Soloing with Friends

Cari Ryan
Pacific Rim Christian University

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Preparing for a vacation should be filled with anticipation and joy but can be a daunting and stressful task for solo librarians. Such questions as, “who will supervise the library,” “who will provide assistance to patrons,” and “who will make sure the dehumidifier is emptied?” can cause sleepless nights before and even during the vacation.

A study by Saddiq and Burke, entitled, “An investigation into the role of perceived work stress upon absenteeism, job satisfaction, psychological health and family, across 5 disparate occupational groups” was published in 2006. Five occupational groups: librarians, schoolteachers, police, rail and fire personnel were studied to better understand reactions to their occupational stress. Out of the five occupations, librarians reported having the highest levels of work-related stress. The high levels of stress affected absenteeism, psychological health, job satisfaction and occupational stress. While a manageable amount of stress can motivate us, too much stress can cause us to feel discouraged, fatigued, and take more sick days.

Even with high stress levels, solo librarians have well-founded reason to believe that taking a vacation is an unattainable dream. However, a vacation provides the necessary rest and renewal for librarians to happily function at our best. Here are some tips on how to calmly prepare your library as well as your staff for your well-deserved vacation.

**Defining Your Vacation**

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a vacation as “a period of time that a person spends away from home, school, or business usually in order to relax or travel.” In the 21st century, it is very difficult to completely be away from anything. Contact with work is easier than ever because of our social mediums, cell phones, laptops, etc.

The difficulty in getting away has been an issue for much longer than expected. A magazine article from 1875 offers some good advice: “In the first place, to enjoy your rest, and really benefit by it, you should shake yourself entirely free from your ordinary work and surroundings… Make all proper arrangements before you start; have few letters, and no business ones, sent after you; and as long as your freedom lasts let body and mind, each in their own way, keep holiday.”
To “shake” ourselves entirely free from work, it’s important to define how much or little contact you will receive while you are gone. Such parameters can include only taking phone calls during certain hours, only checking emails and not receiving any calls, designating a coworker who will handle all issues, or boldly stating that you will not accept any phone calls nor access emails while you are gone. The parameters you set are truly determined by what you believe is best for your library and patrons.

**Preparing Library Staff**

“How to maintain the library while the librarian is away” is probably not high on the list of training topics with all the multitude of other required trainings provided to library workers. Preparing a person or team of people such as students or volunteers to oversee the library can be a daunting task. Instead of preparing workers right before you leave on vacation, they should be prepared year round.

This is why it is so important to continuously train around the year so that they not only understand their positions well but also have a good understanding of their daily tasks as well as how to handle various situations that may arise while you are gone. It would be beneficial to create a list of “In case of” scenarios and the appropriate actions to take when the scenario occurs (an example would be, “In case a student would like to pay a fine, do the following steps…”). The list can be as detailed as you think is appropriate and may become very valuable while you are gone. Besides year-round training, it would be beneficial to get into the habit of asking your workers how they would handle a situation if they could not reach you. Their response to the question is a good indicator if they need further training.

An impending vacation is also an opportune time to evaluate what new training should be provided to library workers. Consider the activities that you do on a daily basis and see what could be delegated to others to help minimize your workload. However, it is recommended that the worker is trained a considerable amount of time in advance before your vacation so you can ensure they have fully acquired the skill and will able to do it successfully while you are away.

**Conclusion**

Taking steps to ensure the library and your workers are prepared for your time away will minimize any worries or concern. Vacations are an exciting time for you and your family and can also provide a great opportunity to affirm and edify your library staff and volunteers.

Are you a solo librarian? Do you have thoughts or ideas that might assist other librarians? Please consider sharing your ideas with others in ACL by submitting to this column. Contact Associate Editor, Jeannie Ferriss (jferriss@yellowstonechristian.edu) for information.