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R-E-S-P-E-C-T (as sung by Aretha Franklin)

Somewhere – perhaps on another idyllic world in the vast universe – libraries and librarians occupy the pinnacles of aspiration. People scale cliffs, endure untold hardships (rather like the Robertson's spice lady) to consult these oracles of sagacity. A single cryptic utterance from a librarian changes lives and inspires nations – somewhere.

Here in our world a child queried earnestly whether I got paid to work in the library. His mother tried to hush him and I was tempted for a moment to tell him we worked for the love of mankind, but he was only eight years old and irony is too precious to waste. Our world does not value library work or library workers – after all, anyone can wield a date stamp.

Endless discussions about improving the image of the profession focus on how to trumpet our successes or reveal the importance of our educational support, research and community development or similar profound contributions to humanity. At the very least I seek equality with my patrons, believing that human nature is inherently rooted in the ego. If a patron can perceive me as equal to themselves, they might more readily show me respect. Yeah, right; been there, tried that; no T-shirts, only doormats.

Turn the question around for a moment. Do we respect ourselves, our skills, our professional value? Do we truly understand how extraordinarily marvellous we are?

We often jokingly list all our routine functions, such as riot or crowd control, babysitting, marital guidance, psychological counselling, mentoring, career guidance, domestic goddess, celebrity chef, philosopher, public speaker – all the extras we face in a day. While our heads and hearts are busy answering reference queries, our hands and eyes are on automatic pilot, discharging and issuing books, directing people to shelves, watching grubby fingers at the Internet stations. We take multi-tasking for granted. So, how often do you stop, puff out your chest and say 'Gee whiz, I really am so-o-o great!'

Secondly, do we value our profession? Do we keep our knowledge tools sharpened, well-maintained without looking for the carrot on the horizon? If we take pride in our work, our self-respect demands that we keep up to date with our own lifelong learning programme. To paraphrase John F Kennedy, 'ask not what your job can do for you, ask what you can do for your job'. A change of perspective can work wonders for your disposition. With a sense of adventure, technological advances reveal an exciting world to explore and conquer.