

Law Librarianship Skills in Demand in the Age of Information

Law librarians across Australia are moving into corporate positions beyond the traditional boundaries of library administration. How do they do it? How do they do it? Are their librarianship skills utilised in their new position? To find out the answer to these questions and more, I sent a questionnaire to several librarians who have successfully 'crossed the line'. Their responses will be of interest not only to all career-minded librarians, but also to those interested in the future of our profession. *Editor*.

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ALISON WALLACE

Project Manager, GST Team

Ernst & Young, Melbourne

Q 1 Please give a very brief outline of your professional career, but especially what your position was immediately prior to the appointment to a non-library position

Alison: I have managed library or information services for some years, having worked mainly in law libraries and, excepting the last four years, in Brisbane. My most recent law library positions were as Library Manager at Coopers & Lybrand Chambers Westgarth in Brisbane, then equivalent positions at the Productivity Commission and at Ernst & Young. My most recent position was as a Melbourne Senior Manager, Centre for Business Knowledge.

Q.2 What is your current title? If more than one, what have been your titles in non-library positions?

Alison: Project Manager, GST Team. My project is the team itself, so I make myself responsible for anything that will make them more efficient (i.e. make

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more money) in the lead up to the introduction to GST on July 1 and then in the post-implementation environment.

Q 3 What do you think has changed - your job or your title or both?

Alison: Absolutely both. I am no longer in the administrative arm of the company, but rather in the business line of tax, so I am part of the business in a very visible way. My job involves making a difference to the bottom line, which is absolutely measurable, as opposed to having a job where I thought or knew I made a difference to the business but found it hard to prove.

Q 4 What librarianship skills do you utilise in the management/other role? Were these taken into consideration when the appointment was made?

Alison: My strengths are as a manager and organiser. I have had little hands-on research work for years, but have worked instead in the areas of personnel, business development, business management etc. It just so happened I knew libraries as a service line and worked within the four walls of a library. The skills they saw in me were those of an organiser and someone that made things happen. They saw that GST as a service line had a small window of opportunity in which to make money and that the team was struggling to solve their day-to-day and long-term problems as they were too busy doing the client work. My role was to solve their problems so they 'worked better'.

Q 5 Where did the decision to make the change come from?

Alison: They asked me if I was interested and it seemed like a welcome change. I knew I could run a business as I had been doing it for years in libraries and they clearly thought so too, so when the offer was made, although it seemed like a big change I knew I could do it and do it well. I guess I felt no fear so the decision was easy. I have wanted to be attached to the business, rather than be in a separate arm of the company, for as long as I have worked in libraries so that too was very attractive to me.

Q 6 What was the impetus for the change? Was it something that you have worked for? For what period of time? What were your reasons? Was it the idea of someone else in the institution/firm? Do you know the reason why?

Alison: I think I answered that in Q.4 above I do change jobs a fair compared to some people so am easily tempted when I know that change is something that fits in with the sort of work I want. I like always move into a job with a higher profile closer to the people that make the decisions and this one more than fits that criteria.

Q.7 Was there resistance from anywhere? How was it overcome?

Alison: None that I know of

Q.8 Do you have any words of wisdom to offer those who are planning similar path?

Alison: I know this is a personal thing but I am pretty fearless when comes to work I support myself and my small family unit so money IS issue but I am more aware of how hard it is to wake up in a job you hate and am prepared to take some major risks when I want to move on You can need to be a pretty tough cookie to make a difference to a business, but I know that very senior people in this company talk about my position in this organisation and the difference I have made in a very positive way, so I have no doubts that the move has paid off for me. I think I find the change I make in my career much easier to make than my family or friends for example think it is. When it is your life you just make the decisions you have to, to make a positive difference to it.

Q.9 Is there anything that you can add that I have not thought of?

Alison: I know that my network of friends and acquaintances have been critical to my happiness and success at work, and specifically in hearing about and getting jobs. I cannot stress enough the importance of knowing, helping and liking people.

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LORNA MATHIE

Library Manager & Executive Coordinator

Freehill Hollingdale and Page, Perth

Q 1 Please give a very brief outline of your professional career, but especially what your position was immediately prior to the appointment to a non-library position

Lorna: I have been a Librarian for 13 years, firstly in engineering-based special libraries and then moving into the legal area in 1988. My experience has been in government, academic and most recently, in corporate libraries. For the past five and a half years, I have held the position of Library Manager with a law firm.

Q 2 What is your current title? If more than one, what have been your titles in non-library positions?

Lorna: My main position title is that of Library Manager and for the past 12 months, I have also been working for the Managing Partner, and have the title of Executive Coordinator.

Q 3 What do you think has changed - your job or your title or both?

Lorna: I continue to be the Library Manager and have been able to take on the extra role with the support of the firm, particularly with them allowing the Reference Librarian to work full time, ie. an extra two days per week. The Executive Coordinator role is part-time and requires the following up of the business plan, researching papers for consideration by management, liaising with groups of partners in the firm on special projects, assisting other managers with their projects, and coordinating input from key players on strategic issues.

The change has mainly been through exposure to the business of managing a law firm, and developing a relationship with the key decision makers. The partners see the Library Manager in a more strategic light and are more likely to discuss a range of issues with me other than 'read any good law books lately?'

There have been benefits in being more aware and informed on new areas of interest to the firm and which people are involved. This has meant we can target the current awareness more effectively. It has also assisted with collection development decisions and being better prepared on issues that may affect the Library such as budget and space.

Q 4 What librarianship skills do you utilise in the management/other roles? Were these taken into consideration when the appointment was made?

Lorna: The skills of Library Manager have been seen as the main strength in extending into the role of Executive Coordinator. Particularly, research skills, organisational ability, and track record with meeting deadlines are less obvious help, but equally important, was the fact that librarians usually know most people in the organisation and we therefore have a wide picture of who works on what. We are seen as “non-political”, respectful of confidentiality, and have usually developed good communication skills. This “non-political” profile is important in the Executive Coordinator role as you are often dealing with very sensitive issues and it is important not to be seen as biased or pushing particular issues. This is not to say that you can’t influence things ...

The other important skill has been the importance of understanding the business, communication of the issues you are examining, and keeping key people informed of what is going on. Development of concise, business report writing skills are also required.

Q 5 Where did the decision to make the change come from?

Lorna: The decision was not a conscious one, rather circumstances presented themselves and the timing was right.

Q 6 What was the impetus for the change? Was it something that you have worked for? For what period of time? What were your reasons? Was it the idea of someone else in the institution/firm? Do you know the reason why?

Lorna: I had participated in the firm’s Leadership and Development Programme run through Curtin University’s Business School. This three-

month programme was extremely interesting and whetted my appetite to continue developing my managerial skills

During this period, the organisation had been through a large merger which had presented a huge number of challenges and workload. Things were beginning to settle down and the challenges (and pressures) were abating. The Library staff had often assisted the previous Executive Coordinator with her research and I had often discussed the issues she was investigating for the Board.

I had also discussed my interest in this work in performance appraisals and also my interest in continuing to seek challenges and professional development in the light of things settling down post-merger. When the Executive Coordinator stepped down from the position to take maternity leave, I was approached by her and the Human Resources Manager to consider taking on the job.

Q.7 Was there resistance from anywhere? How was it overcome?

Lorna: Apart from a complete lack of confidence in my own ability to do the job, I had a question of whether the position required legal qualifications as the previous holders of the position were lawyers. This had been discussed prior to my being approached, and it was decided that if an issue required legal input, I could seek assistance from one of the legal staff.

My appointment was also passed by the Chairman of Partners and the Managing Partner, both of whom have been very encouraging. The firm had also had a positive experience with my predecessor in the Library Manager role. The previous Library Manager had moved into senior management and taken on the position of Human Resources Manager. This experience certainly made people less nervous about my own appointment.

Q.8 Do you have any words of wisdom to offer those who are planning a similar path?

Lorna: Only that my career has never been planned. Everything has been a natural progression. I have been faced with some huge challenges, all of which seemed overwhelming at the time, but you manage to get through, learn

new skills (often without realising it), and find yourself at another level, professionally and personally

I must state that I have also had managers and supervisors who have had faith in me (more than I have had in myself at times) and they encouraged me to "have a go" Colleagues within the law librarian field, in the law firm, have also been great sounding boards when I have needed guidance (and patient listeners when things start to get out of hand)

Q 9 Is there anything that you can add that I have not thought of?

Lorna: The only thing I would like to mention is the effect that my extended role has had on the Library staff I was initially concerned that my appointment should not have a negative impact on the high level of library services. I believe that overall, the position has been beneficial to all of us. I think they have seen the role as good for the image of the Library, and certainly have access to more information and have taken the opportunity to use this information in a proactive manner.

In practical terms, the staff have had to cope with a large number of non-library related phone calls and enquiries. The Library staff have also had to cover my absences when attending meetings or when I am out and about the firm. They have been a great support and it has been a tremendous team effort. I believe it has also given them more confidence to deal with day-to-day issues on their own. As an example, the Reference Librarian has also developed her role. The full-time work has enabled her to get more into the flow of the office and develop key relationships, increase our training programmes and she in turn is "having a go"

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ANN WOOTTON

Head of Operations

Arthur Robinson & Hedderwicks, Melbourne

Q.1 Please give a very brief outline of your professional career, but especially what your position was immediately prior to the appointment to a non-librarian position

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Ann: I worked as a librarian in law firms since 1984 My position immediately prior to the appointment was (1) National Library Manager and (2) National Knowledge Manager (more than one change from librarianship).

Q 2 What is your current title? If more than one, what have been your titles in non-library positions?

Ann: My current title is Head of Operations. My previous non-library roles were IT Project Manager (prior to existing role); Training & Development Manager (while Library Manager)

Q.3 What do you think has changed - your job or your title or both?

Ann: Definitely both

Q 4 What librarianship skills do you utilise in the management/other role? Were these taken into consideration when the appointment was made?

Ann: In my current role, one area of responsibility is the library and so my previous knowledge is certainly valuable. As I have remained in the provision of services, I believe that my customer focus (from librarianship) is invaluable. Other skills which have assisted include the ability to manage several tasks at once, glean all information in one hit (the reference interview!), manage people and delegate responsibilities, manage budgets, ability to keep abreast of technological and other changes, thinking laterally.

Q 5 Where did the decision to make the change come from?

Ann: Me, initially, in looking for new challenges.

Q 6 What was the impetus for the change? Was it something that you have worked for? For what period of time? What were your reasons? Was it the idea of someone else in the institution/firm? Do you know the reason why?

Ann: I made the first change while I kept working as a National Library Manager. The position of Training & Development Manager (which included the Precedents area) came up in the firm and I put my hand up for it. Why? Because I felt the need to broaden my experiences and have additional challenges. This lasted for 2 years working both positions until a restructure

meant that I needed to choose between the two. I chose the option of focus on librarianship and knowledge management. My second change to IT Project Manager came out of the blue and was through a contact recommending me for the position. This lasted for the life of the project, before the end of which I was offered my current position as Head of Operations, responsible for areas of Library, Legal Support, Secretarial Services and IT.

Q.7 Was there resistance from anywhere? How was it overcome?

Ann: Not that I was aware of although it was sometimes difficult to devote enough time to all staff when doing the dual role of Library Manager and Training Manager.

Q.8 Do you have any words of wisdom to offer those who are planning a similar path?

Ann: If you want a change, seek it out. When opportunities arise in your field or elsewhere, make sure it is well known that you are keen to be involved. Don't be nervous to try new things and learn new jargon! Keep in touch with your librarian colleagues - they are of great support regardless of what you are doing.

Q.9 Is there anything that you can add that I have not thought of?

Ann: No.

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NICKI McLAURIN SMITH

Manager, Center for Business KnowledgeTM
Ernst & Young, Melbourne

Q.1 Please give a very brief outline of your professional career, but especially what your position was immediately prior to the appointment to a non-librarian position.

Nicki: I have been in law librarianship for about 10 years, having 'fallen' into it during my Graduate Diploma in Library and Information Studies at Melbourne

University as it was then. I don't have a law background

My most recent position was Melbourne Library Manager at Corrs Chambers Westgarth Lawyers. In that role I got involved in developing the Corrs website, and the beginnings of knowledge management.

Q 2 What is your current title? If more than one, what have been your titles in non-library positions?

Nicki: Manager, Center for Business Knowledge™ - note the US spelling and the trademark, all part of our globalisation process! I am one of several managers and senior managers in the Australian Center for Business Knowledge, reporting to our Chief Knowledge Officer Kim Sbarcea. Many of us have a dual reporting structure and also report to a global Center for Business Knowledge leader or to a partner.

Q 3 What do you think has changed - your job or your title or both?

Nicki: Absolutely both. I now work as part of a team in the business, I sit with the team and am involved at the planning stage with all new projects. My main focus is internal knowledge - or what our people know - are they sharing their knowledge? Do they need more education? Do they have enough external knowledge on their desktops? I help with all these aspects, and I get involved in client presentations a lot as well.

Q 4 What librarianship skills do you utilise in the management/other role? Were these taken into consideration when the appointment was made?

Nicki: Not so much my research background, but more my technical ability: the fact that I had developed Notes databases and worked a bit on internet/intranet design, and had my Masters in Business Information Technology (MBIT) from RMIT. I do use my research and content knowledge ALL the time though and people come to me for that even though I refer it on.

Q 4 Where did the decision to make the change come from?

Nicki: From me very much - I wanted to do knowledge and be more embedded at the strategic level.

Q 5 What was the impetus for the change? Was it something that you worked for? For what period of time? What were your reasons? Was it the idea of someone else in the institution/firm? Do you know the reason why?

Nicki: I had to move firms to make the change I wanted to make - my firm could not see me as expert in KM - although I had studied it and thought about it for years!

Q.5 Was there resistance from anywhere? How was it overcome?

Nicki: As above - sometimes you have to make that move if you are not happy where you are

Q.6 Do you have any words of wisdom to offer those who are planning a similar path?

Nicki: Have faith in your abilities - we are a very highly skilled profession but need to work on our own marketing and selling and people liaison skills as we have to market ourselves.

Q 7 Is there anything that you can add that I have not thought of?

Nicki: Think 'outside the square' - apply for jobs without 'librarian' in the title!

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ANNE GARDNER

Manager, Information Systems & Project Manager, Special Projects
Minter Ellison, Perth

Q.1 Please give a very brief outline of your professional career, but especially what your position was immediately prior to the appointment to a non-library position.

Anne: I started out in academic libraries firstly in cataloguing, then serials and reference. I moved across to the Law Library at the University of Western Australia where I worked for about 5 years. I then took the leap and went into private law firms where I've been ever since. I started out as the Library Manager at Minter Ellison and have gone on to become their Special

Projects Manager which is probably just a groovy title for managing all the jobs no one else wants to take responsibility for!

Q.2 What is your current title? If more than one, what have been your titles in non-library positions?

Anne: Although my substantive title is Manager, Information Services, I also have the title Project Manager, Special Projects which encompasses all the 'non-library' projects I'm involved in I use the titles interchangeably depending on what 'hat' I'm wearing at the time

Q.3 What do you think has changed - your job or your title or both?

Anne: My job has definitely been an evolving one - so much so that at this point I don't have a job description and I'm trying to develop one

Q.4 What librarianship skills do you utilise in the management/other role? Were these taken into consideration when the appointment was made?

Anne: Obviously the organisational skills librarians have are essential in project management. Also I have a fairly strong grasp of IT issues which has been important but I think the key skill that I've been able use is communication. As librarians we have a service ethic which means that all our communications within the work environment are aimed at helping or informing our clients. This non-confrontational method of communication has helped me through many situations where I've found myself having to mediate and negotiate the needs of various opposing groups

Q.5 Where did the decision to make the change come from?

Anne: I think most of us question our career paths at certain times along the way I had been in academic libraries for over ten years and about five in specials when I knew I was ready for a change in direction I decided to do some further study - I had thought of doing something in IT but I was drawn to the MBA and certainly found it very beneficial.

Q.6 What was the impetus for the change? Was it something that you have worked for? For what period of time? What were your reasons? Was it the

idea of someone else in the institution/firm? Do you know the reason why

Anne: There has been a bit of a push-pull effect here. I would say my 1c very much one that has evolved. In certain ways I started to outgrow library management role at Minter Ellison so was looking around to take different responsibilities in order to find more challenging ways to contribute to the firm. At the same time Minter Ellison supported me through my M so they were looking to find ways to utilise those skills. When the project management role came up it was mutually beneficial for me to take on

Q 7 Was there resistance from anywhere? How was it overcome?

Anne: I've never found any resistance - in fact I've had nothing but overwhelming support. Perhaps the only difficulty is where I actually fit into the scheme of things. Law firms are still quite traditional in their hierarchy when it comes to development discussions and salary reviews they are not quite sure what benchmark to judge me against.

Q 8 Do you have any words of wisdom to offer those who are planning a similar path?

Anne: If you like a challenge and enjoy the 'steep learning curve' path then by all means it is well worth it.