

I'm Still Still KNOCKING...



In the search for the elusive full-time career in the museum field, making sure you have the right education and skill-set is no easy feat. Whether you are trying to find that first job, or looking to update your skill-set as a mid-career professional, professional development is key at all stages. But where does one go to get those skills? What skills should you be getting?

This column will seek to address these concerns from my perspective, (a determined museum professional, with 4 different part-time jobs, only one actually in a museum), but I hope professionals at all stages of their careers will be able to learn something here as well. After all, one of the great things about our field is the collaboration and sharing of information that occurs.

Getting More Than a Foot in the Door

This issue begins a two-part piece that will explore what employers are actually looking for in employees and what newcomers to the field are doing to make themselves stand out. For this issue, I contacted two well known and successful museum professionals (with over 30 years of combined experience) and asked them to share what they look for in employees. And hint, it's not all about your education.

David Alexander, Head of Archives, Access and Digital, **RBCM**, President of the British Columbia Museum Association and Chair of the Roundup Editorial Committee. "I am responsible for the BC Archives, physical and digital access to museum and archives collections, and preservation and digital services and initiatives. I manage a team of about 30. I have more than a decade experience in the museum



world, five years at the Royal BC Museum and before that I was CEO of a technology company called Zero One Design that developed web and software products for museum and gallery clients."

Tracy Calogheros, CEO, **The Exploration Place + Science Centre**. "I have been with The Exploration Place Museum + Science Centre in Prince George for almost 22 years; I've been the CEO since 2003. Over the years I have served as President on the BCMA Board, Vice Chair of the Emily Carr University Board of Governors, Secretary for the Canadian Association of Science Centres, as well as held a variety of positions with tourism, business and political organizations."



What do you see for the future of the field, especially job wise? Do you see more jobs opening up or will the job market get even tougher?

David Alexander: “It really depends on funding and how entrepreneurial museums are in the future. I don’t see government funding increasing but I do see interest in the museum experience rising among visitors so if we, as a sector, are able to find alternate sources of funding – then yes, I see the job market opening up.”

Tracy Calogheros: “The general consensus is that there will be a lot of movement in our industry over the next 10 years. People do tend to stay in their positions much further into their senior years in museums, but time is linear and it will inevitably create openings. For fellow Gen X’ers and the cohorts younger than us, that means that jobs across the whole industry are about to open up. I believe we will see wholesale change in the approach to museums as the current leadership retires in large numbers and young professionals get the chance to take the reins. At the same time, funding is under pressure at all levels of government, leaving museums to operate with smaller teams and restricted programs. A fresh approach to earned revenue, streamlining through technology and targeted expenditure of human resources within organizations creates a challenge that to me, is exciting; one that is tailor-made for a collaborative and inspired youth. We have the unique opportunity to craft our facilities with the next 100 years in mind as we hit Canada’s sesquicentennial under the leadership of a new government that is looking to invest in Canada, our brand and our youth.”

What education do you look for in potential employees? Are there any specific programs you see as beneficial?

David Alexander: “It depends on the position, but I always look for leadership potential. Training can

happen while on the job but I look for experiences, whether paid or volunteer, that indicate a potential employee has gone above and beyond in their career and will bring that to my workplace.”

Tracy Calogheros: “I look for people who are excited to learn and for people who love people. I need reliable, collaborative staff who are eager to work in teams, are flexible about their duties and job description and who know things that I don’t. My team has benefitted from having people join us from all industries; accommodations, food, tourism, forestry, biology, archaeology, fine art, military, business, education, child-care and more. It’s not so much the education a person brings to the table as it is their approach to work, life and learning that allow me to add them to my team.”

What skills do you see as most important in your employees?

David Alexander: “I see digital literacy as an important skill that all employers, not just museums, will be looking for. In all areas. Digital used to be the realm of communication types, these days it is vital for all staff.”

Tracy Calogheros: “Honesty, commitment and flexibility. People who are eager to learn, to grow and who do that from a place of intellectual curiosity best fit with my vision of “museum as community forum”. Our work, while rooted in collecting, research and dissemination, must be informed by local needs, global events and cultural evolution... In order to be successful in this type of corporate culture, a staff person must be a self-confident communicator, a self-motivated worker and a self-guided learner; in return I offer a large degree of autonomy, the chance to explore personal passions, management support and work/life flexibility (you’ll notice I didn’t say money – museums are not about the “Benjamins”).”

What training would you like to see employees (both potential and current) have when it comes to First Nations histories and cultures?

David Alexander: “With the results of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, having an understanding of First Nations culture and history is necessary in our work.”

Tracy Calogheros: “We have an outstanding relationship with the Lheidli T’enneh Nation; a relationship that has taught me much. Every First Nation



Above: *Royal BC Museum.*

is different, each one has its own history and traditions so the most important thing a staff person can bring to this ever deepening relationship is that curiosity I mentioned earlier. Genuine interest in learning from each other, a willingness to be honest about the past and excited about a collaborative future with a realistic view of the capacity and finances of both the Museum and the First Nation is all it takes to start the process. I think that this is a life-long learning process; that there is no course you can find that will give you everything you will ever need to know to understand First Nations' culture. Having said that, a grasp of what we already have learned about First Nations' histories and an

understanding of post-contact history is an invaluable asset.”

Finally, do you have any advice for those of us looking for a job or looking to move up in the field?

David Alexander: “Talk with potential employers, so few people do informational interviews and it is a great way to make a direct connection and tap into the connections of the person you are talking with. An email inquiry is fine, but I’ll remember someone much better if they’ve taken the time to set up a meeting with me. And volunteer. It shows that you have a passion for what you do.”

Tracy Calogheros: “My advice to anyone in our field is to explore. Learn from the successes and failures of those of us who have been doing this awhile and never be afraid to offer your opinion and your ideas. Always keep an open mind, recognize that while you don’t know everything, neither does anyone else, treat your coworkers with kindness, your partners with empathy and your audience with respect. We have the best jobs on the planet for someone who is creative and curious, who likes to be challenged and take some risks, who understands that our work has always created a foundation for, and launching pad to, the future. I often tell my kids that I don’t know what I want to be when I grow up, and as a metaphor, that sentiment describes this industry perfectly; it’s not about arriving, it’s all about what you learn while you’re getting there.”



Above: *The Exploration Place + Science Centre.*



Above: The Exploration Place + Science Centre.

Thank you to both David and Tracy for lending their knowledge and experience.

Are you a new professional with a story or advice to share? Please contact me at sarahksewell@gmail.com. I'd love to hear about your experience and share it with the readers of *Roundup*.

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