

## Next Generation Librarianship: Where Do We Go from Here?

by Mickey Coalwell, Northeast Kansas Library System

- Do you believe generational differences are a factor in today's library workplace?
- What steps could libraries take to recruit a new generation of library workers? Why do we need to think about this today?
- How do you see libraries changing over the next few years? How do you see younger and/or newer library staff being involved in these changes?
- What steps can libraries take to create a healthy work environment for all staff? Why is this particularly important in a 21st Century library?

These were some of the important questions posed by renowned author, blogger, and *Library Journal* columnist Rachel Singer Gordon to library staff and trustees attending her workshop sessions in September, sponsored by the Northeast Kansas Library System.

Shannon Roy's article in last month's *KSL Newsletter* discussed generational differences in terms of four different age cohorts:

Traditionalists (b. 1922-1943) take job obligations seriously, respect authority, and like workplace rules to be clear and fair. They currently represent about 5% of the workforce.

Boomers (b. 1943-1960) like direct communication, teamwork, and consensus building. They seek money and recognition, and tend to be spenders rather than savers. They represent about 45% of the workforce today.

Generation X (b. 1960-1980) are self-reliant, pragmatic and informal. They value autonomy and are technology users who grew up in a diverse, global economy. They represent about 40% of the current workforce.

Millennials (b. 1980-2000) are confident, "street smart" multi-taskers who naturally use and adapt to rapidly-changing technology tools. They put their work and personal lives on par, and respond to immediate rewards. They are about 10% of the workforce, but growing quickly.

These age cohorts are all represented in the Kansas library community, and their clashing values, styles and preferences can often lead to sparks in the workplace.

Gordon has been studying the multigenerational library workforce, and her book, *The NextGen Librarian's Survival Guide*, is aimed at new librarians, library school students, and those considering the profession of librarianship.

Singer, herself a NextGen librarian, focuses a lot of her attention on librarians between 20 and

35, since it will be this generation's task to bridge the chasm between the analogue and digital generations.

Gordon emphasized the importance of mutual respect among library workers, regardless of their age: “When I surveyed people for *The NextGen Librarian's Survival Guide*, I got some amazing comments, ranging from, ‘Boomers need to retire already and let us get on with it; they're too stuck in their ways and can't deal with change’ to ‘Younger librarians have no work ethic and no understanding of librarianship; all they can do is push buttons and they're lost when the network goes down.’”

Along with respect and understanding, Gordon stressed the need for effective succession planning in libraries, as graying leaders and administrators retire. Many libraries have avoided the inevitable issues of succession and leadership, and Singer issued a wake-up call to libraries who think they don't need to consider these issues now.

She encouraged ongoing exploration and discussion of generational issues in local libraries, in library board meetings, and in regional conference settings. Gordon applauded the interest this topic has garnered in professional circles of late.

“If anything comes out of this outpouring of generational programs and presentations, I hope it's an awareness of our underlying assumptions and of the necessity to combine our diverse skills, strengths, and generations to work together productively in a 21st century library.”