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A Valentine to Law Firm Librarians, or “Ten Things Librarians Wish Lawyers Would Do”

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Do you have a professional law librarian on your support staff and as part of your administrative team? If so, I suggest that you start thinking now about what to do for your librarian for Valentine’s Day. Flowers, gourmet chocolates, opera tickets, rubies - nothing is too good for your librarian. I’m serious!

Consider: law librarians, like vintage wines, ought to be appreciated for their rare qualities. As a matter of fact, experienced law librarians are an exceedingly rare species, and may be on the brink of extinction because there are fewer and fewer graduate schools of librarianship in California and the United States*, and because law librarians are aging and retiring. We do try to recruit for the profession, so hopefully you will always have the help you need, but do reward your librarian generously to make the profession as attractive to new librarians as possible and to retain the expert librarian you have now.

Librarians possess a specific skill set that is rare and valuable. They understand law publishing and legal resource vendors, they know how to choose the best resources to help lawyers do their work, they can set up systems for finding work product or design intranets and extranets, they can help plan library facilities that are comfortable and efficient, they know how to find out just about anything, and they can find information very quickly and efficiently. As exempt staff they do not watch the clock. They take part in professional continuing education and network with colleagues to stay current and keep their skills honed. They may not be able to do miracles, but they have been known to save the day for their lawyers in many instances. In short, they are true professionals.

To encourage you further to appreciate your librarian on Valentine’s Day and every day, here are some tips to help you work with your librarian. Take note, and start shopping soon for your librarian’s valentine gift. Thank you for reading.

Ten Things Librarians Wish Lawyers Would Do **

1. Always treat librarians with professional courtesy; this is noticed and will help you get what you need. As my mother says, “You can catch more flies with sugar than with vinegar” by which she means “be nice.” Librarians constantly prioritize requests. I have to admit that I sometimes help nice people first.
2. Be patient and take time to answer the librarian’s questions when you ask for assistance. Share any information you have to make the librarian’s job easier and you will get what you want faster and cheaper. Also share what you’ve done so far so that the librarian doesn’t repeat work.
3. Always mention your specific deadline and be honest. Expand your vocabulary— is everything really needed “ASAP”? (What does that mean anyway?) Try practicing the

phrases "tomorrow afternoon would be fine" and "I need it by 2 p.m. today for a client meeting."

4. Don't make your request to the librarian and someone else at the same time. Librarians hate duplicating effort. One of my least favorite things is finding out that someone else is also working on your request. Grrrrrrr!

5. Always sign out materials you are taking from the library, and follow all library rules and procedures that make sense. If they don't make sense say something! Librarians want to help, not hinder you. Follow the rules and finding library materials should be effortless. Most "missing" books are the result of borrowers not updating check-out records.

6. Read emails from the Librarian religiously. Announcements of new library materials and databases, vendor training visits, missing books and library service enhancements are important and for your benefit.

7. Include the librarian in space planning and budgeting. Your librarian has expertise in both areas so not including him/her isn't smart.

8. Update your online research skills at least annually. Attend training opportunities that your librarian provides. Inefficient online research means higher overhead for the firm and higher client charges. Online charges are usually on the library budget, which is one reason why the librarian wants you to get more training.

9. See the library as a profit center, not just a black hole for spending money. Librarians do bill for research and professional assistance where appropriate. Give your librarian client-matter information whenever possible.

10. Thank your librarian sincerely and at every opportunity. And be sure to pass the praise along to your librarian's boss.

* UC Berkeley closed and then re-opened its former graduate library school as the "School of Information Management Systems" or "SIMS" but has not sought accreditation from the American Library Association for its degree program and thus its graduates cannot work at institutions requiring degrees from accredited schools. UCLA folded its library school into the Department of Education. San Jose State operates the only graduate library science program in Northern California.

** It would be great to see a list of "Ten Things Lawyers Wish Librarians Would Do." If any lawyers reading this are so inclined I'm sure that the Daily Journal would welcome your submissions.

(Ms. Papermaster has been a law firm librarian for 30 years. She has a B.A. in Political Science and a Master of Library Science degree from the University of California, Berkeley.)

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