e-mail? You do have a personal e-mail account, right? Do you have your e-mail contacts backed-up?
4. Start checking out the salary surveys. What is the current market? Ask friends and colleagues what the market is like right now. Some markets, geographic or other sectors and industries, are more buoyant than others. How is your mobility? Can you move physically? Are your skills transportable if you described them in another way? If you discover you're underpaid (and who isn't!), maybe you want to move anyway.

5. Check out the online job sites. Places like Monster, Hot Jobs and Workopolis are great places to get advice, see job prospects and surf to gain insights. Set up alerts on these for your search or research. (You may even have these already set up as part of your competitive intelligence research, eh?)
6. Check with your local library school or iSchool. Many have career centers and advice or websites. You are an alumna or alumnus of various schools. Most care about the success of their grads. It's worth a call to check in and see what they know.
7. Read these books – Marcus Buckingham's *Now Discover Your Strengths* (take the free online test), and *Go Put Your Strengths to Work: 6 Powerful Steps to Achieve Outstanding Performance*, and *What Color is Your Parachute*. All three have helped me through difficult periods in my career to identify my strengths and communicate them well. Check out the free eBrary e-books and the execuBooks weekly business book summaries available as part of your SLA membership. There's real value here for you to build your skills and patter.
8. Now is the time to participate even more in your SLA chapters' or divisions' discussion lists. It gets your name out there. It promotes you as a good thinker and engaged professional. Don't overdo it and, obviously, make sure you're helpful and professional, but it's certainly a great resource for support, knowledge and advice. Volunteer for unit positions or international committees, etc. and contribute.
9. Register and start collecting professional contacts and colleagues in the major social networking sites - LinkedIn, Plaxo, Facebook, Naymz, Ning, etc. You'll find many of your fellow SLA members in these networking tools already. The spoils can go to those who are connected in an effective way. Build your network beyond the walls of your employer.
10. Be sure to attend your local chapter meetings. Now is the time to ensure that you are broadening your network and circle of contacts. From personal experience I can attest that I rarely got hired for a new position without the advice and assistance of colleagues at SLA. The SLA membership directory, referred to colloquially as the Who's Who, is your source of friendly fellow members who can help.
11. It's never too late to invest in your own professional development. Thousands of professional development opportunities are discoverable through SLA's Click University. You even have the free Click U Course of the Month and the SLA Innovation Lab and 23 Things are free too. What do you want your next position to involve?
12. Lastly, nothing is better than being interesting! Read Edward de Bono's great book, *How to be Interesting*. I did and found it extremely useful. I'm not great or even comfortable at small talk and I found this book to have a whole bunch of great tips. We are an international association of interesting people. We have interesting perspectives and contributions to make, now and into the future. Let's bring our candles out from under the baskets and shine our light everywhere.

I believe these changes to be parallel to those that took place in the Thirties when the financially-driven economy of the last century was created. Opportunities will open up for those who are ready as we create the information and knowledge-based economy – especially for librarians and information professionals as represented by the membership of SLA.

Good luck to all and be careful out there. Care about each other and continue to support SLA.

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