



*Review*

## ***Understanding Librarians: Communication is the Issue***

*Barbara Hull, Ed. Oxford: Chandos, 2011 (distributed in North America by Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.). 182 pp. ISBN: 978-1-84334-615-9. \$85.00.*

Reviewed by Scott Michael Stone  
Performing Arts Librarian  
Leatherby Libraries  
Chapman University  
Orange, CA

Communication barriers swarm all around us in both our professional and personal lives. Some can be as obvious as people speaking different languages, while others, such as library anxiety, are much more subtle. Dr. Barbara Hull's book, *Understanding Librarians: Communication is the Issue*, strives to illuminate and address the issue of communication barriers in public and academic library settings.

This book can be informally split into two separate sections. The first looks at common communication barriers encountered in the library while the second puts forth ideas that could be used to avoid or solve the previously described communication problems. Each chapter is broken down into small, easily digested chunks of information, normally not any longer than two pages. This arrangement makes the book very easy to read in short bursts (perhaps in between helping patrons at a not too busy reference desk). Additionally, when returning to the book in search of particular passages, I actually found myself using the detailed table of contents rather than the index, like I normally would. This excellent arrangement of the book demonstrates that the book was certainly written by a librarian for librarians.

Specific communication barriers addressed in the first section include those resulting from psychological, social class, education, language, literacy, numeracy, technology, and disability issues. All chapters presented on topical, although not particularly innovative, information. Even though I wasn't shocked by any of the communication barriers discussed by the author, it was helpful to see them all listed in one resource. After all, as the 1980s G.I. Joe cartoon stated, "Now you know, and knowing is half the battle." A word of warning: it was ironic that I had a somewhat difficult time understanding portions of the book due to the use of British jargon after the author clearly stated that one should avoid technical jargon when dealing with patrons. Obviously, this is a result of the author's nationality and workplace; however, one should be aware of this fact prior to casually adding this book to one's collection. Much of the discussion is quite applicable to any library, regardless of location; however, some of the presented information would not be particularly relevant to an American librarian.

Much like the first half, many of the solutions presented by Hull in the second part of this book were not particularly groundbreaking. Some of the communication solutions discussed include evaluation of research, staff development, and self-publicizing. For me, the highlights of this second part were actually chapters contributed by two different authors on adapting traditional bibliographic instruction practices to the needs of the Google generation (by Denise Turner) and on an academic librarian-in-residence program (by Christine Oughtred and Marion Churkovich). In fact, I already have plans to try one of the exercises described by Turner in some of my own instruction.

While most of this book doesn't particularly present new and innovative ideas, in general, I think that reference and instruction librarians at public or academic institutions could benefit from this book as a reminder of possible communication issues they might deal with on a daily basis. If you choose to read this book, you might want to skim portions of it and then concentrate on the last few chapters of the book to discover some different and innovative ideas.

©2012, S.M. Stone. *Journal of Library Innovation* is an open access journal. Authors retain the copyright to their work under the terms of the following Creative Commons license: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 (United States)

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/>