



3-2010

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Recommended Citation

Miller, Julie. "From the Editor," *Alki: The Washington Library Association Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (July 2010), p. 4.

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Strategies for Renewal and Re-engagement

by Julie Miller

At the 2008 WALE conference in Olympia, I gave a presentation titled “Moving Forward in Your Job (Even if You Want to Stay in One Place).” I thought fifteen, maybe twenty, people who were fairly new to library work and interested in changing position classifications would show up. Surprisingly, the room was packed. I spoke from an administrator’s point of view about two aspects of employees: level of competence and degree of engagement with their work. Some employees have low competence but high engagement (“newbies” fall into this category); others have high competence and high engagement (AKA “shining stars”). Can you guess how almost all members of the audience identified themselves? If you guessed “high competence, low engagement,” you’re right. A lot of people in that room were well on their way to burn-out—and they were looking for a way to re-engage with their jobs.

I suspect the situation is even worse now. As the recession has created higher demand for library services at the same time library budgets are being cuts, we are all trying to do more work with fewer resources. A crisis often brings out the best in us. But the daily stresses of doing the work of two people—often without an increase in pay—can wear down anyone, and even dim the light of a shining star.

This issue of *Alki* focuses on strategies for renewal and reengagement. One recurring theme is the use of technology to revitalize our libraries, as in “Everything Old Is New Again” by Bo Kinney and “A Legacy of Learning” by Susan James. Both articles describe how the digitization of local history artifacts not only increases access to historical information, but can also reenergize communities. In “*Ja, genau!*” Sara Hatch describes the technology-driven culture change at her library and offers a strategy for adapting.

Another strategy for renewal is to learn a new skill or seek out a new experience. In “The Guadalajara International Bookfair,” Nadean Meyer gets outside of her linguistic comfort zone

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(she doesn’t speak Spanish) to renew her interest in selecting foreign language materials. If you still aren’t sure of the difference between synchronous and asynchronous online learning, Jennifer Fenton provides a primer in her article “Renew Your Skills with Online Resources.” And according to Angelina Benedetti, everything she needed to know about cooking she learned as a reference librarian in “A Shelf-taught Cook.”

If you really want to be re-energized, take a big risk. The Washington alumni of *PNLA Leads*, the biennial library leadership institute for our region, describe the impacts of the week-long intensive institute on their work and lives in “Growing Our Own.” I had the privilege of being a mentor at the 2008 institute, and I was revitalized by the quality and passion of

the participants. (I was even inspired by one member of my group to begin taking yoga classes, something that had always intimidated me. The stress reduction benefits of yoga have been life-changing. Megan, if you’re reading this—thank you! *Namaste.*)

This issue of *Alki* includes a new column, titled “The Learning Curve,” by WLA Program Coordinator Kate Laughlin. In this first column, Kate introduces Elluminate, WLA’s newest tool for providing virtual training, online group work, and committee meetings. “The Learning Curve” will provide WLA members with another strategy for renewal—through WLA programs.

Finally, David Wright reminds us to lighten up in this issue’s “I’d Rather Be Reading.” A belly laugh is good for the heart and the soul!

You’ll also notice *Alki* has been revitalized with color. This issue is the first in full color. I hope the new look enhances your enjoyment of *Alki*.

Renew. Refresh. Revitalize. Let your star shine brightly. 📖