

Handout for

The Indispensable Librarian

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The complete set of handouts for this presentation can be downloaded from <www.doug-johnson.com>

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*Some handouts for this workshop are taken from
The Indispensable Librarian, and The Indispensable Teacher's Guide to Computer Skills,
Linworth Publishing, 800-786-5017*

What will replace these things by 2020?

Keys	Dry cleaning
Keyboards	PCs
Dry Cleaning	Newspapers
Insurance agents	Offices
Cash	Express mail
Travel agents	Floppy disks
Express mail	Video stores
Stockbrokers	Business travel

The Indispensable Librarian Will librarians go the way of the slide rule and buggy whip or become the most important people on the planet? The current roles as outlined in Information Power are reinterpreted, and some additional, proactive roles are suggested. A discussion of specific media competencies, retraining opportunities, and job security strategies follow.

Why did you choose the library/teaching profession? What is your mission?

What are the goals of your school? Your teachers? Your principals?
(Remember WIFM!)

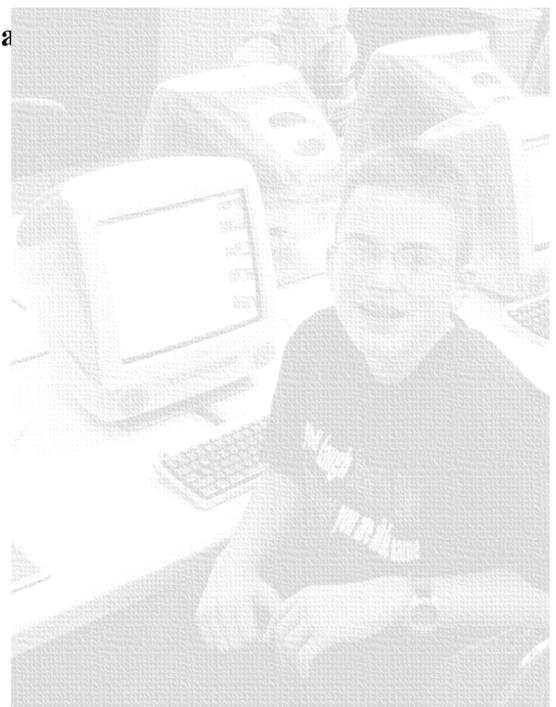
How does technology personally empower you?

When everyone learns to use computers, what's next?

The BIG QUESTION:

What is it that **I** do for the school that makes me indispensable?

What are skills required of tomorrow's workers?



Sidebar: Surviving Educational Transformation

Surviving Corporate Transition (William Bridges, William Bridges and Associates, 1990.) is a pretty awful title for a pretty good book. While Bridge's audience and examples are from the business world, much of the theory he extols works just fine in schools and should be heeded by teacher-librarians in this time educational transformation.

Downsizing, restructuring, role redefinition, site-based management, local empowerment, accountability, consolidation, co-location, and TQM seem to be the current educational buzzwords of choice. The number of teacher-librarians in my region has lessened, while the amount of work asked of those who remain has grown. As society changes because of the information explosion, everyone's role in it will change - including yours and mine. I happen to be rather fond of getting a paycheck, and I know everyone's position is vulnerable to cuts. Bridges offers three valuable suggestions for keeping one's job:

1) Head for the edge. *The people who work along the interface between the organization and its external environment are the sources of all the information that is needed to survive in this rapidly changing world.*

Are you, as your building's information expert, capitalizing on this important task? Do you read, filter and direct information to your patrons who not only use it, but become dependent upon it? As information moves from print to digital format, are you the "interface" to the Internet, to on-line card catalogs and databases, and to CD-ROM sources?

Are you the school's emissary to other organizations in the community that also provide services to your "customers?" Do you facilitate the use of other libraries in the community? Can you tap into the information services and professionals of local post-secondary institutions, government agencies, business, and health care organizations?

Do you "add value" to the information search process?

2) Forget jobs and look for work that needs doing. *Security in turbulent times comes from doing something important for the organization, not from filling a long-standing position.*

The most successful teacher-librarians I know listen to teachers' and principals' problems. As we all know, most teachers aren't shy about sharing them. What in your building is important and *may not be getting done*? Interdisciplinary units? Staff development in technology? Care and circulation of equipment? Site-based council? PTO chair? Building newsletter? Student council advising? Peer counseling? Computer network management?

I've always had an affinity for jobs no one else wanted - especially those my boss liked to pass off. If my job and someone else's job were both on the line, my supervisor's reasoning might go thus: "If I fire Johnson, I'll have to find someone else to do all those nasty jobs he's taken on, or I'll have to do them myself. Hmmm, let's see who else I might axe instead..."

I would not be too narrow in my definition of a professional task either. It might be better to perform vital clerical or technical work than an unnecessary "professional" duty. But then lobby for support.

3) Diversify your efforts into several areas of activity. *Like diversified investors, people with composite careers can balance a loss in one area with a gain in another. Consequently, they are not subject to the total disasters faced by people who have all their bets on one square.*

Some media people I know are removing their teaching endorsement from their license. Now if you feel that if you can't have a job as a teacher-librarian, you'd rather not have a job in education at all, that's exactly the thing to do. But unless you have a real good feeling about that last lottery ticket you bought, be aware that the employment in the "real world" is not always that rosy either. (I knew somebody who worked in business once and he complained a lot about bad bosses, inhuman demands, long hours, and poor pay. Remember Dilbert works in the corporate world, not education.)

The smart thing for those of us who must work to do is to *add* areas of endorsement. Coaching, ESL, middle school, administration, and reading certification all make one a more valuable employee. In the same vein, a list of successfully completed projects, grants, or workshops show administrators that you are versatile. If your media job is reduced or eliminated, a great track record betters your chances of the school finding a new place for you or of your securing work in another district.

Virtual Librarian

What might some of the functions of the Virtual Librarian be? Network administrator certainly seems like a natural role. Training staff to use e-mail, remote file storage, and Internet search engines is a great job. How about becoming an electronic information evaluator and selector? Or even more importantly, becoming a teacher who can develop information evaluation skills in her staff and students? When information is transmitted to a class instead of the class being transmitted to the media center, where should the Virtual Librarian be working with students? For families who can connect to the school information networks via home computers and modems, does that mean the Virtual Librarian becomes a community education worker too?

Crowsnester

Crowsnesters learn and teach and learn some more. Once it was enough for information-technology specialists to garner a body of specialized knowledge and then, like wizards, ration it out to patrons who needed it (which often created resentment in the patron). Advances in technology have made the "wizard" approach to service unethical. Everyone needs not just information, but the ability to harvest it and work with it and use it. *The most valuable person in an organization today is not the one who knows the most, but the one who can learn the best, and can teach that which is learned to others.*

Rabblrouser

The teacher-librarian's role as Rabblrouser is not one of critic, but one of builder. Remember the Noah Principal: "No more prizes for predicting rain. Prizes only for building arks." Rabblrouasers have a plan, vision or principal around which the roused rabble can rally. If your budget were magically increased 1000%, do you have an improvement plan you could immediately start implementing? If you were suddenly given total control of your school's staff development program, do you know what you'd teach? If you were made King or Queen of your school, what decrees you would immediately enact?