

The Future of the Profession, 2019: Vision Statement of the 10th Northern Exposure to Leadership

Background:

March 2009 marked the 10th Northern Exposure to Leadership (NEL), an institute created by library leaders to motivate librarians who are new to the profession and to develop their leadership skills. Set at Emerald Lake in the Canadian Rockies, NEL uses experiential learning and mentorship to help future library leaders create, articulate, and achieve visions for organizations and for library service as a whole. The following article is the collective expression of the participants' vision of librarianship ten years from now. It is written from the perspective of one new librarian's educational and work experience.

Vision Statement:

What's a guy to do with an MBA? With so many similarly qualified candidates to choose from, Lee Bryan really felt a need to differentiate himself. Getting an MLIS seemed a natural choice, after all, the Chief Information Officer at his last internship was a librarian and she'd had so many great opportunities and had a fabulous range of skills to offer.

Of course getting accepted might be tough, given the competition, but Lee felt that his MBA might provide him with an edge. Lee was sure that being a Librarian would open a lot of doors for him, not to mention the associated prestige.

With guidance and a recommendation from his mentor, Lee applied for and was accepted to the MLIS program of his choice. He was pleased to see that the students in his class had been recruited from a variety of cultural and academic backgrounds, such as chemistry, mathematics, geography, etc . . . The curriculum offered classes that introduced Lee to the core values of the profession including intellectual freedom, strategic adaptation and information coaching. Though Lee had already completed an undergraduate degree in information systems and an MBA, he had never been in a program that was so technologically advanced and focused on the end-user experience. Semantic web technologies, user generated content, and information behaviour all figured prominently in his coursework. The culture of the school emphasized and rewarded innovation, advocacy and active participation geared towards shaping the provincial and national political agenda as it impacts the information needs of the public.

The last two semesters were the most exciting. Lee was gaining confidence with his new skills and knowledge. He recognized the new opportunities opening before him: designing learning or community spaces in both the corporate and public environment, as well as in libraries; embedded information expert in corporate research teams, government think-tanks, a system design team... even in the design of new user interfaces. There were also established career paths available to pursue such as, information liaison for faculty, diversity coordinator for city information and library programs, knowledge facilitator for academic commons, knowledge management, competitive intelligence, and community outreach librarian.

Lee's confidence was growing, what with the number of organizations that had already approached him and his classmates in the hope of tapping into the resources that librarianship offered. Three weeks before graduating, he accepted a lucrative two-year contract with an automotive company, informing the design of interactive information systems for new products, from the metadata enabling system functionality to the system user's personalized experience.

Moving on from that position, Lee felt he needed a greater challenge. He had come to realize all the potential that a professional such as he could bring to other research fields and the need for his expertise in various arenas.

Being innovative, like most people in the profession, he convinced an environmental advisory board to hire him as part of its climate change and sustainability team. He tailored the position to maximize his skills and best help the advisory board meet its objectives. He monitored and analyzed new legislative initiatives and non-government organization endeavours at the international level. He helped team experts manipulate data and better understand the situation. Ultimately, the advisory board was able to influence government policy and legislation.

Lee was gratified that his skills and credentials enabled him to form important alliances between diverse groups and to foster transformational change in both organizations and individuals.

Prepared by Émilie Gagnon, Michelle Sinotte, Sherri Vokey and Aaron Wood; thanks to all NEL participants for their invaluable contributions.