

LEADER PROFILE

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION

After becoming an official mouthpiece for legal information professionals and law librarians alike with his *3 Geeks and a Law Blog*, Greg Lambert decided to put his words and ideas about what librarians should be doing as a profession into action by becoming an active participant on several American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) committees and using his new platform as Executive Board President to drive the Association and the profession forward.



Greg Lambert has had the good fortune of working in all three library types throughout his now 20-year career in librarianship. He attended both law school and library school at the University of Oklahoma, earning his JD in 1997 and MLS in 1998. “I went to law school initially thinking that I would be practicing law when I got out, but I was married to a librarian and after the first year she convinced me law librarianship was the way to go,” said Lambert. After finishing up school, he initially worked for Oklahoma City Law School as the electronic services librarian, before moving to a government position at the Oklahoma Supreme Court,

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where he managed the public legal information website—Oklahoma Supreme Court Network (OSCN)—and 75 of the 77 country law libraries within the state. After a few years, he moved to Houston to serve as project manager for what was then an OCLC (online computer library center) regional provider called Amigos Library Services, headquartered in Dallas, where he led a project to replace the collection that was destroyed at the University of Houston’s Law Center during tropical storm Allison. In 2004, he went to King & Spalding in Houston to become the library and records manager, a position that served as his first initiation to law firm librarianship. He remained at the practice for eight years before taking on his current position as chief knowledge services officer at Jackson Walker LLP. “I’ve pretty

much been happy wherever I’ve landed, but in the firm environment, I have really found my niche,” said Lambert. “In government and academia, you have certain constraints, especially budget constraints, where if it doesn’t fall within the budget that year, it’s almost impossible to get something outside of the plan done. In law firms, we might bring 10 new attorneys into a brand-new practice area and we have to quickly respond to that. I have found firms really fit my style of management.”

How did you get associated with AALL?

I was in law school and Nickie Singleton, who was the law library director at the University of Oklahoma at the time, caught wind that I was taking library courses as well as going to law school and had plans to be a law librarian. She quickly grabbed me and said, “All right, you absolutely have to join AALL.” She didn’t force me, but she showed me the benefits of being a member and how that would help over time.

Now that your term as president has officially begun, what is first on your agenda?

First thing is to drink a strong cup of coffee. All jokes aside, we’ve done an excellent job in the past decade within the Association of minimizing the effects of the shrinking membership, but it’s really time to look for ways to stop the decline in numbers and revenue and look for more ways to grow the Association. One of the things I’ve learned from working in law firms during a major recession is that you can’t cut your way to prosperity. AALL needs to find ways of retaining existing members, recruiting and attracting new members, as well as selling educational and other services to customers of legal information services. We have a lot to offer, so we need to make sure that we act in a way that makes our members and customers look to us first to satisfy their needs within the law library and legal information services areas.

Do you have any special initiatives or goals planned for the coming year?

The theme for this year is “From Knowledge to Action.” Law librarians and others in the legal information profession tend to be some of the smartest, most educated, and most credentialed members of their organizations. However, this

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QUICK HITS WITH GREG LAMBERT



ebooks or print?

I'm more about the content than the platform, but if I had to choose, I would go with print.

Favorite takeout? Thin-crust pizza. I grew up outside of Chicago, so you would think I would be more of a deep-dish kind of guy, but I love a nice, thin, New York-style pizza.

Favorite quote? From a not very good movie, "The choices we make dictate the life we lead." Danny Davito said this while

playing Bill Rago in the film *Renaissance Man*.

Favorite book? Fiction: Christopher Moore's *Blood Sucking Fiend*. I love a book that will make me laugh.

Nonfiction: *Tranny: Confessions of Punk Rock's Most Infamous Anarchist Sellout* by Laura Jane Grace. Being the father of a son who is transgender, it was a great read about one of my favorite musicians who also went through the process of transitioning genders.

Favorite TV show to

binge watch? Anything from Joss Whedon: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, *Firefly*, and now *Agents of Shield*. I love anything that he does. The one show I will try to watch live each week is *The Walking Dead*.

Favorite app? There is an app called Bands-In-Town that tracks concerts and music shows that are going on in your city. You tell it where you are and it will give you a list of shows that are playing in your area.

Favorite travel destination?

West Hollywood, California—I love the music scene there and have flown out to hear local bands several times.

legal researcher in a firm. She told me that the librarians and her peers (other legal researchers) are just an amazing resource to the firm. She mentioned that lawyers frequently comment on how nice and helpful these librarians are, and she commented back to them that they were completely missing the point: The law librarians and the other professionals in her department are smart, curious, creative, and intuitive, and they're just brilliant at what they do; they're efficient, they're effective, they find the correct answer, and they find it quickly and are conscious of making sure it doesn't cost the firm anything more than what is reasonable for the issue at hand. Yes, we can do all of this and do it with a smile, but that's not the value. The value is that we really do things better than anyone else can when it comes to that type of work, so that's what we need to push because that's the real narrative.

How do you stay engaged and passionate about your work?

I surround myself with other passionate people who are constantly challenging the boundaries of the legal information profession and beyond. I like being around those who don't start the conversation with "We can't do that," but rather start with "Why aren't we already doing that?" One of my favorite stories to tell is when someone I was interviewing with commented in an off-the-cuff kind of way, "Why would you limit yourself to that?" I took that as a challenge and decided that I would take more risks, and ask to do more nontraditional things—I really wanted to make sure that my voice was included in the conversation. You have to have passion in order to challenge these traditional views.

What is one of the most valuable lessons you've learned in the professional leadership positions you've held?

I have learned that you become successful by solving the organization's problems, not just the library's problems. Find out what keeps the stakeholders in your organization up at night and find ways of solving those issues. You can have a library that runs like a well-oiled machine, but if that doesn't solve your overall organizations problems, then it doesn't really matter.

doesn't do much when you aren't part of the decision-making team at your organization. We need to find ways of exposing the powers that be in our organizations to the power of people in their law libraries and knowledge resources departments. I would like to see more white paper publications, and placement of articles in journals and other publications that are read by those decision makers. We need to find opportunities for members to engage with industry leaders in ways that press the question: Why aren't they leveraging this talent in better ways to benefit the law firms, law schools, government institutions, and other businesses that have law librarians and legal information professionals on staff?

What do you think are the biggest challenges in law librarianship?

I think we tend to underestimate the power we have. I recently talked to a newer member of AALL who is not a law librarian, but is a

What do you think is in store for the future of the legal industry?

A slow, steady, methodical change. For those that can take the knowledge of the industry and create an action plan addressing these changes, there is a world of opportunity. In the law firm world, we talk about automation, artificial intelligence, commoditization, and the shrinking of the legal market. For the creative and the savvy, that change and uncertainty is a potential goldmine. I see it as a way for the industry to finally find ways of plugging holes in the system. Courts could speed up the process of providing services to the public. Access to justice issues can be addressed and improved. Universities can provide new styles of teaching that not only prepare students to think like lawyers, but also prepare them for the new opportunities that help fill the gap in legal services between the haves and the have-nots. Law firms and corporations can decrease the overall cost of individual legal services and increase the proactive process of risk aversion and due diligence over the traditional reactive methods of being unprepared. There's a solid place in this new legal industry for law librarians and legal information professionals, but you have to be engaged, and always be looking to solve the overall problems addressing your organization. If you're doing that, you definitely have a seat at the table in the future.

What's the value in being a member of AALL?

The best thing is the people. AALL is the best place to leverage peers, education, and advocacy for both the legal information profession as a whole and the legal information professional individually. Being a member of AALL means you have near-instant access to thousands of peers, but even more important is when you find those dozen or so close associates who become friends whom you can go to and pick their brain about how they would handle certain circumstances, which can be truly invaluable. We also tend to be exposed to the newest changes in vendor products. We train our members on how to be leaders in both the law library field as well as being leaders in the industry as a whole. I think one of the best things that I enjoy is that we stand up for the values of law librarianship and

Being able to interact with professionals across such a wide spectrum has enabled me to adapt new ideas and find more innovative solutions.

make sure that legal information is accessible in our democratic society. It's a powerful thing that we do.

What is the best career advice you've received?

I used to say it was when someone asked me, "Why would you limit yourself to that?" However, I have changed that recently. My good friend and fellow *3 Geeks* blogger, Toby Brown, gave me some sage advice when I was asked to take on a project in my firm that was definitely not a traditional law library role. Toby asked me:

- Is this something you can do, and do well?
- Is this something that will be valuable for the firm?
- Is this something that solves a problem currently facing the firm?

I answered "yes" to all. He then replied, "Then shut up and do it." That's probably the best advice I've ever received. I was able to look at things holistically—determine if this is solving a problem for the organization as a whole, and if so, then do it.

What do you find most rewarding about your job?

Again, I go back to the people. My greatest joy is watching the people on my team succeeding. I've been in this profession for 20 years now, and there are librarians and others who have once worked for me now leading their own departments. I've watched research attorneys who have worked for me become so valued and successful at the firm that they were then put on a partner track. I've always believed that people do well when they feel they are making a difference. I'm also a huge believer in the idea that "if you look good, I look good." I love it when people make me look good. ■