MELANIE HUGGINS

KAREN BROSIUS

Melanie Huggins is now going to talk a little bit about how can libraries position themselves to be used and be useful to the next generation of leaders in our communities and why should the next generation care. And so, she's going to talk a little bit about that.

MELANIE HUGGINS

I'm really disappointed that Rob Finlay wasn't in love with libraries when he lived five miles down the road from me. And I was trying to raise $42 million to build (LAUGH) a facility. We didn't even know each other and he still doesn't even know about the facilities not in the city anymore. This was when I was in Charlotte. So, how disappointing is that? (LAUGH) I think my husband who has a degree in Mass Communications and Journalism, he loves to point out to me that everything is about communication. Everything comes down to communication and, I went to the University of South Carolina Library School and some of you even here may know that the Library School and the Journalism School are now under one roof. And when that first happened, I thought well, first of all, you know my husband and I did that a long time ago but now, what a great opportunity, you know to, to have a Library School and this crossover and this kind of cross-pollination of ideas. And have these library people coming into the Library School with polished journalism and, and communication experience. I understand that's not really happening but I have high hopes that eventually, that, that partnership will really firm itself up. But again I just wanted, I almost, it's humbling for me to be here because there's so much talent in the room and, and I'm getting what Mark said, is we just want to start the conversation. We certainly don't have all the answers. We have a lot of questions. But I think what's so exciting about libraries and I think museums too, but certainly about libraries and why the future you know generation should spend their time and talents with us is that the vision that I have and that many of us in this room have for what a public library can be is so incredibly exciting. I always say that the thing that is so wonderful about my job is that my job is about lifelong learning. That's also the thing that's horrible about my job because you have to focus. Everything is lifelong learning. We're learning while we're walking down the street if you're intuitive at all. So, we have to really focus our efforts. The vision that I have for our public libraries in the future and that many of us have, and it's already happening in some places, is that we become more about our services and less about the stuff that we own. Really just turning the library inside out and Mark does have of all worlds right now. Not having a building and having to show people what you're about without a building, is probably the best way to show that we are not about stuff. We're about services. So, I agree and I'm trying to raise money now in Saint Paul. It seems to be that's some training that we need in the Library School by the way. I'm trying to raise money to renovate buildings in Saint Paul and I just met with a group of donors and they don't want to bail the city out. They don't want to come in and pick up where the city's responsibility should have been and re-carpet or repaint. They want to know what matters. Why would I pick you out of all the other people that come to me? So, it's about communication. It's about showing that we're about services not stuff. And many of us are familiar with Thomas Frey and his work on The Future of Libraries. And one of my favorite things that he says is that it's about experiences. And we need to know what kind of experiences our public, want to have in libraries. And that's really difficult to get at because Bob said last night that we hold the public trust and, and that's true and people do value neighborhood libraries. But they also have, whether they use them or not, because a lot of your donors don't use libraries (LAUGH), but they have this perception of what a library is. And sometimes, that works in our favor and sometimes it's really hard to say but we're not just about that. We are about these other things. We do create outcomes. One of the things that again, about communication, is it's key for us in, in these positions, in leadership positions, to know what our community values. And this morning as I, and I'm sure others, you are watching CNN and I'm looking at Stacy and watching South California just go up in flames, you're thinking about what is that community

value right now? Where are they? Where are they in that spectrum of value and what are libraries going do to step up? And I'll be really interested to see what happens because it happened after Hurricane Katrina when you had librarians handing out toilet paper. I mean that was, you know (LAUGH) that was a pinnacle moment when people who couldn't find their loved ones were coming to the library to use the Internet to figure out where their families were. And I hope and I think that the South Carolina, oh the South Carolina excuse me, my, my prejudice is showing, that Southern California, the California libraries will do much of that. We'll see those things happening because we do look at our communities and say what is our community value and how can we be a part of that network? In Saint Paul, our community values, the top three values that we have are the same in many urban environments, education, safety, and economic development. And in all three of those, libraries have something extraordinary to bring to the table. And education obviously, that seems obvious enough because we have books and materials and, but we know public libraries are doing extraordinary work in the area of early literacy. We know as our populations age, that people want to age in place and so, we can do a lot to form partnerships to be where people are aging to make sure the continuum of learning is supported. We've got some fabulous partnerships across the country with community colleges. So, there's lots of ways that we kind of make education everyone's business. I'm really proud of some of the things that we did in Charlotte and some of the things we're doing in Saint Paul. We just launched Blast Off To Kindergarten, which is a community-wide awareness campaign about what it takes children to, what it takes to get children ready for kindergarten. And a huge piece of that is obviously, early literacy. So, why shouldn't a library be a champion there? And why shouldn't a library be able to say, it's because of our projects and our support and our network of partners that we are creating this outcomes for children? Public safety -- how many of you in public libraries and if you're funded the way that I'm funded in Saint Paul, it gets to be a cops versus libraries issue. Do we fund more cops on street? Do we keep libraries open? I've been telling you, they are not mutually exclusive. There's a lot of correlation between the things that happened in the after-school hours with teens being victims of crime or being involved in criminal activity or, and then the fact that when our library's open in the afternoon. There's a safe place for them to go. So, the idea of library as safe harbor, as a place of respite, I think should apply to museums as well. We are doing some really interesting work, partnering with our police in Saint Paul because let's face it, they're going to get more money than us. So, if we, I mean that's reality in Saint Paul, right now, it could be everywhere but, but we can partner with them. And they have more resources, then why shouldn't part of the time that they're doing their community policing be spent in a library, building relationships with the kids that come in every day? So, there's some opportunities there with public safety. And the other thing about community values is economic development and it you know, those of us that work in libraries, we know it make sense. We are the first place people go, a lot of new immigrants go, when they want to apply for a job and they don't have the technology. They don't have a scanner where they can scan their resume and very few people will take a resume in paper form anymore, so where they are going? They're going to the public library. The other interesting thing is I've started to do some work with the Chamber and with the Visitor's Bureau because when we're trying to attract business to Saint Paul, one of the things that they want is an educated workforce. And we can say, here's how libraries support that. The other thing they want is a good quality of life for the families who they're trying to get to move to St. Paul. And so we can say, look at these neighborhoods and these library programs and services that we have. So, I think the challenges are great. One of the biggest challenges about leaders in libraries is that and Tracy and I just had a short conversation about this, is that library schools don't fully prepare people for what the job really is. And it's hard to find people that have the marketing, the fundraising, the public speaking, the instructional technology, the information literacy skills. I think academic libraries do the instructional technology better than public libraries do but why are we not hiring people with those skills? At one point, I had said to a colleague and I'm very transparent, as you probably can tell, if we hire one more person that loves books and not people, I think I'm going to shoot myself. (LAUGH) You know it's just, I mean you can teach people the job. You can't teach some of these other skills or if you're getting them, you're not getting them in library school. So, where are we looking to get that next generation of leaders from? I want it to be library school, I want it to be, but right now, I don't think it's quite there So, we have a lot of challenges.

And, I think one of them is that as the next generation of leaders in this room always trying to push the envelope and in moving our institutions forward while knowing we've got to go back and work with the different bargaining units and the unions and the funding and the politicians, that's a real challenge. So, it's things like this that give us a chance to not forget why we're in the business to begin with, and create those networks, and I'm just happy to be here and be a part of the conversation.

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