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John is currently exploring the world of graphic novels and reading *Climate Changed: A Personal Journey through the Science* by Philippe Squarzoni, *Unterzakhn* by Leela Corman, and *The Encyclopedia of Early Earth* by Isabel Greenberg.

Forward Thinking focuses on public library trends and innovation.

Open All Night

One of the most productive actions anyone who works in a library can take is to put themselves in the role of a library user and attempt to see the library through that person's eyes. Start from where the public parks and take their path into the library. Enter through the public entrance, not the staff entrance. Look at the signage and the layout of the building, not from the perspective of someone familiar with libraries, but from the perspective of someone who may be visiting your library (or any library) for the first time. It is often very enlightening what you may learn.

Recently, Andrew Shaw, communication manager for Salt Lake City Public Library (SLCPL), engaged in a similar mental exercise to describe how our users might use our main library at various times and the activities that might occur. He detailed an hour-by-hour listing of possibilities, including:

9:00—*The Lord of the Rings* movie marathon begins in the auditorium. Sixty rabid fans file in to take the journey.

10:00—Six Salt Lake Community College students gather in a meeting room, drawing figures on a whiteboard and quizzing each other on compounds.

11:00—Three local entrepreneurs gather and put the finishing touches on their business plan.

1:00—A dishwasher gets off work from a downtown restaurant. He wanders in to check his email and check out a magazine before heading home.

2:00—A University of Utah history student edits her essay for the fourth time.

3:00—A homeless teen discovers his new favorite CD in the local music collection and asks a librarian to find the artist's next concert.

4:00—A traveler comes in to print off her boarding pass for a 7 p.m. flight.

These may seem like very traditional activities at any U.S. public library, but this exercise was done for a very non-traditional audience—those who would use a library overnight. SLCPL is currently proposing to keep the doors of its main library open 24/7, a drastic increase in its service hours that some in the community say is completely outside its mission. Those who would be served during this time (shift workers, students, night owls, and many others) are saying that they will finally be equals to those who live a 9-5 existence and be included in the library's mission to be "a dynamic civic resource that promotes free and open access to information, materials and services to all members of the community to advance knowledge, foster creativity, encourage the exchange of ideas, build community, and enhance the quality of life."

There are still many steps necessary to take this from the conceptual stage to reality, and it is possible that it may be stopped at the completion of the needs assessment, community forums, required budget amendment, or fundraising that has been promised. Personally, I am excited at the opportunity to provide "Library Service for Everyone" (our unofficial tagline), but as with all innovations, there are lessons that have been learned, and this article is not about what a 24/7 library will look like. It is, instead, about the unfolding process of reaching that goal.

Recognize Shared Goals When They Occur

The concept of a 24/7 library is not new. Many academic libraries never close their doors during the weeks around finals, and a smaller number remain open around-the-clock for longer periods of the year. College students do not live by a “normal” schedule, and academic libraries have served these users by offering their services in the hours that are convenient. Over my career, I have often worked with users of public libraries that would be much better served by overnight hours as well, and it has always been in the back of my mind that, perhaps, public libraries should follow the lead of the academic community in this regard. Two things, though, always stood in the way: (1) funding and (2) the assumption that there would be little or no use during the overnight hours.

On September 18, 2014, three members of SLCPL administration met with three community advocates to discuss their request to open the doors of the main library overnight for a very specific demographic group: homeless teens. They were willing to bear the costs for this, but we were uncomfortable with serving such a limited audience and had prepared a counterproposal for a two-year pilot of 24/7 library service that would be open to all, paid for by private and corporate donations raised by these community advocates. Their goal of providing a safe and comfortable (non-shelter) environment for homeless teens would be realized, as well as our goal of broadening service to the entire community.

A third goal could also be realized, and this would be key in getting approval from the Salt Lake City Council for an appropriation of the funds raised. Salt Lake City has several planning documents, including its *Downtown Plan* (1995), *Creating Tomorrow Together—Commission Report* (1998), and its *Downtown Master Plan* (currently in draft form for consideration in 2015), that contain copious references to city government’s desire to create a “vibrant downtown center 24/7,” to have a downtown that is “teeming with people 24/7,”

to ensure “a city that is alive at night,” and to provide “activities, attractions, and amenities for its 24-hour population.” Three groups (the library, the city government, and the three community activists) had distinct but overlapping goals that could all be realized through one innovation: 24/7 library service.

Frame the Conversation and Respect Perspective

As conversations with staff ensued, one of the most important lessons learned concerned how to frame conversations. As with anything new, it is an automatic and reflexive action to retreat to the framework in which you are most comfortable. Administration tended to discuss 24/7 library service in terms of community impact; middle management tended to discuss it in terms of staff workload and balancing competing objectives; and frontline staff tended to discuss it in terms of how it would be implemented. Unless a clear framework was established for whether the *why*, the *how*, or the *what* was being discussed, these conversations quickly became frustrating for all involved, with administration wishing that staff would get out of the weeds, and staff wishing that administration would come down from its ivory tower.

Innovation can be uncomfortable and frightening. For administration, it can be frustrating to be immediately peppered with logistical questions, and for staff it can be frustrating for those questions to remain unanswered as the larger concept is examined. It is only through truly understanding that all of these perspectives are valid and come from the same place (a desire to best serve the public), albeit a different perspective, that productive discussion can be had. Establishing at the outset of every conversation what is to be discussed—the *why*, the *how*, or the *what*—is imperative.

Make It Relatable and Easily Understood

As the conversation moved into the public sphere, it became apparent that I cannot talk in sound bites. As a friend and mentor of mine once said, “John never says in ten words what he can say in fifty.” Describing what an innovation might mean, how it should occur, and the steps that are required to bring it to fruition can quickly degenerate into an overly complex description of outcomes, procedural/ policy changes, and mechanics. There are audiences for whom this may be appropriate, but they are rare.

As an example, an amendment to our budget will be required for 24/7 library service to proceed. When asked about this, I would often launch into a mind-numbing explanation of the library’s budget, city council’s legislative calendar, and the municipal appropriations process. This did not help our cause; Andrew gently suggested a different answer: “We are simply asking for council’s permission to spend the private and corporate donations that will be raised. No tax dollars will be used for this pilot project.” The reaction of thinly veiled suspicion that I had typically received was quickly replaced with one of understanding and excitement.

There are many other aspects of our unfolding journey towards 24/7 library service that could be described: trying to overcome the relentless comparison of the main library to a homeless shelter, alleviating the concerns of downtown residents regarding security, and the successful garnering of support from the police chief, service agencies, and downtown business organizations. Library service 24/7 may be innovative, but it is also remarkably traditional. Libraries exist to serve their users, and any innovation should be seen in this light. We will continue to do what we do, and often the changes that we make are simply a recognition that society has changed, and we need to change with it. Library service 24/7 is such an innovation—it is not a change in what we do, it is merely a change that will allow what we do to finally reach everyone. ■