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Librarian As Mentor: Grow, Discover, Inspire

Eboni A. Johnson

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**LIBRARIAN
AS MENTOR**

Grow.
Discover.
Inspire.

LIBRARIAN AS MENTOR

Eboni A. Johnson

EDITOR

M B M
PEAK
SERIES 



MISSION BELL MEDIA

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— Introduction —

“Leadership is not about titles, positions, or flow charts. It is about one life influencing another.”

—JOHN C. MAXWELL

In the very broadest sense, a mentor is a person who teaches, guides, or gives advice, often — but not always — to someone who is younger and/or less experienced. These relationships can form and develop organically, or they can be established in more formal or structured ways. Some people may prefer a one-on-one mentoring relationship, whereas others may prefer a group model instead. We’ve all seen or experienced mentoring in our jobs and other areas of our lives. New employees are sometimes paired with more experienced co-workers for the purpose of learning organizational culture. Junior faculty members may be taken under the wings of senior colleagues for help in navigating the rigors of the tenure track. Mentoring may be a part of any succession planning that occurs when an organization anticipates a major change in leadership. Problem solving, career planning or insight, and goal setting are quite often important aspects of the mentor–mentee relationship.

At one point in my career, I wasn’t sure that I needed mentoring. Although I wasn’t a “seasoned professional,” I wasn’t a newly-minted librarian, either. I had plenty of career experience under my belt and felt confident that I could guide my career where I wanted it to go without help from others. I felt extremely vulnerable asking for or accepting help from someone who could mentor me even when it was clear that I needed it. A trusted colleague took an active interest in my career and offered her experience and expertise; I accepted that help and will be forever grateful to her for even offering it. Later on, as I grew in my career, I allowed myself to be vulnerable and to ask for help navigating another professional situation. Luckily for me, my

mentoring relationships have worked out well, but others may have experienced very different outcomes. I believe that the influence each of us can make in others' lives is at the heart of mentoring.

This book brings together stories from librarians in all kinds of environments from academic, public, school, and special libraries to those institutions that are closely related to libraries, such as museums and archives. Librarians at all career stages are represented here.

The chapters are arranged thematically in four sections. The first section, *Role of Mentors*, presents five chapters that speak to how mentoring has positively impacted and influenced the authors' growth as professionals, regardless of which side of the relationship they were on. Wendy Wasman recounts her first day on the job, where her mentors encouraged her through the transition to her role as the full-time librarian at her museum; she, in turn, has mentored undergraduate and graduate students to consider careers as information professionals. My chapter leads readers along my career path and those who have been lights along the way, but discusses how I found my niche as a "life coach" for the students with whom I'm lucky enough to have forged good relationships beyond the research-specific needs that bring them into the library. In her chapter, Diana D'Agostino emphasizes that, in her experience, mentoring was the natural outcome of the active participation of many people in her village; this kind of interaction helps both mentor and mentee understand each other's circumstances and leads to more fruitful outcomes. Pamela Espinosa de los Monteros had mentors who also served as cultural and academic translators to help her negotiate barriers that she faced as an immigrant to the United States. Wrapping up this section is Alexia Hudson-Ward's chapter where, supported by scholarly literature, she reflects on the key differences between mentoring and mentorship and how that played out in her professional experience.

Not all mentoring models involve pairing more- and less-experienced people, though. Peer mentoring is a popular model in which those who share similar experiences can serve as resources, coaches, and support networks for each other. While this model is often seen with groups of people — students, for example — it also works one-on-one and can be particularly empowering to everyone involved. Mentor/mentee roles are generally less

rigidly defined, and someone could be both teacher and student, often at the same time. In section two, Geneva Chamblee-Smith and Sarah Jane Levin both tell us about how their peer mentorship communities have given them safe spaces to be mentees while also gaining the confidence to recognize their value as mentors. Dan Cherubin brings an international perspective as he describes his participation with the International Librarian Network's peer-mentoring program, but he also tells us about how mentoring has worked in a variety of library environments in which he's worked — which has spanned just about every different type of library one could imagine! In their chapter titled "The Mentor Connection," Cheryl McGrath and Sarah Seestone conducted a series of interviews and surveys among past and current employees at Stanford University Libraries (SUL) to explore whether a visible culture of mentorship is possible within that organization. A more formalized program had been established at SUL, and the authors sought to gain insight into whether the mentoring they experienced and heard about from participants was the result of organization-wide culture or whether it was isolated among various departments.

The third section of the book discusses various forms of career mentoring and speaks particularly to the idea of succession planning that I mentioned earlier; some of the themes that were discussed in previous chapters are echoed here. As a librarian with tenure-track faculty status, Deidra Herring reiterates the importance of having several career mentors who helped her find her way and feels especially responsible for paying that mentorship forward to others as she more fully transitions into a leadership role at her institution. Likening the PhD journey to a marathon relay race, Jason Alston talks about the mentoring role that he fills and stresses that while he is being groomed to be a leader, he is also grooming those who come behind him to do the same. Success comes from full participation in the mentoring processes, as well as from being clued in to both the explicit and implicit information that is passed on. Charlotte Beers Plank is new to the field of librarianship and is still finding her way. Even so, she has experienced in her own career how mentoring is important for building relationships that ensure the continued success of our profession. At some point in our careers, we may be — rather, we should *expect* to be — called upon to usher in successive generations

of librarians just as previous generations taught, mentored, groomed, and welcomed us.

Finally, section four explores two distinct ways of approaching community mentoring. Public library director Rachel Rubin discusses why developing and mentoring community advocates matters. Taking the time to become an active, trusted community partner helps the library to gain long-term support and loyalty among its community members. Rachel talks about how she was able to lay that foundation in her own community and how we can also use opportunities to encourage advocacy for our libraries. In another example, a suburban public library system saw a need to tackle several strategic priorities: learning, community engagement, and stewardship. A facilitated mentoring model was used to create a project-based program to support staff development and learning while also deepening the library's engagement with local teens. As opposed to a strict mentor–mentee model, this type of mentoring introduces a third person (facilitator) who supports the mentor and mentee as the relationship develops. Cynthia Sturgis Landrum, Darryl Allen, and Jerica Copeny played important roles in this model and share their experiences from which we can all learn.

All the stories told here speak to the impact and importance of mentoring in all of its forms. While the success or failure of a mentoring relationship is important to reflect upon, perhaps it is more important to think about what was learned during the process. It is my hope that these stories help you to consider the benefits mentoring on either side of the relationship, and to encourage you to include mentoring as a crucial part of your professional practice and legacy.

Eboni A. Johnson, Editor

————— DEDICATED —————

With all the love in the world to my life mentors:

my parents, John and Sylvia Mand and my maternal grandparents,
Sanders (1915–1996) and Ethel Olds (1920–2015)

&

With all the thanks in the world to my professional mentors:

Marsha Hamilton, Kathleen Abromeit, Kathryn Venditti (1953–2015),
Alice Crosetto and Alexia Hudson-Ward

About the Editor



Eboni A. Johnson has been a reference and instruction librarian at Oberlin College since 2009 and has recently taken on responsibilities for outreach and programming for the library system. Although she's still finding her way in this new role, Eboni is excited about all of the exciting possibilities. "I dwell in the realm of possibility," she says. "Rarely a day goes by that I don't ask 'what if?'"

When asked about the most surprising part of her job, Eboni says, "I'm most surprised by the fact that I've been able to forge close relationships with students that transcend the research-specific needs that bring them to the library in the first place." Although now she is a generalist in humanities and social sciences, Eboni has also worked as an agricultural sciences librarian at a large research university and as a librarian at a major newspaper in the Midwest. The mental agility needed to bounce between many different subject areas and projects has served her well in each position. She especially loves demystifying the research process for users and empowering them to be "savvy information seekers, consumers, and producers." Eboni's path to librarianship was a bit of a winding road, but you'll have to read her chapter to find out where it took her and how she ended up here! One thing she knows for sure is that she could not have made a better career choice: "I honestly cannot imagine doing anything else. I am in my happy place, and my work truly brings me joy."

Outside of the library, though, Eboni has many interests that keep her busy. In addition to spending time with family and friends, she enjoys

knitting, reading, ballroom dancing, and cooking. “I’ve collected recipes for years,” she says, “but now I’m taking the time to actually try them out. I love to eat, so I may as well cook what I love...and maybe learn to like new things along the way.”

———— List of Contributors ————

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|---------------------------------|--|
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| Genevia M. Chamblee-Smith | <i>Cook Library, Towson University</i> |
| Dan Cherubin | <i>Wesleyan University</i> |
| Jerica Copeny | <i>Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library</i> |
| Diana M. D'Agostino | |
| Pamela Espinosa de los Monteros | <i>The Ohio State University</i> |
| Deidra N. Herring | <i>The Ohio State University Libraries</i> |
| Alexia Hudson-Ward | <i>Oberlin College and Conservatory</i> |
| Eboni A. Johnson | <i>Oberlin College Library</i> |
| Cynthia Sturgis Landrum | <i>Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library</i> |
| Sarah Jane Levin | <i>The Urban School of San Francisco</i> |
| Cheryl McGrath | <i>Stonehill College</i> |
| Charlotte Beers Plank | <i>Hudson Library & Historical Society</i> |
| Rachel G. Rubin | <i>Bexley (OH) Public Library</i> |
| Sarah Seestone | <i>Stanford University Libraries</i> |
| Wendy Wasman | <i>Cleveland Museum of Natural History</i> |

———— About the Contributors ————

Darryl E. Allen is a Certified Workforce Development Professional (CWDP®) and a Project Risk Management Professional (PMI-RMP®) through Project Management Institute (PMI®) with specializations in program implementation and social emotional learning (SEL). Darryl is the founder of the Mentorship Institute and has guided financial institutions, universities, museums, and libraries through the strategic implementation of evidence-based programming. The Mentorship Institute has collaborated with Clemson University's Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life. These efforts have resulted in teaching faith-based communities with strong PK–12 education programs how to address “a hidden culture of bullying.” All schools have some level of bullying behaviors; however, Allen says, “The idea that any school or group is automatically free of bullying behavior only allows negative actions to persist.” Research shows that ignoring a problem is counterproductive. When asked about his greatest challenge in his job, Darryl says that his greatest challenge is also his great joy: “staying useful today while providing data that will positively shape the future.”

Jason K. Alston, PhD, is an information literacy librarian at Coastal Carolina University in Conway, SC. “It’s been a Carolina life for me, as I earned my BA in English at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington in 2005 and my MLS from North Carolina Central University in 2008,” says Jason. After a long, tedious process in which he was appreciative of the leadership of many mentors, he finally earned his PhD in library science from the University of South Carolina in 2017. Outside of librarianship, Jason’s interests include keeping up with the Carolina Panthers, enjoying Carolina barbecue styles, and following politics (an activity he doesn’t restrict to the Carolinas). When not at work, Jason states, “I’m always interested in a plate of shrimp and grits, so if you’re ever down my way, let’s have lunch!”

Genevia M. Chamblee-Smith, a library associate at Towson University's Cook Library, has six years of experience working in academic and special libraries with the technical services department. Prior to library science work, she earned a degree in psychology and human services. Genevia worked three years as a case manager only to discover her life mantra: "At the end of the day, I still wanted to like people." Being true to herself, Genevia found that a new career began where she left it — in the library. Genevia believes that "Mentors should be cheerleaders for their mentees. I specifically like the 'peer mentor' dynamic because all parties walk away with something tangible. Peer mentors are on the same level of learning and life." One of her own peer mentors helped her to discover information literacy and using hip hop to engage student learning. When asked about what makes peer mentoring effective, Genevia responds that success requires trust and honesty for it to be a fruitful experience. "Through my peer mentoring relationships, I discovered that I am an instigator and introvert remixer. I enjoy developing creative ways to pursue evidence-based research in librarianship."

Dan Cherubin is the Caleb T. Winchester university librarian at Wesleyan University. Dan has worked in libraries for thirty years, and 2017 marks his twenty-sixth year as a librarian. Prior to Wesleyan, he held leadership positions at New York Public Library, MONY Life Insurance, Rabobank International, The Wildlife Conservation Society, the Tokyo American Club, and, most recently, as the associate dean and chief librarian at Hunter College. Dan has a BA in music from Bard College, an MA in media studies from the New School and an MSLS from Columbia University. When asked about the best part of being a librarian, Dan states, "Without a doubt, the best part is the opportunity to work in so many different places in so many different subjects. Every day can be something different." When not in the library, he can be found on social media as "SkaLibrarian," a moniker he has held since the 1990s.

Jerica Copeny is the assessment and continuous improvement strategist at Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library. She has a BA in art history, an MLIS from Dominican University, and an MS in human computer interaction

from DePaul University. When asked about the best part of her job, Jerica responds, “The best part is putting on the hat of ‘data detective’ as I channel my inner Sherlock Holmes to focus on solving organizational informational needs.” With being a “data detective,” the most challenging part of her job and the most thrilling is connecting disparate data types to uncover insights to issues within the organization. Data can come in various forms from text and statistics to images; having to decipher the meaning within them can be time consuming and requires patience, when working with these various sources. Jerica enjoys utilizing skills from the field of data science to connect and analyze the depth of data. Along with being a data detective, Jerica enjoys planning culinary excursions for future trips to food capitals like Paris and London.

Diana M. D’Agostino, a contractor managing a research group for a government agency, has seven years of experience working in a library, but many more in educational and information-organization roles. When asked about her favorite part of her job, she says it’s a tie: “I love that I meet new people all the time, and they bring me a whirlwind of new topics to learn about, but I also love that my fondness for trivia and minutiae that ‘should come in handy someday’ actually does, on a regular basis!” Diana is constantly surprised to have developed such an interest in STEM topics. She finds joy in this work because she feels that in being a librarian, she can actually get paid to go on information scavenger hunts every day. When not working in the library, Diana plays in a handbell choir and spends time “with people who encourage me to share information and to be kind.”

Pamela Espinosa de los Monteros, Latin American studies librarian and assistant professor at The Ohio State University, is a former public librarian and Mary P. Key Diversity Resident Librarian. Pamela received a BA from the University of San Diego and an MS in library and information science from Syracuse University. She became a librarian after completing a Fulbright Garcia Robles Binational Business Fellowship in Mexico supporting an international conservation research initiative. Through this experience, she

observed frequent challenges stemming from cross-cultural information exchange between scholars, regardless of academic preparation and language proficiency. At the conclusion of her fellowship, she redirected her career to libraries. When asked about what motivates her, Pamela responds, “I want to dedicate my career to improving global information access from and about Latin America. I was thrilled to find a profession that is collaborative, facilitates access to global information resources, and requires subject specialty in more than one area.” When not at work, you can find Pamela at the public library reading random books pulled from the area studies collection.

Deidra N. Herring, education librarian and associate professor at The Ohio State University Libraries (OSUL), began her career as a Mary P. Key Diversity Resident Librarian shortly after completing her master’s in library and information science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2005. Deidra was appointed a faculty member at OSUL in 2006 and received her bachelor’s degree in education from Central State University in 1994. Academic librarianship was actually an accidental second career for Deidra; because of this, she enjoys sharing her journey with others. Deidra loves inspiring colleagues to encourage interest and spark curiosity about teaching and research in the field. Deidra says, “I love working in an environment that celebrates different cultures of people where no two days are ever alike.” If she did not work in a library, Deidra, who has a passion for healthy food, would be a holistic educator with a food truck!

Alexia Hudson-Ward, director of libraries at Oberlin College and Conservatory, earned her BA in English literature and African-American studies from Temple University and her MLIS degree from the University of Pittsburgh. Alexia is pursuing a PhD in the managerial leadership in the information professions program at Simmons College. When asked about what motivates her, Alexia states, “Leadership exhilarates me! I am a fan of pro football (GO STEELERS!) and college sports.” Alexia has learned a great deal from several interesting roles in marketing and communications over the years, including marketing manager for The Coca-Cola Company. Her mom and

grandmother are her first leadership influences. She describes them as “two fine Southern ladies who taught me that women can lead with authority while wearing pearls, pumps, and lipstick.”

Cynthia Sturgis Landrum, the CEO–director of the Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library in Evansville, IN, has worked in libraries (health sciences, academic and public) for more than twenty years and in four different states. Cynthia received a Bachelor of Arts in linguistics from Northwestern University (IL). She earned a master’s in library and information science from the University of Mississippi. Recently, she has described herself as being 5+ chapters away from earning a PhD from Simmons College School of Information Science. Her library journey began at the age of ten when her mother took a job with a health sciences library. Cynthia used to meet her mother in the library after school every day until she reached middle school. Cynthia lovingly remembers, “As I was preparing to go to college, my mother asked if I’d ever considered becoming a librarian. I laughed loudly. She who laughs last, laughs the longest. Mom is still laughing.” As a library director, one of Cynthia’s challenges is balancing the present reality of the organization with what is possible in the future.

Sarah Jane Levin, librarian at The Urban School of San Francisco, transitioned from working in academic libraries to the high school ten years ago. Sarah loves working with curious and headstrong teenagers. She states, “I was initially drawn to librarianship after working as a shoe seller in college; I get the same thrill helping a student find the most useful source as I did helping a customer find the perfect pair of shoes!” Sarah has been active in the Bay Area Independent School Librarians (BAISL), which offers her myriad outlets to be both mentor and mentee within what she calls “a group of passionate, inspirational, and cooperative colleagues.” When she’s not in the library, Sarah enjoys sewing her own clothes and swimming in the cold waters of San Francisco Bay.

Cheryl McGrath is the director of MacPhaidin Library and director of the Collaboratory for Innovative Design at Stonehill College. She has been the

head of access services at Stanford and Harvard universities and the head of circulation at Emerson College. Cheryl began her career as a circulation and reference associate for Greene County Public Libraries in Ohio. When she began her first job managing peers, she realized that this experience would change her; seeing the big picture and helping others see where each individual role shapes and guides the entire project and environment is rewarding. Cheryl finds leadership exciting because it is about exchanging ideas and collaborating. When not at the library, Cheryl can be found hiking and kayaking with her daughter.

Charlotte Beers Plank is an emerging technologies librarian at the Hudson Library & Historical Society and has worked there since 2015. Charlotte moved to Ohio for her undergraduate studies at Oberlin College (BA in German studies, BMus in organ performance) and received her MLIS from Kent State University in 2015. Since it is still early in her career, Charlotte states that she is eager to learn as much as she can about libraries and leadership in the library from mentors. She says, “I hope to be able to incorporate their leadership styles into my own and continue to advocate for libraries throughout my career.” In addition to working at the library, Charlotte serves as the organist for a historic church a few blocks away from the library. Cheerfully, she states, “I often see the same people at both places — I’m happy to be part of a vibrant community that supports libraries, history, and the arts so much.”

Rachel G. Rubin is the director of the Bexley (OH) Public Library. Prior to joining the library in 2010, she worked for the Columbus Metropolitan Library and the Worthington (OH) Libraries in management roles. She holds a BA from Carleton College, an MLIS from Kent State University, and a PhD in managerial leadership in the information professions from Simmons College. Rachel is an ALA councilor-at-large and a member of several ALA committees, as well as an active member of the Ohio Library Council. Rachel believes it is a leader’s responsibility to build a healthy organizational culture that supports staff, is responsive to the community, and builds strong

relationships inside and outside the library. She lives in Bexley, Ohio, with her husband, three cats, an outnumbered dog, and eight bicycles.

Sarah Seestone, assistant head of access services at Stanford University Libraries (SUL), has managed the circulation, course reserves, evening operations, and user privileges programs since 2000. Sarah also serves as an administrator for the circulation, course reserves, and user modules of the ILS system, as well as a business analyst and owner of technology projects that enhance public services. In 2011, she gained responsibility for the media and microtext center and can still spool a microfilm reader when asked — not quickly, but she can do it. Sarah is inspired by library leaders who work through obstacles by utilizing the knowledge and gifts of talented people regardless of where they sit in an organization. Sarah also appreciates when technology is used to enhance services for an entire community and beyond. When not in the library, Sarah is “in the bleachers at a baseball or soccer game, getting muddy in the garden, or hiking in the deserts of southern Utah.”

Wendy Wasman has been a professional librarian for nearly thirty years and can't think of anything she would rather be. Wendy received her BA from Oberlin College in 1985 and her MLS from Kent State University in 1988. Immediately after getting her MLS, Wendy became the librarian at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. In this role, she found herself in charge of a whole library, performing every task from ordering the books to dusting them! Wendy also participated in the Cleveland Freenet, a precursor to the Internet, by running one of the first online reference services, “Ask Dr. Dino.” She and her husband moved to Philadelphia in 1994, where Wendy was the science librarian at Haverford College for four years. After moving back to Cleveland in 2000, and working part-time in two different temple libraries, Wendy returned to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History in 2008. In her current role as librarian and archivist at the museum archives, Wendy proudly states, “My favorite part of my challenging job is that I can honestly say I learn something new every single day!”

— Foreword —

I believe in mentorship, and a significant proportion of my professional energy is dedicated to seeking it out and providing it in kind. This was not always the case, however. I was intimidated by the concept of mentorship at the beginning of my career in libraries and mystified by the exhortation that I should be actively engaged in it. Who were these mysterious mentors, where could I find them, and how in the world was I supposed to ask for their...what exactly? Help? Advice? Leverage?

I come from a culture in which asking for assistance is tantamount to admitting a lack of knowledge and/or capability and where for generations a “good ol’ boy” system of implicit patronage has not benefited communities and individuals of difference. As a result, I had to consciously learn that mentorship can be a means of challenging ingrained systems that redundantly benefit the privileged and working, instead, toward a more just distribution of influence.

At its best, mentorship is about communication, recognition, and mutual respect. It requires a sensitivity to encourage talent, an openness to generative collaborations, and a dedication to professional and personal growth. True mentorship is reciprocity and mutually supportive action, wherein individuals in communities of practice recognize one another’s value and cultivate a shared responsibility for ongoing development.

When mentorship works, it helps us cultivate a profession in which the values of inclusion, diversity, and personal/organizational growth are acknowledged and actualized. Desiring to be mentored is not a sign of weakness or lack of capability; it is, instead, a manifestation of leadership, confidence, and potential. Seeking to mentor is not a signal of arrogance or a desire to indoctrinate; rather, it is an acknowledgement of privilege, generosity, and responsibility.

Mentorship in libraries is an essential and critical practice, and for all involved, it takes conscious effort. There is no point in a career at which one cannot be both mentor and mentee, and one can convincingly argue the importance of embodying both roles perpetually. This book presents a series of examples through personal stories for anyone working toward mentorship in libraries, no matter your career stage, background, organizational type, or professional focus. I encourage all who read this volume to do so with a willingness to learn and be challenged and as a commitment to continuous and mutually supportive action.

Char Booth
September 28, 2016