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Review of What's the Alternative?: Career Options for Librarians and Info Pros.

Theresa M. Nawalaniec
Cleveland State University, t.nawalaniec@csuohio.edu

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Theresa M. Nawalaniec

WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?: CAREER OPTIONS FOR LIBRARIANS AND INFO PROS

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WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?: CAREER OPTIONS FOR LIBRARIANS AND INFO PROS. Rachel Singer Gordon. *Medford, N.J.: Information Today, 2008, 272 pp., ISBN: 978-1-57387-333-8, \$35.*

Rachel Singer Gordon's book provides a thorough overview of career paths for librarians and information professionals. The book is geared toward librarians who wish to change careers within the library profession as well as those who want to pursue a career in a library-related field or in a totally different field where they can employ their information skills. *What's the Alternative?* specifically covers how to make a career transition; a list of possible organizations, fields, and roles in which to work, as well as starting one's own business; staying connected to the library profession; and how to continue learning and growing in today's rapidly changing world of information. These topics are addressed in a way that is very realistic, interesting, and easy to read.

It seems that very few books have been written on alternative careers for librarians. However, when one considers the number of information professionals who are currently employed, those seeking work, and the many students currently enrolled in schools of library and information science, there is a need for a practical guide that outlines possible careers for librarians. Ideally, this guide should offer hope to those seeking a new, library-related or alternative career as well as to those interested in recharging a current career to keep up-to-date and marketable in today's quickly changing information marketplace. Does Gordon's book accomplish this task?

At the outset, the book explores "why" one might seek an alternative career and encourages the reader to do some honest soul searching in order to make wise decisions by first identifying important wants, needs, and values. It is recommended that a personal mission statement be written after assessing one's individual strengths and weaknesses and then

evaluating possible career options rather than just jumping into a new career. Library-related careers in organizations such as vendors, associations, and library schools are discussed in the context of first identifying one's transferable skills and how they can be applied in these organizations. In addition, organizations that are similar to libraries, such as bookstores, publishers, museums, and research organizations are listed and accompanied by an enumeration of transferable skills, experience, and personal traits that would be beneficial in these types of working environments. Also included are lists of additional resources for further information on each particular type of organization.

For the more adventurous, ideas on starting one's own business in areas including freelancing, consulting, and speaking are presented as another option along with detailed information on how to market and build the business. Likewise, performing information work in non-library settings such as fund-raising, records information management, and information architecture is advocated by Gordon, who states, "many positions with day-to-day duties that incorporate much of what we think of as library work might be viewed by companies as something else entirely." As a result, one should look for different keywords and titles such as "data mining", "analyst", and "researcher" when seeking a job. One chapter of the book also covers "very different roles" including a translator or interpreter, book writer, paralegal, and even a private investigator. The author is very motivational in encouraging the reader to consider these possible career options as well as others that they can identify by thinking outside of the box and relating them to one's hobbies, passions, interests, and personality.

Especially interesting are the ideas for "non-traditional roles" in traditional institutions that Gordon presents as a way for library workers to expand their options within the library or even outside of the library, but within the organization where they currently work. These roles

and skills can be attained by learning more technology, participating in job rotation, and adding additional duties to one's current position, while eliminating less pertinent duties. Keeping ties to the library profession is important in cases where a librarian ventures out into a non-library-related career. Also stressed is the necessity of further education whether through formal education for those who do not have a library and information science education or through continuing education classes. Overall, *What's the Alternative?* is well written and does meet the goal of offering hope to library and information professionals by providing a wealth of information to those seeking a new career as well as to those wishing to recharge their current careers. Particularly helpful are the testimonials written throughout the book by employees who have successfully made a career transition. These testimonials provide real-life examples and answer questions such as what skills are needed to make the transition, what advice one would give to others contemplating a transition, what is liked and disliked in the new career, as well as what is missed and not missed in the employee's previous, traditional library career. The author is very positive and supportive in inviting information professionals, including those without an MLS, to explore all of the options that are available to them and to brainstorm new possibilities for careers other than those covered in the book. The appendices in the book include: how to locate a non-traditional position (detailing how to approach employers and rework one's resume); a list of useful websites with a URL for updated links to these sites (what a great idea!); and a list of resources.

Reading this book was truly enjoyable. I would recommend that all librarians read it if only to gain a renewed outlook on what we are capable of accomplishing and what we can offer various employers. In summary, regarding your choice of career paths, Gordon advises one to "regularly evaluate your new path to see if it continues to meet your needs. Never stand still."

This advice is similar to the saying that if we aren't moving forward, we're not just standing still, but are actually falling behind.

*Theresa M. Nawalaniec
Sciences and Engineering Librarian
Cleveland State University*