

Editorial

The Best Librarians: Who Are They?

In early October I was invited to speak on managing human resources at the fifth annual conference of the Oklahoma chapter of ACRL. Jeanette McQuitty from Northeastern State University, president of the chapter and main organizer of the program, told me that the issue of motivation was of considerable interest to many of Oklahoma's academic librarians and might make a good focal point for my presentation. I agreed and began to work.

It was not very long before I asked myself the question, Why do we want a motivated employee or a motivated workforce? Slowly, several answers formed in my mind. These answers centered on the employee, the library as an organization, the user, and finally, our society. "Can Do: The Urge to Excel" was the title of my presentation. I sent this title to Jeanette along with a series of questions relating to my topic that she wanted in order to guide discussion at each table during the lunch break after my presentation. Discussion leaders were selected.

At one of these tables Georgene Timko, also from Northeastern State University and discussion leader, read my fifth question! "How do we create a climate where the striving for and achievement of excellence are basic norms?" The group was stymied. We grappled with the issue of excellence. We concluded that it would be necessary to search backward from the type and quality of services that are offered to the campus community for our answer. We went no further. At the time I wonder how we would define an excellent reference, instructional services, collection development, or catalog librarian. I didn't have an answer.

The next day on the flight from Oklahoma City to Sacramento I read an article entitled "No. 1 in His Field." It stated that this superior talent practiced his "art" with a rare skill:

Some people disapprove . . . but I say if you get caught up in the old ways . . . you'll never excel. . . . The way I do things seems to please people. . . . Yes, I consider it an art form. And I work at it. I just hate to see someone with a lot of talent not work to enhance it. The talent might just as well not be there if it isn't developed. An artist must work.

In commenting on this familiar figure, Bud Harrelson remarked, "The thing about Ozzie [Smith] is if he misses a ball, you assume it's uncatchable. . . . If any other shortstop misses a ball, your first thought is, 'Would Ozzie have had it?'" *Sports Illustrated* (September 28, 1987, p.65).

Many librarians dislike sport stories. But sports have great performers because they have standards of excellence: in golf, the lowest score; in tennis, the most sets; in field hockey, the highest score; in baseball, the fewest errors per chances. In academic librarianship we haven't developed standards of personal excellence, but we need them.

In several future editorials I would like to feature a series of library superstars: librarians who excel in serving their campus communities. The focus will be on direct patron contact and services.

This individual should work harder, smarter, longer, and better than anyone else around. While recognized by you and campus users this person may be otherwise unknown. Publications are not necessary. Research is not necessary. Performance on the field, the user's turf, is the primary criterion.

Send the name of your nominee to Charles Martell, Editor, *College & Research Libraries*, California State University, Sacramento, CA 95819, and tell me why and how this person excels.

I'll put your choice within a context. I may even call you or your choice for more information. This can be a start toward developing our pantheon of heroes—the best librarians, those who excel in the trenches, where it counts the most.

CHARLES MARTELL

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