LEGAL EASE
SELF-CARE FOR LIBRARY STAFF

DIGITAL WHITE PAPER
When discussing this writing project with colleagues at a conference, one law library director enthusiastically remarked that our profession desperately needed a white paper on self-care. She went on to recount a conversation she was having with other directors about how they work all the time. Self-care is not just needed at the highest levels of our profession, it is needed throughout the ranks and among the staff at law libraries everywhere. Mark Engsberg, assistant professor of law and director of library services at the Hugh F. MacMillan Law Library at Emory Law, stated in a 2014 AALL Spectrum article focused on contemporary academic law librarianship that, “although not something to covet, law librarians can possibly claim a higher level of professional angst than most other types of librarians.” Engsberg incisively acknowledges the so-called chaos of the times, a description we have co-opted for the entirety of this work, and presents a motivational essay that encourages action and presents a roadmap for the courageous law librarian. One might even call his essay a battle cry, specifically when he states, “academic law librarians should think of the changes in legal academia and in academic law libraries as permanent and
fundamentally existential rather than temporary or minor (albeit painful) tweaks around the edges. We should bravely embrace these changes. In fact, we should actually march out to meet them.” The contributors and collaborators of this white paper celebrate the courageous work of law librarians and other legal information professionals; however, this paper is not focused on the “bravery” and “courage” of members of our profession. Instead, this white paper focuses on reflection, healing, limits, and self-care. It provides helpful strategies for law librarians.

This paper is the result of a collaboration between members of the Research, Instruction, and Patron Services Special Interest Section (RIPS-SIS) Patron Services Committee and the Legal Information Services to the Public Special Interest Section (LISP-SIS) of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL). It is also a collaboration among authors who work in different library types, at different stages in their careers, and in different areas of the country. Another facet of the collaboration is with members of the mental health community whose research has informed this work. In fact, the contribution of one of the articles in this paper was written by a mental health professional. The collaboration for this paper could not have been possible without the support of AALL, LISP-SIS, RIPS-SIS, Genevieve Tung (RIPS-SIS Patron Services, chair), Heather Haemker (AALL publications manager) and the publication design team at AALL. Finally, there would be no white paper without the authors who have been on this journey with us. A special thank you to Jessica Almeida, Alex Burnett, Catherine McGuire, Jianna Heuer, Jocelyn Kennedy, Sarah K. C. Mauldin, Kristen Moore, and Heather Simmons.

From the outset, it is important to state what this paper does not include. White papers typically deal with a problem and present best practices for solving the stated problem. This paper will stray from that tradition. The current climate of so-called chaos is not a problem that can be solved. Even if it could be solved, it is unlikely to be solved in a white paper. Instead of presenting a solution to a problem, the collaborators and contributors discuss and reflect on strategies for self-care. In self-care, there are no objective best practices, just practices that work best for you. This paper does not advocate for one approach over another. This work is non-exhaustive, non-judgmental, and flexible. Also, the authors of this work have sometimes chosen to discuss self-care from the perspective of law library staff who engage with patrons through reference and access. This choice, born from both the job duties and experiences of the authors, is largely without meaning. The advice this paper gives can apply to staff in all library positions, in all law libraries and legal information centers that have stressors. In addition, this work is not attempting to paint self-care in a romantic way. Self-care can be difficult. Self-care can take bravery. Self-care can mean different things to different people, but it is necessary.

CONFRONTING A STEREOTYPE

In a 2008 Above the Law blog post, an anonymous law librarian is quoted as pronouncing, “Don’t forget law librarianship. Great hours, low stress, academic lifestyle, and the chance to abuse law students at will. Nothing could be finer.” Although the stereotype is that librarianship is a low-stress profession, this does not appear to be the whole story. One MLIS student author writes, “Despite the fact that librarianship is a low-stress profession, this does not appear to be the whole story. One MLIS student author writes, “Despite the fact that librarianship is often stereotyped as a low-stress job, there are still many employment factors within the profession that can cause stress and eventually lead to burnout.” At least one library career website recognizes that these stressors (and others that are part of the profession) can impact the people who work in libraries and states that library staff can be vulnerable to burnout:

The very nature of library work predisposes us to burnout. A normal library workday can be described as a continuous round of interruptions.

The same website describes burnout as a “disabling reaction to an overload of stress on the job.” In marked contrast to the stereotype, there is even a website titled Librarian Burnout. There are a number of factors that contribute to stress and burnout that will be explored in this introduction and throughout this work.

STRESS AS PART OF THE JOB

There are certain pressures endemic to the profession of librarianship. Looking at online articles on stress by, about, and for librarians, is a quick way to confirm this assertion. One blog discusses the pressures of working in a library as:
We have sexual harassment, we have mentally ill patrons, we have fights and drunk people and screaming kids. And it’s not just ‘problem’ patrons that make it stressful, either. Librarians often act as a sounding board for people who just need to talk, and sometimes that can be stressful on us. … We are there for people, as we should be, but we are human too and it all takes an emotional toll.

There are online resources that discuss law librarianship more specifically. Recently, a post by a librarian in a public law library commented, “People come into my law library, by and large, because they are in crisis. Public libraries like to tell the happy stories—kids at story time, job applicants. At the law library, we are open to the public, but the stories are rarely happy. People enter with the fear that they don’t belong. They’re scared, lost, confused, and hopeless. Our users struggle to understand and articulate their problems, and they’re up against a system they know almost nothing about. Heightened emotions are the norm.” As the above comments make plain, working in libraries, while intensely rewarding, can be stressful and overwhelming. Another blog on the topic states:

Even as an academic law librarian, some of your time is spent dealing with difficult patrons. From stressed-out, highly competitive students, to impatient, arrogant faculty (we probably have more degrees than they do!), to the clueless, scary public, these patrons represent the hardest and sometimes the most rewarding part of law librarianship. (And no, not all patrons are like this.) With students, it’s about calming them down and managing expectations; for faculty, it’s learning to speak their language and communicate the way they want, whether it is by phone, email, or in person. The public patrons are often scared because they don’t know how to navigate the legal system; sometimes they’re scary because they have a mental health issue that influences their behavior ….

Those in our profession who do not work directly with the public, such as those who work in private academic or law firm libraries, are not immune to these challenges. Faculty, students, co-workers, and partners may be impaired by substances and/or struggling with their own mental health issues. Stress and burnout can occur in any library department, even those that do not primarily work directly with patrons.

THE CHAOS OF DOING MORE WITH LESS
The last 10 years has brought stress levels to a new high. Law libraries as well as law library staff seem beset on all sides. Drawing from experience, two critical articles make this point, one from Law Library Journal and one from AALL Spectrum. Both suggest that members of the profession are facing a variety of extreme pressures. The following list is not exhaustive, but it presents a range of pressures that can and do effect law librarians, law library staff, and law library administrators.

- Competition in legal education
- Changes in legal practice
- Unmet needs for those who cannot afford a lawyer
- The burdensome cost of legal education and debt
- Questioning of law library autonomy (specifically with respect to the duty to economize)
- Changing American Bar Association (ABA) standards
- Technological change and the future of print collections
- The preservation of legal materials
- The repurposing of library space
- Limited resources and staff
- Changes in funding structures
- Sharp increases in the cost of legal materials
- The introduction and proliferation of online databases of primary and secondary sources
- The change in the nature of legal research
- Increased demand for adopting entrepreneurial solutions to increase revenues
- Increased demand for seeking opportunities to network with other libraries and organizations
- Increased demand for marketing law library services
- Increased demand for purposing underutilized resources
- Outsourcing
- Change in expectations
- Change in service models
- Changes in job functions and descriptions

Additionally, at least one author has recognized that proposed solutions to recent challenges are themselves distressing, stating “many of
the most prominent reform proposals should be disheartening to academic law librarians: our collections and instructional services are either ignored or grouped ignominiously with vanity building projects, bloated administrative budgets, and other sources of ‘wasteful spending.’ We have faced, and continue to face tremendous change. As AALL Executive Board member Jean P. O’Grady put it in her 2016 AALL Spectrum article on outsourcing, “it is no longer sufficient for library leaders to know the latest trends in librarianship; they must immerse themselves in the vast landscape of trends impacting the business and practice of law.” Changes in our profession, our job duties (what is expected of us), our organizations, and our job descriptions can all cause stress. In fact, “the most notable effect of organizational change processes is that it frequently leads to employee stress.”

DEALING WITH STRESS AND BURNOUT
Stress, and the related concept of burnout, has many symptoms and can cause many problems. There has been quite a bit written about how to deal with, handle, and manage stress inside and outside the workplace. Included among the many common suggestions put forth are the following:

1. Eat well
2. Sleep/rest
3. Limit alcohol and/or caffeine
4. Exercise
5. Relax
6. Be positive

This list of self-care techniques, wisdom, and practices may be helpful, but it is not detailed and focused on law librarianship. This white paper goes beyond conventional wisdom and develops stress management and self-care practices which are varied, useful, and specific to our profession. We hope to present best practices and start a much-needed, broad conversation within our profession about how to care, not only for our stakeholders and our patrons, but for ourselves and each other.

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LEGAL EASE: SELF CARE FOR LAW LIBRARIANS

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SELF-CARE FOR LIBRARIANS: THE NECESSITY OF SETTING BOUNDARIES

Establishing and using boundaries to provide better services, while staying physically and mentally healthy.

BY CATHERINE McGUIRE

In an article titled “Traits and Motives in the Psychology of Personality,” author Mark Snyder notes that reference and public service librarians as a group tend to have “helping personalities.” Law librarians are no different than the generalists in our field. Librarians thrive on assisting people in solving problems. Our profession tries to exhaust every avenue, every possible crumb of information, and in doing so, we tend to overextend ourselves. Overextending ourselves can cause fatigue, exhaustion, and at its worst, burnout. Reasonable boundaries in the provision of reference services must be set and respected in order to maintain physical and mental health. Adhering to service boundaries can be challenging, but maintaining those boundaries is a critical aspect of our daily work.

BOUNDARIES AND THEIR PURPOSES

Boundaries are the limits imposed by a librarian, library, or parent institution that help the librarian provide service in a measure appropriate to the institution’s aim, while preserving the librarian’s ability to stay separate from the matter at hand. Boundaries also help keep librarian/patron interactions manageable. By definition, a boundary fixes a limit or extent; it marks a dividing line between two or more entities or concepts. A limit, also by definition, prescribes a maximum or minimum amount. The two terms are similar, overlapping in many practical senses. Throughout this discussion, both terms will be used, with some distinctions in usage. Generally, boundary will be used in a general, less-specific context, referring more to

philosophical, emotional, and non-quantifiable concepts (personal space, emotional investment); limit will be used for quantifiable factors (limited time, limit to page count).

The concept of boundaries is discussed widely in literature regarding the “helping professional” fields, such as social work and nursing, and in the context of relationships with patients or clients. In a 2006 issue of Ethics and Behavior, author Wendy Austin discussed how, in these spheres, boundaries “involve issues of power, influence, and control … relationship boundaries are often blurred and ambiguous…” The library field can easily be considered a “helping profession,” and like social work and nursing, our service boundaries are often ambiguous. Freud’s guidelines for trustworthy therapy, described by Austin, can readily be applied to librarians and include, “informed consent … nonexploitation, neutrality, avoiding dual agency, and relative anonymity.” Boundaries serve several critical purposes:

- Boundaries provide a measure of control for situations (patrons and questions) that may risk spiraling into the uncontrollable, thereby putting undue pressure on the librarian or the library’s resources.

- Boundaries allow for a large measure of self-care in a field where a great deal of effort, emotion, and mental energy, consciously or not, is invested by the librarian in assisting patrons.

- Boundaries, and the more specific limits to service, establish a reciprocal, protected arena in which the librarian and patron can exchange information, provide and receive assistance, communicate, and reach a conclusion that is mutually satisfying. According to a Pacific Library Partnership handout called “Limit-Setting with Library Patrons,” boundaries help with time management, information, resources, and behavior. Ultimately, boundaries are good for the health of the library and staff, and therefore, the well-being of the patron and institution.

WHY BOUNDARIES AND LIMITS ARE NECESSARY

The library’s physical space and financial limitations dictate the application of practical limits, such as hours of operation, number of reference staff, collection size and availability, and borrowing privileges or lack thereof. Such practical measures are categorized as limits (quantifiable). Practical and quantifiable limits are some of the tools that can help librarians establish boundaries, which is the more nebulous of the two terms.

A library’s mission ensures that appropriate work is completed and appropriate levels of service are met. Institutions and their libraries set boundaries through mission statements. A library’s mission statement reflects the aim of the institution, and thus the end-goal of reference provision. The language used in mission statements is often broad, allowing flexibility for different patron groups. A mission statement, like quantifiable limits, helps librarians establish boundaries in patron interactions by providing a baseline against which to guide consistency of service.

- Boundaries have the practical application of allowing for the accomplishment of responsibilities and consistency of service.

- Boundaries help staff preserve or recoup their own mental or psychological strength to handle or cope with the demands placed on them by the very nature of reference work.

- Boundaries allow for flexibility, because every librarian is a unique individual, with stress-bearing capacities varying across the spectrum.

Without boundaries, the details, burdens, challenges, confrontations, threats, and troubles inevitably found in dealing with the human element become oppressive and unendurable.

The modern reference librarian handles a myriad of service challenges, each one with a
unique ability to disrupt calm, positivity, and mental health. A reference librarian’s day is filled with multitasking, decision-making, masses of information, time pressure and interruptions, claims on compassion, ethical challenges, and other self-draining circumstances. A breakdown of the impact of each of these is helpful in understanding why having and being mindful of boundaries is critical to a healthy staff.

The nature of public service is personal interaction. The transference of patron emotions during these interactions can result in an overtaxing burden for the reference librarian, unless the librarian can maintain emotional boundaries. Helping people, particularly people with truly personal and life-altering inquiries, can be fulfilling, even exhilarating. In a 2015 *Law Library Journal* article, author Filippa Marullo Anzalone indicates that helping people can also be draining, exhausting, and “spirit-depleting.”\(^3\) Charles Figley’s article “Compassion Stress: Toward Its Measurement and Management” proposed the term compassion stress or compassion fatigue to describe the emotional costs of caring for traumatized people.\(^4\) Figley refers to this term when discussing people who are “in the business of helping others recover from misfortune,” which is a clear descriptor of librarians and for many of the patrons arriving at a law library reference desk. Patrons are scared, frustrated, confused, angry, and bewildered; their behavior often involves many other emotions. The outcome of their situation may have the potential to change their lives forever, often in a negative direction. Librarians, like others in “helping professions,” are predisposed by the nature of their jobs and personalities to experience mental and emotional exhaustion. Author K.A. Becker quoted Herbert Freudenberger in her article “The Characteristics of Bibliographic Instruction in Relation to the Causes and Symptoms of Burnout,” stating “helpers are constantly dealing with people who have problems, so they come into contact with only the negative aspects of their clients’ lives.”\(^5\) In the article “Social and Emotional Self-Efficacy at Work,” authors Carina Loeb, Christine Stempel, and Kerstin Isaksson add “if an employee feels emotionally drained and exhausted from work it can lead to actions to distance oneself emotionally and cognitively from work as a way to cope with the work overload.”\(^6\) Distancing oneself results in below-par service to our patrons.

Multitasking and interruption can lead to forgetfulness, energy drain, and an inability to fully listen to a patron or a colleague (see also Heather Simmons, “Unplug to Recharge: How Mindfulness Is Integral to Self-Care” on page 17). A reference librarian’s job rarely involves managing one task at a time or focusing for long, uninterrupted periods on a single project. Most often, multiple demands are being met simultaneously. Some demands, like patrons and colleagues, are external, while others (e.g., lack of focus or inattention), are internal. Whether externally or internally driven, moving from one task to another takes mental energy. Only the most routine of tasks can be handled without noticeable mental effort. In her article, “We’re All Multi-Tasking, but What’s the Cost?,” Melissa Healey states, “When [the brain] does several tasks that involve conscious attention, the brain ‘discounts’ the attention it applies to each.” Sandra Kirmeyer, in “Coping with Competing Demands: Interruption and the Type A Pattern,” expands on this concept, explaining energy is needed “to evaluate the significance of and decide on appropriate responses to multiple, concurrent inputs. When interruption causes employees to leave tasks unfinished, these tasks act as distractors and further effort is required to inhibit attention to them while processing new inputs.”\(^7\) Kathryn Hensia pointedly notes in her article “Too Much of a Good Thing: Information Overload

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and Law Librarians,” that “less brain attention means executing our jobs at a less-than desirable level.” In “Evidence for the Need to Distinguish between Self-Initiated and Organizationally Imposed Overload in Studies of Work Stress,” authors Gregory A. Laurence, Yitzhak Fried, and Steffan Raub state that when a librarian’s mental and physical capacity fails to meet the demands of multiple concurrent tasks, “role overload” or “overload stress” results, to the detriment of the workplace and the librarian’s own self.⁹

The glut of available information, known as information overload, may be keeping us from performing at our best. A librarian’s skill in absorbing, evaluating, and relating information is more necessary than ever before, but the availability of masses of material in a multitude of formats—much of it overlapping and a good deal of it not properly vetted—has negative consequences similar to that of multitasking. Hensiak describes information overload as the point “when the receiver receives so much data that the receiver is overwhelmed to the point of being unable to engage in higher levels of processing needed to move from data to information … [it] occurs because the progression from data to information and eventually knowledge is prevented because the sheer amount of data essentially blocks the progression along the spectrum.”¹⁰ As information professionals, the last thing librarians need is a barrier to our ability to process information and relate relevant material to the patron.

Decisions about which information sources to provide to patrons must be made in order to serve them well. However, the need to make many decisions in a short time, known as decision fatigue, creates a mental energy drain. In his article “Do You Suffer from Decision Fatigue?” published in The New York Times, author John Tierney describes a study in which parole board decisions are shown to be impacted directly by the time of day in which their decisions are made.¹¹ The later in the day, and therefore the more decisions made along the way, the more likely the board is to deny parole. Similarly, when an engaged couple spends several hours registering for wedding gifts, as time progresses, they may become less likely to have an opinion on their choice, and opt for the easiest choice presented. Tierney goes on to say that “the more choices you make throughout the day, the harder each one becomes for your brain, and eventually it looks for shortcuts.” These cognitive shortcuts might include under serving patrons by not looking beyond the first resource the librarian consults, or failing to verbally walk a telephone patron through several links on a website to the needed information, or waiving the required copy fees for a 13-page opinion simply because the librarian’s brain is too tired to compute the cost and process the patron’s credit card.

In their article “Customer Mistreatment, Employee Health, and Job Performance: Cognitive Rumination and Social Sharing as Mediating Mechanisms,” authors Lisa E. Baranik, Mo Wang, Yaping Gong, and Junqi Shi state that the “effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions,” a process called emotional labor, can deplete the librarian’s personal cognitive resources.¹² Long term, this can lead to lowered work engagement, impaired performance, and even burnout.¹³ Reference and public service librarians are often the “face” of their institutions. As the staff with which patrons are most likely to interact, they are encouraged, and even required, both by their organizations and by personal credo, to remain approachable, friendly, and pleasant. Most patrons are equally friendly and pleasant. However, there are certainly exceptions. When faced with an exception, attempting to maintain a friendly demeanor can tax a librarian’s energy

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to a wearying, even debilitating, degree. The differential between the emotion the librarian is feeling and the expression the librarian tries to physically project can create an emotional discrepancy or dissonance.\textsuperscript{14}

Librarians face the pressure of ethical and legal concerns related to the provision of information. Law library literature abounds with discussions of what exactly the line is between legal information and legal advice. Seemingly, no two practitioners agree. While we can largely describe the difference to each other in language we collectively recognize, if not agree on, describing that difference to the public patron seeking our expertise is another matter. In his 2010 dissertation titled “Uncertainty Management in Reference Interactions with Pro Se Law Library Users,” Paul Healey asserts a “need to make the limits of service clear to pro se library users. Such limits can be seen as a preemptive strike against activities or requests that could be interpreted as legal advice. As such, service limits [serve] to manage uncertainty by restricting the realm of potentially problematic activities.”\textsuperscript{15} In “Wanting to Do More but Bound to Do Less: A Law Librarian’s Dilemma,” author Paul McLaughlin Jr., adds to the discussion of boundaries and restrictions when stating “… there is no consensus on what the limits are for librarians when helping patrons find legal information [but] caution and preparation are necessary to minimize the chance of legal and ethical problems.”\textsuperscript{16}

The difficulties described above are only some of the many challenges reference librarians face in simply doing their jobs. Each day when approaching their shifts at the reference desk, librarians can expect to handle many simultaneous tasks, be interrupted multiple times, present a smile instead of a frown, explain, often more than once, why we can’t just “tell someone the law,” and stand firm as the emotional push grows stronger and stronger. Anzalone sums up the potential stream of activity as:\textsuperscript{17}

In addition to providing reference and research advice, explaining the fine points of various technologies, and delivering a host of bibliographic services, many of us teach, give presentations, write … law librarians wear many hats and function as managers, teachers, consultants, researchers, advisers, and information providers …

In a short stretch of reference desk time, a librarian might be reviewing and responding to half a dozen emails and digging into a complicated legislative history for one patron while walking a second through how to email himself a case from Westlaw. A third patron may appear at the desk, angry at the court’s decision for the other side, declaring all lawyers to be the spawn of Satan. Through the diatribe, the librarian keeps a smile on their face while simultaneously directing a passing law clerk to a treatise on state criminal law. The reference desk telephone rings multiple times, with one call from a patron discussing the suspected abuse of her children by her ex-husband and another from a judge having trouble accessing a Lexis ebook. During this activity, a co-worker has stopped by the desk to ask for input on a research project. Each task requires mental energy, resulting in less available energy for the next task. The establishment of boundaries can eliminate or shift some of the pressure.

\textbf{WHY BOUNDARIES ARE DIFFICULT TO SET}

As a group, law librarians tend to strive toward perfectionism, desiring answers to questions, solutions to problems, and organization of materials, thoughts, and processes. Anzalone put it simply when she said, “we try to keep everyone happy.”\textsuperscript{18} The desire to make people happy makes setting boundaries complicated—we are always trying to reach that point, and it is often unattainable. We cannot solve everyone’s problems. The desire to try makes


\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, 574.
it hard for us to welcome boundaries; we are more likely to see them as more of a hindrance than a help. Indeed, we are taught to reach past our limits and strive for exceptionalism. The American Library Association (ALA) Code of Ethics reflects this desire to serve and please our patrons:

> We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.

Setting boundaries is complicated by the amorphous nature of the lines drawn by each individual. Boundary language and actions, unlike limits, are not specifically quantifiable. Rather like legal advice, we know it when we see (or hear) it. But each person experiences things from a different perspective. For example, “appropriate” personal space is defined by and differs for each individual based on various factors, including culture, gender, age, etc. One person might more easily cope with persistent questions from a patron than another. The definition of legal advice may be interpreted differently from one librarian to the next (see discussion above). It is therefore difficult to keep the line at the same place for every person, librarian, or patron. Indeed, we find support for the flexible application of boundaries in the literature of professional helping relationships. Authors Wendy Austin, Vangie Bergum, Simon Nuttgens, and Cindy Peternel-Taylor note that flexible boundaries do not reflect inconsistency, per se, but rather “good therapeutic judgment … the concept of a solid, rigid limit does not convey the softness of reality … rules etched in stone are not appropriate.”

Flexible boundaries allow librarians to address the unique presentation of demands of each individual needing assistance. Perhaps the biggest challenge in setting boundaries is making sure all staff are consistent in the message transmitted to patrons. Consistency is touted as the goal. However, as no two patrons are exactly alike, and, as indicated above, flexible boundaries allow for the unique presentation of demands, perhaps equity rather than consistency should be the goal. To reach either goal requires excellent communication (both staff-to-staff and administration-to-staff), templated language (scripts), and plenty of practice.

**KINDS OF LIMITS AND BOUNDARIES**

Library-set limits for patron interactions fall into three broad categories: tangible, service, and emotional/cognitive.

Tangible limits include elements such as dress codes, food or drink in the library, the use of cell phones, and limits on the use of public computers (e.g., legal research only, for specific sites, for a certain amount of time, etc.). These limits are most often identified in patron policies or codes of conduct. It is most often easy to detect when someone has transgressed a tangible limit.

Service limits delineate the assistance that library staff can and should provide. These include limitations set by the administration, such as the type of research staff will do, the amount of time staff will invest in a query, the amount of material staff will read over the telephone, the volume of material staff will provide, and the cost of services (e.g., copy fees and overdue fees if applicable). Service limits also include limitations set externally by law, which include copyright, privacy, and the bar on the provision of legal advice. These limits are broadly described by a library’s mission statement and, like tangible limits, should be identified and described in patron policies.

The third limit category, that of emotional or cognitive limits, is much harder to define and describe, and cannot be easily or effectively written into a mission statement or patron policy. These are the boundaries that we, as information providers, are often called upon to set for ourselves and sometimes for our colleagues. Emotional boundaries are a factor of time, the personality of the provider and the patron, and the unique interaction between the provider and the patron. It includes listening to the facts of the question, as well as to the stories outside of

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what is relevant to the reference question. It is the investment of emotion that a provider makes during the interaction. These types of boundaries are difficult to set, as they are dependent on the personalities and circumstances involved.

**SETTING AND COMMUNICATING BOUNDARIES**

Setting boundaries depends, in large part, on the self-understanding and recognition of the service librarian involved. Rather than a strict list of specific “dos and don’ts,” library personnel should be taught consciousness and recognition—to be conscious of their own personal boundaries and to recognize the potential for transgression of those boundaries by those they are assisting. There is no hard-and-fast rule to describe every instance of boundary crossing. Again, we find guidance from the helping professions’ literature. Author Wendy Austin states that “Guidelines that address every eventuality simply do not exist, and practitioners need to be able to draw on their clinical knowledge and judgment, as well as their knowledge of the client and his or her circumstances, to determine a course of action that is based on the client’s best interests.”

Boundaries are therefore set by the person dealing with the situation, using a formula of self-awareness, recognition of patron reaction, and an understanding of the overall library’s mission.

Emotional self-awareness can go a long way toward helping service librarians detect the need for boundary setting. Recognizing a self-rise in negative emotions (irritation, anger, embarrassment at not being able to help, or frustration) allows the librarian to respond with self-coping mechanisms, thereby lowering their personal negative reaction. Recognizing the rise of negative emotions in the patron (anger, fear, confusion, shame) allows the librarian to respond with calming language or enforcement actions, as needed, thereby diffusing the patron’s negative reaction. The combination may help all parties involved operate with control, respect, and neutrality, resulting in a successful assistance interaction.

Empowering staff to set boundaries where and when needed is a critical component of success. The administration (library or parent institution) sets a general tone with a mission statement. Frontline staff should then determine the handling of each situation as it arises. There is considerable support for frontline empowerment in work psychology literature on customer service. Staff empowerment gives “latitude to correct problems as they occur, thereby mitigating employee and customer frustration and antisocial behaviors.”

There is similar support for staff empowerment in library literature.

The combined partnership of self-awareness, recognition, and empowerment results in the highest possible level of service.

Having recognized the need for boundaries and determined the broad parameters circumscribing acceptable actions and reactions, the next step is communicating these to both staff and patrons. Good communication is critical to the success of boundary setting. Communication should be both written and unwritten. Written communication includes policies, codes of conduct, and mission statements. Unwritten communication, such as body language, is equally effective, and when combined with written policies, establishes a practical and fluid delivery system.

**ESTABLISH WRITTEN POLICIES FOR STAFF**

Written policies outline the broad parameters of acceptable behavior and activity, and give staff a hard line to fall back on as necessary. Library literature is replete with suggestions for drafting such documents, as well as suggestions for posting placement at the library’s physical location and online presence. When staff relies on the same written policies and statements and repeats the same message to patrons, a homogenous tone is set.

**SCRIPT TEMPLATE LANGUAGE FOR STAFF**

Scripted language has a dual benefit: (1) a homogenous tone is set, meaning patrons have consistent and/or equitable service; and (2) verbal reactions become automatic for the staff, taking very little emotional energy to produce, thereby leaving more energy to deal with the rest of the interaction.

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Once scripted language is set, staff should practice so that under pressure, the scripted language rolls out easily in a calm and smooth tone.

Meet regularly to discuss scripted language so that ideas, events, and thoughts of all staff members are heard and understood, and nothing is forgotten or put aside. Encourage discussion as a group to allow for sharing and airing of viewpoints. Ensure the language is comfortable to use and is easily understandable.

OFFER CHOICES TO GIVE PATRONS A FEELING OF CONTROL
Patrons feeling backed into a corner, out of choices, or out of control often display frustration, anger, or embarrassment. Giving the patron even a small measure of control and choice in the situation can help keep the situation calm, negating the need for harsh boundary setting. This can be as small a measure as letting them choose between two sources, two formats, or two referrals.

CONSCIOUSLY USE UNWRITTEN COMMUNICATION TO CONVEY BOUNDARIES
Unwritten communication includes physical stance and facial expression. Moving a half-step back or simply rocking back on a heel, can help staff put enough distance between themselves and the situation, even if it is on the telephone, to enable the recovery of enough emotional energy to handle the interaction calmly. Likewise, making or breaking eye contact, or reducing a high-wattage beaming smile to a pleasant expression, can gently but firmly communicate to many patrons a restriction of involvement.

USE THE BUDDY SYSTEM
Back up colleagues by replicating the language used and the boundaries set.

DON’T APOLOGIZE FOR THE BOUNDARIES
Apologize for any errors, but only if they were made by you or your library. In several places in library literature, authors recommend apologizing to an angry patron to try to diffuse the anger. This, however, hands the power in the interaction to the patron, and renders any boundary setting void, putting the librarian’s self-care at risk. Apologies are appropriate only when an actual wrong has been done, and when the apology is made by the wrong-doer. An apology is appropriate if there was an error in transmission of a document, or an accidental phone disconnect, or a failure to follow through on research as promised. An apology is not appropriate if a judge ruled on their motion adversely, or the patron arrived at the library after hours. In these cases, the librarian should not apologize just to keep the interaction calm. Use supportive language like “That must have been difficult for you,” and “I’d be happy to show you where we post our hours on our website for future reference.”

HANG UP THE PHONE ON ABUSIVE PATRONS
Verbal abuse is never acceptable. The appropriate boundary is the click of the handset.

FINAL THOUGHTS
Boundaries are often viewed as a reaction to negative behavior, but they can also help guide and support the assistance we provide in normal positive interactions. Simply stated, boundaries help keep us from overextending our emotional resources. They help us rein in the investment we might make in a patron’s situation by establishing time, resource assistance, and information limits. They help us handle demanding or challenging patrons; they give us a way to disengage from well-meaning but overly social patrons. They keep us from spinning our wheels and wasting time on unneeded tasks. Most importantly, they keep us physically and mentally healthy.

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UNPLUG TO RECHARGE: HOW MINDFULNESS IS INTEGRAL TO SELF-CARE

How mindfulness relates to law librarianship: its scientific benefits, the different types of practice, how to get started, and how to deal with roadblocks.

BY HEATHER J. E. SIMMONS

"Each day’s mindfulness practice on the cushion helps us to know ourselves better, but also positions us in the world to successfully share space with a community of others when we are off the cushion. Mindfulness alters our perception of how we relate to our world by making us better listeners, more open to new ideas, put ourselves in the shoes of others, understand others’ points of view without reacting to them, thus a law librarian who practices mindfulness regularly can emerge as a disciplined leader with the ability to inspire change in others. In a world of shrinking budgets, staff reductions, and stress, mindfulness helps to guide us on our way through the occasional chaos that is the twenty-first century law library.”

—Kyle K. Courtney

Librarian and Co-Founder of Harvard Law School Mindfulness Society
MINDFULNESS AND LAW LIBRARIES
Modern life and law librarianship has become insanely hectic. We are constantly scrambling to keep up and do more with less. The many forms of social media and smartphones apps have only made things worse.

Humans have evolved the flight-or-fight response to deal with stressful situations, such as when coming face-to-face with a saber-tooth tiger. It is hard-wired into the biology of our brains. But for the most part, neither flight nor flight are viable options for people who work in the modern law library. As much as we would love to run screaming from the reference desk, or punch that obnoxious vendor, neither option is an appropriate response for a law librarian.

Whether it’s a litigation partner calling from the courthouse on a 10-minute recess, a professor whose article deadline is due tomorrow, or a question from an especially challenging self-represented litigant patron, it is our job to help patrons find the legal information they need. That is the problem, isn’t it? Our patron’s emergency becomes our crisis—we usually don’t have a choice. Due to such varied and urgent demands on our time, we are often unable to adhere to a plan or to complete our daily tasks. As a result, we experience stress due to a lack of control.

So what are our options? The answer is mindfulness. Simply breathe. That’s all there is to it. Practicing mindfulness is like drinking a cup of tea: it is both calming and energizing at the same time.

FINDING FOCUS
The American Association of Law Libraries Mindfulness in Law Librarianship Caucus was founded in 2013 by Alexandra Lee Delgado, reference librarian and professor of practice at the University of Arizona College of Law. She brought together a group of law librarians at the AALL Annual Meeting to discuss how we could implement mindfulness in our lives and at work. Since that time, she has created a caucus website filled with useful information about mindfulness, resources, and events. In 2016, the caucus sponsored a program at the AALL Annual Meeting in Chicago called “Mindful Meditation: Reduce Stress and Improve Your Work, Workplace, and World.” This program featured law librarians, an attorney, and a Buddhist monk who led a guided practice. The caucus also maintains a social media feed on Twitter.

Having attended a few mindfulness conferences for legal professionals and educators, I saw how participants valued finding community and exchanging ideas. I wanted to facilitate that sense of community in AALL. I think that is reflected in the mission and vision statement that was crafted by the community of AALL members at the start of the caucus. The caucus was formed “to support the efforts of law librarians, academics, and practitioners in the research, teaching, scholarship, and practice of mindfulness in law. Its purpose is to recognize and further the ongoing work of AALL members that improves the quality of life of all individuals in the legal profession.”

WORKING WITH THE PUBLIC
Some years ago, I attended a seminar focused on dealing with difficult patrons. The techniques I learned there have served me well ever since. Some of those techniques include:

1. Listen to what others have to say without trying to interrupt them.
2. Actively listen. Repeat back to your patrons what they just told you (i.e., try repeating back, “If I understand you correctly, you are concerned about ….”). This will solve many problems, as your patrons will be happy that someone actually listened to what they had to say, regardless of if you are able to help them or not. This represents what mindfulness is all about: being fully present in the moment shows the patron that they have your full attention.
3. Express empathy (remember, empathy is not sympathy). Rather than apologizing, say “I understand how frustrating it is when ….”
4. Calmly state the library’s policy, and explain what you can do to help them. If it’s a rule that cannot be bent or broken, just repeat the policy.

1 Alexandra Lee Delgado, email message to author, July 28, 2017.
An important thing to note, aside from listening, is that no matter what the other person says or does, remain calm and relaxed.

**WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?**
The father of modern mindfulness in the United States is Jon Kabat-Zinn, who developed Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which led to Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). He defines mindfulness as “the awareness that arises through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

Mindfulness is the complete opposite of the law school experience—there is no judgment. Instead, we work toward cultivating an open curiosity about the feelings, emotions, thoughts, and sensations that we are experiencing in the present moment. Merely observe, without being caught up in the whirlwind of our thoughts.

“When was the last time you did nothing?” is the question Andy Puddicombe asks at the beginning of his TED Talks program, “All It Takes Is 10 Mindful Minutes.” The modern world is highly distracting; we never seem to have time to just stop and smell the roses. In fact, a study found that many people would rather inflict pain on themselves than do nothing, finding that “[t]he untutored mind does not like to be alone with itself.”

**WHY MINDFULNESS?**
We all do it—constantly checking email and social media can be a hard habit to break. But this activity can reinforce negativity. It’s important to turn it all off and unplug for a few minutes.

The pace of modern life is so hectic that we are all tempted to multitask. Any teenager will tell you that they are perfectly capable of doing homework, watching TV, and texting their friends—all at the same time. The truth is that multitasking is a myth. What we do instead is serial uni-tasking. As you force your brain to continually shift from one activity to another, you have a harder and harder time focusing on any single task. As a result, we often run on autopilot, not giving our full attention to anything we do. Every law librarian needs dedicated stretches of time for deep thinking—this is where creativity and innovation come from. But how can we unplug long enough to accomplish anything? One solution to this problem is mindfulness.

From a strictly work-related perspective, law librarians should consider a mindfulness practice because of the increased clarity and productivity it provides. You will do more in less time by focusing exclusively on the task at hand, and the mental space created by sitting still for a few minutes will positively impact your creativity and problem-solving abilities. This benefits your work performance as well as your legal organization. However, mindfulness benefits do not stop with your career. Mindfulness affects you personally as well by fostering less stress, increased peace of mind, and even more fulfilling relationships (as those around you feel heard and appreciated). It is an all-around win!”

Mindfulness is something you can do anywhere, at any time, in **three minutes or less**. Regular practice provides the most benefit, but short sessions can be a great way to handle stress and conflict in the moment.

Before we look at the benefits of mindfulness, and the specifics of starting a regular mindfulness practice, let’s get some background vocabulary out of the way.

**MINDFULNESS VERSUS MEDITATION**
The word meditation is loaded with negative baggage. Many people have bad memories of the Transcendental Meditation movement of the 1970s, the Beatles’ unpleasant experience with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and people who ran away to join cults. Meditation also has religious overtones. It involves strange mantras and chanting. There are all kinds of intimidating accessories: bells, pillows, beads, incense, etc. While technically the formal practice of mindfulness is a form of meditation, we are going to call it mindfulness.

Mindfulness is a completely secular activity. It may trace some of its earliest origins back to

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2 Wendy Maines, email message to author, June 30, 2017.
Buddhism, but today anyone can benefit from it. Mindfulness does not require any belief in any particular religion or deity.

My first mindfulness teacher never said the word relax. At the end of a mindfulness practice, you almost can’t help feeling relaxed, but it is an end rather than a means. If you consciously try to relax, it is like trying to fall asleep: the harder you try, the less it works. As you follow a mindfulness practice, noticing the sensation of the weight of your body where it touches the chair or mat, you will naturally relax without ever having to think about it. If instead you feel restless and distracted during your mindfulness practice, this is just fine. It does not mean that you did anything wrong; your experience is your experience.

THE SCIENCE OF MINDFULNESS

People have believed that mindfulness is beneficial to brain health for millennia, but science has now developed to the point that we can prove it. MRI scans show that regular mindfulness practice can shrink the amygdala, the primitive part of the brain where the fight-or-flight response happens. At the same time, the pre-frontal cortex grows; this area is where higher-order brain functions occur. In addition, there is evidence that mindfulness can be a factor in reducing heart disease, inflammation, and pain. In addition, Jon Kabat-Zinn has found that mindfulness practice improves the immune function.

There is even science supporting mindfulness in the practice of law, showing that it can reduce age and race bias, and improve workplace effectiveness.

GETTING STARTED WITH MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is very simple, just sit still and focus on your breath. The breath is always there—if you aren’t breathing, then you are unconscious. It’s an automatic activity; one that is going to happen anyway. Breathing is a constant thing, always there in the background even when you aren’t aware of it. It is not necessary to breathe slower or deeper. There is no need to try to change your breath, just observe it the way it is.

Some people think that mindfulness is the ability to sit still and have no thoughts. Nothing could be further from the truth. Mindfulness is about stepping back and observing. The brain’s job is to think; you cannot stop thoughts from happening. The key to mindfulness is the ability to recognize when the thoughts have strayed, and gently escort your focus back to the breath. In 2016, I attended a retreat led by Sharon Salzberg where she said that noticing when the mind has wandered is when the magic happens, because you can always begin again. Sharon’s co-author, Joseph Goldstein, describes it this way: “It’s not that we shouldn’t have thoughts, but rather that we train not to get lost in them.” Or, as Jon Kabat-Zinn puts it, “You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.”

Another way to practice mindfulness is to seek out a quiet space, such as a reading nook, in order to breathe and be still. In the same way, you can have a mindfulness spot in your house. Create a place exclusively dedicated to mindfulness practice, where you can sit or lie down, where it is quiet and uncluttered. Ideally, this should be a place where you won’t be interrupted. I live with a family of pack rats, so my house is full of clutter. My goal is to create a space where I can retreat to do my practice and not be distracted and frustrated by all the stuff. What about creating a space in your law library where you can practice mindfulness? Law libraries value quiet space, so we are already halfway there.

TYPES OF MINDFULNESS

There are several different types of mindfulness practices. Try them all and figure out which work best for you. Additionally, there are a number of apps and books on mindfulness that provide guided practices, talking you through the process. Types of mindfulness include the following:

- **MINDFUL SITTING** This is the simplest form of mindfulness and is where most people start. Simply sit and breathe. Some people like to sit on a pillow so that the hips are higher than the knees. Sit in a chair, with your feet flat on the ground, arms and legs uncrossed. Sit up straight, try not to slouch against the back of the chair. Close your eyes or soften your focus, and pay attention to your breathing. Follow the entire breathing
process. Feel the air as it passes through your nostrils, across your palate, down your throat, and into your lungs. Feel your abdomen rise with the breath. This is the in-breath. Now follow the breath as the lungs deflate and the abdomen falls, feel the breath travel up your throat, across your palate, and out your nostrils. This is the out-breath. Try to keep your mouth closed if possible. Some people like to count their breaths, choosing a number between four and 10. If you reach number 15, then your thoughts have strayed. Do not judge or criticize yourself for having thoughts, merely acknowledge them and return your focus to your breath.

**MINDFUL WALKING** Sitting is killing us; get up and go for a walk. I particularly like mindful walking as the movement helps me focus more easily than when I have to sit completely still. My issue is that when I try to walk slowly I tend to fall over, so I go a little faster than many mindful walkers do. The library stacks are a great place to practice mindful walking.

**MINDFUL EATING** When was the last time you slowed down enough to really taste your food? Do you eat dinner in front of the television? Rather than sitting in front of the TV, go in the kitchen and make something healthy and delicious. When it’s ready, sit down at the table and eat—just you and the food. Focus entirely on the experience of eating the food. Experience all the associated sensory functions—what does it look like? What does it smell like? How does it feel on your tongue? What does it taste like? When you eat more slowly, you feel full sooner and you eat less. There is a guided mindfulness practice on eating a raisin that takes nine minutes. It would be difficult to eat this way all the time, but try occasionally incorporating it into your routine.

**BODY SCAN** A body scan mindfulness practice focuses on checking in with each part of the body and noticing any sensations you find. Heat, cold, dampness, dryness, itching, tingling, pain, etc. When I’m practicing and I notice that my ear itches, rather than mindlessly reaching up to scratch it, I focus on experiencing the itchiness, and more often than not, it goes away. In Norah Baker’s 2016 study, “Using Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Mindfulness Techniques in the Management of Chronic Pain in Primary Care,” she states that “people who have chronic pain report that mindfulness can help them step outside their pain; by observing, they no longer feel trapped inside it.”

**ROADBLOCKS TO MINDFULNESS**

- **FALLING ASLEEP** If you fall asleep during your mindfulness practice, it does not mean that you are doing it wrong. It simply means that you needed sleep more than you needed mindfulness. Try a different time of day. First thing in the morning or late at night are convenient times to remember to do your practice, but it’s not a good idea to do it while lying in bed. Your bed is too comfortable and you are likely to go to sleep.

- **SITTING STILL** Some people just can’t sit still. If you are too restless to sit still, try a mindful walking practice. If you are sick or in pain, try a body scan mindfulness practice.

- **DISTRACTING THOUGHTS** When you find yourself continually overwhelmed by your thoughts, try a technique called labeling. What kinds of thoughts are you experiencing? Some possible labels are: planning, worrying, daydreaming, etc. Labeling your thoughts will help you step back and observe, and to return your focus to your breath.

**DEALING WITH STRESS**

How you perceive stress determines whether it is harmful to you—it’s not how much stress you have in your life, it’s how you perceive it. It is believing that stress is bad for you that makes it harmful to your health, not the stress itself. Nothing focuses your attention like stress. Actors and litigators use stage fright to perform better—they find it energizing. Other ideas for dealing with stress include:

- **Gratitude**. First thing every morning, start the day by thinking about three things for which you are grateful.

- **Be Present. Be Grateful.** These concepts are linked, “the more grateful you are the more present you become,” states psychologist Robert Holden.
Sandra Day O’Connor’s Secret to Happiness is “work worth doing.”

The single most helpful thing you can do is to go for a walk in nature. Literally, go out and smell the roses, listen to the birds, and look at the trees.

DEALING WITH YOUR INNER CRITIC
The inner critic—we all have one. It’s a feature of impostor syndrome. See if you can acknowledge it and move past it. Sharon Salzberg, who has studied and taught mindfulness since the 1970s, has found an interesting method to help: give your inner critic a name. She named hers Lucy, after the Peanuts character. When she is practicing mindfulness and hears that voice starting to say negative things, she says, “Hi Lucy.” By recognizing her inner voice and naming it, she takes away its power.

MINDFULNESS IN THE LAW
Many mediators practice mindfulness, alone or with other participants, right before they begin a mediation. It helps them stay calm and keep their perspective. A number of law schools have started mindfulness programs for their students.

MOVING FORWARD
The result of a regular mindfulness practice is focused attention. In every area of your life, you will become better at noticing when your mind is wandering and be able to bring your attention back to the task at hand. Mindfulness practice helps us become more empathic. It allows us to listen without judging. It helps us to be more open to new ideas. Through mindfulness we gain a new perspective on working with our patrons, our management, our co-workers, and ourselves. Just five minutes a day and a few simple instructions can make all the difference.

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In a profession with plenty of introverts, coping with work-induced stress can turn many law librarians inwards. Retreating to an insular state of mind and disconnecting from co-workers and managers are natural responses when someone is put under external pressures. In the article, “A Review and an Integration of Research on Job Burnout,” Cynthia L. Cordes and Thomas W. Dougherty explain that these insular responses are symptomized by some of the established characteristics of burnout: “emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment.” Instead of turning inward, setting boundaries with managers and asking for help can be effective strategies for preventing and mitigating certain causes of stress and burnout.

For more discussion of boundaries, see Catherine McGuire’s article on page 1.

SETTING BOUNDARIES
When there is a lack of established boundaries between employees, co-workers, and bosses, several problems can arise, which can contribute to stress and burnout. Both Eilene Zimmerman’s 2012 New York Times article, “When You’re the Worker Who Can’t Say No” and Jennifer Winter’s 2014 The Muse article “Reality Check: How to Handle Unrealistic Expectations From Your Boss” point out that these problems include uneven delegation, undesired shifts in job responsibilities, inability to meet deadlines, and difficulty reaching work product expectations. In a world

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Communication is key to setting boundaries to ensure that the work is focused and equitably delegated.

Most librarians are in touch with their reasons for entering the profession, and see that other librarians share such tendencies. We are not in it for the money, power, or fame: libraries are full of givers. In their 2017 *Harvard Business Review* article, “Beat Generosity Burnout,” Adam Grant and Reb Rebele state that while men are more likely takers, women are more likely givers. According to the American Library Association’s (ALA) “2017 ALA Demographic Survey” by Kathy Rosa and Kelsey Henke, 81 percent of librarians are female, which adds up to a profession full of givers. The American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) reported that their members have the option to report gender. In a May 2017 email, AALL reported that, similar to the ALA, of members that reported gender, 76 percent identified as female, 23 percent as male, and 1 percent did not identify as either. Applying the ALA survey to Grant and Reb’s idea of women as givers, it is easy to generalize librarians as selfless givers. The idea is that people fall within four categories on the generosity spectrum: takers, matchers, self-protective givers, and selfless givers. Takers lack respect for your time and can be very demanding; they should be avoided. Matchers, however, can be a good check on takers, since they view interactions as transactional, *quid pro quo*. Self-protective givers set boundaries and know their limits, but find ways to make a big impact when they give. On the other hand, selfless givers lack the self-awareness of the self-protective givers, and thus fail to guard their time, energy, and resources. Like the self-protective givers, selfless givers enjoy being generous, but their inability to set boundaries results in unsustainable demands upon their time. When word gets out about how generous they are, they are unable to curb the deluge of requests for their time. This is true for co-workers that demand a lot of time as well as patrons. Most reference librarians have had the experience of the clingy patron who tries to contact them directly rather than going through the normal reference intake process. This isn’t necessarily a bad thing, but reference intake procedures are there for a reason. It is tough not to be a victim of your own success with patrons, but news of a particular librarian’s excellent work can spread rapidly. Help the patrons, but keep the library strong by making sure that the work and accolades are spread as evenly and equitably as possible.

Do not let boundary problems languish. The more the boundaries are crossed, the more the boundaries move. Communication is key to setting boundaries to ensure that the work is focused and equitably delegated. This idea is stressed in Laura McMullen’s 2015 *U.S. News & World Report* article, “6 Tips for ‘Managing Up’ and What That Even Means.” Stu Chalmers’ post “5 ways to cope when your boss gives you too much work!” on the *What’s Dave Tomlinson Up to Now?* Blog, suggests that by failing to set boundaries with managers and co-workers, you’re setting yourself up for failure. There is only so much work that can be done in the allotted time that we have at work. As Dennis Nishi explains in his 2013 *Wall Street Journal* article, “Why It Pays for You to ‘Manage Up’,” and as Dana Roussanier explains in her 2015 *Harvard Business Review* article, “What Everyone Should Know About Managing Up,” whether the hefty workload is from poor management, slacking co-workers, shrinking resources, or other factors outside of your control, it is always in your best interest to have healthy work relationships. With everyone, there is a tipping point when deadlines and expectations can no longer be met. In his 2017 *Chron* article “The Best Ways to Tell Your Boss You Have Too Much Work,” Jordan Meyers discusses how learning to say no is an important part of setting boundaries, but he adds that to effectively deflect additional pressures on time, a more nuanced response than just “no” is required.

Simply saying ‘no’ or refusing to help or take on more work is sometimes unavoidable and it can be jarring and damaging to relationships. Declining requests at work and saying no in general can seem like something that would reflect negatively on the employee, but it is more important to look at the longer-term issues that may be at stake, according to Eilene
Zimmerman in her 2012 article “When You're the Worker Who Can’t Say No.” Many law librarians regularly receive unreasonable patron requests. Adept at handling these types of requests, law librarians are experienced in clearly setting patron expectations in a reassuring and constructive way. Reference librarians are versed in the art of tact and deflection. Eilene Zimmerman explains more generally that this experience can be directly transferred to saying 'no' to co-workers or managers who put unreasonable requests on your time and energy. Instead of a non-negotiable ‘no,’ offer explicit reasons why it might be detrimental to the organization to put other tasks aside, try to deflect the work onto co-workers, or negotiate to delegate parts of the request elsewhere.

MANAGING UP
The concept of ‘managing up’ can be useful both in setting boundaries and asking for help. In Whitney, Johnson’s 2014 Harvard Business Review article, “Managing Up Without Sucking Up,” managing up can be summed up as understanding the boss’s priorities and playing to them. A more focused and indispensable role in the organization can be a reward of managing up. This concept is not without its detractors, and the potential pitfalls of it are not without merit. In the 2012 Forbes article, “My Advice On Managing Up—Don’t,” Mike Myatt discusses these potential pitfalls. While managing up, acting outside of your role in the organization must be avoided. If not avoided, negative results can include resentment from co-workers, drift in job responsibilities, and being seen as trying to perform the manager’s job. These would all work against the employee trying to manage up.

Myatt construes the concept of managing up as “a great catch-phrase and an interesting concept” that, in practice, often manifests itself as “promotion of self-interest, brownnosing, manipulation, gymnastics of corporate climbing, and mind games.” While critical of managing up, even Myatt admits that engaging and collaborating and, when appropriate, challenging, advising, and objecting are essential aspects of doing a good job. In the context of setting and maintaining boundaries, the challenging, advising, and objecting parts are particularly important.

When each employee is hired, there are inherent boundaries that are set forth in job descriptions, training, and agreed-upon job goals. As much as possible, stay true to the job for which you were hired. Maintaining focus on those goals for which you were hired can be reasons for highlighting boundaries when the job starts to veer from the job description because of excessive or changing work demands. Whitney, Johnson’s 2014 article stresses understanding the manager’s role in the organization and that using your skills to keep them focused on their goals can help you stay focused on your job goals. Dennis Nishi adds that thinking about what managers need and how they need it can help you articulate boundaries and understand why they should be there.

Managing up doesn’t have to be a shadowy and manipulative endeavor to be helpful in setting boundaries. Whether or not it is called ‘managing up,’ simply focusing and fostering open communication can help set boundaries and reap the rewards of managing up. If you find yourself doing a job for which you did not apply, and the strategies for setting boundaries and asking for help are not helping to refocus your position, then it might be time to consider other job options.

For law librarians employed in libraries with a union, the presence of a union can sometimes help diffuse potentially tense scenarios when trying to set boundaries with managers. Some unions offer informal counseling on workplace issues and may be able to mediate meetings with managers when trying to set boundaries about the employee’s role in the organization. A more direct method than the more subtle concept of managing up, having a union representative beside a librarian in times of potential conflicts with a manager about the librarian’s role in the organization can be reassuring for the librarian, yet intimidating for the manager. This intimidation may stem from the manager seeing the union representatives presence as a show of force, as well as an implied threat of further action by the librarian if he or she is not appeased. Some of the methods and communication skills outlined below can be helpful in alleviating any perceived threat in order to maintain a positive relationship with the manager. It is important to be clear with the manager that an attempt to have an informal, union-mediated meeting to discuss boundaries is in good faith and that it is offered as an alternative to formal union procedures.

When involving the union to set boundaries with managers, it is vital to ensure that throughout the process, the manager is not feeling as if they are in a defensive position. Being able
to foster an environment where the employee and manager are working toward a common goal is paramount. Interest-based bargaining is a negotiation strategy that can lend some clues as to how to foster an environment of working toward a common goal. Instead of coming to the table with demands in the inherently adversarial structure of traditional collective bargaining agreement negotiations, interest-based bargaining requires everyone to come to the table with problems and a willingness to tackle those problems collaboratively. Solving problems this way, as equals, can generate feelings of teamwork, progress, and general positivity. To successfully use this strategy, it is important to constantly take into account the best interests of the organization as a whole. Librarians can use this strategy, focusing on common interests to refine their role in the organization. Even if an employee does not emerge from such a meeting with exactly what they hoped for, if the employee feels confident that both sides are working toward greater goals and is able to gain some concessions, there will likely be positive feelings from all those involved. Interest-based bargaining requires complete buy-in from everyone involved, so in the event that a manager is unwilling to work with the employee and union, the union will likely be available for more formal actions such as grievances. Grievances are generally a last resort option, and will likely cause long-term damage to the relationship between the employee and manager.

ASKING FOR HELP
Helping others is a core value of librarianship. Spending a career helping others by giving time, energy, and our specialized knowledge and skills can be draining. Whether asked by library patrons, colleagues, or family members, librarians give an exceptional amount of time directly to others. Setting boundaries is discussed above, but another issue is that sometimes librarians do not ask for enough help, nor are they willing to accept it. In order to balance the giving that is a fundamental part of the job, it is important for librarians to also ask others for help. Asking for help can also foster a healthy relationship, and can be beneficial to the person receiving a request. When asking others for help, there is an unspoken acknowledgment of respect. Nearly every co-worker or manager is an expert or particularly knowledgeable about some aspect of the organization. Being asked for help recognizes and affirms the relationship between you and the co-worker or manager and highlights their importance to the organization. At the same time, ensure that boundaries are not being crossed and that the request considers the other person’s workload. In addition, it is important to make clear that it is a request and not a demand. A January 2014 article from meQuilibrium titled, “Give help and be willing to accept it,” explains that asking others for help may sometimes be necessary, but it also empowers them because they now have an influence on something outside of their own tasks or projects. The American Psychological Association’s webpage “Manage stress: Strengthen your support network,” points out that asking for help also opens communication channels and helps build camaraderie.

In the event of a change requiring redistribution of responsibilities or the addition of more work on one employee, asking for help may be the best way to deal with the stress of additional work. However, asking for help can be perilous. It is easy to accidentally step on someone’s toes by crossing boundaries, to sound as if you are only concerned with your own work and not the larger organizational goals, and to appear as if you are shirking your duties. Keeping the issues in perspective and establishing channels of communication can ensure effective help.

Inspired by the words of rapper and actor O’Shea “Ice Cube” Jackson Sr., on his 1993 album The Predator, it is often best to check yourself before you wreck yourself when thinking about asking for help. Failing to maintain perspective on why help is needed can end in a wreck. This can mean appearing as if you are complaining, unable to handle adversity, or asking for special treatment. Below is a list of four common pitfalls to avoid when asking for help:

- **Crying Wolf** Regularly complaining to your boss in a way that always paints you as the victim is not professional. There are times when people need to vent about situations in the workplace, but complaining to the boss is not necessarily the appropriate avenue. It can appear selfish by putting yourself at the center of problems.

- **Handling Adversity** Victimizing yourself and complaining regularly can also have the same effect as crying wolf. By appearing as
if you cannot handle problems without complaining also shows that you do not necessarily have the tools to deal with adversity. When a manager tries to understand why an employee regularly complains, they might think that the employee is unable to communicate, solve problems, adapt or focus. These negative characteristics can erode the trust in the relationship between the employee and manager and can be ominous for the operation of the organization at difficult times.

- **SPECIAL TREATMENT** In her 2011 article published in *The New York Times*, “It’s Not Mount Everest. It’s My Workload,” Eilene Zimmerman cautions that appearing as if you are asking for special treatment is a way to wreck yourself that requires little explanation. Asking for special treatment puts the employee’s needs ahead of the organization’s goals, and therefore reflects negatively on the employee. Finally, Cynthia Meason warns in her *Chron* article, “How to Ask Coworkers to Share Work Responsibilities,” that asking directly for help from co-workers can be seen as going around the organization structure. One of a manager’s jobs includes delegation of work, so it may be necessary to go through them.

- **MAINTAINING PERSPECTIVE** Checking yourself means having a coherent and well-articulated reason to ask for help, having a thought-out plan about who can help and how, and most importantly, reviewing the situation through the lens of your manager or whoever is being asked. Keep the reasons for asking for help in perspective. In their respective articles, Jennifer Winter and Eilene Zimmerman discuss the need for a reason for help higher than just your own desire to free up some time. It is imperative to relate the problems and ideas for a solution to the manager’s/organization’s goals. When asking for help, be clear about what work will not get done when you are given new responsibilities, and make sure you are clear about what should be prioritized. These methods of checking yourself can help get you out of your comfort zone and help prevent or mitigate the difficulties and potential negative aspects of asking a manager for help.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

Keeping open communication channels is an important element of setting boundaries and asking for help. More specifically, when asking for help, there needs to be a clear plan with reasonable expectations. Dissecting job responsibilities and how much time each task takes is an important first step. Evaluating those tasks and prioritizing them can also be helpful when asking managers for help. A close evaluation may also uncover ways to streamline work. This may end up being all the help that is needed. Dissecting tasks and evaluating the time commitment for each one allows for a simple way to show which tasks will get less time when new ones are added. In her article, Zimmerman suggests that relaying this information clearly and concisely establishes the foundation upon which you can request help. This type of introspection and discussion can also help identify training needs or a need for new tools.

It is not easy to set boundaries and ask for help, especially for employees that have been surviving in an environment for an extended period of time. A little dose of what Kim Scott calls ‘radical candor’ can help. According to Scott, as stated when she appeared on Tom Ashbrook’s March 20, 2017 *On Point* episode, “How To Be A Better Boss,” ‘radical candor’ means “caring personally at the same time that you’re willing to challenge directly.” The underlying ideas set forth in this white paper are not fundamentally radical, but asking for help and setting boundaries are challenges to the manager, to the organizational structure, and possibly to co-workers. Relating personal care is vital to justifying the challenge and garnering empathy. If done effectively, setting boundaries and asking for help are useful ways to stem the tide of mounting workloads and other demands that contribute to burnout.

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FEEL BETTER, BE BETTER: SOCIAL WELLNESS & CARING FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

How positive relationships and getting involved in the community can decrease stress and improve overall health.

BY JESSICA ALMEIDA

For law librarians, hours of being on our feet or in front of a computer, dealing with a variety of interruptions, can drain our batteries and leave us feeling burnt out. One way to find balance with these day-to-day stressors is through the act of self-care. Usually self-care is envisioned as time away from others, embarking on quiet contemplation and activities that a person enjoys. When thinking about self-care, one gravitates toward the notion of a relaxing day at the spa or a quiet hike through the woods. Though this type of self-care can be a great way to decrease stress levels and focus on an individual’s self-worth, too much can be isolating and lonely. When this happens, consider ways to incorporate community into your self-care routine by developing positive relationships and being active in your community. By connecting with others and giving back, you can also decrease stress and improve overall health.

One path to self-care through community is called social wellness. Social wellness is participating in positive relationships with people you care about and trust. These strong, healthy, and supportive relationships can have lasting benefits on your mood, health, and happiness. Through these relationships, we find support and guidance, which help to reduce stress, solve problems more efficiently, and generally leave us with a more positive outlook.

Being involved and giving back is another expression of self-care through community. By using our time and abilities for the good of others, we increase feelings of self-worth and can develop a different perspective on life. These small acts, from having lunch with a friend to volunteering at a soup kitchen, can
make an immense difference in your overall health and wellness.

**SOCIAL WELLNESS**

Social wellness is the developing and nurturing of positive relationships with the people around you. Having a strong support system can help librarians deal with the day-to-day frustrations that they encounter. The American Psychological Association (APA) believes that having strong social support networks can actually improve your self-esteem, help you become more independent, and allow you to cope with difficult situations. Researchers have determined that people in satisfying relationships are the happiest and healthiest. Developing and nurturing these relationships can take time and effort. However, the benefits you receive to your overall well-being outweigh the time and effort one must make. When thinking about these types of social relationships, it’s easy to think of family and friends. But in a small community such as law librarianship, try focusing on meeting librarians who are from the same area or have the same interests. Other law librarians understand the demands and stressors of our profession, so make sure to take the opportunity to develop relationships within the law librarian community.

**HOW DO WE FOSTER POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS?**

1. **DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE YOU TRUST AND ADMIRE.** The road to social wellness does not include toxic friends and rude family members. In a 2006 study from the *Journal of Happiness Studies* titled “Happy People Become Happier Through Kindness: A Counting Kindnesses Intervention,” researchers concluded that happy people have positive experiences with family and friends that included an act of kindness. Spend time with people you enjoy and who enjoy you. Be kind to your loved ones and you will receive kindness in return. How can you professionally develop positive relationships? Try networking with librarians that are involved in local or national library organizations. Consider joining the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) Mentor Program, either as a mentor or mentee, to meet and be inspired by other law librarians. For the mentor, these opportunities can help you hone your coaching skills or gain insight to your management style. As a mentee, you can seek guidance and advice on career goals and professional development opportunities. You can also explore other mentoring opportunities through local bars, chapters, and other associations.

2. **WORK ON YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS.** The Department of Health and Human Services outlines how to develop good communication skills, which will lead to less misunderstandings, help you become better at dealing with conflict, and help you develop an increased level of trust in your relationships. You can achieve this by being a more active listener, speaking in a clear, effective manner, and creating an environment conducive to good communication. A good way to practice your communication skills is through attendance, networking, and presenting at conferences or professional meetings.

3. **REACH OUT AND MAKE PLANS OFTEN.** Life is busy and stressful, so sometimes it is hard to take time to make plans. However, making the effort makes all the difference. Take a weekly class with a friend. Have a date night once a month with your significant other. Meet up with other local librarians once a semester for coffee. Spend time making happy memories with people.

4. **ALLOW OTHERS TO CARE FOR YOU.** Sometimes the hardest part is communicating your needs to others and asking for help. Take people up on their offer to assist you. Let your mom babysit the kids so you can have a night out with your significant other. Let your friend bring you chicken soup when you are ill. If you are overwhelmed with a project, ask a co-worker or fellow committee member for help. You will both feel the benefits.

**The American Psychological Association (APA) believes that having strong social support networks can actually improve your self-esteem, help you become more independent, and allow you to cope with difficult situations.”**
5. **PROMOTE WELLNESS WITHIN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.** When meeting up with a friend, why not do something active or something that makes you feel healthy? Go for a walk. Try a new smoothie place. Nowadays, there are all sorts of adventurous activities you and your cohorts can try, such as trampoline parks, zip-lining, and completing a Tough Mudder. Not that adventurous? Take a walk through the local zoo or have a picnic in the park. If attending the AALL Annual Meeting, talk a colleague into joining you for yoga before the breakfast meetings start.

6. **MAKE MORE FRIENDS.** Many studies have concluded that friendships have more health benefits than relationships with family or even a spouse. Researchers have also observed that it is more difficult to make friends after you turn 30, but that does not mean you stop trying. Continue to meet people through your community, workshops, and conferences. Just work on being social, and remember not everyone is looking for a new best friend, so casual friends and acquaintances are a great start.

7. **CONSIDER OWNING A PET.** Pets can improve your mental health by loving you unconditionally, helping reduce stress, and making you more active. Petting is known to be soothing, and you will always have someone to talk to. Dogs especially are great motivators for spending more time outside getting exercise. For more information on adopting a pet in your area, go to the ASPCA website or contact your local animal shelter. Already have a dog? Consider training them as a therapy dog and bringing them into work occasionally. Allow everyone in your library to enjoy the benefits of man’s best friend.

**GETTING INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

One of the best ways to meet new people and de-stress is to get involved in your local community. But how can I get involved? Following are some ways to get active in your community.

1. **FIND A LOCAL CLUB YOU ARE INTERESTED IN.** If you like to knit, then find a knitting circle. If you like to dance, take ballroom dancing lessons. You can use the internet to find classes at local community centers or colleges. Look at bulletin boards at your local library or town hall. Try your local recreation committee; they sometimes have inexpensive fitness classes, movie nights, and seasonal festivals.

2. **TAP INTO YOUR SPIRITUALITY.** The sixth element of the American Library Association-Allied Professional Association Wellness Committee’s “8 Elements of Wellness” is spirituality. The committee encourages library workers to find a purpose, focus on good decision-making, and find time to relax. If spirituality is something you are interested in, find a new place of worship or go back to your old one. If church is already part of your weekly life, try joining a religious group or committee. But spirituality does not only include organized religion, it can also represent activities such as yoga and meditation. Find an aspect of spirituality that speaks to your interests, beliefs, and values. Even at conferences such as the AALL Annual Meeting, you can find opportunities to center yourself through yoga classes and workshops on mindfulness. See Heather Simmons article on page 17 for more information.

3. **GET ACTIVE.** In a 2001 study titled “Does Exercising with Another Enhance the Stress-Reducing Benefits of Exercise,” researchers determined that exercising with others reduces stress and increases calmness in participants. To benefit from this, start a walking club with co-workers. Have a gym in the area? Meet a local friend for lunchtime class at Zumba, yoga, or self-defense.

4. **CAN’T FIND WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR?** Create your own. Start a knitting circle, coloring club, or book club at your local library. Invite your Facebook friends to meet up for a run or a hike at your local park. At the most recent AALL Annual Meeting, a group created an unofficial 5K for librarians who wanted to walk or run around Austin.

**GIVING BACK TO YOUR COMMUNITY**

In “Tips for Preventing and Coping with Stress and Anxiety,” the APA reports that being social and giving back to your community can reduce
stress and increase your self-esteem. Here are ways you can contribute to your self-care while helping your community.

1. **Volunteer in Your Local Community.**
   Volunteering can have a wonderful effect on your overall health, leading to a more positive outlook and focused purpose. Research the volunteer opportunities in your community. Find something that interests you or enhances your abilities. You could teach a class on legal research at the local public library. Too close to your day-to-day activities? Then volunteer at a soup kitchen, local food pantry, or animal shelter. Find more volunteer opportunities on the Corporation for National & Community Service website.

2. **Participate in Chapter Service Committees.**
   Some local chapters of AALL have community service committees, which organize drives or help members find volunteer opportunities. This is a great way to give back to your community and network with local law librarians. The Law Librarians of New England have a very robust service program. Their service committee has provided stuffed animals to first responders as part of Project Smile, collected books for the Rhode Island Department of Corrections, and compiled professional wear for SolutionsWear.

3. **Become an Activist.**
   With the current political climate, many librarians have been pursuing activism in their spare time. Whether it is starting a letter or email campaign to local members of Congress to continue library funding, or marching for women’s rights, librarians are being empowered to make their voices heard.

4. **Organize a Drive.**
   If you do not have a service committee in your local chapter, then consider organizing a drive that benefits your community. As librarians, you know your community best and how to get your patrons and co-workers to donate. Pick a local organization to collaborate with, choose a donation drop-off site, advertise the need to your patrons and co-workers, and collect the items needed. You will be doing something great for your community and making everyone feel good in the process.

**Being Happier and Healthier**

Librarianship can be a stressful profession. With the constant interruptions and continuous and ever-escalating demands for our attention and energy, librarians need to take time to unwind and recharge. For many librarians, solitude is a great way to relax and rejuvenate ourselves after a hectic workweek. However, too much alone time can leave us feeling lonely and detached from others. Instead, try focusing on the social wellness aspects of your life to increase your overall health and happiness. Reconnect with old friends, make new friends, or adopt a pet. Focus on making happy memories with the people or animals you love. Being active in your community can also help reduce stress and increase your well-being. Join a club, exercise with friends and co-workers, or try a yoga class. Also, consider giving back to your community, which is another great way to increase your self-worth and bring forth a positive outlook. Find a volunteer opportunity in your area that brings you happiness, march for a cause, or organize a drive for a community organization in need. Focusing on our families, friends, and community can benefit us in ways traditional self-care cannot. Give one of these ideas a try and see how you feel after a month. You may just find yourself a little happier and healthier.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CONTINUING EDUCATION IN PREVENTING BURNOUT

How various factors lead to burnout, and how professional development and education can help prevent or minimize their effects.

BY KRISTEN R. MOORE

According to Christina Maslach’s 2003 book *Burnout: The Cost of Caring*, job burnout can result from an “incongruence, or misfit, between the worker and the job.”¹ Kevin Harwell’s 2013 article “Burnout and Job Engagement Among Business Librarians,” notes several characteristics that contribute to burnout including, “high workload; time pressure; conflicting demands on the job; lack of adequate information to do the job well; lack of social support, especially from supervisors; and lack of feedback.” According to Nancy McCormack and Catherine Cotter’s 2013 guide, *Managing Burnout in the Workplace*, workload, underwork, type of work, physical environment, conflict, role conflict and ambiguity, control, social support, reciprocity, social comparison, and leadership style can all add to burnout as well. Continuing education and professional development are both important tools to have in a library staff’s arsenal to combat burnout and address a number of the contributing factors.

When people think of continuing education they often think of formal degree programs or classes, webinars, seminars, and conference sessions. But, it can also include informal learning, such as sessions, consultations, coaching, and mentoring. Continuing education is part of a person’s professional development, but it can include a little more. Professional development is the growth and advancement of an employee in the field and can include activities such as becoming involved in professional organizations, and leadership style can all add to burnout as well. Continuing education and professional development are both important tools to have in a library staff’s arsenal to combat burnout and address a number of the contributing factors.

¹ Christina Maslach, *Burnout: The Cost of Caring* (Malor Books; April 24, 2011; 3).
conference presentations, and adding to the scholarly literature in the field. The following is a discussion of the various factors that lead to burnout, and how professional development and education can help prevent or minimize their effects.

**WORKLOAD AND TIME PRESSURE**

Workload is a common contributing factor of burnout. When workload is excessive, one can become overwhelmed, ultimately leading to burnout. Workload can become excessive if one “lack[s] the basic skills, sufficient time, emotional authenticity, or other resources to complete assigned tasks efficiently.”\(^2\) Continuing education can also help an employee’s workload become more manageable by giving them the skills they need to perform their job. It can also provide ideas on how to perform a job better. Learning to do a job well leads to greater efficiency and feelings of a lighter workload. While it will not reduce the workload, it can make the work itself more bearable.

Time pressure can also play a role in workload and burnout. While learning to perform a job efficiently is important, it is also important to manage one’s time. There are numerous books, articles, webinars, seminars, and conference presentations that teach time management. For example, AALL has a webinar on “Managing Your Time, Projects, People, Ideas and E-mail Using MS Outlook.” And, Chris Bailey’s book, *The Productivity Project: Accomplishing More by Managing Your Time, Attention, and Energy*, is a fairly simple introduction to becoming more productive to get you started. Talk to your colleagues for other recommendations. Take some time to invest in learning these skills. A little bit of time now could save a lot of time down the road and reduce stress tremendously. Supervisors and colleagues may also have tips. This is where professional development comes in handy. By working with other library employees across institutions and meeting others at conferences, networking events, round tables, etc., the pool from which to receive advice is greatly expanded. You will meet people who perform the same job duties or who have similar expectations and goals, and those in higher positions who have a vast amount of experience in navigating the field of law librarianship. These people will be full of potential ideas on how to manage job responsibilities or the task at hand.

**LACK OF ADEQUATE INFORMATION**

Even if one is not overwhelmed by workload, he or she may be stressed by insufficient knowledge to perform a job. Librarianship is a helping profession, and if a librarian or staff member feels they cannot adequately help a patron or do their job, it can lead to stress and burnout. Educating oneself is the best thing to do in such instances.

Continuing education in this situation could take many forms. It could involve coaching from a supervisor or trusted colleague. It may involve a consultation or mentoring relationship with someone at another institution who performs the same job. One could also consider shadowing another library employee. It may involve classes or webinars to learn the necessary skills. Or, it may be taking time to read up on the latest technology advancement in an area. Whatever it is, continuing education is important for addressing this concern.

Professional development also plays a vital role, even if indirectly. Becoming involved in professional organizations and attending conferences provide library staff with a means of connecting with other like-minded members in their field. These relationships are important in creating opportunities for mentoring, and serve as resources to reach out to when information is needed on how to perform a job or handle a new task or situation.

**UNDERWORK**

While many understand that excessive workload can lead to burnout, few understand that being underworked can add a great deal of stress to a job as well. Underworked can include “not being challenged enough on the job, or not having enough work to do, a lack of interest in the tasks that need to be done, or trying to

Continuing education can address a number of these factors.

First, if one finds himself/herself not being challenged, one should look for ways to improve qualifications for more challenging work through advanced degrees or certificates. Simply challenging oneself with coursework could be enough to energize and regain interest in the job. One could also challenge themselves through committee work or scholarly writing. Learning new skills through education can provide an employee with opportunities to take on new, more interesting tasks as well. Professional development through committee work and writing can also be a way of filling time gaps when work is slow.

**CONTROL**
Having control in one’s job is important to one’s mental well-being. Employees who feel they lack autonomy in their jobs are at a greater risk for burnout than those who feel they have control over decisions in their job. When a job offers little autonomy, it is hard to believe one can change the situation. However, professional development may be able to assist in gaining some control in the job. McCormack and Cotter suggest that external validation may be one method for achieving some workplace autonomy. Receiving recognition through professional organizations, scholarship, and presentations can shift the balance “as managers are often unable to ignore the opinions of their peers in other institutions.”

Becoming involved in professional development activities allows you to take some control over your job and career. You may not be able to control all aspects of the job, or how a supervisor treats you, but you can control your professional development, the committees and organizations you become involved with, and the scholarship you pursue. By having some aspect of control in your job, you can reduce the risk of burnout.

**SOCIAL SUPPORT**
Lack of social support in one’s job can also lead to burnout. Again, connections made through professional development activities can help alleviate this problem by building a network of colleagues one can reach out to. If your immediate workplace is not supportive, you can at least have a support group of peers to contact when you need to be built up, have a problem you need help with, or just need someone to vent to. In addition, supervisors can show support by investing in an employee’s professional development. This can be done by encouraging continuing education, supporting attendance at conferences, and allowing time for writing and research. By doing so, a supervisor is communicating that the employee is worth investing in and that he or she is there to help them meet their goals and achieve success in their career.

In addition, by being with others who share enthusiasm for the job, you can bolster your own morale. After attending a conference or meeting, you will come back to the office rejuvenated with new ideas and excitement for upcoming plans and activities. That fervor may spread within the home institution. But even if it doesn’t, you will still have found some new ideas to try to implement to enrich your own work life, and you will have developed a support network to reach out to when that enthusiasm wanes.

**JOB ENGAGEMENT**
The opposite of job burnout is job engagement. Engaged employees are viewed as energetic, involved, and efficient, rather than exhausted, cynical, and ineffectual, like their burnt-out counterparts. Professional development can help with increasing job engagement, thereby deterring job burnout. Collaboration is one method of combating stress and becoming engaged in one’s work. Working on projects with other library staff formally or informally through professional organizations, collaborating on articles, or developing workshops and presentations, can lead to intellectual stimulation, while reducing feelings of isolation. As previously noted, being bored in one’s work can lead to burnout. But, intellectual stimulation and challenge can increase engagement.

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3 Catherine Cotter and Nancy McCormick, *Managing Burnout in the Workplace* (Chandos Publishing; October 31, 2013; 29).

4 Ibid., 43.

5 Ibid., Harwell, 2013, 3-5.

PARTING THOUGHTS
With so many demands and time constraints in the library work environment, it may seem counterintuitive that taking time for continuing education and professional development could reduce the risk of burnout. When feeling overwhelmed and tired, the last thing one thinks of is adding more to their plate. However, both continuing education and professional development are very important to the well-being of an employee as these measures counteract many of the factors that can lead to burnout.

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Working is stressful. Working with lawyers with demanding practices, law students worried about grades and job prospects, and public patrons facing confusing terminology and situations compounds that stress in the professional lives of law librarians, making us prime candidates for job related burnout.

Anyone can be overwhelmed by looming deadlines, seemingly endless tasks, and the constant needs of co-workers and patrons, but for some, this stress puts a strain on mental and physical health. Nearly everyone who has ever held a job understands having a rough day or maybe even a rough week, but what if it’s more than that? What happens when that week turns into a month or more, or when just getting out of bed and going to work every day requires effort and determination? When work gets to be too much it’s time to take a hard look at your job and career to figure out if changing your work can really change your life.

The internet is rife with suggestions for how to know when it’s time to let go of a job or career and find another one. Many are in the form of lists for what to look for if burnout may be an issue. Some helpful articles on the topic include: “14 Signs It’s Time To Leave Your Job,” by Jacquelyn Smith; “10 Important Signs You’re On The Wrong Career Path,” by Maya Kachroo-Levine and Tania MacDonald; “7 Signs You Should Quit Your Job Because Sometimes It’s Better to Walk Away,” by Phoebe Waller; and “6 Signs It’s Time for a Career Change,” by Alison Doyle. Articles that can quickly answer questions on how to change direction if you find yourself in this situation include: “The Quickest Way to Tell If You
Need a New Job Or Career,” by Kathy Caprino; “What to Do If You Feel Stuck in the Wrong Career,” by Dana Rousmaniere; and “The Fastest Way to Turn Around Career Burnout,” by Stephanie Vozza.

The phenomenon of burnout has also been studied extensively and is written about regularly in psychology and mental health literature. Studies have looked at the issues of job fit, secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and motivation among professionals. While there are some studies specifically focused on librarians, most of the literature looks at burnout and stress in other helping professions: namely teaching, medicine, mental health counseling, and social work.¹

DEFINING BURNOUT

Patricia Potter, RN, PhD, defines burnout as “an impairment of motivation to work, resulting in a growing inability to mobilize interest and abilities.” Potter goes on to describe the symptoms, which include chronic negative emotions, problems with personal interactions, physical symptoms such as fatigue and general malaise, impaired job performance, substance abuse, and increasing cynicism. Christina Maslach, Michael P. Leiter, and Susan E. Jackson introduced the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) in 1980 as an assessment scale for burnout syndrome. It consists of three subscales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The authors note that the syndrome is found frequently among professionals in human service institutions where interactions are often centered on problems with no easy solutions.

Law librarianship is a profession that is built on personal interaction with users to find information to solve legal problems. Patrons range from members of the public with pressing legal needs to law students dealing with school stress to attorneys facing tight deadlines. Each kind of library user brings a unique set of challenges that are comparable to the issues patients and other individuals present to psychologists, social workers, investigators, and other professionals doing “people-work.” Professionals at risk for burnout often work in situations where needs are greater than the resources available, time is always of the essence, and the stakes, both real and imagined, are high.

AM I BURNED OUT?

In order to determine if you are burned out, you have to take a look at yourself, the job, and your relationship to the job. One way to do this is by asking a series of questions about your work situation and its effects on your mental health. Multiple experts provide burnout checklists focusing on the same major themes. The list below is a compilation of common questions based on the work of Maslach and Leiter, Stamm, and others.²

- Is going to work each day something that you dread?
- Do you dislike the people that you work with?
  - Your co-workers?
  - Your boss?
  - Your patrons?
- Are you bored at work?
- Is the quality of your work slipping?
- Do you have doubts about the mission of your organization or the outcomes you are working toward?
- Do you complain about work all the time?
- Are you experiencing physical symptoms of stress?
  - Fatigue?
  - Insomnia?
  - Headaches?
  - Lingering colds and other ailments?
  - Aches and pains?
- Are you experiencing psychological symptoms of stress?
  - Sadness?
  - Irritability?
  - Increased or new alcohol or drug use?
- Do you like who you are at work?
- Do you think of your patrons as people with questions or as questions alone?


Once you have thought through these issues you can begin to evaluate the severity of your distress, and what you can do to change the situation. One way to measure your level of burnout is using the MBI to rate a series of statements by frequency, ranging from “Never” to “A few times a month” to “Every day.”

Examples of inventory items for the three subscales listed above include:

- **Emotional Exhaustion**
  - I feel emotionally drained from my work.
  - Working with people all day is really a strain for me.

- **Depersonalization**
  - I’ve become more callous toward people since I took this job.
  - I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally.

- **Personal Accomplishment**
  - In my work I deal with problems very calmly.
  - I feel I am positively influencing other people’s lives through my work.

A companion instrument, the Areas of Worklife Survey (AWS), was developed by Maslach and Leiter in the 1990s as a measure of how well organizations respond to burnout. It looks at employee experience in six areas: Workload, Control, Reward, Community, Fairness, and Values.

**SO, IS IT MY JOB OR IS IT BIGGER THAN THAT?**

Following is another series of questions that can help you see the bigger picture when it comes to your job and career. Consider how you would answer each of the following questions:

- Are there changes that you or your organization can make to minimize work stress?
- Can your organization hire someone to help you?
- Can you grow or shrink your responsibilities?
- Can you change your work schedule?
- Can you shift some of your job duties around?
- Can you have access to additional staff or resources?
- Is something temporary, such as a renovation or an unfilled position, causing distress, and if so, when will it be over?
- What do you like about your job?
- Can you do more of this kind of work in your current job?
- Can you do more of this kind of work in your current organization?
- Can you do this work somewhere else?
- In a different kind of library?
- In another profession?
- What do you dislike about your job?
- Are there other organizations or other jobs within law librarianship that do not have or require what you dislike?
- Are there jobs anywhere that do not have or require what you dislike?
- What are you good at doing and what do you like to do?
- Do you have a passion for something?
- Is it what you currently do?
- Is it related to what you do?
- Is it something completely different?
- Do you feel like you fit within your current work environment?
- Within your larger organization?
- Within your local librarian peers?
- Within the American Association of Law Libraries?

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To determine if the burnout issues you face are specific to your workplace or role, to law librarianship, or to the library profession as a whole, you need to consider all of the measures available to you. In Banishing Burnout, Christine Maslach and Michael P. Leiter provide a series of evaluation exercises and planning tools to help you decide. Their workbook combines facets of the MBI and AWS to review what works in the situation and what could be improved, and provides templates for action plans to implement on your own and within your organization.

Look at your answers to all of these sets of questions. Do you see opportunities for change within your current job? If so, is it feasible to request some kind of accommodation from your employer, or can you make changes on your own to lower your levels of stress and/or distress? If you enjoy doing the kind of work that you do, but are in a situation where you don’t feel that you are heard or valued, it might be time to consider another job within law librarianship. If you find some aspect of your job, like managing a budget or supervising other professionals, unpleasant, but enjoy other parts of your work, perhaps you should look for a job in another organization or with a different set of responsibilities. If the thought of answering another reference question, resetting another password, or approving another invoice makes you want to scream, it could be time to look outside of law librarianship, or the library profession as a whole, for a new job. Remember that you are an individual with inherent worth beyond your role as a professional and that stepping away is neither shameful nor a sign of failure.

WHAT DO I DO NOW?
Recognizing the signs of current or impending burnout, or that your current job or career isn’t right for you, is a huge step in taking care of yourself as a person and as a professional. Take time to assess your needs and determine if the changes that you need to make are big or small. Perhaps the most important step is to seek out guidance and help if you need it. Support can come from a friend or family member, a trusted colleague, or from a professional like a psychologist or career counselor. Taking the time to understand yourself and your relationship to work will help you to be a happier and healthier person and professional.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF LAW LIBRARIANS SEEKING MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

Tips for seeking out professional treatment for mental health issues.

BY JIANNA R. HEUER

Being a law librarian means working in an environment where you need the ability to check in with yourself, understand your needs, and recognize what you are currently feeling. These tools are essential, and understanding how to achieve these abilities is where consulting with a mental health professional (i.e., psychotherapist) can be invaluable for both your quality of life and your ability to do your job. Everyone’s mental health is important. For people working with the public, the majority of your job is taking care of staff, patrons, professors, and co-workers. Not making mental health a top priority can result in poor work performance, compassion fatigue, burnout, and other mental health issues.

Knowing your inner emotional world and being able to identify what you can and cannot tolerate are not necessarily innate skills. Oftentimes we need help learning to identify what exactly is going on in our heads, and therapy is great way to do that. However, seeking out mental health services can be difficult for many reasons. A negative stigma still exists for seeking counseling or going to therapy.1 Psychotherapy helps us deal with the stresses of everyday life; it’s not just for people who are severely mentally ill. This distinction is important because the average person thinks that therapy is for “sick people.”

The types of therapy that exist in our modern world are overwhelming, and it is difficult to decide which type of therapy would be most useful or effective. Often people cannot identify

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the signs within themselves that indicate it is time to seek help. Many express concern over finding a good therapist. Roadblocks such as these are hard to overcome, but with the right information, it’s easier to identify when to seek out the advice of a therapist and how to go about finding one.

The first question many people grapple with when thinking about talking to a mental health professional is “what exactly is therapy?”

Psychotherapy is a broad term used to refer to a wide range of treatments that help people deal with everyday life issues, emotional problems, crisis, trauma, identity issues, stage of life issues, and mental health issues. There are many different approaches to conducting psychotherapy. Some of the most popular include Cognitive Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Psychodynamic Therapy, and Interpersonal Psychotherapy. The type of therapy you choose to engage in is directly related to what you are currently grappling with in your life, and what you specifically need from a mental health professional to work through or resolve your conflict. While each of these types of therapies looks very different in practice, the underlying aims are the same: to increase individuals’ self-awareness, explore and better understand the thoughts and feelings of clients, help them find ways to cope with what is happening in their lives, and create a safe place for them to learn more about their internal conflicts.

The multitude of options can make it hard for people to choose which therapy to engage in. Breaking down what each approach is most commonly used for and what they look like can help. Following is a brief description of the four most widely used mental health approaches.

**COGNITIVE THERAPY**

Cognitive therapy focuses on thought patterns and how to change them. By using validity testing, cognitive rehearsal, guided discovery, journaling, homework, and modeling, the therapist works with clients to look at negative beliefs and thoughts that reoccur in their lives. This approach allows the client to work on restructuring the thoughts leading to rational beliefs about themselves and their lives. Cognitive therapy is usually eight to 12 weekly sessions and each appointment is 30 to 50 minutes long. Cognitive therapy is most often used for “agoraphobia, Alzheimer’s disease, anxiety or panic disorder, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), eating disorders, mood disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), personality disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psychotic disorders, schizophrenia, social phobia, and substance abuse disorders.”

**COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT)**

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a therapy oriented to problem solving. Clients learn how to identify thinking patterns that are not helpful while learning skills that modify their beliefs and change their behaviors through strategies such as behavioral and thought exercises. This therapy is very structured, involving homework and tasks to be completed each week. CBT includes weekly appointments lasting 45 to 50 minutes; usually people seek this type of therapy for four to seven months. CBT treats psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, mood swings, PTSD, obsessions and compulsions, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), substance dependency, phobias, disordered eating, persistent pain, erratic sleep patterns, sexual issues, and anger management issues.

**PSYCHODYNAMIC THERAPY**

Psychodynamic psychotherapy is an insight-oriented therapy that emphasizes making the unconscious conscious. This therapy focuses on the relationship between therapist and client. Through the interaction, key life issues are

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3 Ranna Parekh, MD, “What is Psychotherapy?” American Psychiatric Association (July 2016).


discussed, enacted, and resolved in the therapeutic relationship, which translates to change outside the therapy room. The goal is for the client to state all their thoughts, feelings, and freely associate, which brings problematic themes to the surface so they can be discussed and resolved.6

Psychodynamic therapy is generally long term in nature, lasting many years in most cases. Many people seek out psychodynamic therapy when they are looking for a better understanding of who they are, and why they do what they do. “The psychodynamic approach is designed to help individuals with a wide range of problems, but tends to be most effective in treating more specific issues such as anxiety disorders (i.e., phobias and obsessive compulsive disorders).”7

**INTERPERSONAL PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Interpersonal therapy focuses on understanding your role in interactions with other people, as well as the nature of relationships in your life. This is a task-oriented and structured form of therapy. Therapists use role-playing to help clients identify and express emotions in themselves and their relationships in a healthier way. This orientation was originally developed to treat depression, but is now used to treat “role disputes, interpersonal shortcomings, life stage transitions, relational conflicts, grief, and other attachment issues, as well as anxiety, dysthymia, substance abuse issues, disordered eating, bipolar disorder, postpartum depression, social phobia, and post-traumatic stress.”8

With a better understanding of what therapy is and what happens in the different therapeutic orientations, it is easier to choose what type of therapy is the right fit for the person in need. But how do you know when it’s time to seek a professional? There are signs in everyone’s life that indicate your friends, family, and co-workers are not sufficient support for what you are going through. Professional burnout can impact your personal life and your personal life can impact or increase feelings of job dissatisfaction. Usually, if you are experiencing any of the following, it is time to seek professional help:

- You no longer enjoy activities, relationships, or work that you once did.
- Your feelings are more persistent and intense than they once were.
- You feel a lack of cohesiveness in your identity.
- You feel you are excessively using substances, sex, or people to cope with something that is bothering you.
- You’ve experienced a loss.
- You feel out of control.
- You have endured a trauma.
- You feel disconnected.
- People in your life have mentioned they are worried about you.

Certain jobs come with a risk of specific mental health concerns. Law librarians, like many others who work directly with people all day, every day, could at some point in their careers encounter compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue comes in two parts: burnout and secondary traumatic stress.9 Burnout refers to the exhaustion experienced after a long period of stress or frustration. Identifying symptoms include:10

- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Crying jags
- Anxiety attacks
- Loss of appetite
- Weight gain due to lack of exercise or overeating in reaction to stress
- Teeth grinding
- Insomnia
- Nightmares
- Increased drug, alcohol, or tobacco use
- Forgetfulness
- Low productivity
- Inability to concentrate

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Secondary traumatic stress refers to “the natural, consequent behaviors and emotions from knowledge about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other. It is the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person” and it can lead to compassion fatigue.\(^\text{11}\) Compassion fatigue can be treated effectively with any of the four types of therapy listed above.

When people have these symptoms, there is likely to be an internal conflict, and seeking out mental health help will assist in sorting out what is going on in your psychological world. It is important to identify within yourself that these symptoms exist, have persisted for a while, depending on how long the issue has persisted (two weeks or one month), and that you do not have the tools to deal with them. If you can see that these three qualifiers exist, then it is time to find help. People also seek out mental health professionals because they want to explore thoughts and feelings they are having that they do not understand, to explore issues of identity, or simply to have an objective person in their life that can provide support. Whether it is a crisis or exploration you are seeking; psychotherapy is an invaluable tool to enable you to better understand what is going on in your internal world.

Once someone has decided it is time to seek help they often have a hard time finding the right kind of help. It can be difficult to start the search for the right therapist. The best place to start, as long as you are comfortable with it, is to ask friends and family for recommendations. When someone you trust suggests a psychotherapist, it often makes people feel more comfortable with starting the process. If that is not an option for you, there are great resources online that can help you find the right mental health professional.

Many organizations and universities participate in Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). “An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a voluntary, work-based program that offers free and confidential assessments, short-term counseling, referrals, and follow-up services to employees who have personal and/or work-related problems.”\(^\text{12}\)

This is a great place to start your search for a therapist. If you contact your human resources department, go online or call the number provided by your insurance company to inquire about behavioral/mental health, they should be able to inform you about a specific program to help employees.

The most widely used website to find a therapist is Psychologytoday.com, where you can search for a therapist by zip code, insurance, or type of issues they treat. Other online options include searching directly through your insurance company’s behavioral health webpage, zocdoc.com, goodtherapy.com, and networktherapy.com.

Seeking mental health services is a personal decision that people must make on their own. Generally speaking, coercion and pressure to enter therapy does not yield positive results. It is often a difficult decision for people due to the perceived stigma surrounding mental health and the shame that comes with asking for help. This does not need to be the case. People seek therapy for many reasons including, but not limited to, dealing with everyday life issues, such as crisis management, anxiety, depression, life-stage changes, substance abuse issues, stress, identity, and oppression issues. Further, many seek therapy as a way to explore their thoughts and feelings. You do not need to have a mental illness to work with a mental health professional. Psychotherapy and mental health services are a support system to help you retain your ability to be the best professional, partner, family member, and friend you can be. Talking to a mental health professional is a substantial and important step in working through what is getting in your way, while enhancing what is working in your life.


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CREATING A CULTURE OF SELF-CARE: THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY AS AN ORGANIZATION

Tools for promoting self-care in your institution.

BY JOCELYN KENNEDY

Throughout this paper, the authors have offered tools to help individuals address and cope with burnout in the workplace. This final section addresses the role of the organization in creating a culture in which self-care is promoted and exercised. Organizations must ensure that employees have the skills, tools, and time to engage in self-care. In addition, an organization is responsible for establishing and maintaining a culture that assists employees who are at risk of experiencing burnout.

HOW AN ORGANIZATION MAY CONTRIBUTE TO BURNOUT

Technology has significant and unimaginable impacts on one’s work life. Many of these are positive—at our fingertips we have text-level access to information previously only accessible by indexes and deep research. We can easily edit documents, track expenditures, and communicate with our colleagues without ever leaving our desks or picking up a phone. In fact, we don’t necessarily have to be at work to work. Email, intranets, electronic files, laptops and pervasive access to the internet allows employees to engage with work from any location. While in many ways these are improvements in the workplace, such improvements also create the notion of a 24-hour work day and deterioration of the boundaries between our professional and personal lives, which leads to burnout for some employees.¹

As noted elsewhere in this paper, burnout has three major aspects. Exhaustion, cynicism (also referred to as disengagement), and diminishment of professional efficacy. When these aspects are combined, burnout leads to disengagement that decreases productively in both work output and quality. In addition, physical symptomology can lead to unscheduled leave, and a high degree of cynicism that often leads to negative relationships and morale. Employees experiencing burnout are not only being personally harmed, they are harming the organization that fails to provide them with support. It is in an organization’s best interest to create a culture of self-care to protect its greatest asset: its employees.

Burnout can occur because of characteristics of the job or the profession. These factors are discussed elsewhere in this paper. However, burnout may also arise due to organizational characteristics, such as organizational structure, policies, resource allocation, and space allocation. Of particular importance are organizational values, as well as the context of structure, process, and resource allocation to actual and perceived fairness and equity within the workplace. As organizations undergo rapid change, the day-to-day work of our employees also changes. According to Christine Maslach, this can lead to a misalignment in the employment agreement. With fewer resources, organizations are asking more from their employees, while reducing opportunities for advancement, compensation increases, professional development, and security of position. These factors can lead to actual or perceived inequity in the employment agreement. When an employee feels they are no longer receiving appropriate benefits for the work they provide, burnout can occur.

Many large organizations, particularly those in which most libraries are located (firms, academic institutions, governmental agencies), have established Human Resources (HR) departments with defined benefits packages. HR departments may offer courses to employees on topics such as dealing with stress, setting work priorities, mindfulness, and even physical wellness programs that encourage employees to be attentive to their physical health. Vacation, sick leave, and personal time are in place to allow individual employees the opportunity to disengage from the workplace and attend to themselves and their families. Organizations in the information services industry often offer healthcare packages, which may include at least some access to mental health professionals and other types of wellness programs. These organizations may have Employee Assistance Programs, offering another layer of services from counselling to mediation. These benefits are part of the employment contract.

However, these courses, services, and benefits are only useful if employees are able and encouraged to participate and/or use the benefits. Employees may not feel able to take leave due to understaffing and workloads. HR courses can be a fee-for-service and organizations may not be willing to send employees due to diminished budgets. Managers also may not be trained to refer employees to EAP programs. In these instances the organizational structure prevents employees from engaging in self-care. When employees suffer from sustained burnout and ignore self-care, performance declines, morale deteriorates, and people leave the organization. Burnout impacts not only the individual, but by extension, the organization.

CREATING A CULTURE OF SELF-CARE

Creating a culture of self-care within an organization requires prioritization of people over process. This does not mean that the organization must suffer in productivity. In fact, happier employees are more productive than unhappy employees. This means shifting focus toward

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the employee. Changing a culture, particularly within the context of a larger institution, is challenging. However, being the best place an employee has ever worked usually translates into being the best place a library patron has ever visited. This is a win-win for the organization, its employees, and its patrons.

**CARING ABOUT YOUR EMPLOYEES: THE SUPERVISOR’S ROLE**

In a culture of self-care, managers and supervisors are engaged with employees on issues of burnout. A 1:1 meeting with a direct report should include discovering the employee’s view of their workload and stress levels. Managers pay attention to work distribution and attempt to balance work assignments fairly and equitably across employees and departments. Managers are trained to notice behaviors that suggest burnout and to provide appropriate guidance and resources to an employee exhibiting such behaviors.

**ENCOURAGING THE USE OF LEAVE TIME AND RESPECTING TIME SPENT AT WORK**

The organization limits its demands on personal time. Managers encourage (and may even require) that employees take time off. Managers are aware of how many hours an employee is spending at work and, if they are working excessively, the manager addresses that by either working with the employee on priorities, arranging for comp time, or ensuring that the employee has the resources to accomplish their work within a standard work week. Very few employees in libraries are required to be on call. For those employees who are in an on-call role, the requirements are clearly stated in job descriptions, with on-call parameters clearly defined. This typically applies to managers and supervisors. All other employees are not required to answer phones or respond to text messages or emails during off-hours, unless clearly articulated and defined—for example, an emergency phone tree.

Employees taking personal leave are not expected to answer the phone or respond to text messages or emails. Arrangements should be made ahead of time to shift responsibilities to other staff during an employee’s leave, whether for a day, a week, or an extended period of time. In fact, it is a good idea to utilize the organization’s email system to delay delivery of emails during an employee’s leave. Managers cannot control an employee accessing email remotely. By not emailing an employee during their leave time, the manager, and by extension the organization, sends a message that it values the employee’s personal time and recognizes boundaries.

Another boundary area that can cause burnout for employees revolves around time allocation in the office. Frequent interruptions, unproductive meetings, and unrealistic or shifting deadlines add to stress levels. Respecting an employee’s time in the office is as important as respecting their time outside of the office. Organizational norms that emphasize productive meetings, focused work periods, and realistic deadlines can help reduce workplace stress, resulting in less burnout in employees.

**BUILD ADEQUATE STAFFING OR EXAMINE PRIORITIES & DISTRIBUTE WORK ACCORDINGLY**

The organization is structured so that departments are staffed accordingly to provide advertised services and products. It is not actually possible to “do more with less” staff. An organization that has downsized must examine its offered services and adjust them accordingly. The managers and leadership must deliver the message to patrons and other customers about adjustments in delivery times, and the elimination of services due to loss of resources. The organization must also examine workflows and processes to maximize available staff time. This can be particularly difficult for employees who strive for excellence and perceive any process changes as a watering down of quality. It can also be difficult for employees who find comfort in the familiar or whose work-identity is entwined with work that is being downsized, outsourced, or eliminated. Managers must be mindful of the negative impacts adjusting workflows can have on employees and be prepared to assist those who are affected by change.

**APPROPRIATE TRAINING/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**ENSURE YOUR EMPLOYEES HAVE THE SKILLS NECESSARY TO COMPLETE THEIR WORK AND GROW IN THE PROFESSION**

The organization provides appropriate training, education, and professional development so that
employees can meet job expectations and achieve career success. This can be in the form of funding for education, training and professional development activities, and paid leave or release time. A clear professional development and job training policy ensures equitable access to opportunity. A manager can demonstrate support of professional development by making sure employees are aware of opportunities and supporting participation by adjusting work priorities.

CREATE AND ENCOURAGE SOCIAL CONNECTION FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT
The organization provides social opportunities for employees to build a culture of connection. Through connection (e.g., shared lunch breaks, social outings, and celebratory events), employees develop a system of support within the organization. Building peer relationships provides another pathway for help when needed by peers as well as managers. Conversely, the organization recognizes that connecting with peers socially is not valued by all employees. Employees who choose not to engage in social activities should have opportunities to make meaningful professional connections through committee work, shared projects, and team-related activities. Those employees who chose not to participate in social activities should not be penalized.

DEFINE CLEAR EXPECTATIONS
The organization clearly articulates expectations through appropriately crafted job descriptions and clearly articulated work expectations. Employees participate in individual goal setting and managers check in regularly to ensure that employees are meeting their goals and are not working outside of work expectations. Employees who are uncertain of their role, the parameters of work requirements, and pathways to success can suffer from burnout. Effective goal setting is one way where employees are given some autonomy to set individual goals that are supported by the organization. When expectations change, it is clearly articulated to employees. If an employee is given a role of increasing responsibility, compensation and benefits should be increased as well. In a world of limited resources, if compensation is not negotiable, other forms of recognition should be given. It should also be clear to the employee what they are receiving in exchange for added responsibility. When possible, added responsibility without compensation should be limited in terms of scope and duration.

FINAL THOUGHTS
Organizations play a vital role, negatively or positively, in employee well-being and burnout. There are a number of practical things an organization can do to minimize the opportunity for burnout. These include respecting boundaries, encouraging connection and self-care, setting clear expectations, and providing appropriate training and development opportunities. When organizational culture supports and makes room for self-care, employees may be more productive and less prone to burnout. To see how well your organization is performing in regard to self-care, fill out The National Center on Family Homelessness’ Organizational Self-Assessment survey.

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