

Fact Sheet for Peter Bromberg

See peterbromberg.com for resume and links to writings, presentations, and testimonials

A Little Bit About Me

Over my twenty-two year career as a librarian, I have had the opportunity to be of service in many roles including supervisor, teacher, speaker, writer, coach, mentor, mediator, and advocate. I am passionate about the value of libraries in our communities and motivated by the desire to see libraries continually develop and deliver more innovative and customer-centered services and experiences. I am equally motivated by a desire to create healthy and highly functioning work environments.

A good friend once referred to me as a “potentialist” because of my belief in the potential of all people. For me, libraries are about fostering that potential - in our customers, in our communities, and in the workplace. The hallmarks of my career have been the ability to think and act strategically, communicate effectively, create collaborative and high impact programs and services, develop the strengths of others through mentoring and coaching, and build partnerships and alliances to accomplish big things together that we would be unable to do alone. As a former supervisor said to me recently, “You helped people work well together, and be happy doing it.”

The common threads running through my career have been a passion for developing the skills and talents of others, and building a strong, inspiring, shared organizational culture rooted in shared values, mutual respect, and transparency. My experience working at Nordstrom prior to becoming a librarian was fundamental in shaping my views on the importance of (and joy in) delivering exceptional customer service, as well as the importance and positive power of a trusting and supportive organizational culture, focused on *truly* empowering employees to use their good judgment in all situations.

By nature I am a people-focused, strategic thinker, driven by a belief that we can achieve positive end results by aligning our energy around an inspiring shared vision. I value, and strive to model, curiosity, honesty, ethical conduct, kindness, and professionalism while bringing a sense of humor and perspective to all that I do.

My background and experience in training has been foundational in informing my approach to work. I have designed, developed, and delivered numerous workshops and programs on a variety of topics, including supervision, communication, goal-setting, teamwork, and emotional intelligence. Developing an effective learning experience is a human-centered exercise in strategic thinking, where intentional, strategic design choices are made to create activities that will bring about a positive change in the knowledge, attitude, and/or behavior of the learners. I have found that this mindset has helped me to think strategically and in a human-centered manner in all that I do.

My work has always revolved around helping people and organizations to be healthy and effective, and I have a long history of promoting collaboration and developing partnerships. At the end of the day, my focus is always on the quality of the customer experience – whether the customer is external or internal. I continually ask myself how I can use my time to ensure that every customer and staff member feels enriched by their experience with the library.

I look forward to having the opportunity to visit with you and learn more about your branches, your communities, and your personal experience with the library. Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my thoughts.

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Thoughts on the Future of Libraries

In 1921, my Great Aunt Anna, 16 years old, fresh off the boat from Russia, and speaking not a word of English, entered a branch of the New York Public Library. Over the next few weeks she eagerly checked out and read as many books as she could by the Russian masters -- Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, etc., reading them in the original Russian. She soon realized though that she needed to learn English, and with the help of the librarian, she began a self-study of her new adopted language. Years later she would write of that experience, "The library saved my life."

Those words, "the library saved my life," were written about an experience that happened almost one hundred years ago. Yet the power and relevance of the library is as strong today as it was then. Why? Because our core values and mission remain timeless and relevant. It may be heretical to suggest, but I do not believe that libraries were ever fundamentally about books. Our mission has never been about books per se. Our mission as a public library is about offering a platform for self-directed learning and community connection. I also believe that it is the staff that makes a library a library, not the books. We occupy a unique space in the civic ecosystem – a place where each person is received and welcomed as a citizen and as an equal. And our only agenda is to facilitate and support their self-exploration without judgment.

That same professional ethos is equally applied to our local businesses and civic organizations, and libraries are increasingly taking our expertise in the areas of reference and collection development and using those skills to better understand the needs and aspirations of our community, while also curating the individual and organizational expertise and assets present in the community. Libraries are well-positioned to be at the center of our communities, using our deeper knowledge and understanding of the needs and assets to build connections between and among various groups and stakeholders. I see this "community reference" work as highly aligned with our traditional skills and job duties, but taken out from behind the reference desk and out into the world around us.

I don't foresee that libraries will soon be without print materials, nor should we. Books are largely the library "brand," and I think they will continue to be a core focus for some time to come. Additionally, I recognize that the reason libraries began collecting books to begin with was to support learning and exploration, and I think there are many opportunities for libraries to think creatively and expansively about other ways in which we can be supporting learning in our communities. The collection of books was based on a model of scarcity, and a recognition that it was a public good to pool resources to create access to a collection that would otherwise be out of reach for many or most. Today, libraries provide access to computing and reliable broadband for the same reasons.

Not every library requires a makerspace or a digital media lab. However, I do see these developments as in line with our tradition of providing access to tools and contexts that promote learning. Many suggest that the skills and knowledge needed for success in the 21st century are focused on collaborative problem-solving and critical thinking – skills that are best developed through DIY and participatory learning experiences. I foresee that libraries will build on the success of our physical collections, technological offerings, and programming, and continue to find ways to create new types of learning experiences that support the needs of our children and all of our community members. For these reasons, I am extremely optimistic about the power of libraries, now and into the future, and expect that we will continue to "save lives" in ways that we have yet to conceive of.