

Starting a library contract

Sally Goodenough

Imagine a job where you are caught in the middle of a vicious dispute between two supervisors, or where you are locked in the basement accidentally one night. Think how you would feel, watching while your workmates have a morning tea without you every week, or discovering that the contract you thought had ended actually had weeks still to run. This checklist will help you to get your contract off to a good start and to avoid real-life disasters like these.

The beginning of your new contract is a critical time. It is your opportunity to establish yourself and set expectations which will last for the whole contract period. You need to work *with* your employer to seek information and acceptance instead of waiting passively for them to appear.

Deal with your employment framework first. Check hours of work, rates of pay and the duration of the contract. Even if you are working for an agency, confirm the details at the workplace as well. Who can direct your work? Who you can turn to for conflict resolution? Who signs time sheets? Who should be approached for advice on work issues? Don't be discouraged from asking for information that you need.

Your physical needs are also a priority. Get a building pass, and make sure it works. Explore the building, and find the kitchen and bathroom. Ask about parking or public transport, and where to buy and eat lunch. Find out about the telephones, emergency exits, and security arrangements, especially after hours. Make sure you know how

to adjust your chair and other equipment, and that your workplace is safe.

Social relationships are the most important thing to get right. Introduce yourself to everyone, including staff outside the library. Try to adjust your behaviour to suit the workplace culture. Some people may find you threatening, or resent contractors, or just not like you. You need to take the initiative and persist until you are accepted. Ask to be included in meetings and social events. As a social being, you need to be recognised by and included in the group.

Once you feel comfortable in your environment, you can concentrate on finding out the details of your work. Write down responsibilities, procedures, deliverables, and due dates. Test computer network access, passwords and other tools thoroughly. Make sure everything works properly for you, not just for the person demonstrating it.

This is not a theoretical checklist, but a summary of things I could have done better over the last three years. I have found that professional skills and a good recruitment agency are not enough for success as a contractor. You also need assertive strategies and social skills to help you to adapt quickly to each new workplace and establish yourself within it. Only then can you apply your skills and perform at a professional level.

Sally Goodenough has worked on short-term contracts in libraries in Canberra for the last three years. E-mail sallyjg@effect.net.au.

Who's Where

Recent movements in the library and information sector

New copyright officer at National Library

Miranda Lee has been appointed to the position of executive officer of the Australian Digital Alliance (ADA), and copyright adviser (Law and Policy) for the Australian Libraries Copyright Committee (ALCC).

Miranda was previously employed as a legal and business affairs associate of Enegee Entertainment. She has also worked in the past with the Arts Law Centre and Minter Ellison, and undertook an internship with Sesame Street (New York) as a film co-ordinator.

Miranda is a solicitor of the Supreme Court of New South Wales and graduated in Mass Communications and Law from Macquarie University. She is looking forward to working with the National Library, the ADA and the ALCC in managing the challenges posed by the changing copyright environment.

Miranda is based at the National Library, and can be contacted at mlee@nla.gov.au. Nick Smith, the former copyright officer, has moved to the Attorney General's Department. ■



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