

Lessons from Miss Frizzle: What Should be The Guiding Forces for an Entrepreneurial Library

2010 Michigan Library Association Meeting

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Lessons from Miss Frizzle

Miss Frizzle's Rules:

- Take Chances
- Make Mistakes
- Get Messy



Lessons from Miss Frizzle

- The books and episodes always starts with **a simple question** or problem
- **Without guessing** at the answer, Miss Frizzle guides the group to find the answers
- The path is **not always clean** and paved
- The goal primarily is the **process, not the result**

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Lessons from Miss Frizzle

- This approach can be applicable to library problems as well
- It asks us to consider:
 - ~ Developing a simple question
 - ~ Thinking through the possible answer
 - ~ Knowing that the path might be difficult
 - ~ Focusing on the process
- So what is entrepreneurial thinking?

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What is an Entrepreneur?

- Someone who discovers:
 - ~ a new solution to an existing problem
 - ~ a new product or service
- Understands how patrons work
- Understands how patrons use your services and resources
- Understands patrons on **their** terms

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What is an Entrepreneur?

- Seeks opportunities, even if they are not comfortable
- Accepts risk & failure as part of the process
- Practices patience with the implementation of new services
- Learns from programs that do not work

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What isn't an Entrepreneur?

- Someone to come up with a new way to charge people
- Conservative (from a workplace POV)
- Some who is risk adverse and hates 'getting it wrong'
- Strictly copies what other people have done before

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What isn't an Entrepreneur?

- Implementing solutions to problems that might not exist (communication)
- Implementing what YOU think people want
- Implementing technology that others have used - but are not requested by the community
- ***Do not cram other people's innovation down the throats of your users***

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Anyone can be the “Idea Man”

- Everyone in the library has:
 - ~ a unique and distinct vantage point
 - ~ a unique interaction with the patrons
 - ~ the ability to contribute to the success of the library
 - ~ a vested interest in the overall success of the library

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Anyone can be the “Idea Man”

Yes, the Idea Man! What're his hopes and dreams, his desires and aspirations? Does he think all the time or does he set aside a certain portion of the day? How tall is he and what's his shoe size? Where does he sleep and what does he eat for breakfast? Does he put jam on his toast or doesn't he put jam on his toast, and if not why not and since when? – Newspaper Editor



*Hudsucker Proxy
(1994)
Joel and Ethan
Cohen*

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Anyone can be the “Idea Man”

- How I became an ‘idea man’
 - ~ Library training consultant with Innovative Interfaces, Inc.
 - ~ Learning from my father, NJ retail entrepreneur
 - ~ Thinking about our patrons and how they work and use the library

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Understand one’s “Market”

- Every academic library has *unique* characteristics that one needs to discover.
 - ~ What do our patrons want?
 - ~ What do our patrons need?
 - ~ Who are our students?
 - ~ What is our curriculum?
 - ~ What type of research is conducted?

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Understand one's "Market"

- How to reach out to your community?
 - ~ Consider all requests that arrive
 - ~ Connect with administrators
 - ~ Listen to the student leaders (MBA and BBA Section Leads)
 - ~ Informal groups
- How do people use your library?

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Change Your Organizational Culture

- Is your library culture entrepreneurial?
- If not, how can we steer people to think this way
- Organizational change:
 - ~ can be difficult
 - ~ cannot turn on a dime
- Slow/gradual changes allow both staff and community to adapt

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Change Your Organizational Culture

- Successful elements to change include:
 - ~ Ensuring a comfort level for the staff
 - ~ Taking smaller steps. Change the 'slippery slope' to a 'slight incline'
 - ~ Provide staff with 'resting places'
 - ~ Resist the need for metrics to measure success

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Change Your Organizational Culture

- Successful elements to change include:
 - ~ Resisting the need to overcomplicate issues (trying to find the **perfect** solution)
 - ~ Do not create “too big to succeed” projects

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Appreciating & Accepting Failure

- Not normally part of a librarian's culture
- We have a strong desire to do things well
- Perfection paralysis can be daunting and difficult to overcome
- **We are a service monopoly – this can reduce our need/desire to change**
(academic)

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Appreciating & Accepting Failure

- We run a greater risk of failure when we explore services that are off the beaten path
- The road to innovation is not paved!
- The organizational response is a product of its **culture**

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Appreciating & Accepting Failure

- We tend to front load projects and services with excessive preparations
- We expend extensive effort to work through every possible issue, not just the plausible ones
- Ross administrator portal (manager's handbook)
- Inflates the job only to make it beyond reach

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Appreciating & Accepting Failure

- We are great at killing our babies – Stephen Abrams
- Stephen's Lighthouse Blog:
 - ~ <http://stephenslighthouse.com/2010/03/23/how-to-be-anti-creativity-and-innovation/>
 - ~ <http://stephenslighthouse.com/2010/06/11/why-do-innovation-initiatives-fail/>
- <http://failbrary.org/>
- **Innovation cannot happen when failure is avoided at all costs**

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Appreciating & Accepting Failure

- Why experimentation is good!
- Dealing with setbacks
- Be careful of the Acceleration Trap (April 2010 HBR)
- Don't get married to the results!

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Appreciating & Accepting Failure

- One way to help people understand failure is through examples of people who failed and then grew
- Use 'reasonable' examples of failure

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Appreciating & Accepting Failure

@21, failed in business
 @22, lost a legislative race
 @34, lost a congressional race
 @45&49, lost senate races
 @52, elected president



As a sophomore, he was cut from his high school basketball team



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Appreciating & Accepting Failure

- These are not great or uplifting examples for staff
- While goals are meant to be big, examples can be more effective in those involving organizations such as:
 - ~ New Coke
 - ~ Northwest & JetBlue's Snow Adventure
- How does an organization overcome adversity?

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Appreciating & Accepting Failure

- Use examples of failures that are more in line with what types of experiences that your staff have
- This eliminates the disconnect between the example and the staff-member

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Building The Entrepreneurial Library

- At Kresge Library, we built an entrepreneurial library **not by proclamation, but by our actions**
- A willingness to see service opportunities, even in non-traditional library service areas
- Break down issues into core components – not linking a problem immediately with a solution
- Developing a focus on process, not results, will pay dividends down the road

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Building The Entrepreneurial Library

- **Think Directionally – not Definitively**
- Take steps to move in a direction – not an exact location
- Goals and plans should be in flux as you move forward
- Great goals are meant to be huge and mostly out of reach - if they are attainable, they are more like tasks!



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Building The Entrepreneurial Library

- Work through problems as a group
- Understand the needs of the patrons/students
- Do not discount those needs based on what others are doing
- Do not see technology as a goal, but as a means to a goal

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Building The Entrepreneurial Library

- The key elements of our entrepreneurial culture is:
 - ~ Built a new culture where unconventional ideas and services can be advanced and considered.
 - ~ Allowed for failure – not every idea is a good one.
 - ~ Allowed a chance in culture to develop – NOT be imposed.
 - ~ Created an environment that allows for a wide diversity of opinions to be expressed.

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Building The Entrepreneurial Library

Corey's Management Perspectives

- Reward innovation – NOT just success
- Do not get bogged down with metrics
- Understand how long it takes for new products and services to “take” in the market – especially with peer-to-peer connections
- Understand an organizations capacity for change (lessons from the Detroit Lions implementation of the ‘West Coast Offense’)

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Mini Cases

- Service enhancements and changes over the past four years at Kresge Library.
- Some venturing into non-traditional library services.
- Examples of what we are doing at Kresge – and HOW we are working through the problems.
- Questions we asked:
 - ~ Is this an information need?
 - ~ Can we help?
 - ~ What is the real cost?

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Mini Case - Reference Desk Hours

- Problem: Part-Time MBAs need to change work schedule to get to the Library before 5pm
- Pathway: Discussions with both Part-Time MBAs and Day MBAs
- Proposal: Expand to 7pm Close on Monday – Thursday (had the ability to hire a temporary staff member to anchor this desk time and it provided outreach to Part-Time MBAs
- Payoff: Became very popular service desk time, among all Ross Students
- **Progress: Expanded reference service from 11am to 9am opening with existing staff – also very popular**

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Mini Case – Syllabi Archives

- Problem: Students wanted a way to look at old syllabi when selecting classes
- Pathway: Students talked about it in meetings with the Deans
- Proposal: Deans originally proposed an online space to view all these (CTools). We countered with a different solution that provides more flexibility and access to a wider audience (alumni)
- Payoff: Kresge Course Syllabi Archives
- **Progress: Moved to a database structure in 2010 and starting finding other audience members for the service**

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Mini Case – Faculty Scholarship DB

- Problem: No good way to track faculty scholarship
- Pathway: Through accreditation process, we realized that we had no great way to pull this information together
- Proposal: Blank slate to create a system to manage this. Tried blogs, wikis and considered a stand alone database. Came up with a proof of concept database using our library catalog.
- Payoff: Kresge Faculty Scholarship Database
- **Progress: Through Beyond the Grey Pinstripes citation review (ranking for green programs), we realized that we cannot export the data as needed – we need to tweak this (not a failure – but an opportunity)!**

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Mini Case - Evening Printing Service for Faculty

- Problem: Faculty requested a means of having evening support for printing class handouts (to facilitate a just-in-time approach).
- Pathway: Learned through Faculty meetings with Chief Operating Officer
- Proposal: Create a mechanism where faculty can submit jobs and have them printed at Kresge Library by evening staff. The jobs would be limited in what could be done on the machines at the Library.
- Payoff: Not much – we have only had this used a few times in the past three years.
- **Progress: Maintaining service – though assessing the need – We might have misread the market/demand**

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Back to Miss Frizzle

- Experimenting is a messy job
- We can test and test, but services might never take off at our library
- Not every idea is good
- If we were solely fixated on success, we would only do things successfully implemented elsewhere
- We should never fear the ‘cost’ of success

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Thank You

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