Who here wanted to work in libraries when they grew up?

Me? I honestly didn’t have much of an idea of what I wanted to do when I was at school.

Some people have a clear direction in regards to career path when they are at school. Others are undecided and as they develop interests, one thing leads to another and suddenly they’ve found what’s right for them.

Ultimately I’m going to speak about the transition I took to get to where I am today. From:

- Studying at TAFE / doing Work Experience / being employed as a Casual / Working under Part Time & Full Time contracts / and finally....... Full Time work

TAFE

I’m a qualified Library Technician. I undertook the 2-year Library Technician course at Perth Central Tafe. Some of you here may be thinking of enrolling. If so I’d strongly encourage you to consider it, it’s a great course. If you’re currently enrolled, I encourage you to make the most of your studies and learning opportunities. I believe that two of the most valuable study units are creating a display board and work experience.

One of the tasks they ask you to do in TAFE is to make a display to put up within a library. This is a great way to engage with library staff and the display is an excellent reminder of something that you’ve done in the library. If you do a really good job when creating it, making sure you target the right audience and include pamphlets, etc., it will show library staff that you put thought, effort and planning into your work. Also, remember to take a photograph of it for future reference.

In the course you will learn many great skills that you can apply in everyday working situations. That said, there is only so much the course can teach you before you get a real hands on experience and this is were work placement comes in.

Work Experience

Work Experience is an incredibly valuable and worthwhile exercise to undertake. It will make a strong impact on a resume and help lead to many opportunities. I believe this to be especially the case when looking for your first job position in a library. If you have done a work placement, you can often refer to the knowledge and skills you have learnt. For example: you may use this information in an interview. Work experience is really important and I urge you to take full advantage of this.
When selecting a placement, sit down and put a lot of thought and consideration into your chosen selections. I would strongly recommend that you choose a place you’d like to end up working at. There are a couple of reasons for this too.

- If you do this you’ll end up having more fun. Choose a place you’ll enjoy coming to and working at each day.

- You get to know the staff really well and they will remember you. The more effort you put in, the better. By working hard, the staff will remember the kind of worker you are and if there are any positions advertised, this will work in your favour.

- You’re given a range of tasks that would normally be required for you to do if you were working there full time. This helps give you more of an idea of what would be expected if you were to work there.

- You’re getting trained to use their library systems and catalogues. In TAFE one of the courses you take, is using the system ‘Adlim’. Different libraries have different systems they use. This is a really great opportunity to say that you are able to use different systems. Out of TAFE, I’ve learnt dynix, sisi-dynex and Millennium.

Ultimately you’ve given the library a trial run. Once you’ve finished your placement, you should be able to determine if you like working in a particular area. Eg (wherever you did the placement) Public Libraries or school libraries, etc. You may decide that working in Public Libraries is not for you and that you may prefer a quieter specialised library. Likewise, you may really love it and established that you like Public Libraries.

More importantly, you should determine if you like working in your chosen placement library. If a placement were to arise you may want to apply for a position.

Also, whilst your there, learn from other staff members experience by asking lots of questions. The staff will be helpful and should be happy to answer any queries. It will help you and it’ll show that you are enthusiastic and eager to learn. It will also benefit your efficiency and give you more of an understanding on why things are done the way they are.

Work experience should be seen as a possible ‘foot in the door’. I say this, as it was how I ended up getting my first casual position. Not just in High school, but also in TAFE you’ll have the opportunity to do a work placement towards the end of the Technicians Diploma. I opted to do my placement at Civic Square Library and at the end of the placement; I was offered a casual position.
It was the experience that helped me get the position, because by then I was all trained up, I knew the staff really well and because I’d worked really hard. Even if you don’t find that you’re offered work, you will be remembered and you may be fortunate enough to have a reference letter written for you. It happened to me when I was in year 12 after being confronted with compulsory work experience.

Casual Work

Most Public Libraries consist of Branch Libraries. The ‘City of Canning’, the ‘City of Cockburn’, or the ‘City of Sterling’. They all consist of more than 1 library and as a result they often share in a pool of casuals, (One Budget).

The City of Melville consists of 5 branch libraries. I worked as a casual for 2 years. During this time I managed to gain work at all of them.

The more I worked at these different libraries, the better I grew to know the staff and this was a really good thing. The branch librarian would see that their staff get along with a particular casual and the next time they needed someone to work a shift, they would think to ask you first.

Another great thing about working as a casual (especially at different libraries) is that all your tasks will vary. This means that you are learning new skills all the time. I would strongly recommend that when you learn a new skill or do something important, that you write it down. These skills can be written on a resume or even brought up in an interview.

If in an interview, you can refer to various jobs you’ve done at work or in a placement. For instance, a question may be ‘How well do you feel you are at working as part of a team and individually, provide an example’. Over the time you’ve spent working in one of these areas, you would have worked as part of a team and individually on separate tasks in your role. You can speak of these.

As a casual, I found I ended up working for particular libraries for longer periods of time. I was often asked to do a couple of shifts to begin with, but the more time you spend with the one library the more work they ask you to do. People often become sick or apply for leave, at which point a casual is asked to fill in. If you have been working there for a while and you know the regular routines, etc. they may ask you to take up the time. I would often fill in for people this way and slot into their position.

This provides a really great advantage for when any contract work is advertised.
**Part Time / Full Time - Contract Work**

Whilst at the City of Melville, I received a couple of part time and full time contracts which lasted a couple of months at a time. Working under these contracts gives you a real sense of working day-to-day tasks on a regular basis. This is a good comparison portraying the differences between working a casual position at 5 different libraries (where all the tasks vary) and working full time.

Undertaking contract work, full time or part time, is an excellent way of proving that you’re worth considering for a full time position should one be advertised. You would be assuming more responsibilities and it would show that you could manage working in the position on a full time / part time basis.

It’s important to remember that all of the skills you learn are transferable from one position to another. As I was employed as a casual, I knew how the staff worked and got to do various parts of their jobs, I was able to incorporate these into the rest of the tasks I was given when on these contracts.

One of the greatest opportunities working under my final contract was using the VDX system for interlibrary loans. Although this system is slightly different for working in academic libraries it was a great advantage to learn and it was able to help me with my new role in Murdoch University working with interlibrary loans.

**Full Time Work**

Everything that I did up until this point enabled me to achieved full time work. I now have a Full time position with Murdoch University Library and I love my job.

I really hope you were able to get something out of this presentation today. I would like to encourage each of you to continue studying and taking advantage of every possible opportunity available regardless of how big or small. It all adds up and will greatly assist you in finding the position that’s right for you. Good luck and thanks for listening.