

Library Consultant: Career or Dead-End Job?

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AS ONE EARNING A LIVING as a self-employed library consultant, I receive occasional letters from would-be library consultants. These letters open interesting windows on the perceptions others have of a miniscule branch of librarianship. Some endow it with glamour and even lucrative benefits. Others question whether it is worthwhile; a few wonder whether it has a future. Most, however, want simple directions on how to enter this curious—if not mysterious—line of endeavor from wherever they happen to be on their personal career ladders.

Recognizing that this is not supposed to be an encyclopedic treatment of this subject, I would like to share what, at best, must be considered personal—and therefore very prejudiced—views. I have gone to no length whatsoever to research or document the points I want to make (horrors!), but offer them strictly as one individual's commentary based solely on a career of some thirty-five years in librarianship with about one-third of that as full-time library consultant.

One further confessional note: I never had any conscious intentions of becoming a library consultant—this career somehow evolved, a little like Topsy, until it seemed a choice had to be made between continuing work as a library director and consulting. To me, the choice seemed obvious and there are no regrets. But it would be a grave error to assume the path I have followed is either typical or desirable for others.

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Motivation

When others talk about the possibility of becoming a library consultant, I usually find their motivation illuminating. Quite often their comments are based on their perceptions of library consulting as a career. Here are some characteristics named in recent inquiries I have received:

1. The work is never boring—always filled with excitement and interest.
2. Income for library consultants is substantially higher than that of most salaried librarians.
3. Consulting provides opportunities for extensive and enjoyable travel—at someone else's expense.
4. Assignments give consultants complete independence to do as and when they please.
5. Increased professional recognition is virtually guaranteed.
6. Consulting offers a practical solution to tough career choices ranging from dead-end jobs to mid-life crises.

Seldom are concepts such as *service* or *help* mentioned among these inquiries. To paraphrase, most ask only what the profession can do for them—not what they can contribute to library service. It would be unfair, of course, to deny that all of the stated perceptions are erroneous. But more on that subject later.

Character Traits

Before discussing some of the more obvious aspects of the consultant's career, I would like to identify some of the characteristics which, from my observation, seem to be important. These begin with certain character traits which are presented here in no particular order. Actually, their relative importance depends upon time, place and circumstance.

Tact. Tact is the ability to discern what is appropriate to do or say when dealing with others. Without a full measure of this capability, the library consultant will find it difficult—if not impossible—to create and maintain an adequate working relationship with the client.

Sincerity and honesty. The successful consultant's practice is built on the innate sincerity and honesty of the practitioner. Clients place an unusual degree of trust in the consultant's ability to analyze difficult situations, evaluate alternatives and make appropriate recommendations. Often the end result produces major changes in the organization,

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affecting the status, income and even the future careers of numerous human beings. Likewise, implementation may involve expenditure of sizable sums of money for systems, staff, land and buildings. Obviously, those who would be dishonest or insincere have no place in such positions.

Patience and understanding. Patience and understanding seem to be twin traits that every client tests. Patience is challenged by contracts slow to be written, information which comes in bits and pieces, project timetables that change without warning and without consideration of the consultant's other commitments, and personalities which sometimes try one's temper and soul.

The consultant's capacity for understanding is often tested first by trying to comprehend the client's requirements. Often these requirements are poorly articulated, sometimes misconceived and frequently obscured by secondary or unrelated issues. The accuracy of interpretation of information and the validity of one's eventual recommendations depend heavily on understanding both the stated needs of the client and the political climate within which the client must function.

Self-discipline. The lack of a high degree of self-discipline goes far to account for the 95 percent failure rate attributed to general consulting—library and all other types. One must be a self-starter with sufficient willpower to see each job through to the end. The unpleasant tasks must be done, as well as the ones which are more appealing—there's usually no one to delegate the hard jobs to. For the consultant, the fifty-, sixty- or seventy-hour, six- and seven-day work week is the norm—clock-watchers need not apply!

Ability to create/innovate. To a considerable degree, the consultant's success depends upon creating solutions for difficult situations and finding innovative ways for handling recurring problems. This requirement mandates keeping up with technological changes and adapting and transferring solutions from one field to another. Incidentally, providing creative and innovative solutions means introducing change and this, in itself, involves an element of risk which the consultant cannot avoid.

Perceptive and intuitive capacity. Consultants must have the capacity for perceiving that which is not obvious. Some of the most critical factors in many assignments emerge from intuitive perception rather than from hard facts. Lacking intuition, the consultant may struggle unsuccessfully to identify the source of a problem or to create an acceptable solution. Hidden agendas, suppressed attitudes and other bugaboos more often than not must be sensed from nuances of casual conversations rather than from other sources. Like an investigative

reporter, the consultant must know how and when to ask the right questions without upsetting those providing the information. Intuition and perception must then combine to produce an accurate and inciteful understanding of what has really been said.

Commitment and self-esteem. A successful consulting practice requires an unusual degree of commitment of self and of personal resources. The individual must have sufficient self-esteem to trust his/her own judgment. The consultant must be committed enough to continue when conditions are adverse. Commitment may be a particular problem for those who maintain full-time jobs and practice consulting on the side: How well can they serve two or more masters?

Sense of humor. Possessing a sense of humor and retaining it under a variety of circumstances are essential qualifications. Taking oneself too seriously is a sure road to difficulty. Delays, unexpected barriers, personality quirks among clients, surprises—not always pleasant ones—and sudden, sometimes arbitrary changes in project scope and/or schedule are but a few of the situations which are best met with a sense of humor.

Love of people. Much of consulting practice turns on the ability to establish, maintain and utilize a good working relationship with people. Unless one enjoys people in all their endless variety, don't become a consultant! The greatest single reward in our practice has been the numerous friendships which have resulted across the nation. Without the love for people, a consulting practice would have no heart. Surely it would be a sterile, boring and empty career.

Persistence. Persistence, which is an outgrowth of self-discipline, must be numbered among a consultant's prime qualifications. All outsiders' assumptions to the contrary, a consultant must accomplish many tedious tasks—from compilation and analysis of endless data, to writing and editing reports that seem dry and repetitious. Dogged persistence is required to meet deadlines which may have been unrealistically established by the client or assumed by the consultant before a full knowledge of project complications was realized. Lengthy literature searches must be made and endless interviews conducted. Through it all, the consultant must persist in order to meet schedules and to fulfill the scope of the contract. At such times, persistence becomes a test of the consultant's character and commitment.

Education and Experience

“What sort of education do I need to become a consultant?” and “Where should I get the experience needed?” are two questions fre-

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quently raised. As to the first, I have yet to work with a potential client who has had more than a casual interest in my scholastic background. Perhaps it is taken for granted that one would not enter this field unless proper credentials had been achieved. Are multiple master's degrees or a doctorate advantageous? No doubt there are situations where this is true. However, my clients are more interested in my making the effort to keep up to date in relevant fields.

Speaking of formal education for library consultants, this is an area not yet addressed satisfactorily by our profession. Neither is there any provision for formally approving, licensing or accrediting consultants. Sorry, no impressive certificate or license to frame and hang on the wall! So much for educational credentials.

Experience, on the other hand, is the subject virtually every client is *most* interested in. In fact, consultants largely are chosen because of their records for solving clients' problems. Would-be clients are certain to ask the consultant for a descriptive list of representative projects. Former clients are then asked to comment on such questions as:

1. the ability of the consultant to establish and maintain a satisfactory working relationship with project personnel;
2. the nature and effectiveness of the consultant's proposed solutions;
3. the ability of the consultant to perform project assignments on time and within the project budget.

Gaining the required breadth of experience on which to base one's reputation is a perplexing "chicken-and-egg" question which all would-be consultants face. Since formal coursework is not available, those who wish to enter this field usually do so by seeking small assignments, often at very limited fees, and gradually working up to larger projects. Some find it possible to serve informally as an apprentice to a consultant with an established practice. This works especially for those who can offer unusual skills and knowledge in some specialized field. For instance, from time to time we have used individuals from such areas as automation, video technology, and library service to the Spanish-speaking. The crucial fact, to paraphrase John Houseman is that "consultants acquire their reputations the hard way—they earn them."

Other Qualifications

For those seriously considering becoming consultants, certain other qualifications should not be overlooked.

Specialized Knowledge. By and large, every consultant is a specialist in something or other. It is this expert knowledge and experience which others need and will pay for. Consultants' potential for success will be conditioned by their ability to isolate and market their expertise.

Financial Resources. For those expecting only to work as a part-time consultant, this point will have little meaning. However, for those contemplating leaving the security of the regular salary for the promising but sometimes elusive rewards of consulting, I will repeat the advice a consultant in another field gave me when I was at this same crossroad: (1) have at least one full year's work under contract before signing your termination papers; and (2) expect the first three to five years to be slim ones.

While consultant fees—or at least the hourly or daily rates—may appear lucrative when compared to salaries, remember that there are often delays and gaps between projects—and between payments, as well. Meanwhile, office and personal expenses continue unabated. Banks are not prone to accept a consultant's prospects for future projects as good loan collateral—let alone for cash deposit. Months may pass between receipt of request for a proposal (RFP) and the final decision of the responsible body—let alone receipt of a signed contract and the initial payment. Meanwhile, the cost of doing business continues as you pursue new leads, knowing that you cannot afford to depend on the promise represented by any given proposal. Further, even when the contract is signed, there are project start-up costs, travel expenses, and other expenditures which may not be reimbursed for some time. And then there are the delays in payment over which the client has no control—delays which can stretch into several months. Needing sufficient financial resources to survive these cash shortfalls is a sobering reality.

Adequate Time. For those wishing to begin consulting on a part-time basis, consider seriously how much time you can and are willing to devote to consulting. I have already indicated that the full-time consultant works long hours—and so does the part-time consultant. You are fair neither to yourself nor to your client if you cannot devote sufficient time to the project. Are you willing to give up your evenings? weekends? holidays? vacations? Most surely this will be necessary. Is your schedule flexible enough to meet changes in clients' requirements on short notice? Can you do justice to your full-time job while devoting time, energy and mental and physical resources to this outside work? Only you can decide how much you are prepared to sacrifice.

Good Health. "Availability" is almost a synonym for "consultant" to many clients, and it depends upon maintaining a healthy mind and

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body. Field trips are apt to be both long and intensive—the eight-hour work-day is seldom observed. Some days require sitting for endless hours—not always in comfort. (After a field trip with us, a colleague volunteered that the prerequisite for consulting is withstanding interminable sitting.) Travel will add its own strain to the regimen, as will numberless, undisturbed restaurant meals and an endless succession of forgettable hotel rooms. And then there's the fatigue that accompanies having to be on top of each situation at all times. Let me illustrate with the log of an all-too-typical week in our own practice.

Sunday: Left San Diego at 7 A.M. and arrived at our destination at 7:55 P.M. Nearly six hours were spent flying and the rest were passed in three airports making transfers. Incidentally, three hours were lost due to time-zone changes.

Monday: Arrived at client's office at 8 A.M. for initial session, reviewed project schedule, finalized field trip requirements and interview schedule, and became acquainted with staff principals. Ate a carryout lunch following an extensive tour of building and grounds. Adjourned for dinner at 7 P.M. (with client), then continued work through 10 P.M.

Tuesday: Similar schedule, except that after dinner, the client representatives went to their respective homes while we returned to our room to review data gathered that day, create lists of information still needed, and revise the next day's work schedule accordingly.

Wednesday and Thursday: Similar schedule.

Friday: Return to San Diego; while en route we recapped data gathered and listed tasks remaining to be done.

Saturday: Read the stack of accumulated mail, deferred telephone calls, and began preparations for a three-day field trip the following week to work with another client nearly 1000 miles away in the opposite direction. This trip will include formal presentations to a library board and a city council, followed by media interviews and negotiations on a contract amendment.

Keeping such a pace, not the least uncommon among consultants, means retaining one's health in spite of long hours, fatigue, stress, shifting time zones, and changes in climate. One-third of our time was spent last year in field work—and nearly 100,000 miles were flown. Enough said about the health requirement.

Ability to Write. Whether inherited or acquired by dint of training, a consultant must be able to put his or her findings and recommendations into acceptable prose—and with some rapidity. A well-written and meaningful report is much more apt to be read and implemented. Since the final report is almost always the most lasting and tangible evidence of the consultant's contribution to a project, the importance of good writing skills seems self-explanatory. This skill must be honed so that

drafts can be kept to a minimum, there being little time for extensive rewriting.

Communication Skills. In virtually every area of library consulting, communication skills are basic to success. Such skills begin in the marketing of consulting services. Often this process begins as a response to an RFP—a formal request for proposal. The written response indicates the consultant's ability to analyze client needs and to respond in a meaningful way. If interviews of prospective consultants are involved—and often they are—the consultant's communication skills must compete with those of others seeking similar consideration. Where consultants' qualifications are similar, the assignment is most apt to go to the consultant who makes the best impression during the interview.

Once the project has been awarded, fact finding will again depend upon the consultant's ability to communicate with staff, public, officials, and others. Using communication skills will play a decisive role throughout the project and culminates in the final report phase, where the client must be convinced that the findings are reasonable and that the recommendations are worthy of implementation.

Objectivity. The consultant must retain a sense of objectivity when dealing with data and situations. While local conditions must be understood, including biases and prejudices, these cannot be allowed to warp findings and recommendations. The client is paying for an independent appraisal. (If the client wants only the consultant's endorsement of his or her own perceptions, opinions and solutions, beware!) Among other things, this means adherence to the stated goals of the project and avoiding tangents which, however intriguing, are not germane. Strong personalities encountered during a project can exert undue influence on the outcome if the consultant fails to retain a firm sense of objectivity.

Perspective. Clients expect consultants to maintain an exceptional amount of perspective. This is akin to objectivity. Those closest to the local situation often have shortened perspectives and cannot view problems and solutions in the long haul. Therefore, the consultant must be able to show how solutions may relate to the immediate concerns of the community and to the continuum of the library's development. The ability to provide this perspective is one of the consultant's unique contributions.

Keeping an Open Mind. Implicit in much of the foregoing discussion is the need for the consultant to keep an open mind. No matter how similar projects may appear to be, one must resist the effort to reach conclusions without sufficient confirming evidence. No matter how subtle, differences in circumstances may make it impractical to transfer the solution from one project to another. For one thing, the structure

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and demographics of a library's community—as well as the characteristics of a library's collections, staff, programs, etc.—are apt to differ among libraries more than the uninitiated may realize. Political realities will also vary widely. Therefore, the consultant must keep an open mind until fact finding and analysis have produced the full range of possible alternatives.

Home, Family and Travel. Travel is one of the “givens” of most library-consultant practice. However, contrary to what some might suppose, exotic destinations and sightseeing are a rarity on most consultants' itineraries. True, travel can be fun—but, as already noted, it can also be grueling. Would-be consultants must seriously consider the effect frequent absences from home may have on them—as well as on their families. Inevitably, consultant's social and recreational life is held hostage to the client's needs. Trips may range from overnight to several weeks. Intervals at home are sometimes too short for anything but repacking for the next field trip. Since travel schedules are usually determined by the client's needs and convenience—not the consultant's—disruption on the home front is almost certain to occur. Some consultants and their families are willing to accept this—others cannot.

Special Skills

Special skills of some kind are needed in virtually every field of library consulting. To be salable, these must usually exceed the level of similar skills otherwise available to the prospective client. For instance, the automation consultant will want to have developed programming skills and familiarity with the major computer languages—something few librarians have time or opportunity to learn in any depth. Consultants dealing with community analysis, levels of library service, and long-range planning will need some skills in sampling and statistics. Public relations consultants undoubtedly will have honed their journalistic abilities and will be able to show published work as evidence of their skills. Library-building consultants must have a familiarity with building codes, be able to read and interpret architectural and engineering drawings and specifications, and must be able to visualize two-dimensional representations in three dimensions.

Skills can be learned in various ways. However, it is my impression that few library consultants set out to acquire such skills in anticipation of becoming a library consultant. Rather, most gain skills for other reasons, usually job-related. Then, because others recognize their expertise, such individuals are asked to “help out” by taking on consulting

assignments. If the some-time consultant finds the work agreeable, additional classes, self-tutoring, attendance at professional workshops and institutes will serve to broaden his/her skills and will keep them sharpened to a working edge.

The Library-Consultant Marketplace

Having delineated some of the characteristics and requirements for the library consultant, as I see them, perhaps it is time to consider the existing marketplace. In recent years, shriveling budgets and shrinking programs have reduced, but not eliminated the market for consulting. Here is a quick overview of some of the areas which remain active in spite of the recent budget blitzes.

Automation. Automation is probably the number-one field of activity for library consultants. It presents the classic case for seeking help in a highly complex field where local expertise is not sufficient. A number of very busy consultants are rushing about the country to share their expertise—all the while gaining valuable experience and contacts for use in the future. Most of these individuals have considerable background in automation, whether they have library degrees or not. With only a small fraction of our libraries automated and with the possible applications growing as mini- and microcomputers enter the field, it is probable that qualified consultants in this subject will face a project backlog for some years to come.

Video services. Video technology is also beginning to make an impression on the library world. Here, again, is an example of a sophisticated and fast-changing technology which libraries must tame and use. For the foreseeable future, expertise greater than that locally available will be needed in many library situations. Video consultants are emerging from the video technology field as well as from the ranks of library audiovisual specialists. Video consultants see studios, video-cassettes and video disks replacing many other audiovisual formats. I suspect that video consultants will be around for some time—especially those trained in production facilities and programming.

Public relations. There is tangible evidence that libraries recognize the need for individuals who specialize in the art of public relations (PR). Perhaps it is an acknowledgment that libraries must develop and maintain a new image if they are to reach their stated goals. Most librarians now realize that good PR means much more than an occasional newspaper article or book-review column. Consultants in this field include those with library backgrounds as well as others. This is an

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area of perennial interest in which a certain number of well-qualified consultants will always find a demand for their services.

Personnel. Personnel was a very active field for library consultants a few decades ago when personnel administration first became an area of concern. Specialists in demand were capable of writing job specifications and creating classification and pay plans. A few are still doing business, but the focus tends to center on unions, labor relations, and similar subjects. With the build-up of personnel departments by governmental agencies, academic institutions, and others, the expertise formerly provided by the consultant is available in-house. However, it would not be surprising to see a resurgence in this area. The individual trained as a librarian but cognizant of current personnel philosophies and techniques may find this an adequate market.

Library management. Opportunities for library management and operations studies have lessened somewhat in recent years. This decline probably is due more to the lack of funds than it is to the cessation of managerial problems. Even in these years of curtailed budgets, however, libraries here and there have retained library consultants to help streamline operations, reduce costs and increase productivity. In some cases, the library-management consultant has been replaced by the management consultant firm using a systems approach with multiple disciplines, computerized databases and a host of other tools too sophisticated for most library consultants to compete with. Moreover, the library is frequently lumped with other departments within a given agency and may be studied as part of the total organization rather than as a distinct unit. Except for the isolated library, therefore, it would appear that general library management may offer less growth than some other fields for the would-be consultant.

Library systems. When library systems were a new concept, consultants frequently were called in to prepare feasibility studies, propose organizational plans, study plans for providing system-wide services, suggest goals and objectives, and to examine or create intra-system and inter-system delivery and communication alternatives. Like library-management consulting, this need seems to occur less frequently now. However, as systems stabilize and develop, it is likely that there will be periodic need for outside assistance in making evaluations and in preparing long-range plans. Increasing numbers of systems are multi-type, giving some advantage to the consultant with varied experience.

Collections. Though still few and far between, more libraries appear to be retaining consultants to assist in collection evaluation. Academic libraries, in particular, experience occasional need for this

service as part of their preparation for accreditation. The ability to relate collections to library and institutional goals is particularly important here. Experience should include extensive service in collection development and materials selection.

Buildings. Library-building consultants probably have achieved a higher visibility than most others. Use of consultants on building projects—while far from universal—is sufficiently common to have gained some recognition. Experience, once again, is the primary qualification. Competition for the limited number of jobs is often strong. Consultants on building projects may prepare or assist in the preparation of the building program. Their services may or may not include review of drawings and specifications during the architectural development phase. While the consultant is usually retained by the library, architects sometimes engage a library building consultant. Building consultants may also prepare facility feasibility studies, assist with site selection, review existing structures to determine how space utilization can be improved, or evaluate nonlibrary buildings for possible reuse as library facilities. While most building consultants are librarians, a few architects have chosen to compete in this field. The market for library-building consultants seems to be gaining strength now, after a number of years when money for construction was nearly nonexistent.

The Library-Consultant Business

Whether conducted on a part-time basis or as a full-time career, consulting is a business—make no mistake about that! Further, the library consultant, for whatever time he/she may be involved in this practice, is self-employed, with all the advantages and requirements thereof. This includes mandatory filing of tax returns, considerable bookkeeping, and maintaining an office of some kind with appropriate supplies and equipment. Consultants who find it desirable to supplement their own skills must identify and hire individuals with specialized skills to serve as subconsultants. Most consultants must also have access to typists and others with secretarial skills. Once a payroll is created, the complexities of the business begin to increase. Perhaps this is why so few library consultant practices grow to any size.

To be a successful consultant, one must understand and be able to compete in the marketplace of his/her chosen field. Usually, this means becoming involved with at least the following:

—*Advertising availability.* Not so long ago it was considered unprofessional—if not unethical—for consultants to advertise their

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services. Now, some consultants advertise openly and *American Libraries* each quarter provides a special section of its classified ads for this purpose. Still, the majority of consultants have yet to use this means of gaining recognition. Rather, there continues to be a strong tendency to assume that recognition should come from projects which have been completed and from participation in professional activities—including writing for professional journals, speaking at workshops, and appearing on programs. This being the case, a consultant must seek opportunities to gain visibility in professional activities where potential clients are most apt to assemble.

Other means of getting attention also exist. For instance, in the case of library building consultants, a list of those meeting certain limited requirements is issued periodically by the Buildings and Equipment Section through the ALA/LAMA (American Library Association/Library Administration and Management Association) office. Copies of the list are sold to librarians, architects and others requesting information on library-building consultants. A similar list is being prepared for those in public relations; likewise, lists may be forthcoming in other specialized areas in the near future. Meanwhile, a limited number of library consultants are included in more general publications such as the *Consultants and Consulting Organizations Directory* published by Gale Research Co. However, the extent to which such information is actually used is unknown.

—*Getting jobs.* Occasionally consultants are retained directly. However, in most cases, the standard procedure is for the client to issue a request for a proposal (RFP) to a number of prospective consultants. Making certain that one is on the list to receive such RFPs is obviously important. Of course, this relates directly to the foregoing discussion on advertising one's skills and availability.

After receiving the RFP, a major effort must be made in analyzing the prospective client's needs and presenting these in the form of a proposal. Such a proposal will be subjected to intensive critical examination and must strictly adhere to the format and other requirements set forth in the RFP. While trying to make one's proposal distinctive, sight must not be lost of the necessity for addressing every question posed by the RFP. When competition is stiff, proposals are often eliminated because of "noncompliance" regardless of how much experience the individual may have or how well his/her proposal may match client needs.

After the client has received the proposals, they are carefully reviewed. The best of the proposals are then selected as a "short list," for

further consideration. Depending on the number short-listed, this may include interviewing. If interviews are to be conducted, the short list is apt to be narrowed to three to five proposals. The interview team will review the consultant's qualifications, experience and details of his or her proposal. The consultant will be asked to clarify any points about which there may be question. Occasionally, the consultant may be asked whether or not he/she will consider making modifications to the proposal—sometimes to the price. Usually the choice of consultant is made some days or weeks following the interviews. Before leaving this subject, perhaps it is important to note that the consultant will probably pay his/her own travel expenses for the interview. Clients more often than not assume this to be a normal part of the consultant's business expenses.

Once the interviews have been completed, the client determines which of the consultants is to be retained. Sometimes this requires making changes in project scope or schedules.

—*Negotiating contracts.* Having the project assignment, the next critical part of the consulting business is negotiating a contract. Most client agencies have an attorney or contract division to assume this responsibility. However, since many of these people are unfamiliar with the retention of consultants, considerable attention must be given the negotiations and the contract to be certain that it provides reasonable protection for the consultant as well as covering the client's interests. A course in business law and access to an attorney experienced in contract law can be helpful—and sometimes essential for self-protection. Normally an entire project is apt to be completed without reference to the contract. Nonetheless, upon occasion the wording and provisions of the contract must be enforced. Hence, the need for clarity and full understanding of contract terms.

Contract negotiations may be accomplished in a few hours or they may take many weeks. Contracts may be as simple as a letter of agreement and as complex as a many-paged document filled with legal language and previously unfamiliar provisions. Oftentimes it is not until contract negotiations are well underway that it will be mandatory for the consultant to show evidence that he/she carries specific types of insurance at given amounts and/or must post a performance bond. If a lump sum contract is being negotiated, these unexpected costs must be absorbed by the consultant, thereby perceptibly lowering the margin of profit. Once in awhile, such costs become so onerous that the consultant may find it necessary to withdraw from the negotiations.

Schedules are also set as part of these negotiations. Besides agreeing to meet the major project deadlines, the consultant is apt to be required

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to provide a time schedule for each of the tasks indicating beginning and ending dates. Such schedules may use procedures such as PERT (performance evaluation review technique) or CPM (critical path method). For the part-time consultant, scheduling tasks means looking realistically at the amount of time probably required for each task as well as the amount of time available beyond the regular work week. Full-time consultants must fit the schedule for the new project into the master schedule maintained for all projects under contract. This is not always an easy job since conflicts in deadlines, field trips, filing of reports, etc. must be avoided. Each client group must have the satisfaction that the consultant is devoting appropriate time to their particular project and that schedules will not have to be reshuffled or deadlines missed because of conflicts with a full-time job or other projects.

—*Fees.* “How much should I charge?” is one of the questions frequently asked by enterprising neophyte consultants. (It is a question experienced consultants also ask themselves as the need to keep their practice profitable faces the requirement of being competitive.) The amount of the fee depends largely on the qualifications and experience of the consultant. Individual requirements differ tremendously. Some part-time consultants relate their fees to the hourly rate of their current salaries. Others maintain fees comparable to those charged by consultants in similar professional fields.

Setting fees and arriving at a bidding price for a given job are matters requiring considerable thought and calculation. Projects may be bid on a number of bases. The most common of these are: (1) charging an hourly or daily rate within a “not to exceed” figure and with reimbursable costs for travel, meals and other expenses added as a special provision, and (2) a fixed fee which may or may not reimburse all out-of-pocket expenses; if these are not included in the fixed fee, they may be covered by a separate provision detailing reimbursable expenses. The client usually chooses which method will be used. At present, library consultant fees range from less than \$100 per day to more than \$500 per day—experience and reputation usually being determinants. In any case, the problem of remaining competitive while turning at least a modest profit is a continuing challenge.

In calculating fees and preparing proposals, the consultant must be constantly aware of the unexpected expenses which may be incurred. Remember also that consultants may experience cash-flow problems, like any other business. Expenses for travel, office, etc. must be paid on time regardless of how long it may take a client to pay an invoice. (The payment period is seldom less than 30 days following receipt of invoice and 60- to 120-day cycles for bill payment are not uncommon.)

—*Doing the job.* Each client expects the consultant to complete all the tasks required to fulfill the scope of the project as agreed to in the contract. If the project is well conceived and the task requirements carefully delineated and scheduled, this usually presents little problem. However, unforeseen factors and events sometimes occur which insert new information or conditions that must be reckoned with. If these are significant, work may need to be halted until an appropriate adjustment is made in the contract amending the scope of work, tasks, fees, schedule, or other factors.

As part of the consultant's response to the RFP, the client's project is usually broken down into specific parts. Separate tasks are then established for each of these. Then a schedule is constructed which incorporates all of the tasks so that the project deadlines can be met.

Getting the project done means completing all of the required tasks. Not infrequently, tasks may need to be modified during the course of the project with some deleted and others added. If the consultant is working closely with the client, it is usually a simple matter to reach agreement on such changes. Unless the modifications require change in the fee, an informal agreement will often suffice. This should be conveyed by a letter signed by both parties, just for mutual protection.

Meeting schedule deadlines is an important aspect of the consultant business. For the part-time consultant this means a realistic assessment of the time available after completing the requirements of the full-time position. For the full-time consultant, it is a matter of determining how adequate time can be prorated among the several projects which are going on simultaneously. Particular attention must be given in either case to avoid overlapping of project deadlines, especially for the final reports.

Once the information for the project has been generated and analyzed, the results in the form of findings and recommendations must be placed in the form of a final report. (In the case of the building consultant, the final report is the written building program.) Usually such reports are far too long and detailed to interest any but those who are very close to the project. For this reason, the consultant may wish to issue an executive summary of the report or even a press release to secure wider recognition of the project results. This should be done, of course, with the full cooperation of the client.

—*Record keeping.* As noted in the beginning of this section, consulting practice requires keeping records. Not the least of these is a detailed accounting of time spent on each project, records of all phone calls, accumulation of all receipts for use in claiming reimbursable expenses,

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and use of standard accounting procedures for office expenses. Such accounts are required for filing federal, state and, in some cases, local tax and other forms. Time spent in these procedures must be covered as normal operating overhead and is not directly billable.

Conclusion

So, is being a library consultant a career or a dead-end job? That all depends on the individual. For some it will appear that the negative factors clearly outweigh the positive ones—especially if job security and a regular schedule is of importance. However, for those who are more concerned about other goals and are interested in a way of life that has considerable variety, enables them to make new friends, provides opportunity for being near the cutting edge of our profession, and offers the advantages and disadvantages of being self-employed, then it is indeed a worthy career. However, such a career—either full time or part time—will be less attractive to those who want to use their available leisure time for other pursuits and/or who place a high value on income security. Obviously, since in our practice we consider new friendships and the meeting of interesting people as among the greatest rewards, we have found service as a library consultant offers a very satisfying career.

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