

800 Words

Head for the Edge, August/September 2009

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"A conclusion is the place where you got tired of thinking." - Harold Fricklestein."

Permit me a small personal indulgence. A few days ago I mailed in the manuscript for my new book, *School Libraries Head for the Edge: Rants, Recommendations and Reflections*, to the editors at Linworth Publishing. It is a collection of Head for the Edge columns from over the past fourteen years. As HFE begins its fifteenth year in this issue of LMC, I thought it fitting to share the introduction to the new book ...

"Head for the Edge" first appeared in Linworth's TECHNOLOGY CONNECTION magazine, a predecessor to LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION, in February of 1995. The title of the first column was "Making Change Work for You." It was about 800 words, one page long. I've written about 80,000 more words for the column in the following years.

These columns have been written, I'll admit, for a rather selfish reason. It is through writing that I reflect, distill, organize and understand what is happening in my professional life. Being a reflective practitioner, the experts say, is a good thing. You could call these columns my "pre-blog blog."

Readers of this column have been generous with comments, criticisms, and praise. It's the rare conference I attend or week of e-mail that goes by that someone doesn't say, "When reading LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION I always turn to the last page first." Since I do exactly that with a number of magazines, I find it high praise indeed. Compliments are a strange combination of both ego gratification and satisfaction in knowing one has helped another person. Thanks to all who have offered them.

A few observations about writing this column:

1. It was a delight to work with editor Carol Simpson for most of the years I have been writing. She's a wonderful editor, a respected professional librarian, and an all-round class act. In 2008, the esteemed Gail Dickinson took the editorial reins. So far, so good, but I am keeping a close eye on her.
2. One of my guilty pleasures is re-reading my old columns. Other than wincing at an overuse of exclamation points, I still get tickled reading my own stuff. Much like the author himself, I like to think, they seem to be aging quite gracefully. My wife thinks it's sick.
3. I am struck by the lack of humor in most professional writing. Too many writers feel that in order to be taken seriously, they must always *be* serious. This is a mistake. We too often forget that in order to connect with another person intellectually, you have to connect emotionally as well.
4. The profession needs more writers who are willing to tackle our sacred cows. The best writing I've done is that which has kicked up the most dust. My dad used to say that opinions are like, well, a certain anatomical feature – everybody has one. We're all doing practice-based research every day we do our jobs. More people to need to share their knowledge *and* opinions.
5. Most of my columns are about opportunities embedded in the problems we face. We need to start looking for opportunities rather than complaining when something new comes on the educational scene. I certainly have my doubts about many of the educational "silver bullets du jour." But I have also felt unprofessional knowing that I have also been a willing keeper of the dirty little secret that our schools continue to graduate students who are unprepared for life. We should stop complaining, and start figuring our place in an era of educational accountability.
6. The librarian will always be the sole determining factor of quality of the library program. I've yet to see a great program run by a mediocre professional or a good professional that could not make significant improvements under the worst conditions. We are impatient, we hold ourselves to incredibly high standards, and we dream big. Those aren't bad things, but we also need to remember that our greatest accomplishments are when we improve, even a little, the life of an individual student. Providing that one book that was "just right," that one piece of

illusory information, or that one life-long skill may have longer lasting ramifications than all the formal lessons we've planned or taught.

7. And finally, I will once again beat that same old drum – either we take responsibility for the technology in our lives and schools and master it and use it and be seen as the experts by others or we will be replaced by professionals who will.

I believe that the school library field has a bright and fascinating future. Remember, the one thing your library has that the Internet never will is YOU!