



## Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Are law librarians a visible and valued part of the legal community? If not, why not? And what can AALL do to spread the word?

As I wrote in my November column, I've been inspired lately by the book, *The Tipping Point*. Author Malcolm Gladwell explains how important changes are sometimes set in motion by a series of seemingly unimportant actions or events. I find his ideas to be very relevant to the work of our Association.

Fostering the profession of law librarianship is one of the primary objectives of AALL, as stated in our Bylaws. What combination of small, easily accomplished things might we undertake in order to address this objective—to boost our own professional stature and make sure we aren't overlooked and under-appreciated?

To transform our image, it is clear that law librarians need to put more effort into something that tends to make us uncomfortable—tooting our own horns. Self-promotion, whether shameless or more subtle, is an acquired skill—one that many law librarians seem to be lacking, at least when it comes to the outside world.

A recent informal survey of active AALL members showed that “law librarians are quite effective at promoting their contributions and value to one another, [but] they do not actively promote law librarians to groups external to AALL,” writes Gail Warren in the April 2006 *Members' Briefing* on promoting law librarians, found in *AALL Spectrum*. For our own personal good, and for the good of the profession, we need to change this situation.

We need to ensure that law librarians are seen as talented and capable professionals and that our contributions to our institutions and the legal community are acknowledged and appreciated. Many of us take justifiable pride in our work, but we often lack a sense of responsibility for promoting our profession.

Being overlooked and undervalued can be dangerous. These days some court and firm librarians in particular find that their employers won't give them the support they need to be active professionally in AALL—to attend the Annual Meeting, be involved in committee work, or run for office. Employers that don't fully acknowledge the contributions of their librarians may not see the need to provide those librarians with opportunities for professional growth and development.

In a time of budget cuts and library closings, it is essential that employers recognize that our knowledge and experience are important to the mission of our institutions and that we need their support to refresh and enhance our skills on an ongoing basis.

## Commanding Attention

To be visible means to be easily viewed or perceived by others—in our case, our employers and the larger legal community. If law librarians want more recognition outside our own ranks, then writing articles for law library publications is not enough. We also need to write for legal publications that are read by practicing attorneys, legal administrators, law professors, and judges.

In 2004 a group of AALL members formed a new group, the Publishing Initiatives Caucus (PIC). The purpose of PIC is to inspire and motivate individual law librarians to get articles published in outside venues, in order to promote themselves and the profession of law librarianship.

After nearly three years of existence, the accomplishments of PIC include a very useful Web site ([www.aallnet.org/caucus/pic/index.htm](http://www.aallnet.org/caucus/pic/index.htm)), which contains citations (many with links to full text) for more than 130 articles published by AALL members in outside legal publications. In December 2006 PIC added a subscription option to its compilation of published articles, with both RSS and e-mail options, to provide updates about new content.

Other ways to raise the profile of law librarians are readily available to AALL members:

- **Reach out to an influential outside group in the legal community** by inviting a representative from that group to attend the AALL Annual Meeting as a VIP guest. Two complimentary full registrations to the Annual Meeting are available each year to each chapter ([www.aallnet.org/chapter/vipman.asp](http://www.aallnet.org/chapter/vipman.asp)) and each special interest section ([www.aallnet.org/sis/vipman.asp](http://www.aallnet.org/sis/vipman.asp)) for VIP guests of their choice.
- **Ratchet up your PR efforts.** In the February 2006 issue of *AALL Spectrum*, Ellie Slade provides a list of tips on “How to Raise the Law Librarian Profile.” As she points out, “To offset the current trend toward low wages and recognition in the legal profession, law librarians must embark on aggressive marketing and public relations efforts.”

- **Borrow good ideas—don't reinvent the wheel.** A list of ideas that individuals and various AALL entities have used successfully for “Promoting Law Librarians to the Legal Community” appeared in the April 2006 *Members' Briefing* in *AALL Spectrum*. It was compiled by an AALL special committee that did its work in 2005-2006 and was chaired by Gail Warren.

## Demonstrating Value

AALL continues to work hard to improve the image of law librarians at the national level. Take the time to re-read the “Statement on the Value Added to Organizations by Law Librarians” ([www.aallnet.org/committee/pr\\_statement.asp](http://www.aallnet.org/committee/pr_statement.asp)), which the AALL Executive Board adopted in 2003. It gives an inspiring summary of the contributions of law librarians as information evaluators and managers, as expert researchers, and as teachers and trainers. But we need to get the word out about the contributions we make in our workplaces to the people who call the shots.

Of course, one measure of how a professional is valued is how well he or she is paid. On the AALL Economic Status of Law Librarians Committee Web site ([www.aallnet.org/committee/econstatus/econstatusresources.html](http://www.aallnet.org/committee/econstatus/econstatusresources.html)) you'll find a “Resource Guide on Law Library Compensation.” The guide provides information about surveys, pay equity, and salary negotiation, including two streaming audio files from a 2004 Annual Meeting program about salary negotiations.

The committee is also sponsoring a program at the 2007 Annual Meeting, “Who Really Sets Our Salaries? A Discussion Among Decision Makers and Librarians.” And committee members are developing a toolkit to help law librarians become better self-advocates.

What is really needed to make the “visibility and value” message “tip” for law librarians? I think the answer may be found in the subtitle of Gladwell's book: *How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. AALL entities, and we as individual law librarians, need to get serious about promoting our profession, using some of the opportunities that are readily available to us.

If each of us takes some action, however small, we will be closer to a new, more favorable image for law librarianship—within the legal community and beyond. ■