Librarian Superpowers Activate! | Office Hours

by Michael Stephens
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In my last column ("Champion of Confidence," *LJ* 6/1/18), I shared a conversation I had with Sally Pewhairangi, a New Zealand librarian working on a new website called The Library Boss. We explored how confidence in our abilities is just as important as competence. We finish our discussion this time with a deep dive into qualities that should be part of the information professional's skill set.

What's the next step to keep boosting confidence, especially in the digital environment in which things can seem so confusing and quick to change?

The good news is you [already] possess six qualities that can help boost your digital literacy confidence—adaptability, critical thinking, curiosity, empathy, patience, and problem-solving— and use them to varying degrees for different situations. The one quality that boosts your confidence with things digital—your digital superpower—is the quality you prefer to use regardless of the situation. It is the one that comes most naturally to you and makes you feel confident when you use it.

Thinking back to my time as a public library Internet trainer, my superpower was empathy or perhaps patience, as I guided patrons through web basics and what search engines did. Break this down for me because I think it applies to library folk trying to do new things and to LIS students who might need to use their own superpower on assignments and projects.

Absolutely. My digital superpower is curiosity. But even though I like to try new things, sometimes I still don't believe I can do everything right. Let's say I want to make a video, because videos are so useful and popular now. Here's what I would do:

1. Set a supersmall goal: The purpose is to develop your confidence so that you can achieve goals (not just improve your competence by completing tasks). The key is to choose something that you haven't done before but believe you can with preparation. My supersmall goal is to make five home videos in the next five days. Other supersmall goals might be: write a blog post about five subject-specific websites you'd recommend to others, actively participate in a Twitter chat, or create a screen-cast video showing a library member how to download ebooks.
2. Brainstorm: Consider how you can use your digital superpower to achieve your goal in a way that energizes and excites you. If Step 1 is deciding what to do, Step 2 is deciding how to do it. Because trying new things is part of my curiosity digital superpower, I decided to use a different app for each video I create.
3. Get ready: Start preparing. This might include doing preliminary research, making sure you have all the software and equipment you need, and scheduling time to prepare and practice. I asked friends for app suggestions and downloaded five to see how they worked. I found they all worked in the same way, and even though they each had different post-editing features, postediting wasn't part of my supersmall goal.
4. Do it: Now that you have everything ready, schedule all the time you need to achieve your goal. Give yourself a positive pep talk (one phrase I use frequently is "this will not defeat me"). And then do it. I set aside ten minutes each morning so I could get it out of the way before I chickened out!
5. Celebrate: Congratulations, you did it! Acknowledge what you have achieved and feel proud of your success. In each video, I briefly talked about my day. The videos certainly weren't polished by any means, but I learned lots about lighting, background noise, and the

sound of my voice. I'm pleased with what I achieved.

Thank you, Sally, for the time you spent with me exploring these concepts. For our readers, I'd suggest trying this exercise and incorporating these ideas into a future staff meeting or development day.

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