

A Career Change Memoir...

In 2004, I made a major career decision. I decided to combine my technical and business expertise with my commitment to public education and continue the next phase of my career as a library media specialist. I created an [online portfolio](#) and sent the link with a cover letter to school districts in Rockland County. By the end of August, I was offered the position of School Library Media Specialist at [Grandview Elementary School](#) (K-3) in the East Ramapo School District.

First Days

I will never forget the day I was escorted to the library at Grandview. The room felt heavy, gray, and cluttered. I remember thinking – boy does this place need Feng Shui. I wandered around and took a couple of books from the shelves – they were worn and not grade-appropriate. There was a large desk in the middle of the room blocking shelves which held picture books by authors U-Z. There was no technology.

I sat behind the desk and thought, “What have I gotten myself into?” I began opening drawers – surely I’d find some clues to my question, “What do librarians do these days?” I opened a file box that held index cards with little checkmarks indicating that magazines had arrived successfully in September, October... I thought, “Every month has a checkmark – all magazines, for more than one year, made it to the library.” I made an executive decision -- don’t worry about the magazines – the magazines will make it – and what’s the worse thing that could happen if a magazine doesn't show up one month? I chucked the index cards into the trash can. With that one act, I felt empowered to set a new course, lay out some goals, and get started.

I decided to view this job as one of those consulting challenges – figure out what’s working, what isn't working, and get things on track. But I knew I couldn't work on “school time”, I had to work at a pace that made me feel comfortable – fast.

The first thing I did was get rid of the desk – it was removed the third day. Then I wrote out goals for the year which were, in a nutshell: clean, weed, develop, and automate the book collection; ask for an interactive white board and at least four computers; use my own notebook computer until I could purchase one; build a library website as my communications and management center; and find out how I could support and collaborate with classroom teachers.

Week one came to a close. I knew what I’d gotten myself into – and it was good.

Presenting the Plan

I presented a special story and my goals to principal, Dr. McCarthy. I had written the story, "[Reading and Children](#)" years ago. The story helped me to communicate the importance of sharing stories with children. After listening, she asked that I meet with each grade level to share what I'd presented to her. On the third day, the teachers trooped in one grade at a time. We sat around a table and I shared the "Reading and Children" story and my goals for the year. While technology would play a big part in the library program, everything was about literacy, not technology. Technology was easy for me – putting technology to use to promote literacy would be the focus and challenge.

One teacher did ask me if I was serious about accomplishing those goals in one year. She reminded me that this was a school system – not the business world. The warning was a good one – I'd probably have to invest more than time to kick-start the effort – the goals would be accomplished.