

**Information Outlook**  
**President's Column: Info View**  
**May 2008**

(Due April 4, 2008 – strict 750 word limit – it's longer. John I need advice to trim.)

**What's Your Philosophy?**

**by Stephen Abram, SLA President 2008**

In the past few weeks I've had the wonderful opportunity to visit a few chapters and LIS schools as well as break bread or have a quick coffee with quite a few members. It's always a challenge choosing a topic for these president's columns in *Information Outlook*. You think of what you want to say or do as president of SLA collaborating with members, staff and volunteers. You think of when the IO issue will be published and what will be happening then. You think of current events and topicality. It's early April as I write this but this for the May issue. I figure that a lot of conversations in Seattle at our annual conference will be about job hunting and job security. People are worried.

I've noticed that there are some deepening concerns about the job outlook and the overall economic situation in the world today. New grads are worried about whether interesting and exciting positions will be there when they graduate. Some employed special librarians worry about their own job security. Lastly, I've met a few members who are seeking new positions. I haven't noticed things being significantly better or worse over what I've come to expect after 28 years as a professional librarian but people are worried and with reason.

I worry that I meet librarians who somehow blame themselves for their loss of employment. This is usually not the case although it's hard to convince yourself of this when you're on the receiving end of unemployment. What causes most of the employment prospect changes in our field? I've seen talented and valuable individuals have their positions eliminated through no fault of their own. Companies and organizations can lose a key patent, have a major R&D initiative fail, lose a major legal case, be impacted by massive technological change or competition, lose financial strength through sales, stock market or other investment disasters while many other events can cause budgets to be reined in. Add this to other market activities like bankruptcies, mergers and acquisitions and it starts to look like a maelstrom.

We are in interesting times. My own philosophy is that many of these situations are out of our control. Although it can feel very personal, it usually isn't and dwelling on the negative is counterproductive. My philosophy is wrapped up in two poems I post above my desk. The first is "If" by Rudyard Kipling. You know the lines:

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,

...

If you can dream--and not make dreams your master,  
If you can think--and not make thoughts your aim;  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster

Read the whole poem. It's worth it.

I also love "*Desiderata*" by .Max Ehrman; it ends in part:

in the noisy confusion of life,  
keep peace in your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams,  
it is still a beautiful world.  
Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.

What can we control? We can always control our own reaction – at least the public one – to difficult situations. Indeed, it's arguably worse to be the survivor of a downsizing than the victim. We can also control our own preparation for any eventuality. And this is where SLA comes in.

- In SLA we build and maintain a network of contacts, friends and colleagues. While we might get valuable job leads or actual interviews through these contacts, it's more important as a resource for research and advice. I've found many a great sounding board in fellow members.
- In SLA we can prepare ourselves as lifelong professionals and stay current on the latest trends, technologies, and laws. Just reading this magazine for Lesley Ellen Harris' updates on copyright issues is a good start.
- In SLA we can serve as a confidential resource for fellow members. Were not quite a cabal or clique, but there is that patina to our small group of professionals.
- In SLA we can find mentors, formal and informal, who can apprise us of paths to follow and advise us as to what it's like in that sector, that industry, that type of library or that company.
- In SLA we can invest in our own continuous learning and updating our skills and competencies through voluntarism, continuing education, chapter meetings, CLICK University and more.
- Never allow your current employer to reduce your value to your next employer!

All in all, SLA serves as a lifelong resource to prepare for that promotion and success in your career. Concomitantly, it also prepares us for the worst. We can't own the ongoing problems in the economy any more than we can completely own the upside. Like most people we ride the wave. We have an emotional investment in our work. Sometimes it's just not our fault when things go bad. When things have gone bad for me, fellow SLA members were there to help, a lot. So remember to stay involved in SLA as one of your strategies for tough or great economic times. Check out the SLA website, using your ID and password, and see the resources there to remain flexible, adaptable and valuable to your next employer.

Good luck,

***Stephen***