



## NEVER LUNCH ALONE... AND OTHER IMMUTABLE PRECEPTS FOR CREATING A KNOWLEDGE CULTURE BY MARCIE STONE

### SUMMARY

For five decades Jeannette Privat has focused on specialized librarianship, information management, and knowledge services delivery. In today's KM/knowledge services marketplace, Privat continues to bring customer-focused products and services to a continually expanding target group: knowledge workers in the nonprofit and philanthropy community who must access information, knowledge, and strategic learning content to achieve organizational effectiveness. Working with the King County Library System's Nonprofit and Philanthropy Resource Center, which she created in 2000, Privat brings the professional expertise, subject strengths, and marketing skills of specialized librarianship to an extremely popular program. In cooperation with The Foundation Center, NPRC provides access to Foundation Center databases for NPRC clients and offers a heavy schedule of educational, awareness-raising, networking, and strategic learning opportunities to nonprofit staff of the Pacific Northwest. A side benefit of Privat's involvement with NPRC has been the development of a nonprofit community of practice, a networking opportunity ready-made for people who seek to learn how they can work better and smarter in the nonprofit and philanthropic arena.

**KEY WORDS:** knowledge culture, knowledge management, KM, knowledge services, strategic learning, information services, specialized librarianship, Special Libraries Association, SLA, King County Library System Nonprofit and Philanthropy Resources Center (NPRC), Foundation Center, Jeannette Privat



Jeannette Privat is a leading member of the specialized libraries community, a colleague who for five decades has set a splendid example for delivering outstanding information and knowledge services. When we met, Jeannette shared guidance she received from Grieg Aspnes, a former SLA President (1951-52) and long-time prominent librarian. When asked about how to make library services indispensable to the organization, Aspnes had four tips: never lunch alone, overcome the unasked question, make people comfortable in the library; and approach clients in their own physical space. Of course success as a knowledge services professional includes much more, but these principles are a sterling starting point for a successful career.

Jeannette graduated from the University of Washington in 1960 with a degree in Business Administration. She immediately began working in the library at United Control Corporation (now Honeywell), launching a career that is still going strong today. Her first supervisor urged her to get her library degree, which she did in 1969, simultaneously attending classes and working full time. Even before she completed her MLS, though, her business administration education provided her with an important advantage – she was able to look at information services in the context of the overall corporation, giving her a foundation in how businesses work. It was obvious to her that library services should correlate with the goals of the company, and she realized immediately that she would need to take her information to management and staff, rather than wait for them to discover her (although she also developed a series of techniques for luring users into the library.) She also recognized that she would need to become completely familiar with the strategic and tactical goals of the corporation in order to build strong relationships in which her clients would trust her to locate the right

information at the right time. Sound familiar? These are the same tenets that apply to our current dialog about knowledge services, knowledge development, knowledge sharing, strategic learning, the knowledge culture, and all the other elements of information services we talk about, regardless of how we name them.

Jeannette asserts that everything you have ever done, whether within or external to your professional life, will assist you in your work, no matter what position you hold. With that in mind, we discussed a career that is characterized by a series of exceptional accomplishments and an extraordinary service ethic; I came away with a clear picture of how both Jeannette's professional and volunteer activities have contributed to her continuing success and to that of her parent organizations, a perception made even more vivid when I think about the landmarks of her professional life: librarian at United Control Corporation (now Honeywell); establishing and managing the first bank library in the Pacific Northwest at Seattle-First (Seafirst) National Bank, from inception to closure twenty-five years later; becoming the first Executive Director of the King County Library System Foundation; creating and implementing the Career Center at the Shoreline (Washington) Library; and her current success as the founder and supervisor of the Nonprofit and Philanthropy Resource Center of the King County Library System (KCLS), also in Washington.

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Jeannette has also served as the chair of the Visiting Committee of the University of Washington (then) Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) – and she has held many positions in the Special Libraries Association. She's been a member of SLA since 1965, serving in leadership positions as a member of the SLA Board of Directors, Chapter Cabinet Chair, Pacific Northwest Chapter President, Chair of the Library Management Division (now the Leadership and Management Division), and Conference Program Chair. Jeannette was named an SLA Fellow in 1987, honored as the 1993 Distinguished Alumnus of the University of Washington GSLIS, and awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award of SLA's Pacific Northwest Chapter in 1999. Outside of the library sphere, Jeannette has held volunteer leadership positions in numerous organizations, including the Girl Scouts, City Club of Seattle, and the Northwest Chamber Orchestra (where she served as President of the Board of Directors for five years). She is currently on the board of the Puget Sound Grantwriters Association.

In the last ten years, Jeannette's career at King County Library System has taken an interesting turn that connects with specialized librarianship, allowing her to explore new opportunities for providing information and knowledge services. Since 2000 she has supervised the [Nonprofit and Philanthropy Resource Center](#) (NPRC), which she established at the request of the director of KCLS, NPRC's parent organization. The third busiest library system in the country, KCLS is headquartered in Issaquah, Washington, just across Lake Washington from Seattle. The robust philanthropic and nonprofit environment in the Pacific Northwest reflects a lively arts scene; a deep concern with international health, social justice, and economic improvement; and the emergence of a new type of philanthropy that looks for measurable results from funding recipients. NPRC provides a wide variety of research resources to the area's nonprofit and fundraising community, and has been granted Cooperating Collection status by [The Foundation Center](#), a national organization that serves the information and training requirements of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations and is recognized as the authoritative resource for private philanthropy in the country. This connection allows users of NPRC to access the suite of comprehensive databases maintained by The Foundation Center, and also provides the Center with a core print collection.

As Jeannette and I talked, it became clear that the basic practices of good librarianship have remained constant over the years. The environment may vary, the nomenclature may change, the missions of the enterprises might differ greatly, but what was true of successful specialized librarianship when Jeannette got her first job in 1960 is true of good information and knowledge services operations today. We may have developed a new language to describe what needs to be accomplished, in order to realize the mission of the corporation and to make the information business unit (no matter what it's called) an integral and indispensable component of organizational success, but the actions and relationships we describe are fundamentally the same as those deemed successful in the days of the Gaylord charger and handwritten shelf lists.

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Given our current focus on developing the enterprise-wide knowledge culture, I was interested in exploring with Jeannette the similarities and differences she has discovered between serving a defined user community within a large regional library system and working in a corporate environment. As we talked, one characteristic of Jeannette's philosophy emerged immediately: as librarians, we have an obligation to help the world understand the capabilities of libraries and librarians, no matter what they are called. The critical element

here is that librarians understand the potential information sphere that can benefit their corporate (in the large sense) enterprises, and know how to use information to contribute to organizational success. In addition, for librarians this ability for understanding how each organization uses information and discovering what's available enables them to transition successfully from job to job, regardless of the specific mission of the individual employer.

From our discussion, it became apparent that the principles of good library/information service, such as answering the unasked question, gearing specific services to the mission and goals of any group of users, and integrating information services into all facets of the user culture can be tailored to meet the needs of a very broad, geographically disparate client community. By looking at the way in which Jeannette is guiding the NPRC and working with her community, we can see how information services, strategic learning, knowledge development/knowledge sharing (KD/KS), and the creation of a knowledge culture can be accomplished in any community of common interest, whether it is physical or virtual.

First of all, there's the name: Nonprofit and Philanthropy Resource Center. Jeannette insisted that the organization's title reflect the breadth of the subject matter, not just grant writing to tap philanthropic resources but all the complex issues that accompany the founding and management of nonprofit enterprises. Many young nonprofits struggle because the organization's leadership is not aware of the need for developing a perspective that looks beyond the single cause the organization is established to serve.

In the nonprofit community, the most common requirements can be quickly summarized: maintain an effective organization (and its corollary, survive financially); understand the wide range of fundraising techniques and determine which will be most appropriate; and educate the organization's board. This last is particularly important, as there are many misperceptions about nonprofit management that can cause great difficulties if board members try to apply general business tactics without being aware of the special concerns they must address. Not only are these topics given full coverage in the wealth of information available at NPRC, Jeannette's extensive background in nonprofit organizations (board member, officer, grant writer, volunteer) provides her with the insight and knowledge to help the Center's clients work with their own organizations and boards. Additionally, nonprofits can build donor bases using many of the techniques that librarians have employed for generations to build a client base, and that skill, too, is brought to bear in her NPRC work.

As there are many common concerns throughout the philanthropic and nonprofit sector, there is great potential for the development of strategic learning. Although the geographic dispersion of the community isn't a deterrent to developing such connections, it does demand an approach that differs somewhat from an information center located with a corporate headquarters or serving disparate users all belonging to the same organization, as Jeannette experienced with Seafirst Bank. In order to reach and benefit the widest clientele possible, Jeannette has hit the road with presentations, exhibits, and handouts. She also has attended many local meetings with development officers, grant writers, and funders, making NPRC the only one of the Washington-state-based Foundation Center Cooperating Collection members to do so. Linked to these activities, Jeannette is a member of several local nonprofit community support organizations, and she is a board member and active participant in the [Puget Sound Grantwriters Association](#) (PSGA), whose mission is to promote "responsible, effective grant-seeking and foster connections among grant-seekers, nonprofits and funders." In this role, Jeannette utilizes PSGA training sessions, conferences, and bi-monthly meetings to educate the community not only in the area of nonprofit management and fundraising, but also in the advantages found in utilizing the NPRC.

The bi-monthly PSGA programs that Jeannette chairs bring together funders and grant writers (and other nonprofit personnel), providing attendees with the opportunity to benefit from each other's experiences, both

in the funders' panel presentations and in networking activities and informal discussions. These sessions also allow Jeannette to become acquainted with new members of the community and other potential NPRC users, and to learn even more about the information requirements of her clientele. They also expand her knowledge of individual funders, allowing her to provide even more assistance to the Center's users.

Regardless of the environment, one of the common goals for developing a knowledge culture is increasing client awareness, and Jeannette's approach clearly reflects her combined library/business mind-set. She emphasizes that information/knowledge services need to fit into the organization or community, and in each of her jobs Jeannette has fostered the kind of relationships that expand the library's role, ensuring that it progresses into a corporate strategic partner. She has also continually advocated "selling" the library (even before that critical activity became an acknowledged necessity of corporate life, and frequently to the surprise of her colleagues), and far before the days that marketing information services became an acknowledged practice, Jeannette was succeeding in her marketing and awareness-raising programs.

With NPRC, Jeannette's marketing efforts are funded by KCLS, and while she does not currently have her own marketing budget, she is pushing to establish one. In addition to attending community meetings in person, Jeannette also is participating in the library system's YouTube virtual tours of the collection – certainly a new way to approach people in their own physical spaces! She also helps users keep in touch with her community – and with each other – through the Nonprofit Calendar, which she created to furnish a comprehensive list of events of interest (classes, workshops, meetings, conferences, fundraising events, etc) to nonprofit organizations. Jeannette also utilizes the calendar to increase awareness of NPRC and its services by contacting the organizer of each appropriate event with an offer to provide materials about the Center.

In a new development about which Jeannette is particularly enthusiastic, work is underway to increase the capability of the Center's portion of the KCLS web site. Using a number of new applications, NPRC staff will be able to add significant content to the web site, providing additional information about specific Center resources and services, including a topic/subject guide to the site. Other enhancements to the site will provide links from the site's list of publications and commentary section directly to the catalog, as well as a new "did you know?" feature, changing weekly and compiled into an online guide to NPRC's resources. These changes will generally strengthen the site, improving its usefulness to the community and heightening its impact as a marketing tool for the Center.

In addition to the high-tech solutions such as the YouTube tours, the online calendar, and the new web site, Jeannette also uses personal contacts (including handwritten notes!) as a means of introducing herself and the Center, engaging the interest of various organizations serving nonprofit and philanthropic professionals. These networking and marketing efforts all come together to contribute to the formation of a knowledge community within NPRC's client base, and while some progress has been made, for Jeannette it's still an uphill battle to make her potential clients aware of the range of knowledge resources available to them. Her use of such tools as the Nonprofit Calendar – mentioned earlier – for encouraging the formation of a more cohesive community is an example of how she tackles the issue. One of her primary objectives in creating the Nonprofit Calendar was to share event information more effectively, and its success is demonstrated by an increase in the number of listings posted as event sponsors recognize its benefit to the community as well as the advantage of increasing publicity for their activities.

A major difference that Jeannette sees between her current job and previous ones is that she isn't able to offer the kind of pinpoint information push and follow-up that was possible in a corporate setting. Undaunted, she compensates by learning as much as she can about the diverse community that NPRC serves, and by using new technologies as multipliers for "old-fashioned techniques" (her words) for reaching out to her clients and assuring organizational support. To achieve both of these goals, she takes advantage of every opportunity to publicize the NPRC and the services it provides, including one recent ploy that can only be described as mouth-watering: the creation of a chocolate gift-certificate for a one-hour consultation offered as a raffle prize at a nonprofit convention. If that's not an attention-getter, I don't know what is!

In addition to the allure of chocolate, the fact that her consultation services are considered appropriate for a raffle prize speaks volumes about the regard she and NPRC receive from the community. Which brings us to the question of success and how to measure and report it. Jeannette's criteria for success for NPRC are threefold: increase the effectiveness of nonprofits in meeting their missions; make the community aware of

what knowledge and knowledge services are available to them; and develop the NPRC's client base. Since she has two parent institutions, the KCLS and The Foundation Center, she also has two reporting chains and these, too, provide her with measurement and reporting opportunities. The Foundation Center receives an annual report of standards-based measurement of usage for the print and web-based collections, the growth of the Nonprofit Calendar, and her outreach activities, along with anecdotal information about the size and nature of the client community. KCLS receives similar information on a monthly basis, as well as real-time reports of kudos received and feedback obtained from users of the NPRC.

In addition to growing usage statistics, one of the most telling gauges of Jeannette's and NPRC's central role in the nonprofit and philanthropy community is the steady increase in requests for consultation and assistance. Word-of-mouth plays a large part in community-building, and the buzz surrounding both Jeannette and NPRC is growing constantly. To me, this means that there's solid evidence that Jeannette's style of librarianship, information services, knowledge sharing, knowledge development, and knowledge culture building are, indeed, succeeding very well in the distributed environment. For her part, Jeannette is continually learning more about her community's nature, its information and knowledge services requirements, and the resources available to meet those requirements. And Jeannette herself indirectly answered our initial question about the possibility of creating a KD/KS knowledge services framework in a non-corporate setting: NPRC is the reason she's still working after 50 years in the profession. Despite the public library setting, she is still a special librarian!

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