

Getting to Know the “C” People

*How to connect with the go-to
people and increase your library's
influence in the organization*

You find yourself in an elevator with a key player in your organization and have nothing prepared to say. You put a new library initiative into your budget or annual goals but can't seem to make it come to fruition. You feel disconnected about things going on in your organization (outside the library) that directly affect your department.

If any (or all) of these situations sound familiar, don't worry—you're not alone. Librarians are not often the best at marketing their services or communicating their value in their organizations. Numerous articles have been written on how law librarians can better market themselves and their libraries, but the real answer isn't to become better at marketing. Rather, the real solution is to be better at creating opportunities by cultivating relationships with the leaders—the “C” people, key players, or go-to people—within your organization.

Sounds easy enough, right? But how do you take that first step? The very first thing you need to do is to make sure you know who the go-to people are. The go-to people are the ones who are relied upon to make the key decisions in organizations. They are the people who you need to get in front of and close to so you can get what you want—to leverage the assets of the organization to achieve your library's goals.

The next step, before you get to know these go-to people, is to make sure that you get to know and understand yourself. Self-knowledge is essential to creating lasting and effective relationships with others. When you understand your own style, you are more aware of the styles of other people, and this allows you to work more effectively with them.

Who are the Go-To People?

How do you start to get to know the go-to people within your organization? The first step is to find out who they are. Chances are you already know many of them, but if you don't, make it a priority to do so.

Look at resources such as phone lists, organizational charts, internal documents or information (perhaps by searching on your organization's intranet), annual reports, or just start asking around. Think about which departments within your organization might have key individuals in them. These departments could include, but are not limited to, billing/accounting, information technology, marketing and management, or library committees.

Once you have a roster of the go-to people in your organization, how can you keep up with the changes in staff or

leadership roles? If you are involved in orientation for new hires within your organization, use that opportunity to start cultivating relationships with new key people. For go-to people who are physically in other locations, try to keep up with new hires in other offices to see if there are people with whom you should get acquainted.

One of the biggest barriers to developing relationships with the go-to people these days is physical location. Many law firms are becoming global and hiring the best talent wherever it exists, so more and more the go-to people may be in other offices.

Another barrier is that today people are on the go more than ever. So even if they are in your office, they may be out of the office more than they are in it. Think about how you can interact with the go-to people regularly. Can you or do you have regular meetings, phone calls, or one-on-one sessions with them? If not, start thinking about how to interact with them and begin to build those relationships. Again, this is often tricky, so think creatively.

The next thing to consider is what relationships the go-to people have with others. This is the “Six Degrees of Separation” concept in action. Your relationship with one key decision maker may lead you to get your latest idea or initiative pushed through because of a connection that the key decision maker has with someone else.

This concept, although by no means novel, has really developed and morphed into something very different than it used to be. As social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn, become more and more popular, they are changing the way we network and are taking the concept to a whole new level.

When identifying the go-to people, don't just focus on those in leadership roles in your organization. Cultivating relationships with staff members who work closely with or who directly support leaders in the organization can often be just as beneficial to you, since they are often the people who hear about things before anyone else. Although they are probably not the ones who will get you what you want in the end, they can certainly help you get your foot in the door or get you that opportunity to have a seat at the bargaining table.

Where Do You Find the Go-To People?

The next thing to consider is where and when you can find the go-to people. Do the managers and administrators in your

organization have regular meetings? If so, make sure that you are a part of them and pay attention to what people say in the meetings. For example, if your organization has a monthly meeting of the administrative or management team, see if there can be a standing agenda item where each department reports on what is going on that month and in the near future. Listen to what others report on and focus on how it relates to the library.

Take notes and follow up with individuals who could either use the library's assistance or are doing something that the library should be an integral part of. Your efforts to be proactive will begin to make others think of you and the library when making decisions, and the go-to people will start to include you early on in the decision making processes going forward.

Another idea is to see if you can attend other meetings in your organization, such as those of practice groups, departments, or the library or management committee. Some librarians attend them regularly, but even if you can't do that, see if you can attend them quarterly or semi-annually.

Make sure that when you do attend, you have practice- or department-specific information to share. Ask yourself beforehand what kinds of questions you think you might get, and be prepared to answer them if they are asked. After the meetings, follow up with information on areas that other departments are focusing on, or offer library services for cases, deals, or projects that were discussed in the meeting.

What Should You Do?

What is the best way to connect with the go-to people? Have face-to-face contact whenever possible—this may be *the* most crucial element of connecting with go-to people. Walk around your office and get to know people. It can be difficult to determine how we can contribute meaningfully to our colleagues' working lives if we don't know them as people.

We must work on the relationships we want to have—yes, it is work. (It may come easier to some than to others, but it is still work.) One big advantage of face-to-face contact is that it demands an immediate response and, along with that, often comes with instant gratification.

To maximize the amount of potential face-to-face time you can have with go-to people, utilize organization or office events to your advantage. Go to every function that you possibly can. This puts you and the library out there and increases visibility. It is also an opportunity to get to know the

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individuals with whom you want to build relationships.

Practice good communication and, more importantly, good listening skills. Remember that big decisions don't happen all at once, but rather they happen throughout the year in many small conversations and informal meetings.

Finally, never pass up an opportunity to inform people about the library. Don't forget about opportunities to use those “elevator speeches” and make sure to always have one prepared in your mind. You might even want to consider creating a uniform “elevator speech” that you can share with your entire staff as well.

Prepare every level of the library staff with the tools and skills to take advantage of any networking opportunities that arise. Regularly provide your staff with relevant and timely information about library initiatives or future projects, so they can all serve as advocates for the library.

In her book, *Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It*, Peggy Klaus coins her own term for elevator speeches and calls them bragologues. She created a 12-question self-evaluation (available for download at www.bragbetter.com) that provides the facts and specific details to use to create bragologues and then edit the bragologues to create shorter versions, which she calls brag bites.

Why Get to Know the Go-To People?

So, why go to all this trouble? Well, in this day and age, it's no longer an option not to. We need to offer advice, rather than just information, and upgrade our contribution level to our organizations. We have to reach out and redefine our roles—others will not do this for us. We must continually reassert our importance within our organizations. Networking and building key relationships helps the library get what it needs and go where it needs to go. The library doesn't

exist in a vacuum, and we all need to turn to others for support for our library initiatives and ideas.

In addition, your networking efforts will begin to establish you and the library as stakeholders in your organization. In order to do this, some people may have to learn new behaviors, such as projecting the attitude of “I am a key player in the organization's success” and backing up the projection with concrete accomplishments. Learning these new behaviors and attitudes are well worth it in the end.

No matter what, it helps to start building relationships that will continue to benefit you and the library. I believe that marketing isn't our issue—relationships are. If they are done right, marketing takes care of itself.

Building good personal relationships really isn't that difficult. The stretch for many is putting it at the top of the priority list. Remember to focus on the things that preoccupy the stakeholders in your organization; that will help you focus your efforts on things that will get their attention. Good relationships with the go-to people allow us to be entwined in the business process and know what's really going on.

How Do You Do It?

The final question is how. How do you do this in your organization? The answer to this question will, no doubt, be different for every organization and for every individual. One thing is true for everyone—if you start with small steps and build on those as you go along, the question of how doesn't seem as daunting.

Think about one thing that you can start with that will improve your relationships and interactions with the go-to people in your organization. Take a small step in the right direction, and then let the momentum of your initial success carry you forward. Cultivating relationships and

Connect with Your Key Players

1. Get to know the go-to people within your organization. Find out who they are. Look at resources such as phone lists, organizational charts, internal documents or information, annual reports, or just start asking around. Look for key individuals in departments such as billing/accounting, information technology, marketing and management, or library committees.

2. Make sure you have a seat at the conference table. Do the managers and administrators in your organization have regular meetings? If so, make sure that you are a part of them and listen to what others report on and focus on how it relates to the library. Take notes and follow up with individuals that could either use the library's assistance or are doing something that the library should be an integral part of.

3. Have face-to-face contact whenever possible. Walk around your office and get to know people. Practice good communication and, more importantly, good listening skills. Utilize organization or office events to your advantage—go to every function that you possibly can.

consistently reaching out is often the key that opens the door to some of the best and most exciting opportunities. ■

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