



BUILD A CAREER ON BEING VALUED THE REST IS EASY!

Our value lies in our relationships, so make the most of yours, writes Frank Ponte.

Having been in my profession since the early 1990s, I've witnessed a great deal of change in the library world. I saw collections move from print to digital, the lauded introduction and subsequent demise of the abstract databases on CD-ROM, the progression to full text CD-ROM, online full text, and now, the proliferation of 'app' technology.

They've all had their impact on our profession. Library and information professionals have steered many of these changes. We are quick to adapt. We are nimble and agile in understanding and acquiring the necessary skills to impart the features of new technology, and we place ourselves in a position of being valued by our client base by our pioneering nature.

So why do librarians often find conveying value to clients a challenging task?

In my opinion, value emanates from one key component: relationship building. The key to any important and lasting interaction is building trust and creating a relationship with your client, a process that involves several key elements.

ALWAYS BE RESPECTFUL AND HONEST

If you don't know, or are unfamiliar with something, admit it, and get back to the client promptly with the correct response. Always be courteous, don't leap into conversations that don't pertain to you.

UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR CLIENT DOES

There is nothing more frustrating than having someone extol the virtues of a particular product or service, or provide information if it has no bearing on what you do. 'Mine' your information away from your client, so that you can approach them prepared with enough knowledge to ensure a return visit with additional questions.

For example, if you work in an academic setting and are dealing with teaching staff, review the department's website, learn their job titles, check their previous research and collaborations, and

find out about any affiliations they have with other academic staff. All this information is freely available and will illustrate to your client that you have done your homework.

DON'T DO THE HARD SELL

No-one likes a hard sell. It comes across as fake and artificial. Start your initial interaction with acknowledging what the client does and suggesting relevant information or products. Approach your interaction with the question, 'What's in it for them?'

BECOME A USEFUL RESOURCE

The more information you can provide to make your client's job easier, the better their experience, and more value you create. As you build rapport with your client, you will exchange anecdotes and information more easily, ultimately forming a close bond.

DON'T LET FEAR RULE YOU

You have a lot of information to impart. Take the first step by moving out of your comfort zone. If you are met with resistance, move onto your next client. Some clients may need more time to be convinced of your ability. Don't take it personally. Walk the corridors. Get out of the library. Meet people in the cafe. Make it an informal, convivial interchange. My best interactions were over a cup of coffee.

REMEMBER, YOUR CLIENTS WILL TALK

Word of mouth is the best marketing tool to promulgate your skills. If you have done your job well, your client will talk to their colleagues and you'll have them knocking on your door, or better still, walking into the library looking for you.

These tips are not rocket science. They probably sound very obvious to most. However, I am regularly surprised by the number of people I have worked with in my career that have found this information revelatory. The difficult part, it seems, is to build rapport. The easy part is what comes after.

FRANK PONTE

Law Librarian
Fair Work Commission
frank.ponte@fwc.gov.au