



Why We Do What We Do

Perspectives on Law Librarianship: From Shifting Careers to Serving Law Firm Constituencies

by Paul D. Healey

Why do you do what you do?

Why do you get up each morning and go to your job as a law librarian or legal information professional? A paycheck may be part of the reason, but there is probably more to it than that. For those of us for whom law librarianship is the right place — a calling even — the reasons for why we do what we do are sometimes complex.

Law librarianship reflects — and allows us to express — our values. One of the unspoken hallmarks of professionals is that they engage in activities that encompass and express

values. We try to change things for the better and provide services that improve the lives of others.

Law librarianship is something of a hidden profession. Many people don't realize that law librarianship exists as a specialized profession or that there are many of us. We support the information needs of those who work with legal information, a specialized group to be sure. And yet the work of those who need legal information is fundamental and important. Law is one of the most, if not the most, crucial aspects of any civilized society. Legal information is the very stuff of law, its warp and woof. In managing and providing legal information to others, we perform very important work indeed.

This month in *AALL Spectrum* we have attempted to address the question head on: Why do we do what we do? The question itself is so broad and multifaceted that it can't really be answered, except by each of us for ourselves. What *Spectrum* can do is provide individual perspectives that, taken as a group, shed some light on the issue. We searched for answers from law librarians in varied professional settings. Space limitations prohibit presenting as wide a variety of perspectives as we'd like,

but we have sought some diversity. The result is a collection of interesting and thought-provoking essays about the profession.

James Milles writes about shifting his career path from being a computer services librarian to director of an academic law library. His take on the transition from a new area of library service to administration casts the spotlight on how most librarians view various roles in the library.

Cheryl Smith Cheatham provides the perspective she attained as a multidisciplinary librarian. This growing role in our profession has implications for both training and career growth.

James S. Heller's unique view on technical services likens finding the right legal information to finding the right pair of shoes: For both customers, the bottom line is the result, not the process.

Susan P. Siebers delves into customer service in a law firm. Law firm libraries can be intense environments, where librarians have to justify their costs and even add to the bottom line of the firm to survive.

“ Why do you get up each morning and go to your job as a law librarian or legal information professional? ”

The perspectives here are but a small sample of the diversity of ideas about why we do what we do. We hope that they will help you think about your own place in the profession and contribute to your growth.

Many thanks to the authors who have taken the time to contribute to this issue.

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