

OLA 2016 Superconference
Report from: Archana Shah, TPL Board Member & Liaison to Youth

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Fellow TPL Board members,

I had the wonderful opportunity to attend part of the Ontario Library Association (OLA) Superconference this past January 29 & 30, 2016. The number of sessions offered blew me away, with over 4,500 delegates attending in past years. There were CEOs and library board trustees in attendance. It was a wonderful, unique conference for anyone interested in books, reading or libraries!

Here were some of my favourite sessions and my thoughts:

Friday January 29, 2015

1. CEO Panel - What's Keeping CEOs Up at Night

- My first OLA session was packed and standing-room only. Very illuminating session where I heard from the CEOs of the Kitchener, Saskatoon, Edmonton and Hamilton Public Libraries.
- Some issues keeping CEOs up at night include finding and developing management talent, the move of libraries into the creative digital age and how to assess library programming. What is the true cost and return of investment of library programs, how to know if they are a success?
- Assessment and metrics are crucial, there will be less time to make decisions in the future so need good information coming in to make good decisions. This is a time of rapid change in public libraries, with jobs changing all the time, so staff participation important in shaping library service. Public libraries need to make sure they don't lack focus, and to be selective.
- Libraries respond to community need for lifelong learning, and help people prepare for the future. Key will be ability to transform, and evolving skill sets to deal with new technologies.
- Some questions libraries are grappling with: What is the role of the library vs. a community centre? Endless offers of partnership, how to say no gracefully? Good to great, what is your focus? Lack of awareness of services, how to get the word out? Public libraries generally don't sell/promote ourselves very well. What is going to motivate someone to come to the library? No shortage of good ideas, but shortage of capacity to execute. Define your target market.

2. An Integrated Service Model - Understanding and Responding to What Customers Want

- Really interesting presentation on how public libraries can deliver excellent customer service
- One public library system's integrated service model is based on the principles of "surprise & delight, learn, search, spread the word, make it personal, recommend"
- Also key are the 5 Cs of customer service: connect, converse, collaborate, create options, close (invite the patron back!)
- Want patrons to leave with more than they expected.

- This public library system used secret shoppers to evaluate staff. They developed specific scenarios, such as recommendations, youth service, digital literacy.

3. The New World Librarian

- Key skills for librarians include customer service, leadership/coaching, solution finding, hacking skills, innovation, knowing the community. 21st century librarian CARL competencies

Saturday January 30, 2015

Today was the Ontario Library Board Association (OLBA) Bootcamp - such a useful day for library board trustees. I would encourage all my fellow board members to try and attend this day next year, I found it very relevant and useful for new members such as myself, especially. It was a bit surreal to be in a room surrounded by so many folks just like us - library board trustees, as well as CEOs. How often does an opportunity like this come around, not often!

- **Board Assessment - Time for a Governance Check-Up**
 - Governance = guide, lead the way, vision. Governance isn't easy.
 - Important to have structured, systematic board self-evaluations (check-ups), such as annual assessments.
 - How can we make the most of our term? What have we built/learned? Who do we represent? What are we here to achieve? We are there to govern, not manage.
 - Great resource for library board members for self-directed learning - LearnHQ website. It's free. Another great resource is OLBA's "Cut to the Chase" document.
 - Board self-evaluation questionnaire. Identify areas of board performance that are strongest and those that need improvement through surveys and SWOT analysis.
 - Define governance priorities for next 1, 2, 3 years. What board activities result in the greatest benefit to the library? Improve governance capacity and efficiency
 - Governance --> Principles/Policy/Practice/Planning.
 - Board assessment doesn't need to be formal, no agenda, just brainstorming
 - Advocacy = incrementally building the support you need. Invite councillors to the library, provide an annual report card to council (for the \$ put in, what exactly do you get?)
- **CEO Performance Reviews and Feedback**
 - Board - focus on looking forward, not what was done last month
- **Trends & Communities - Community Data Mining**
 - Sources of data: CULC, Environics, census, Vital Signs, MPMP/OMBI (Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative), ILS (Integrated Library Stats), Annual Ministry Statistics
 - "If your presence doesn't make an impact, your absence won't make a difference" - Trey Smith
- **Governance Best Practices**
 - Issues that have been raised by trustees & CEOs in the past include: role clarity, what information to expect from the CEO, strategic/generative thinking
 - Re-think board agendas. What should we be doing, not what are we doing?