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Mentoring APA Library Leaders: Interview with Patricia "Patty" Wong

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Chapter Forty-Two

Mentoring APA Library Leaders

Interview with Patricia "Patty" Wong

Editors: Thanks for speaking with us! You have so much experience in the field. Our first question for you is what does it mean to be an APA library leader in the twenty-first century?

Patty: To encourage, coach, and professionally nourish younger colleagues is both an expectation and a key responsibility for seasoned APA library leaders, especially now. This is a critical moment in history for ethnic librarians. There are perceptibly fewer APA leaders in top library positions in almost every jurisdiction in the country. Part of the answer lies in a sea change where younger individuals are pursuing alternate courses in their career. They may not wish to pursue higher levels of responsibility if that means greater personal sacrifices. There is a significant gap in time between those who are aiming toward retirement and a scarcity of APA library leaders who are ready, willing, and able to pursue key positions as they become available.

On that note, there are several actions that APA library leaders can take in seeking advancement or recognition:

1. Choose a mentor, be a mentor.
2. Cultivate cultural and community-focused resiliency within the organization.
3. Reach out to APA emerging library leaders and share expectations of mutual benefit and growth.
4. Actively engage and fiscally contribute to the work of the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association and the Chinese American

Librarians Association and the American Indian Library Association (addressing the needs of native Hawaiian library members). I might recommend becoming members of the Black Caucus of the American Library Association and REFORMA as well.

5. Remember that APA library leaders often come from APA communities. Engage and support community where and when you can find it.

Editors: What are your methods of coaching and mentoring APA librarians?

Patty: Each one reach one. Reflection is a key part of the process. We need to build in processes. Ask yourself these questions:

- What are your three- to five-year goals personally and professionally? Who are the natural allies in your organization? Key stakeholders?
- Do you know your agency's sacred cows when it comes to diversity?
- Who has the most influence to achieve your goals?
- How do I demonstrate the concepts of inclusion, diversity, and equity as an institutional value?

I encourage individuals to seek mentors at every stage in their personal and professional life. Coaching and mentoring is a two-way interaction. Prepare for your meetings and conversations. Make good use of one another's time and investment. There are a number of issues facing APA individuals that can influence effective coaching and mentoring. One must see these not as mere challenges but as opportunities. Honest and open communication about these experiences is critical for mentoring and coaching from all sides.

1. Generational differences: I am a fourth-generation American-born Chinese. I see things differently than someone whose parents immigrated within the past twenty years. My expectations and experiences influence my choices and decision making and the ways I can navigate in American society and culture. It's not the same for others of different generations.
2. Nativism: There are many subcultural differences between those who were born in communities and countries outside of the United States. The language may be similar, but the subtext and unspoken issues arise in cultural relationships. A stronger understanding of the experiences of immigration from a historical and cultural context will enhance the mentoring and coaching outcome.
3. Glass ceiling/institutional racism/microaggressions: The glass ceiling still remains for most people of color in and outside of the library

profession. Institutional change requires time, reflection, and on some levels, support to make that change permanent. There may be a lot of backsliding. Keep people honest. Don't lose your integrity; but in order to make the change, you need to be an influencer in the organization. Seek a position where you can make a permanent difference.

4. Model minority: There remains a strong perception that APA leaders are going to naturally succeed because of their cultural heritage. On the converse, APA leaders could be perceived as not possessing the "_____"—you fill in the blank—because of their background.

5. Misread by other APAs: Remember that the APA nomenclature was originally an American federal derivation. Although I believe our communities have grown and become stronger as a result of this affiliation, it is critical that we recognize where we come from. Our languages, values, and culture make us unique and are not always compatible.

In addition to being open and therefore vulnerable about my own experiences, here are a few techniques I like to use:

1. I read almost every leadership tome that comes out. I follow noted leaders in and outside of our profession and I pass along to my colleagues those articles and ideas to further their growth, but also to make a difference.
2. I make notes to contact emerging leaders and colleagues, but especially APA individuals and other people of color through a variety of means, most notably e-mail, to keep the connection going. It is up to them to follow through if they wish.
3. I usually pass on the names of like-minded individuals to key leaders at the state and national levels as they are considering candidates for positions, appointed and elected.
4. I am very careful and deliberative about lending my name and endorsement and I encourage others to do the same. Your professional reputation is key as well as your word. Don't say yes to someone unless you plan to follow through and you are confident about that reference. If you are not, the best action you can take is to be honest.
5. Coaching and mentoring goes two ways. I usually keep closer contact with those who reach out to me so that the learning is mutual. The idea is to stretch beyond your comfort zone, which may be counterintuitive to your cultural norm.
6. Mentoring is an organic and evolving process. The mentor you had as a youth is different from the one that you have now. You need not necessarily maintain the same kind of relationship with each mentor

- but, of course, the relationship remains intact and may grow to become a stronger bond.
7. Sometimes we may not agree with a mentor or their actions take divergent paths from ours. In these instances, confidentiality of the relationship remains key.
 8. I actually make note of new APA librarians to the field, to our association (APALA) on a local and national level and try to engage with them as quickly as possible and refer them to others who can provide support from a closer geographic area. I apply this same proactive engagement with other APA leaders in the area where I live and work.
 9. I introduce my close colleagues of color to one another. We are stronger together. Remember that one can lead from any position.
 10. I am honest and forthright in my counsel and expect the same of others. And I try to remember to leave my ego at the door and ask others to do the same.

Here are some of my ideas for new APA leaders:

- Make the call for all to engage.
- Become part of your organization's strategic planning process.
- Volunteer for a staff committee, in a variety of roles—even chair.
- Ask "Do you want to collaborate on a project with me?"
- Mentor within the organization to build in succession planning.
- Participate in a conference as contributor on a panel or program or poster session. Bring along someone else to a conference to help them grow professionally.
- Focus on assets and strengths, instead of gaps.

Editors: How can we contribute to making our workplaces culturally competent in terms of resources, research, and action?

Patty: Commit to making your organization resilient from a cultural competency perspective. That means leveraging the influence you have as an individual and a leader, and inspiring and bringing on others to do the same. Mobilize and motivate:

- Frame the library as an intentional, strategic, and outcomes-based organization.
- Align your organization as the go-to agency for partnership enhancement and development with successful outcomes.
- Use a common language and cultural values of inclusion, diversity, and equity in policy and procedure, services, and program development. This

would include a significant review of existing policies for revision toward equity and increasing access.

- Team approach with a key set of visionary leaders. Find and enlist the support of champions high in the organization who resonate with inclusion and diversity priorities.
- Go beyond your immediate system to seek allies and ambassadors. Who is well respected by your leadership?

Editors: What are some of your best practices in recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce?

Patty: Organizational readiness is critical. Leadership must work with human resources to develop classifications that reflect a value of inclusion and diversity. Internal staff should establish relationships with the diverse professional associations and advertise with like-minded communities and listservs. Develop a model of internal/external panels that reflect the cultural value. That means including people of color and from diverse perspectives on selection panels. Frame that value through interview questions, criteria evaluation, and discussions.

When considering joining a new organization, APA library members should review organizational priorities to make sure that they reflect a commitment to diversity. Consider these questions: Does the organization's mission, vision, and values reflect a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion? Are these commitments evident in their strategic plan, budget priorities, goals and objectives, policies? Does the organization value:

- Outreach;
- Collaboration;
- Programs, services, and collections that reflect community needs and the demography of the audience;
- A staff that reflects the community demographically?

In terms of human resources:

- Develop a directory of staff translators, in the library and throughout the parent organization.
- Respect and value multicultural expertise in the organization.
- Use examples of diverse people in your lectures and presentations.
- Make your EEO report and goals a focal point in your organization.
- Develop a comprehensive diversity plan with HR: revisions of job descriptions, recruitment, selection and retention plan, environmental scan.

- Offer a number of incentives that indicate professional commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Consider:
 - Employee benefits
 - Staff development and support
 - Advancement opportunities (career track and participation in larger structure)
 - Mentoring and coaching (formal and informal)
 - Tuition reimbursement
 - Competitive salaries
 - Sabbaticals
 - Bilingual or bicultural pay differential or value of multicultural experience
 - Job exchange
 - Encouragement and support to participate on organizational committees and professional associations
 - Residency programs
 - Internships and fellowships
 - Librarian trainee programs
 - Flex time
 - Administrative leave
 - Telecommuting

Editors: Thank you for speaking with us. One last question: What do you think are some of the most important issues in librarianship today?

Patty: These are the things I think about:

- How to engage a local and national process to re-value the library as a community good;
- The need to think about librarianship as a profession, not just a job;
- Diversification of funding as a norm;
- Whether we can supply sufficient positions for the number of MLIS graduates; and
- Change as the new normal.

Chapter Forty-Three

The Life and Legacy of Dr. Lois Mai Chan in the LIS Field

Interview with Raymond Pun and Monnee Tong

Janet Hyunju Clarke

Janet: You both were ALA Emerging Leaders in 2014. What was it about and how did you get it started?

Ray: We were both part of the project sponsored by the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA). I remember meeting some of the CALA leaders to talk about this project in our meetings. ALA Emerging Leaders was a really interesting program because it allowed us to work with professionals from other institutions on a specific project that could support the library association. Being Chinese American, I thought it was an interesting project to capture the voices of Chinese American librarians who are prominent in the field. At the time, I was working at NYU Shanghai in the People's Republic of China, so I was the "global" outlier and had to make my schedule work for this project when all of my teammates were scattered in the United States. It was thrilling to make this project "international" in this context.

Monnee: It all started at ALA Midwinter, where we were able to meet the other ALA Emerging Leaders and CALA leaders. I was new to CALA and did not know much about the organization yet (you can read more about CALA in chapter 4 of this book). We went over the project's details and goals, and also got to know one another since we would be working from different corners of the United States (and in Ray's case, the world!). Our objective was to produce a video about Dr. Lois Mai Chan, best known for her expertise in cataloging and classification. As a fellow Chinese American