



# INFORMATION TODAY

The Newsmagazine for Users and Producers of Digital Information Services

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to Explain  
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The Newsmagazine for Users and Producers of Digital Information Services

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The Help Desk, Let's Get Strategic, AI Ethicist



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JUSTIN HOENKE

# A Day in the Life

## The Community Connector

I've been following Maurice Coleman on nearly every social media platform since what feels like the dawn of my library career. At every moment, Maurice has been there to dish out wisdom, knowledge, and kindness. Maurice is not only an amazing librarian-adjacent person, but he's also one of those people who does so much more: trainer, coach, keynote speaker, and all-around inspiration guru for public libraries. Time and time again, I am amazed at how Maurice helps people and libraries connect with each other. None of this is more apparent than in Maurice's podcast, *T Is for Training*, on which he and his co-hosts share how libraries can be flexible and available community connectors.

**YOU HAVE BEEN A CONSULTANT FOR 27 YEARS NOW. TELL ME WHAT YOU DO AT COLEMAN & ASSOCIATES.**

Well, I have only worked in libraries since 2002 and have been training in libraries since 2004. Before that, I worked with various nonprofit groups in New York City as a trainer and grantmaker. My job as the principal at Coleman & Associates is to create experiences that help clients do what they want to do with greater impact. I partner when necessary with my brilliant associates to deliver bespoke experiences that move my clients toward the change they want to create in the world. I also have to keep on top of the newest service models, political environments, and trends and how to evaluate and practically apply those trends to a range of libraries.

So, I help clients address equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice in their organization and community. I work with clients so they can confidently help customers use technology. I teach clients how to teach others almost anything. I show clients the best way to present

information. I help them plan for technology in spaces for the present and the future. I coach leaders to be agile, to be compassionate, and on how to say "no" the right way.

**WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS FROM NEARLY 20 YEARS OF CONSULTING IN THE LIBRARY WORLD?**

One fine day, I was looking through my name alert emails, and I discovered an alert for a presenter named Maurice Coleman discussing a subject I speak about at conferences. It felt like I was being forced to present at this conference. So, I contacted the conference organization and presented my case that I should be paid for presenting and compensated for travel, since they put my name and presentation out there without my permission.

A story about flexibility: My colleague and I collaborated on a 2-day presentation for a library. We created desired outcomes with our contact and took weeks carefully planning 2 days of training to meet the outcomes.

When we hosted the first day of the workshop, we were stunned that our content was not what the group needed. We had to improvise the first day, so they didn't waste their time, and then create a new training session overnight for delivery the next day.

**YOU HAVE MANY TALENTS: TECHNOLOGY, PLANNING, MAKERSPACES, MANAGEMENT, SOCIAL MEDIA, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND SO MUCH MORE. HOW'D YOU GET ALL OF THIS EXPERIENCE? WHAT SHOULD LIBRARIANS DO TO GET THE EXPERIENCE YOU'VE HAD?**

The best ability is availability. If it is not part of your official job description, let your decision makers know you want to try new things and see how they can—and if they should—be used by your library.

Flexibility is key. So is being willing to try, fail, and try again. Don't be afraid to fail. Failure is only truly a failure if you don't learn from it.

Always focus on what you can do to make yourself better, your team better, your library better, and your community better without overextending yourself.

"Other duties as assigned" are a great teacher. Supported learning is the best learning.



Maurice Coleman

**TELL US ABOUT *T IS FOR TRAINING*. YOU'VE BEEN AT IT SINCE 2008, WAY BEFORE PODCASTS WERE THE BIG THING TO DO. HOW DID YOU GET INTO PODCASTING? WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ALONG THE WAY?**

The podcast started because I wanted to re-create the learning and sharing community that organically happens when you gather trainers at any library conference. Library trainers are often the lone wolves in a given library system, and they tend to gravitate toward each other at technology and library conferences.

I love the sharing of stories and resources that naturally happened in public spaces at conferences, and I wanted to have that good vibe year-round. I asked some library trainer friends if they thought a training podcast would help them do their jobs. They all said yes, and we're still here 14 years later.

The biggest lesson from podcasting is that you can't know too many brilliant and dedicated people. The *T Is for Training* community is one of my best resources for ideas, support, and friendship. There have been many people, past and present, who have a part in the success of the show, and I am appreciative of all of them.

**WHAT ARE YOUR WORDS OF WISDOM TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES LOOKING AT THE LATEST AND GREATEST TECH THING? WHAT SHOULD THEY EMBRACE, AND WHAT SHOULD THEY BE MINDFUL ABOUT?**

Don't be afraid to try something and use it. Also, don't be afraid to try something and never use it again.

Bright and shiny don't always make sense. New technology makes sense when it fits within your mission, helps you reinforce your values, and manifests your library's vision. Otherwise, it's sometimes expensive junk.

Library staffers need time and support to play with (learn to control, apply, and share) the new technology to evaluate it and to sell it to your community.

**LINKS TO THE SOURCES**

**Coleman & Associates**  
colemanassociates.net

***T Is for Training***  
tisfortraining.wordpress.com

If it is something geared to your users, then provide time to develop ways to convey why you are introducing this new thing and how it will make a difference to the user experience.

**GIVE ME THREE THINGS THAT YOU THINK EVERY PUBLIC LIBRARY IN THE U.S. SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT AT THIS MOMENT.**

**1** Bridging the digital divide (paraphrasing Malcolm X) by any means available and necessary. The digital divide can be geographic, social, economic, cultural, or generational. Libraries must be the bridge to the future for their users. Seek out staffers who will find and communicate with your constituents. Make it as easy as possible for your current and potential users to access information. Extend your Wi-Fi. Lend hotspots. Invest in charging stations. Take access to the people. Share with your customers easy ways to address their privacy and security. Model that behavior on your public computers.

**2** Protecting and preserving their data from inevitable failure and criminals. Redundant backups and cybersecurity measures are a must to prevent service interruptions. Everyone who works for our library is the first wave of cybersecurity defense.

**3** Always think about community engagement and outreach. Go to the

people. Give people a reason to come to the library. Does your community need an ATM? A place to get packages? A drive-through library window? A branch in a mall? A social worker? A circulating tool collection? A circulating bake pan collection? A portable service point? A pop-up service point (or three)?

**WHAT ARE YOU READING/LISTENING TO/ WATCHING THESE DAYS?**

Books in rotation: *The 1619 Project* by Nikole Hannah-Jones, *The Design of Everyday Things* by Don Norman, *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World* by David Epstein, *The Cult of Personality Testing* by Annie Murphy Paul, and *The New Consultant's Quick Start Guide* by Elaine Biech.

Watching: *The Daily Show* with Trevor Noah, *Last Week Tonight* with John Oliver, *Full Frontal* with Samantha Bee, *The Equalizer*, *Rat in the Kitchen*, *Love Is Blind*, *Naked and Afraid*, *Alone*, MLB, NASCAR, the NBA, and the NFL.

**ANYTHING ELSE? THE FLOOR IS YOURS.**

Libraries are community connectors because of the knowledge and experience of the whole staff. Your custodians, shelvees, and back office and circulation staffers are as important to your library's mission as your reference staffers. They all work together to create a sublime public service experience.

Library staffers can evaluate and either provide customers with or refer them to the right thing for their needs. Libraries are full of awesome people, but not superheroes. Take care of yourself, and you can better take care of your co-workers, family, and community. Self-care is not selfish—it is necessary.

Justin Hoenke is a human being and a librarian. He's worked in public libraries in the U.S. and New Zealand and is currently the library director of Gardiner Public Library in Gardiner, Maine. His professional interests include creativity, public libraries as community centers, and music. Read Hoenke's blog at [justinthelibrarian.com](http://justinthelibrarian.com). Send your comments about this column to [itletters@infotoday.com](mailto:itletters@infotoday.com) or tweet us (@ITINewsBreaks).