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# Just Do It to Stay Interested and Fresh, in Paul M. George, Care and Maintenance of the Successful Career: How Experienced Law Librarians Make Their Work Rewarding

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¶17 The rate of change in the profession and the world in general can all be quite overwhelming. But how dull it would be if we were still doing things the same way we did them twenty years ago! Still typing catalog cards and filing them by hand? Still digging through annual indexes, one at a time, trying to find a specific journal article? Thanks, but no thanks.

¶18 I just adore figuring out a new way to do something, usually using technology, to make a task simpler and easier. That's the most fun. And continuing education in one form or another helps me do that.

¶19 And that is how I have stayed energized and happy in my work. The profession kept changing and I just kept learning. It's that simple.

¶10 Of course, I would think that, wouldn't I? I'm the kid who liked school!

### **“Just Do It” to Stay Interested and Fresh\***

*Timothy L. Coggins\*\**

¶11 When I was the associate director of the law library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I took the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Test to prepare for a staff retreat. It was not much of a surprise to discover that I am an “INTJ” person. INTJs are independent, individualistic, single-minded, and determined individuals who trust their vision of possibilities regardless of universal skepticism. Other adjectives used to describe INTJs are task-focused, action-oriented, tough-minded, decisive, efficient, and productive. (You recognize, of course, that I include here just the “good” qualities!)

¶12 But why, you ask, is this MBTI discussion relevant in an article about how a “more seasoned” law librarian remains fresh in his career? As I look at the INTJ characteristics, I see why I work like I do *and* why working that way enables me to remain excited about my profession and job. A determined, task- and results-oriented personality allows an individual to assume many and varied responsibilities within an institution (hopefully, without detrimentally affecting work quality), and variety is certainly important to me. My own varied responsibilities at Richmond include managing the law library and guaranteeing that its interests are represented well within the law school and the larger university, teaching, helping with technology support, serving as faculty advisor for an online journal, working with development on fund-raising activities, teaming with other administrative personnel to outline goals and objectives for the law school, and handling AALL and other professional association committee work. At Richmond, I also have a fairly unique responsibility for a librarian; I am the manager of the law school's lawyering skills program. This year-long course for all first-year students teaches many skills, including legal research, analysis and reasoning, memo

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and brief writing, motion argument, negotiation, and client counseling and interviewing. I work with eleven practicing attorneys who team-teach the small sections with a librarian. The regular contact with the practicing attorneys helps me better understand one portion of my job, that of helping law students realize what they will be expected to do as attorneys.

¶13 Why is this variety important? Such a range of responsibilities keeps a person energetic, excited about his or her work, and committed to performing well. While the list of duties shouldn't be overwhelming—no one can do too many things well—a manageable variety encourages a person to concentrate on one responsibility, take the steps necessary to accomplish that duty, and then move on to the next responsibility. You know that you have a lot of responsibilities, therefore you work efficiently and effectively in order to accomplish all of your duties. A variety of work responsibilities also permits a person to actually *perform* tasks and duties himself or herself; you cannot spend all your time meeting, planning, and writing reports (although some is, of course, necessary). Actual hands-on work in a law library is a key to me; it keeps me in touch with staff, students, and faculty and keeps me energized and thinking about new possibilities.<sup>1</sup> It also allows me the opportunity to see immediate results and improvements.

¶14 There are three other important factors that help a seasoned law librarian keep a fresh perspective: students, change, and a life away from work. The library staff at Richmond often remark at the beginning of the school year about how young law students look these days. We joke that they all look like they are twelve years old. And guess what? They all *do* look like they are twelve years old. Most of the current entering classes were born many years after I graduated from college and graduate school. Seeing bright, energetic, and enthusiastic new students each year keeps me excited about my job. Just being around them, listening to them talk, interacting with them, teaching them, advising them, and hearing their concerns and worries gives me a vitality that I otherwise might not have.

¶15 Change is another important factor in work. Reading journal articles, talking with librarians at other law libraries, and studying organizational structure provides impetus to review what is going on in your own institution. Determining how, if at all, some of these changes might apply and working with colleagues to accomplish these changes are exciting endeavors. I must admit (and this goes back to my INTJ personality) that this is an area where I have to be careful. First, I'm willing to try out a different approach to an issue as a "test," even when it hasn't really been adequately planned out yet. Second, I'm one of those people who might be described as liking change for the sake of change. Recognizing this, I have to work closely with the staff to make certain that the change is really important, one that will help us accomplish our work more effectively.

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1. I like to work at the library's reference desk because it keeps me in touch with students and other users and their needs. Working evening and weekend shifts at the reference desk really opens my eyes to what actually goes on in the library.

¶16 Finally, life outside work is very important to me. To relax by working in a garden or traveling renews me. It's important to me, for example, to go for long walks on the beach, to attend a concert or play, and, of course, to yell and scream for those Duke basketball teams (men's and women's)! Renewal from activities outside of work makes me a better librarian and manager.

¶17 I'll return now to the MBTI and INTJs' view of life and work as exciting opportunities. Life (and work) is fun, just as it should be!

### Variety Is the Spice of Life\*

Shelley L. Dowling\*\*

¶11 How do I know the difference between a career and a job? When I have bills to pay, I better have a job; and if I'm lucky, I won't hate the work and the bills will get paid until I figure out "what's next." But when I have work that interests me, challenges me to grow and learn, helps me flow energetically into the future, and surrounds me with dynamic colleagues, then I have a career—even if the paycheck is modest.

¶12 It is within the context of a career rather than a job that I can meaningfully share how I have kept myself fresh through the years. For me, the two most important concepts have been: *know who you are*—what are your strengths, limitations, quality of life criteria, beliefs, and goals? And *know what you like to do*—what are you passionate about? With these in mind, you need to continually grow in the knowledge, skills, and abilities that enable you to successfully progress through your career, indeed, through your life.

¶13 Quality of life considerations encompass my whole life, both personal and professional. To the extent possible I balance my interests and my time among the different roles I play in my life—wife, mother, librarian, friend, church member, new grandmother—and just being myself. The stresses in one part of my life are often balanced or dissipated by activities or interests in another part. After a particularly challenging meeting on information policy issues at work—issues that are of great importance to my profession and my institution—I go home, give my kids a hug, and retire to the quiet of my garden to till the soil (the feel and smell of the earth are renewing). I can feel the stress flow out, replaced by a clear, creative reflection on the issues (as well as by a vision of the flowers or vegetables that will emerge as a result of my labors of love in the garden). In the winter when the garden is not available, it's the treadmill and some great rock and roll music to loosen up my mind.

¶14 There is a relatively new concept in physics called "chaos theory," which to me translates into the more familiar idea that "variety is the spice of life."

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\*\* Librarian of the Court, Supreme Court of the United States Library, Washington, D.C.