

## BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

**What's the Alternative: Career Options for Librarians and Info Pros.** By Rachel Singer Gordon. Medford, N.J.: Information Today, Inc., 2008. 288 pages (soft cover). ISBN 978-1-57387-333-8. US\$35.00. xiv, Companion Web site at <http://www.lisjobs.com/altcareers/>.

In today's marketplace, flexibility is integral for career survival. Many roles in librarianship are undergoing change and transition. Librarians are in a more unique position than most workers these days; they possess the ability to maintain ties to their profession while having the skills required in other professions. The problem is, most who possess a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree are not aware of the infinite career possibilities available to them outside of the library world. The possibilities can be realized in Rachel Singer Gordon's book *What's the Alternative: Career Options for Librarians and Info Pros*. Designed to be read by librarians looking for a change in career, this book provides much inspiration to those MLIS holders who want to look outside the traditional library setting.

Gordon, a champion of alternative career options in library and information science and a prolific writer of career advice and intergenerational relations in librarianship, believes that the nature of library school education and library work these days provides the right conditions for alternative careers to flourish. Gordon's passion is borne out of her own varied career in and out of libraries. Her book provides the reasons to reconsider alternative careers for librarians and information professionals and details how to start an alternative career path.

The book anticipates that librarians will have varying levels of comfort in pursuing an alternative career path. Book chapters provide suggestions on how to gradually ease into another career. The book begins with a chapter that helps the reader to assess their strengths, attitudes, and requirements for a fulfilling career. The chapters that follow describe career paths that are similar to libraries. These career paths could be ideal for a librarian who is interested in something different, but does not want to stray too far away from libraries. Later chapters provide more detail for those librarians who would like to start an independent business, shift into the information technology (IT) field, and explore other information work, such as knowledge management or prospect research. Each chapter offers different options for librarians at all stages of their careers, making the book accessible to everyone.

"Chapter 1: Making the Leap", the most important chapter in the book, helps readers establish the reasons why an alternative career path is something they may want to consider. This is where the real soul searching begins: Gordon prompts librarians to clearly outline the reasons to move on to a different field. She lists practical tips that a librarian should think through before leaping into a completely different line of work. Taking stock of your strengths, listing all of your professional contacts, assessing the values you hold

dear, and planning how you can enter a new field are some of the practical tips Gordon suggests before you start your job search. By taking an inventory of what support systems and strengths you may possess, the job seeker is better able to align their skills and interests with the goals of the potential employer.

Chapters 2 and 3 detail information on some of the industries that are closely related to libraries. Gordon offers librarians, old and new, a list of jobs that have some connections to libraries but are not within traditional library settings. Examples of these positions include library vendors, instructors for library and information schools, library associations, bookstore managers, publishers, and museum curators. Each chapter offers background information on what each position entails, informing the reader of the possibilities open to them.

Gordon also outlines possible occupations for those who are ready to make the leap into their own business. For example, chapter 3 explains the various occupations available within small independently run businesses, and chapter 4 explains the nitty-gritty details of planning a small business. Sensible advice for starting your own business is prevalent, including how to draft a business plan and tips on how to develop contacts within your line of work. Such advice is invaluable to first-time business owners. Other chapters provide information and advice on how to secure jobs in other fields such as communications and IT—fields that draw on the librarian's skills set but may not be obviously seen as work that's related to libraries. Chapter 9 describes nontraditional roles in traditional libraries, roles that reflect changing technology within libraries. The appendices list job hunting resources, Web sites, and other references for further reading and research.

Interspersed within Gordon's recommendations and advice are candid testimonials from librarians who have made a successful transition from libraries to other professions. Culled from a survey posted on Gordon's blog, *The Liminal Librarian*, these testimonials provide some comforting and realistic advice for those who are looking for a change in their career path. Survey testimonials come from librarians at varying points in their careers, with varying levels of experience. These testimonials help to reinforce many of Gordon's points throughout the book while offering reassurance that one's dreams can come true despite the many daunting challenges and hardships. The candidness of the testimonials is also refreshing to read. Starting out on your own is a massive departure from the routine work and steady hours that most librarians are accustomed to, and for some librarians, the transition has been daunting, yet rewarding.

Most importantly, Gordon provides a balanced view of the realities of working outside of libraries. She also stresses the importance of promoting the skill set acquired through an MLIS degree and encourages us to look outside of libraries to find rewarding and flexible work. As a recent MLIS graduate, I feel that Gordon's book fills a gap that LIS schools

have neglected to fill: how to find other possible work with your MLIS. Gordon has enforced the endless job possibilities afforded to librarians possessing an MLIS. Reading these candid stories and sensible advice in a clearly written, straightforward manner has inspired me to look beyond libraries for a rewarding career with no end of possibilities.

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