

SOUNDING OFF!

By

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The question of whether librarianship is a profession has been hashed and rehashed with amazing regularity and persistence. Although I would like to add a few morsels to the hash, my primary point is that it really does not matter so long as our attitudes about our work are sound in the context of the present manpower situation.

Recently I heard an advertisement for a periodical described as one "serving the trucking industry—as a profession." This magazine was designed specifically for truck drivers! My first reaction revealed a bit of snobbery in my own attitude, "So driving a truck is a profession now?" On second thought, I came to the conclusion that a new evaluation of the word "profession" as it is apparently understood by many people, can apply to any kind of work from truck drivers to lawyers. If one views his work as a service, is alert to needs and problems, and does his best to satisfy those needs unselfishly, then one can be said to have a professional attitude regardless of his level of education.

As librarians we usually regard the "professional" as one having a master's degree in library science . . . period. The almighty sheepskin automatically transforms one from the ranks of the clerical drone to the omniscient master of library services and adds the privilege of supervising non-master's degree holders regardless of their experience, skills, or knowledge.

In the present organization of library services, we are far too aware of professional and non-professional jobs. We are taught to be aware of these differences in library schools, and rightly so. But if our supercilious attitudes cause us to hesitate to perform a "non-professional" task when that task needs to be performed, then we are not being professional people.

Steps in the right direction are programs offering certification as library technicians. In any library, there are many kinds of duties which are routine and clerical in nature: opening boxes, pasting labels, making duplicate cards, and typing, to name a few. These are not generally considered "professional" jobs. However, if the ratio of clerical assistants to master's degree holders is not sufficient, then the "professional" must be willing to perform "non-professional" duties without feeling that he is defiling his lofty position by doing so. The "professional" is a snob if he refuses to consider an original idea because it comes from a "non-professional" or if he summons an assistant to open a box when it would be faster and more efficient to do it himself.

Everyone who works in a library, whatever level of education or duty he has, should see himself as part of a team with each member having a necessary and valuable function. Each member of the staff should understand the functions of the other members as well. We are taught in library schools, and we read in the professional literature, that librarians should know the inside of books as well as the outside. Yet, if any part of any day is spent by the "professional" librarian in examining books to be added to the collection, the "non-professional" may believe that staff member is not doing his share — "He is reading a BOOK!" Library assistants and clerks need to understand that one need not be forever shuffling cards, typing, or talking to patrons to be performing a useful service for the library.

This kind of resentment from "non-professionals" and snobbery from the master's degree holder forms two opposing teams in a library. An understanding of the functions each performs and respect for the value of each function would help to eliminate the kind of explosive situations that may, and sometimes do, cause poor interpersonal relations in libraries. If each member of the team does his job happily and unselfishly and understands that his job is important and valuable to the performance of the team as a whole, better library service will result. Service is, after all, our most important product.

SOCIETY AND THE LIBRARIAN

By

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1. a. Our society is becoming vastly more knowledge-dependent.
b. The knowledge-action ratio is increasing at an accelerating rate; the *knowledge-action ratio* means the amount of knowledge necessary for any given unit act to be effectively performed.
2. Research is becoming more important for practically all types of social organizations.
3. We are moving toward becoming a whole nation of learners.
4. The principal model for learning is, increasingly, the individual in the library/information center or laboratory (rather than in the classroom).
5. a. The demand for scientific knowledge is going to grow even faster than the demand for other types of knowledge.
b. Hence, there is a particularly great need to provide more and better education for prospective science librarians and for the science-librarianship component in general library education.
6. a. The trend toward total program planning/budgeting will increasingly include the relevant knowledge sub-systems.
b. The provision of library and information services increasingly will be a part of the long-term planning for all types of social units — including political entities of every level on the scale, institutions, and all types of productive and service organizations.
7. Special librarianship will increase in both absolute and relative importance, as will every phase of academic librarianship.
8. Not only will libraries of any given type increasingly develop communication networks among themselves, but there also will be increased reprographic interaction among libraries of diverse types.
9. a. Technological developments will be of increasing pertinence to the work of librarians.
b. Present concern with computer applications is only a beginning toward the harnessing of technology for aid in the performance of library functions.
10. An increasingly thorough-going understanding of communications hardware will be a persistent aspect of library science education.