



The Art of Saying No

Establishing and Maintaining Balanced Workplace Culture

◆—————◆
Calantha Tillotson & Christy Urquieta Cortes

tiny.utk.edu/sayno

Speakers



Calantha Tillotson

Assistant Professor and Subject Expert Librarian (CCI), Health, Wellness, and Professional Programs, UT Libraries

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6090-9713>



Christy Urquieta Cortes

Strategist, Content and Scholarly Communication Initiatives, Lyrasis

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0620-6619>

Agenda

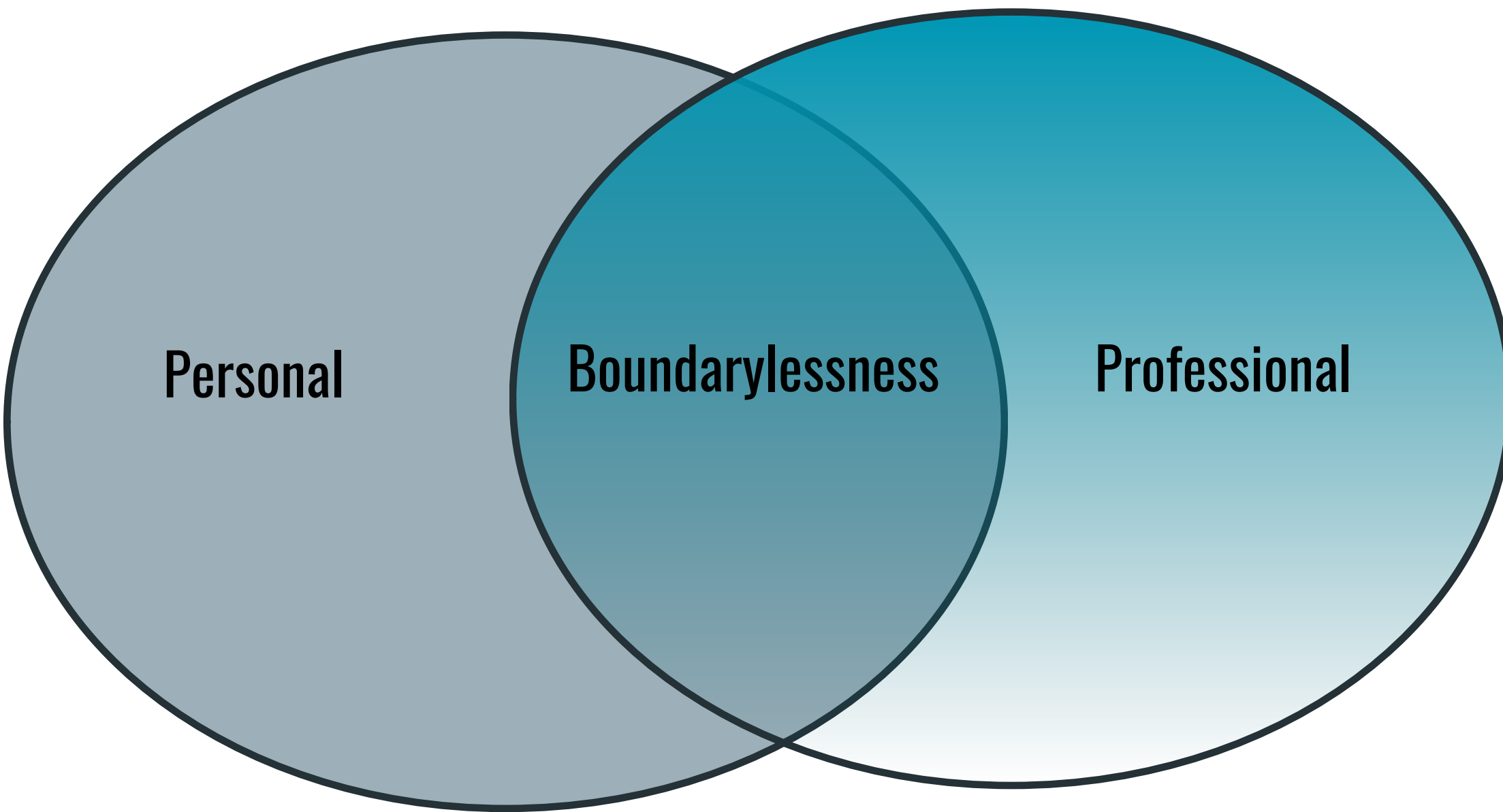


- Introduction
- Librarians in the Literature
- The Expectations
- Expectation #1: At Your Service
- Expectation #2: To Belong or Not to Belong
- Expectation #3: Self-Care Off the Clock
- Looking Forward
- Conclusion

Librarians IRL



Librarians IRL



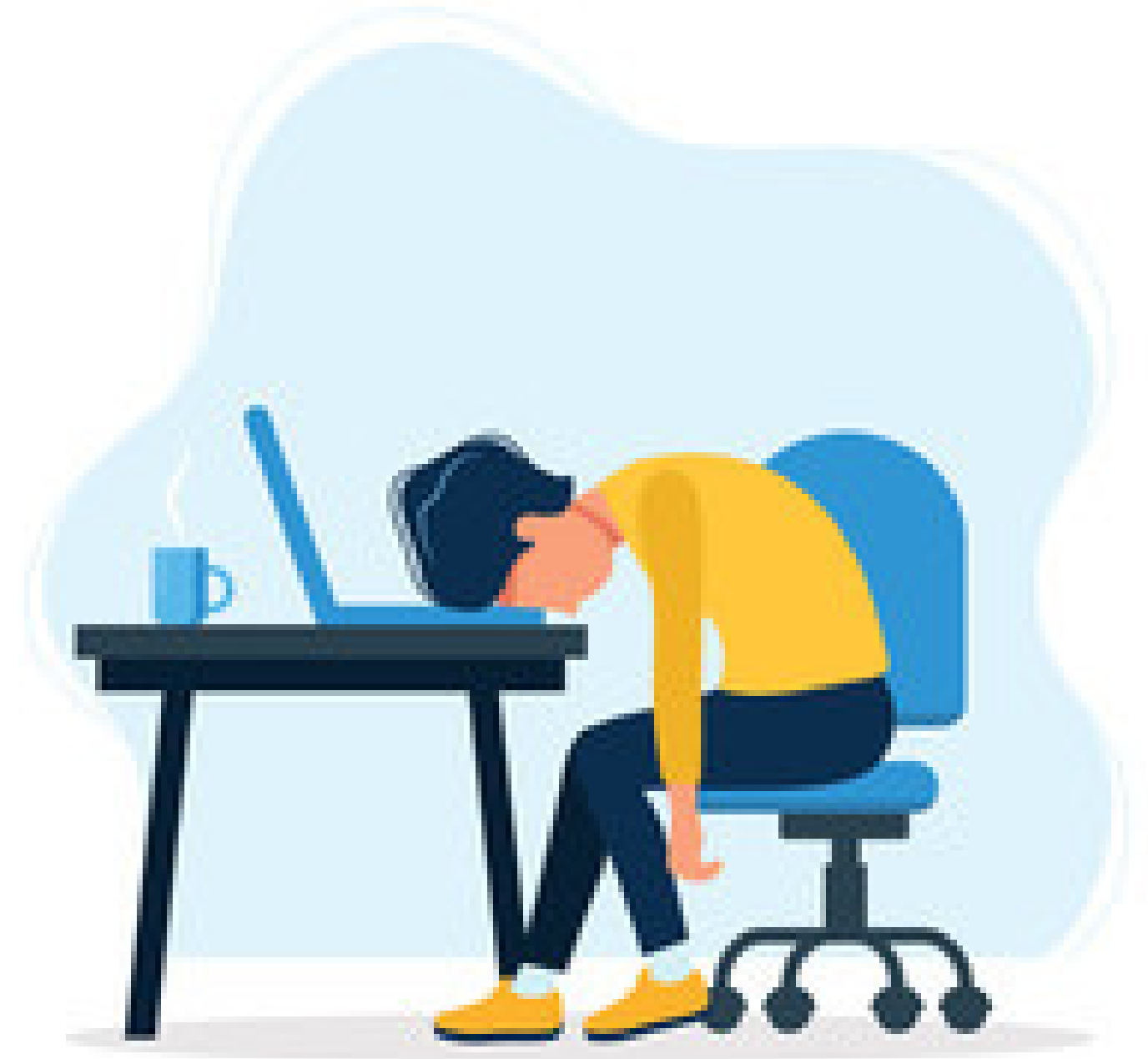
(Kuchi, 2022)



Librarians in the Literature

Roadblocks to Personal Boundaries

- Responding to emails...
 - On personal cell phones
 - During the evenings
 - While taking leave
 - Reluctance to say no to requests from patrons
 - Expressions of positive emotions to suppress negative ones
 - Strong emotional investments in the work
 - Lack of personal agency
 - Role ambiguity
- = **Burnout**

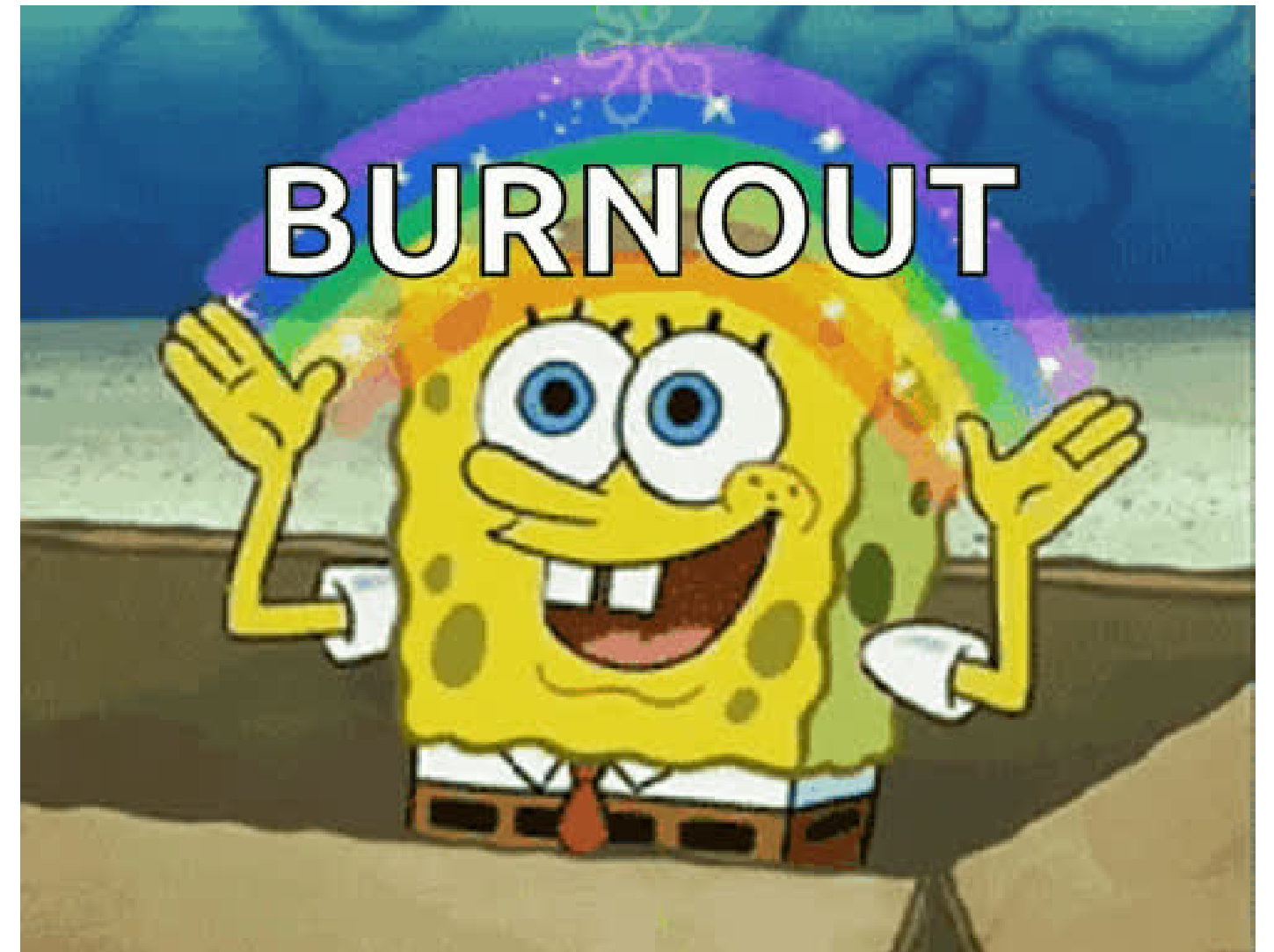


Kuchi, 2022
Hines & Matteson, 2017

Librarians in the Literature

Burnout is the overwork, underpay, and insufficient staffing that create high levels of:

- Emotional Exhaustion
- Depersonalization
- Diminished sense of personal accomplishments



Librarians in the Literature

So, how do we nurture balance?

- Inclusive Communities
- Positive Relationships
- Hybrid Work Schedules
- Sufficient Staffing
- Healthy Lifestyles
- Effective Leadership

All of this = **Slow Librarianship**



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#)



Librarians in the Literature

Slow Librarianship

- “[Does] fewer things in order to do them better.”
- “[Focuses] on relationship-building, deeply understanding and meeting patron needs, and providing equitable services”
- Sees staff as “whole people.”
- Invests in an organizational structure that prioritizes “slowing down in order to ask why we’re doing what we’re doing so that we can do our best and most meaningful work.
- Supports “meaningful practices over chains of impressive-sounding achievements.”
- Doesn’t reward overwork.
- Meets local needs.



Expectations

Librarians are:

1. At Your Service

Librarians must choose:

2. To Belong or Not to Belong

Librarians must commit to:

3. Self-care Off the Clock

Each expectation was reviewed in the literature, reflected on by working librarians, and then reimagined as actionable steps we can take in our workplaces towards a more balanced culture in libraries and other academic spaces.



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

Expectation #1: At Your Service

1. In the Lit

2. On the Ground

3. Taking Action

In the Lit.

We are at your service . . .

- Where service becomes subservience;
- Where libraries are seen as convenience stores;
- Where self is valued over community;
- Where vocational awe meets the productivity pit;
- Where collective action is necessary to combat structural imbalances;
- Where constant adaptations overwhelm missions;
- And we must learn to say no.



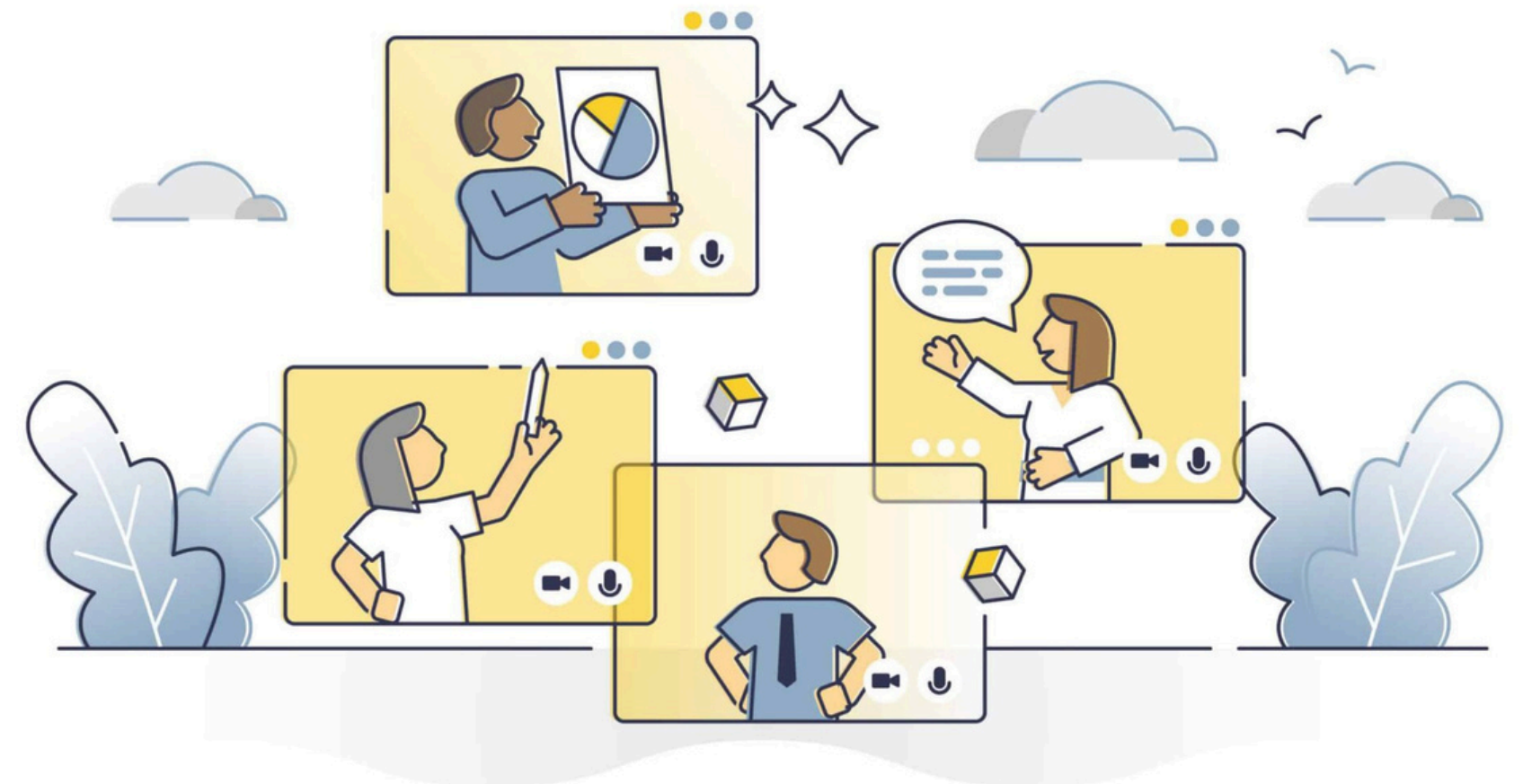
[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)

Glassman, 2017; Galbraith, Fry, & Garrison, 2017
Dixon, 2018; Nardine, 2019
Townsend & Bugg, 2020; Tulgan, 2020
Dolezal, 2023

On the Ground

In our experience:

- Service serves as motivation
- Leading to increasing dissolution of boundaries
 - Lack of solid communication boundaries
 - Schedules that inch professional hours over into personal ones
 - Over commitment to instruction, consultations, and projects
- Resulting in severe burnout necessitating rapid boundary setting
 - Communication management
 - Strict personal/professional time schedules
 - Reduce/remove the automatic "yes"
- Producing (in some cases) management of crossed boundaries



Taking Action: Leaders

If you are an administrator or a manager/decisionmaker:

1. Hire enough people
2. Extra duties should go hand in hand with preparation time, appropriate structural support, and fair compensation.
3. Model communication boundaries and reward employees for the same.
4. Never ask staff to accommodate their boundaries.
5. Advocate for flexible scheduling or other accommodations.
6. Invest in and reward sustainable strategic work.



Taking Action: Librarians

If you are a librarian collaborating with peers/faculty:

1. Carefully consider requests:

i. What is this the best use of your time, resources, or expertise? Does the request meet a specific need? What are the objectives?

2. Keep vocational awe in check:

i. It's just a job and we can slow down to prioritize meeting specific needs over accolades and innovation for innovation's sake.

3. Cultivate communication boundaries that work for you:

i. Establish a clear work schedule and boundaries and share these boundaries with your users, peers, supervisors, etc.

Take It Easy



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)

Expectation #2: To Belong or Not To Belong

1. In the Lit

2. On the Ground

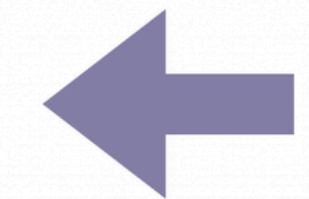
3. Taking Action

In the Lit.

- Are we “safeguard[ing] the rights and welfare of all [library] employees”? (ALA Code of Ethics, 2017)
- How do we avoid “short-terminism” when seeking to advance accessibility and engagement? (Levy & Roberts, 2022)
- Can we hold organizations accountable and protect “invisible” communities from having to advocate alone? (Price, Salzer, O’Shea, & Kerschbaum, 2017)
- What would it take to normalize “body and performance differences” across workplace culture? (Schomberg, 2018)



Long Term



Short Term

On the Ground

- Invisibility
- Fear of reprisal
- Navigating phobia and isms in the workplace
- “Professionalism” vs. personal safety and security
- Feeling forced to “educate” colleagues
- Imbalance of power
- Mental and physical exhaustion



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#)

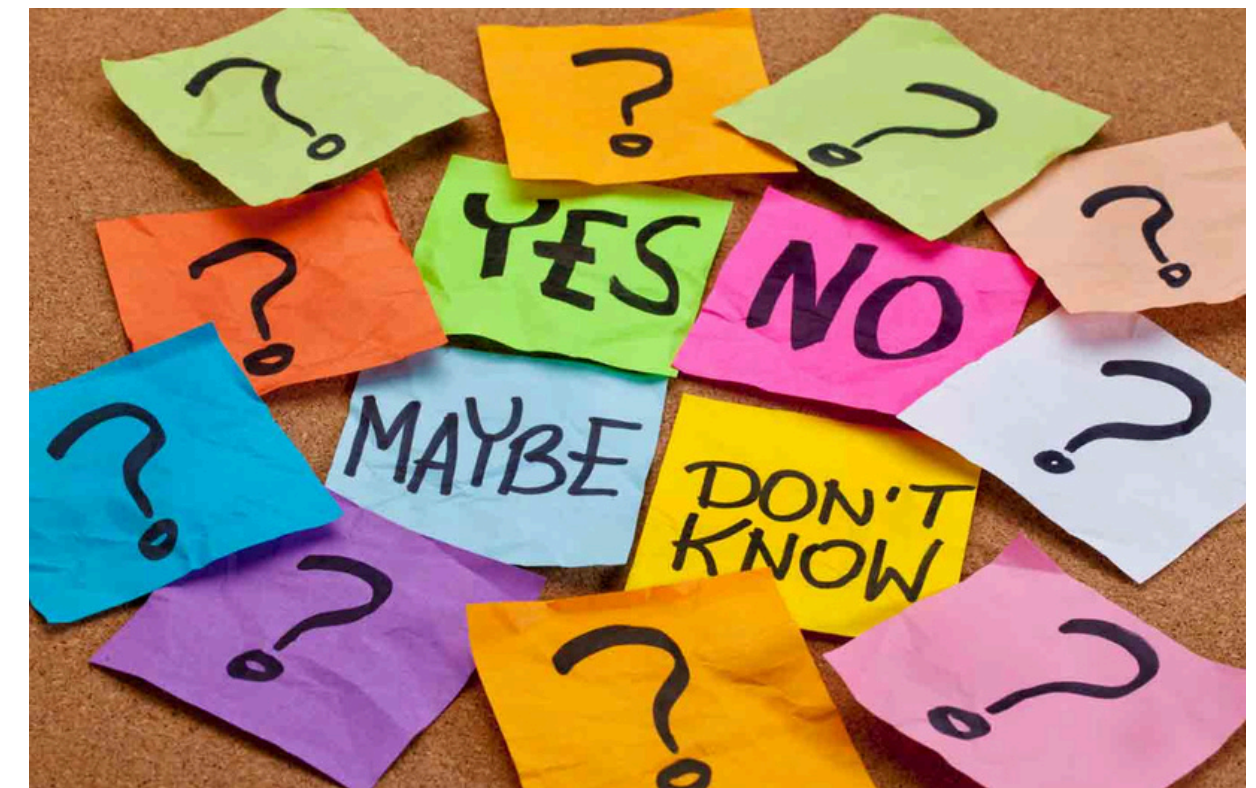
Taking Action: Leaders

- Check your power
- Open yourself to constructive feedback from ALL levels
- Remember most sustainable change is incremental
- Stop operating from a precarity model when making decisions
- Create an internal ombudsman system
- Don't hold funding hostage based on one metric alone



Taking Action: Librarians

- Check your bias and surround yourself with trusted peers/mentors who will hold you accountable
- Speak up to decision-makers on behalf of others (if you are safe to do so and have their permission)
- Participate in decision-making opportunities (strategic planning, policy building, etc.) whenever possible
 - Before making decisions, talk to the people most affected by the potential changes
 - BUT remember not everyone will feel comfortable talking to you about their lived experiences or identities
 - Base decisions/changes on specific, actionable needs



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-ND](#)

Expectation #3: Self-Care Off the Clock

1. In the Lit

2. On the Ground

3. Taking Action

In the Lit

- Academic libraries operate from a philosophy of “precarity” and keeping the status quo “depends on keeping people separated and focused on taking care of themselves above all else” (Schomberg, 2018).
- Employees with disabilities are reluctant to disclose and request accommodations for fear of losing their job or credibility and being treated as “other” (Price et al., 2017).
- Care or self-care “is about setting boundaries that maximize our well-being and provide us with capacity to focus on community care” (Farkas, 2021)



On the Ground

- Balancing heavy work responsibilities with chronic mental health challenges
- Tangible workplace barriers to care for self and others
- Experienced inadequate training and accountability for managers/mentors within the profession
 - Threatened firing as a GRA for taking time off for family emergency
 - After disclosure, told to “toughen up” and stop “wearing her emotions on her sleeve” by manager
 - Called “marshmallow” and said she would be “eaten alive” by faculty/students because she was “too sensitive” by assigned mentor



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

Taking Action: Leaders

- Provide regular opportunities for open discussion of differing needs in the workplace
- Maintain accessibility coordinator/team responsible for adapting practices and spaces using universal design
- Require regular mental health awareness training for administrators, managers, and mentors
- Create and maintain internal policies/procedures that focus on community care and employee wellness
- Establish annual accountability evaluations of supervisors/administrators/assigned mentors by direct reports and peers



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

Taking Action: Peers

- Normalize talking about mental health needs (if you are safe to do so and trust has been built)
- Be mindful of the whole-person experiences of your collaborators/peers and how their personal/professional responsibilities may differ from you
- Be flexible (whenever possible) with meetings/deadlines/assignments, as people's capacity shifts over the lifespan of a shared project
- Take earned breaks/personal time off as needed and encourage peers/collaborators to do the same



Looking Forward

1. Update chapter to focus on building belonging in culturally challenging times
2. Adapt from authors' experiences to interview peers across the profession
3. Continue challenging norms in our own workplaces



Conclusion

1. Let's make sustainable change in academic librarianship that is more actionable than decorative
2. Let's listen to each other about what we need without judgement or criticism
3. Decision makers:
 - a. closely examine the reasonings behind specific policies/practices
 - b. communicate the "whys" and "hows" thoroughly to employees
 - c. allow for feedback and be prepared to alter course based on the feedback as necessary

Questions?

Contact us:

- Calantha Tillotson -
 - ctillot1@utk.edu
- Christy Urquieta Cortes
 - christy.cortes@lyrasis.org

[This Photo](#) by Markus Winkler is licensed under [CC BY](#)



References #1

- American Library Association. “ALA Code of Ethics.” Tools, Publications & Resources. May 19, 2017. <https://www.ala.org/tools/ethics>.
- Bombaro, Christine. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Action: Planning, Leadership, and Programming. Chicago: American Library Association, 2020.
- Burns, Erin, and Kristin E. C. Green. “Academic Librarians’ Experiences and Perceptions on Mental Illness Stigma and the Workplace.” *College & Research Libraries* 80, no. 5 (July 2019). <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.5.638>.
- Carter, Susan, Cecily Andersen, Michelle Turner, and Lorraine Gaunt. “‘What about Us?’ Wellbeing of Higher Education Librarians.” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 49, no. 1 (January 2023): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2022.102619>.
- Colon-Aguirre, Monica, and Katy Kavanagh Webb. “An Exploratory Survey Measuring Burnout among Academic Librarians in the Southeast of the United States.” *Library Management* 41, no. 8/9 (October 20, 2020): 703–15. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-02-2020-0032>.
- Dali, Keren, Norda Bell, and Zachary Valdes. “The Expectation and Learning Impact Framework (ELIF): Evaluating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Professional Development Events for Academic Librarians.” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 47, no. 6 (December 1, 2021): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2021.102456>.
- Dixon, Jennifer A. “Feeling the Burnout: Library Workers Are Facing Burnout in Greater Numbers and Severity-and Grappling with It as a Systemic Problem.” *Library Journal* 147, no. 3 (March 1, 2022): 44–48.
- Dolezal, Joshua. “The Librarians Are Not OK.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 23, 2023). <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-librarians-are-not-ok>.
- Durodolu, Oluwole O., and Philomena A. Mamudu. “Work–Life Balance of Librarians at the Kenneth Dike Library in Nigeria: Implications for the Provision of Library Services.” *Library Management* 41, no. 2/3 (January 1, 2020): 79–90. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-06-2019-0035>.

References #2

- Farkas, Meredith Gorran. “What Is Slow Librarianship?” Information Wants To Be Free (blog), October 18, 2021. <https://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/2021/10/18/what-is-slow-librarianship/>.
- Fiedler, Brittany Paloma, Rosan Mitola, and James Cheng. “Responding to Hate: How National and Local Incidents Sparked Action at the UNLV University Libraries.” Reference Services Review 48, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 63–90. <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-09-2019-0071>.
- Galbraith, Quinn, Leanna Fry, and Melissa Garrison. “The Impact of Faculty Status and Gender on Employee Well-Being in Academic Libraries.” College & Research Libraries (April 25, 2017). <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.77.1.71>.
- Glassman, Julia. “The Innovation Fetish and Slow Librarianship: What Librarians Can Learn From the Juicero.” In the Library with the Lead Pipe (October 20, 2017). <https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2017/the-innovation-fetish-and-slow-librarianship-what-librarians-can-learn-from-the-juicero/>.
- Hines, Samantha Schmehl, and Miriam Matteson. Emotion in the Library Workplace. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utk/detail.action?docID=4843454>.
- Humphreys, Betsy L. “How to Earn a Reputation as a Great Partner.” Journal of the Medical Library Association 106, no. 4 (October 4, 2018): 521–26. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2018.504>.
- Kennedy, Sean P., Melanie P. McGurr, and Kevin R. Garewal. “Manager Perspectives on the Prevalence, Impact, and Management of Work-Related Burnout in Academic Library Technical Services Workers.” Library Resources & Technical Services 66, no. 4 (October 1, 2022): 148–62.
- Kuchi, Triveni. “The Strategic Value of the Liaison Librarian’s Personal Approach to Client Engagement.” portal: Libraries and the Academy 22, no. 3 (2022): 651–79. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2022.0035>.
- Levy, Philippa, and Sue Roberts. Developing the New Learning Environment: The Changing Role of the Academic Librarian. London, UK: Facet Publishing, 2013. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utk/detail.action?docID=1597143>.

References #3

- Nalani Meulemans, Yvonne, and Allison Carr. “Not at Your Service: Building Genuine Faculty-Librarian Partnerships.” *Reference Services Review* 41, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 80–90. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00907321311300893>.
- Nardine, Jennifer. “The State of Academic Liaison Librarian Burnout in ARL Libraries in the United States.” *College & Research Libraries* (May 3, 2019). <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.4.508>.
- Nash, Maryellen, Barbara Lewis, Jessica Szempruch, Stephanie Jacobs, and Susan Silver. “Together, Apart: Communication Dynamics among Academic Librarians during the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *College & Research Libraries* (November 3, 2022). <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.83.6.946>.
- Oud, Joanne. “Systemic Workplace Barriers for Academic Librarians with Disabilities.” *College & Research Libraries* (March 1, 2019). <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.2.169>.
- Price, Margaret, Mark S. Salzer, Amber O’Shea, and Stephanie L. Kerschbaum. “Disclosure of Mental Disability by College and University Faculty: The Negotiation of Accommodations, Supports, and Barriers.” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (June 1, 2017). <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v37i2.5487>.
- Schomberg, Jessica. “Disability at Work: Libraries, Built to Exclude.” In *The Politics of Theory and the Practice of Critical Librarianship*, edited by Karen Nicholson and Maura Seale, 111–23. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2018.
- Townsend, Tamara, and Kimberley Bugg. “Putting Work Life Balance into Practice: Policy Implications for Academic Librarians.” *Library Leadership & Management* 32, no. 3 (September 2018): 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.5860/llm.v32i3.7272>.
- Townsend, Tamara, and Kimberley Bugg. “Perceptions of Work–Life Balance for Urban Academic Librarians: An Exploratory Study.” *Journal of Library Administration* 60, no. 5 (2020): 493–511. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01930826.2020.1729624>.
- Tulgan, Bruce. “Learn When to Say No.” *Harvard Business Review* (September 1, 2020). <https://hbr.org/2020/09/learn-when-to-say-no>.