



UNCERTAINTY

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I love how libraries can foster the good life in their communities and have a profound respect for the work that people in libraries do.

As the director of a small, rural library for almost 10 years, and working for a library system that supports the great work of small and rural libraries I developed a deep appreciation for the importance of rural libraries in their communities. Being a researcher on this project strengthened my conviction that what libraries do matters. I have a passion for seeing people who work in libraries flourish.

Soon into the COVID-19 pandemic I was feeling the weight of how uncertain things were. I was keenly aware of the struggle that I, and the people around me, seemed to be having with uncertainty. As I thought about our case study communities and director interviews I was impressed by how people moved forward and did things that contributed to community wellbeing, despite uncertain outcomes.

I designed these questions to walk through a situation with an unknown outcome. I find that first acknowledging uncertainty can take away some of its power so I can figure out possible solutions. Sometimes the solution involves asking for help or letting some parts of it go.

For this exercise, I invite you to keep it light, it is not meant to dive into significant concerns or situations causing a great amount of distress. For deeper uncertainty, you may want to talk about it with a trusted friend or counselor.

What is in this tool?

This is a series of reflective exercises to help the user unpack where uncertainty exists, what impacts it has on their life, and identify strategies that work for them to process through the feelings and impacts that come with uncertainty.

IN THEIR WORDS

"There's a lot of letting go.

The other thing is willing willingness to delegate and willingness to say you can take this. You know when I ran the playgroup I was so afraid to hire someone else to run it. They're going to ruin it. I was convinced. It's not going to be good. It took a lot to say: I'm going to give it up because I did it for two years. But I had to! It was killing me."

Susan
Interview #4-2-13

What thoughts and feelings come up as you think about this uncertain situation?

Rather than analyze or judge them, write them down and just notice them for a minute. Rather than allowing the uncomfortable feelings and thoughts to stop you from moving forward, can you accept they are there and then lay them aside (let go of them) for this exercise?

It can be useful to notice which parts of a situation you think you can control and which you can't. Jot down a short list here:

Within My Control

- Action Step

Outside of My Control

- Who on my team or in my community can help?

- Is it something I need to let go?

Throughout our study, we noticed that librarians who deal well with uncertainty, are commonly able to approach the future with curiosity rather than fear.

If you approached your example of uncertainty with curiosity, what types of things would you want to know??

What questions would you ask?

If you accepted your own internal discomfort and had external support what actions would you take?

Finally, what are the things you would tell a dear friend in this same situation? List them here:

Now, read this list back to yourself with kindness.

Wrap-up guidance/next steps

How does it feel to do this exercise? Do you feel better after noticing and accepting the uncertainty of the situation? Do you have a plan that will help you get started? Are there things you don't have to carry anymore? Do you know who to ask for help?

It is my hope that facing uncertainty with awareness becomes a practice that you can use again and again. I hope it moves you, your library, and your community forward. Even in uncertainty, I hope you enjoy your job and I hope you flourish.