

Bernard (Buzzy) Basch (BB)

Interviewed by

Toby Pearlstein (TP)

December, 11 2009

TP: Good morning. Today is Friday, December 11, 2009. My name is Toby Pearlstein, and it's my pleasure to be interviewing N. Bernard Basch, known to everyone as Buzzy. Because of his long history of involvement with SLA and the profession as a whole, Buzzy has been chosen to be interviewed as part of the Association's oral history project, *Voices of SLA: an International Oral History*. The project is an initiative of the Fellows of SLA, in partnership with the SLA Centennial Commission.

Buzzy and I are talking today in the Concord, New Hampshire offices of Basch Subscription Services. Buzzy is currently president of Basch Subscriptions, the company he founded more than 14 years ago. He has undergraduate and graduate degrees in business from Washington University in St. Louis, and serves on the national advisory committee for that university's Olin Library. In January of 1991, Buzzy coauthored, *Buying Serials: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians*, published by Neal-Schuman. He is also the author of numerous articles on serials management, and has taught many courses and seminars on serials management. He is an internationally recognized expert in

subscription service management. Buzzy has been a member of SLA since 1979. He has held a variety of positions at both the local and Association level, including chair of the Leadership and Management Division, Committee Chair of the Public Relations Advisory Council and Division Cabinet Chair. He served for two years on the Association's Finance Committee. Buzzy is a long-time member of the Boston, Illinois, Washington, D.C., and New York chapters, as well as the Business and Finance, Information Technology, Leadership and Management Pharmaceutical and Solo divisions. He has close connections with the library community and has held elected and appointed positions in SLA, ASIS and ALA. In 1986, he received the Watson Davis Award from ASIS&T, recognizing his outstanding contributions and dedicated service to that Association. So let's begin Buzzy. First, let me ask you how you actually got that nickname, because I've only known you as Buzzy.

BB: That's the way I've known myself. My mother said I was buzzing around the crib and it's always been. She insisted on Buzzy.

TP: I'd like to start by asking you about your involvement in SLA. I can see how as a vendor, you would want to belong to the Association, but you've obviously gone beyond simply belonging. Can you say something about what prompted your

initial membership, and what seem to have been a constantly growing involvement at all levels?

BB: I got involved because of my mentor, Jo Ann Clifton. She's the one that really pushed me to join, because I'd been involved -- I think I was bartending in the LMD division as a good helping person, and she saw qualities that she thought should be brought into SLA and encouraged me. I signed up and became a member. But I also joined because I felt that in knowing the membership in the years that I'd spent bartending, that it would give me an opportunity to develop my people skills. Having spent five years in the Navy as a Naval Officer, and then coming out and working in management positions, you sort of learn that your word is my command and people respond to your word, whereas in associations and societies, you really have to have people skills. I felt that SLA would give me an opportunity to develop those people skills, so that you don't have to command people but you have to get their respect and they'll respond. And I found it was a real learning curve in SLA. It was a great opportunity.

You are also learning to be persuasive in your ideas, because it's a very democratic organization and people have their own ideas. How do you influence them to change their thinking to get a broader understanding of the impact of

what they're being asked to vote on or to bring some knowledge and information that most people don't have in their careers.

TP: I know we talked earlier about vendors sometimes having a very negative connotation, but as someone who in their career dealt a lot with vendors in negotiating contracts, I do think this whole idea of the partnership between we librarians, if you will, as customers of the vendors is a critical one. Do you have some thoughts about that?

BB: I never considered myself a vendor in SLA, although I did feel pressured or responsible to make sure that my actions reflected positive on my employer, since my employer at that time, Faxon, was paying my way and was willing to pay the funds to join all these associations. But I really found that "professional" is really in the way that you behave. I just never consider myself a vendor. I consider myself a professional. The benefits that I gained from belonging to SLA, I've always felt that I should give back something for, and maybe that's part of a partnership. I know in my business experience, like yours, in negotiating with vendors or people that we're doing business with, we always felt that you had to give to get. There has to be a tradeoff, it can't be all one way, and we try to do that on our business.

Everybody deserves an opportunity and what we try to do is balance our needs against the needs of the vendor. We would call -- when I was with Faxon, we'd call and have a meeting with a particular vendor, say IBM, and sit down with them and say OK, we're going to have certain needs during the coming year, what are your needs? How much equipment do you have to sell? How much software do you have to sell? And we'd take a look at what our needs are and balance that out and in return, here's what we need. We need your customer service. We need to be able to be up 24 hours a day. We need to be assured that somebody will be here in three hours, to make sure that the computer stays up. Then we signed, basically closed our deal with them.

TP: As a vendor yourself, you were also a customer. Do you think that informed the way you dealt with your own customers?

BB: Well, I do but it's a process of knowing what you need. I think that a lot of times, you get a sales pitch, but you really have to define what your requirements are, what your needs are first, and then you can sit down with the vendor and discuss what their needs are.

A lot of times, you don't find that in a customer so you have to do a lot of probing and clarification and confirming.

TP: It's like a reference interview.

BB: It's like a reference interview, that's right, that's a good point, excellent point.

TP: It's interesting too to think about how much each of us depends on the other for success.

BB: I agree with you. Certainly, from a subscription management side, we've been through or I've been through recessions before. It used to be that the library community and librarians would cut their book buying to save the journals, and now they're cutting the book buying and cutting the journals to save their jobs.

That I haven't seen before, and the number of layoffs and the number of people that are out of work as a result of the changes. But also, we're faced with a society that believes that everything is for free and available on the Internet, so why should I have to pay for it. And this goes from top management down to people in the street, and it's a totally different environment. I've never experienced something like this before. How do you convince people that they really need a librarian or somebody to do the investigative work, to find the problem and to search out the sources? How confident are you in the content that you're looking at? I mean, anybody can put anything up there today.

You know everything goes around, comes around, and we'll probably see a resurgence. It's going to take relearning. A lot of people have got to learn that quality beats quantity. We have a couple of newspapers and a couple of magazines, major magazines, where the librarians at one of them just lost their job, *Newsweek Magazine* and *Forbes Magazine*. I'm not close enough to the management. I know that they're losing advertising and they're advertising driven. This is critical. They cut back the frequency of the publications. *Editor and Publisher* and *Kirkus Reviews* have gone out of business.

TP: This actually is a good segue I think, to taking you back for a minute, talking about your expectations of SLA. You said that obviously one of the reasons that you had joined was in order to get better at your interpersonal skills and networking skills.

BB: One of the issues I had early on, I think my first board meeting with SLA, was one of the members at the board meeting never spoke up. I was talking with the president and said encourage these people to speak up. The young lady told me that, "Well, they know the answers, they've been around longer." You know, it's just amazing, the ideas and

suggestions that people can make if they'll just open their mouth.

TP: How would you compare that to other professional associations you belong to? Do you see the same kinds of things happening in those associations?

BB: I think there's more openness in ALA, but that may be just the people I have been in contact with. It's difficult to measure a 60,000 member organization against -- I don't know what SLA is now, eight or ten thousand member organization, and SLA being a staff driven versus ALA being more member driven. Probably ten or fifteen or 20 percent of the membership is assertive and speak up, and the others just follow the path.

I'd say my biggest disappointment, having been a member, is that people don't speak up more. I didn't find it as true in ASIS, having been treasurer for six years and been on the board for ten years, but there the board members tend to express themselves. I don't know if it's because they're more academic. I can't tell you the reason but in all the organizations I've belonged to, they all seem to have trouble making decisions.

But I do recall, talk about ASIS, one thing we tried was to give everybody 100 pennies, and then vote on the top ten projects or interest areas. You were given about 15 or 20

minutes to stack your pennies up where you put your votes. At the end of 20 minutes, we still had two members that hadn't moved a penny towards any of them.

And the other thing is the selling aspect of it. I have to say that in my experience, my educational experience, both in undergraduate and graduate, I never remember a course that I had to sell my ideas. There were a lot of boxes and dotted lines and straight lines, but basically it's a people world and you have to sell your ideas, and by selling, I mean like a used car salesman. You're not being a used car salesman. You're really expressing yourself and your interests and your ideas. Everybody has to sell themselves, and that's probably one of the big failings of the membership, is understanding that. I remember putting together a couple of sessions at SLA on what else can you do with your library degree, a career. I hope I don't insult anybody, but it was like 50 bag ladies coming to the session and you know, how do you tell somebody how to dress for success, to look the part or portray the part or be the part? If you're going to get up on stage, you better put your best clothes on and get that message across and have people understand that.

TP: Do you think there's a role for the Association to play in that kind of almost nitty-gritty aspect of professionalism?

BB: Well, the sessions programming is the key. I think that's one of the weaknesses at SLA. The timeframe, the new topics, hot topics, don't seem to come out very fast. The topics that are not traditional to the library profession that people are interested in, never seem to -- to my thinking, never seem to hit the program or have a separate, I don't know what you call it, segment or track. A track for people that are not interested or have left the traditional library jobs.

TP: That's certainly another way to do a conference, and sometimes the size of the population involved drives that one way or another. The smaller the organization is you're more able to do that.

BB: I wouldn't think that size has anything to do with it. I don't know if over-complexity is right, but the inability to change the way we program. To me, it's very traditional. We've been doing, as far as I'm concerned, the same thing for 30 years. It certainly attracts people, but I think there's an opportunity to bring in a new division, the medical division. I think that the law division brought us 1,000 members. I would think medical could bring us another 1,000 members, but how you pull it off and putting the energy and resources and getting beyond

the complexity or the fight between the Medtronics... I can't even remember the division, Medtronics division.

It's a medical something or other, Medtronic division, and of course they don't want the competition, or at least that's the way it appears to be. Yet, I think there's an opportunity there. I'm a member of MLA and Carla Funk, who is the director, would not like to hear this I'm sure, but I think that the programming, if they give the medical/hospital librarians an opportunity to do their own programming, and SLA could do that, that there's an opportunity to increase membership.

It takes a lot of time and energy and schmoozing. I certainly don't have the time to do that.

TP: You mentioned that -- at least a couple of areas where you think change could happen. One is in the way the annual conference is programmed, and the other is perhaps an opportunity to reach out and start at least one other division that might attract some membership. What do you think, looking back, is the most important change that's happened within SLA since you've been a member?

BB: That's a toughie. What's the most important thing that's happened in SLA since I've been a member? I can't even think of any dramatic change. I'm not sure that we need dramatic changes. I really can't think of any dramatic changes.

You know change, there's a lot of risk to change. Change is an interesting concept because change is OK for you, and I think that that's fine, but it's not OK for me. My life's experience, being involved with computers and systems, and when you start introducing computers and systems, you're introducing change, and what I found, that change can be very threatening, and it really takes a very soft hand and you have to get people involved in the change if it's going to be successful. There's a number of ways to create change, one is top down. It's sort of like trying to build a house by putting the roof on first, or starting from the foundation and building up. I'm a foundation up person, which means you've got to get the people involved and it's got to be their change, their system, not Buzzy's system. Those to me are the most effective systems, the ones that belong to you and not the ones that belong to me. The other issue with change is the timeframe over which change takes place. Twenty years ago, thirty years ago, people were saying well, it's all going to be electronic, but here we are thirty years later and it's still working at being electronic. Nobody can measure the timeframe in which something is going to take place, innovations and new ideas.

But on the other hand, it's gotten so inexpensive. I mean, we were buying computers when I first started the business here as Basch Subscriptions. I think I paid like \$3,000 for a PC. When I worked for Faxon, in 1976 or '78 we bought an IBM. I don't know whether it was 158 or 165, something like that. It was one machine that required a separate room. We had to add, for \$250,000, a glycol coolant machine in the back to cool it. One mg of memory, \$1 million. And now you get a PC that's probably 30 or 40 times more of it, and it's \$500.

It is just amazing. I've said a number of times, it isn't how badly you screw up, it's how quickly you recover. And the great thing about computers is they allow you to recover. And that's a key part of it, but the other important thing is it's not a computer world it's a people world. You're dependent upon people. It's all about people. You sense the right people, the people that are interested, people that are focused, people that want to get involved, that's the key. It's the key in business; it's the key in the society and associations. It's a people world.

TP: We talked about SLA as fostering networking as one of the interpersonal direct benefits, if you will.

BB: That's true, except that I'm on, I don't know how many list sources in SLA. And I could probably some day, get 40 or 50 emails that just drive me crazy, because now I've got to take the time to delete them and take them off the system.

TP: I was thinking admittedly, more of the one on one, and I'm just throwing this question out to everybody.

BB: I really enjoyed the directory, and I could just look somebody up and call them. And now I have to go in, I've got to put my passwords in and all this, to go in, and I've got to go searching. And it's just complex and negative too, I think I would say that. You know, the other thing, and some of the negatives at SLA, is the newsletters. I used to get chapter and division newsletters, and of course it's all electronic now. I used to go down to Washington if I was going to be in Washington or if I'm traveling and going to be in the city, I had the paper there and the newsletter would say they're going to meet on such and such a date. I would look up my calendar and then I could just go to it. And now again, it's more complex or I'll miss it because I deleted that email. You know if I was there I'd go, or if I'm going to be there I'd go, but I don't have the information now and it forces me to do some extra work that I'm not inclined to do. I'm basically lazy.

Divisions or chapters are looking for ways to cut their cost and being pressured to go electronic. I understand that.

TP: Well, you mentioned that Jo Ann Clifton was one of the people that encouraged you to join SLA and acted as a mentor. Can you say something about not only how she influenced you, but maybe were there other folks at SLA that influenced you?

BB: Sure. Well, my first encounter was with Jo Ann. I met her through ASIS. She was very much involved in ASIS and SLA. Jo Ann, I really learned to appreciate her people skills. I can remember an LMD meeting and she was going through the awards, and I was saying to her, "How can you possibly give these people awards, they haven't done a damn thing." And she says, "They're members and they're involved, and you've got to give recognition, and recognition in an association or society is extremely important." That's one of the things that many of the chapters and divisions miss out on. They don't understand about stroking people or stroking their vendors, the people that give them money. It varies because I've belonged to enough chapters and enough divisions and go to enough meetings to see the difference in their encouragement or no encouragement of the vendors' participation.

Frank Spaulding was another person that I really learned a lot from. What I learned from him was his management skills. He assigned and delegated, and when you were delegated, you knew what you were being held responsible for. It wasn't wishy-washy. He had business plans. I remember LMD had a business plan, you know a five year plan, and it was updated. He made sure it was updated. And from two other members, I've learned commitment to SLA, and that is Kitty Scott and Judy Field. Not always to the positive, but they are very much committed to the Association and very much want to try hard to support it and give a lot of energy into it. And I have to give recognition to David Bender, because David, ups and downs that David had, he saw his job as keeping the Association afloat, and he had to deal with lots of presidents and lots of board members who had lots of different ideas. If they were steering the ship, it would be going in lots of different directions, but David kept it going straight and narrow and afloat.

TP: For people who don't recognize these names, if I'm not mistaken Jo Ann Clifton, Judy Field, Frank Spaulding and Kitty Scott were all presidents of the Association; David was the executive director. OK. Can you say something about the people at SLA that you would characterize as the best thinkers?

BB: Well, that's two different things; thinkers versus their vision of what's going to be. Certainly, a person who

expresses his sense of a vision is Steve Abrams. Steve certainly expresses it. I didn't see myself in SLA to get a sense of what was going on in trends in serials. I saw it more as an opportunity to participate, to bring the skills that I had, certainly the management skills, the financial skills that I had from my business experience and academic background, into an association that I felt was weak in that area. And also dealing with well educated people was really my interest. I do go to some conferences, one or two, trying to measure where it's all going in terms of serials, in terms of serials management, but SLA, very candidly, is not the place that I would go. What I have to be careful of in any of these, is that their vision and their personal agenda sometimes go together, and you try to discount that. Some people are very quick to tell you how they're going to lead the world out of the darkness.

TP: Do you think that there's a role for SLA to play in that respect, that thinking about the future vision for the profession, or do you think that that's something that's best left to other people, other entities?

BB: To me, SLA is meat and potatoes, very basic, and programming is the key. I think they should focus more on

programming and improve not just the quality of the program but the diversity of the program, so that there are tracks or slots or opportunities for people who are considering leaving the Association. Look for new topics, new ways. We don't have the structure to do that, I feel.

TP: I'm going to quote something back to you. In an interview last year in *Science and Technology Libraries Magazine*, you were asked about interesting factors you see on the horizon in the information world. In response you mentioned open access and advertising based journals as presenting challenges to the traditional publishing and distribution models. And you talked about the technology allowing the development of E-journals for niche populations. Given all that's happening in the publishing world today, vis-à-vis newspapers and popular magazines, do you have additional thoughts on how the services of companies like Basch to special libraries will be affected by the changes underway, and do you see these changes driving any changes in serial subscription management overall?

BB: Yes. Well, we're seeing an explosion in E-journals that's for sure, E-publishing, and we're certainly seeing it in niche publishing, and we're seeing the traditional newspapers and paper products going down. I think that from my perspective in the subscription of serials

management business, that basically, there are a couple of factors here. One is that we have to keep our costs below what it costs the institution or the individual to place the order, pay the publishers or the creators of the material. The second thing is that we have to be able to provide the electronic access, either to the content or to the journal itself or the piece itself. We're certainly working in both those directions. I don't know where it's all gone. I think that I was right on the niche publishing, I mean whether it be TV channels. I don't know how many there are now, but I think we have access at home to 250 or something like that, and I certainly don't watch the Golf Channel but its there. It's not my thing. Niche-in has been going on in serials for years. Publishers are coming out with new journals all the time and it's more and more niche. The advertising, it hasn't taken off as fast as I thought it would, but I think there's a lot of potential for very specialized advertising, where somebody is willing to pay. You see it on the online services, you see it with Google. Certainly, you know, whatever your specialty or interest is, if it contains an ad or two, you're still going to read it. What I'm finding is that we're being requested or we're shifting from traditional serials into market data, we're

paying for market data. What we're finding is that in these times people are much more receptive. Procurement people are much more receptive to using the service. First of all, it used to be that procurement people didn't want to deal with a relatively small number or small price for a subscription. In the corporate environment, the philosophy was that the individual manager had a budget and they could spend whatever they wanted and where they wanted, as long as they stayed within their budget. Well that seems to be changed or in the process of changing, where they're looking now at passing it through or focusing on a subscription agent or a procurement service. You'll be able to do it electronically from desktop, straight through to the publisher. You know we can provide that link, and we're picking up additional customers and new business as a result of that. It's much more receptive to going through an agent for these smaller transactions and basically have a centralized buying system, rather than to have the individual putting it on a credit card or just buying according to their budget.

TP: They see an advantage in the centralization as cost efficiency sometimes or even process efficiency.

BB: Process efficiency.

TP: Are there many organizations where you've seen the purchase decision move outside the library or an individual with IS skills, to a procurement individual?

BB: I think it's more, yeah. I think we're seeing more procurement people involved today, other procurement organization involvement.

Well, there is software out there that allows the corporations to manage their procurement, like Ariba. I think more and more companies are using that as a way of controlling it and as a way of managing, to reduce the paperwork that's involved in the processing. It's sort of like what we can set up as a catalog and then you can order from that desktop, you can order from that catalog, and basically get, in a sense, next day delivery. It's sort of like office supplies, and then they don't have to maintain a room full of pencil, papers and erasers.

TP: The only thing they need I guess, is the person with the intelligence and savvy on their side to say which the things they should procure are.

BB: Well, that's a process.

TP: And perhaps that's a whole course for SLA right there, on how to do that.

BB: That's true. What I found, my experience has been over the past couple of years, and it's been a hand holding process

with the company with the organization. And you work your way through it as to what they want to put up there. And there are all kinds of exceptions. I mean, everybody's got an exception and you know, how do you control today? If you're into controlling, how do you manage the ordering, say from Asia? We're dealing with a bank right now, international bank, that orders from Asia and orders from Europe and orders from the United States and from our perspective, being able to get Chinese newspapers. You know, you can deal in Taiwan, how do you deal in Mainland China and some of the stuff is local newspapers? We've got one bank that orders through us, a U.S. Bank here, that orders U.S. materials. They've got branches all over the northwest, in all these small towns, and how do you manage the newspapers that are maybe you know, biweekly or weekly. And they don't take credit cards and you question whether they even take checks, some of them. And there are language issues.

How do you find a newspaper in suburban Beijing?

Or find a distributor that you can rely upon.

TP: If you could articulate a couple of challenges that you think face information professionals now, and we've just talked about one that face a vendor of your type, in serials management. I'm sure there are others that face

other vendors, but just now thinking about facing information professionals, what do you think are some of the challenges facing them?

BB: I think you have to be flexible. You have to be able to sell yourself. You have to be able to sell your ideas. You can't assume that somebody's just going to accept them because you're getting paid. I think that you need to have a good understanding of the technology and what's available out there, and I think you have to be supportive of your organization. I think that you have to be for your organization. You can belong to SLA but your organization should come first. I think that you have to be supportive and demonstrate your supportiveness. I think everybody is cost conscious today, so you have to be looking in terms of what's the best bang for your buck.

TP: What do you think SLA's role could be in addressing some of those challenges?

BB: Education. Offering people the opportunity to learn, to share, to share their experiences. We have a lot of members that have a lot of experience, to give and take of that experience. You don't have to invent the wheel over again. I think that's one of the real positives about belonging to an association or society, that you can go out and talk to people, find out what they've done, what they

have learned, what didn't work, what worked. It's not just what worked but what didn't work. You know, you can break your fingers if you want, but you don't have to.

TP: I've always found that people at SLA, when they're speaking at a program, tend to do so warts and all. If someone has put in a system or has tried something, they're really willing to say, here's how I might have done it differently. You don't find that in every profession I think, but that is definitely part of the learning experience, I think.

BB: And I don't think that you're necessarily stealing or giving away corporate secrets when you express yourself, and I think part of it is just speaking up and asking questions too. As I've mentioned earlier, I think that there's reluctance, at least in my personal experience, to ask questions, you know to demonstrate that you're trying to learn.

TP: Well it's funny, in a profession that insists there are no stupid questions and we tell our customers that all the time and ask them to speak up, we ourselves are often reluctant to ask what we think is a stupid question when in fact, ten other people in the room might be wanting to know the same answer.

BB: Yeah. I was the operations manager of the Credit Bureau of Greater Boston, and I remember my boss one time, you know it was a board meeting with all of these controllers and a bit to me, controllers of these department stores and banks, the vice president of banks. You know I was feeling a little bit intimidated by them all and saying to me, now you've got good ideas, you speak up.

TP: That alone is intimidating. It sets quite an expectation.

BB: But it was good advice and yes, I did, because I knew that he would be supportive. I don't have to be right all the time. I'm just asking for clarification and confirmation. A lot of times you're probing. You're probing, and maybe that's the way to couch it, is to say that you're probing for clarification and confirmation. You're not necessarily questioning somebody. You're not trying to put them on the spot by saying well, why did you do that, but you may approach them by saying how did you do that.

So you're not threatening them or they don't feel that they're being threatened by you, which is easy for me to do. I can intimidate people very easily, I understand that, and I don't mean to be. I never felt I owned the brains market.

TP: Always a good thing. You did mention earlier that your philosophy is, what matters is not how badly you screw up but how quickly you recover. This is, I think an important lesson for folks to understand, that sometimes taking a risk is very important. So maybe you could give a couple of examples of when you screwed up and how you recovered in a positive way.

BB: People look upon the business I started as being very risky, and I didn't of course see it that way. I just did things as I thought they should be done and it worked out without a lot of financial -- I mean, I put an enormous amount of my own time into it, but this has been my passion. You know, you can have a hobby and put your time into the passion. In a sense, the business is my passion, so in that way I'd minimized the risk that's involved. There's always risk, life is full of risks. You know, you step out in the street, there's a risk, and the air you breathe is a risk. You just try to be right more than you're wrong (laughter) and hopefully it works out. In terms of what I've learned over my past 30 or so years in the business, in using computers, is that basically, computers can add or subtract or compare and that's all it can do, and divide by subtracting. It's not a very intelligent machine. We have the ability to build the

logic into it and so, and then it runs very fast, and so you use the computer hopefully, to recover. I'm trying to think of maybe a specific case where we've done that. We've made lots of screw-ups or I've made lots of screw-ups, and most of them are related or have been around the business or around using computers, and you just have to rerun it. The first time I ran orders, it was on a Thanksgiving evening and I got so tired, I went to sleep, and I woke up in the morning, you know I did all the right things. I put the paper in and you know there were like 500 pages, 500 orders, and the next day I woke up and there was paper all over the living room. It ran out of toner because I forgot to put new toner in. The programmer is over in England. So I got a hold of him and fortunately, it wasn't Thanksgiving in England, and he worked the day and we recovered it and we ran it. So again, we couldn't have -- if it wasn't for the computer, I don't know what I'd have done to create 500 orders that had nothing on them.

TP: Right. So sort of keeping your head, the old advice, when all others around you are losing theirs. It's this idea of understanding OK, a mistake was made, how do we get out of it; not -- I don't mean to put words in your mouth but not

necessarily stopping to beat yourself over the head or blame someone but saying OK, what do we do now.

BB: Dollar-wise, the biggest screw-up was at Faxon, where we duplicated orders for \$32 million and sent them out to the publishers. I found out about it as I walking around the office on January 3rd or 4th, and publishers were calling in saying, did you really want to pay us twice for this? And what had happened, we'd built these controls into the computer system. I'm a believer in garbage in, garbage out, and it's really up to the departments or whoever's process to put the data in, to make sure what came out was correct. It's not up to the data processing people or the processing center to do that. And the accounting department that had all the controls there had taken off the weekend and hadn't checked the controls, so we reran the orders the following week and the checks, and they got out. We were able to recover from it.

We created a catalog and the catalog, the cost to print it, you know it was very fancy, it was \$100,000 and the printer had given us the catalog. The owner of the company called me up and said, I can't find *TIME Magazine*, and I obviously thought he was going senile because *TIME* was a big seller; we probably had about 20,000 orders to it. I look in the catalog and there's *TIME Taiwan* and *TIME Venezuela*, but no

regular *TIME*, no regular *Newsweek*. And what had happened was we decided the catalog was getting too big. At the low volume, two or under orders, we'd send to Honeywell and they'd produce a microfiche and we'd put it in the back, and then the high volume titles we'd print, as we always did. Well, needless to say, we'd switched the tapes and sent the low volume tape to the printer and the high volume tape to the microfiche, and the printer of course had to redo the job and it was \$100,000, and the only thing Mr. Davis said to me was, "It's not going to happen again is it?" \$100,000. I'll tell you, there was no hanging. I spoke with the data processing people and everybody knew you just don't do that thing a second time.

TP: Well, and to a certain extent, that's the kind of company, I guess you want to work for, is someone that says a mistake was made, let's learn from it and move on.

BB: Rather than hanging people for mistakes. If you never try anything, you'll never make a mistake. We have mistakes every day. You don't want a persistent mistake of the same things done over and over again. I went to work for EBSCO. They told me they did the same thing for \$17 million. And that's what you learn at SLA, that you're not the only one. You talk with your peers, you talk with people, your competitors, competitive organizations, and you find out

that we're all in the same boat. And that's the real key to it.

It's reaffirming and reassuring. I do this conference down in Charleston, the Charleston conference. I put together two sessions and basically, that's what it's all about.

TP: I think that's excellent.

BB: Because you've got the brains, you've got the knowledge you know, but you're not sure, you're afraid you're going to make a mistake. Well, learn from other people's mistakes.

TP: Well that actually brings me to my last question. What advice would you give somebody joining the profession today, whether it's on the vendor side or the customer side? You've already mentioned a lot of different things; risk taking and education and learning from others.

BB: I'd have to say speak up. I find this -- it turns me on. I want to talk with people that come forward and express themselves and not hide and run away from it all.

Be willing to speak up and ask somebody what their ideas are or what their experience was. You know, it's sort of like working a singles bar; all they can say is no. It's not a reflection on you; it's a reflection on them. If I come to your home in Revere, you're going to treat me as a guest. You're going to take me around and introduce me to your husband, you're going to take me around and introduce me to

your friends. You're the host, I'm the guest. I come in and I'm intimidated by your friends and then you try to make me feel at home.

That's what you do when you walk into SLA, like the Fellows reception. You turn your hat around and say, I'm not the guest, I'm the host.

And if you can do that, you make that switch, and that's what you need at SLA or any of these associations that you belong to.

It makes people feel that they're welcome. The chapters and divisions could use this to welcome new members and to focus on new members, not just getting new members, but when they come onboard. I've been to chapter meetings where they were not very receptive.

TP: So I'll ask you one final question because we're at a unique point in time here, in December of 2009, where the Association has just taken a vote on whether or not the members want to change the name. We've just learned that the membership has voted against changing the name. I guess I would just ask your candid opinion about that.

BB: Is it a good idea? Sixty percent of the members thought it was a bad idea. It's an issue that I've personally been involved in, and struggling for I don't know, 20, 25 -- 20 years anyways. It's come up to the Board; it has come up

when I was on the Board. We just have not come up with a clear way of separating out the L word, the "Library" word. There's a significant proportion of our membership that is dedicated to being librarians, and we should recognize that and appreciate that. There's a significant portion that don't want it on their membership, they don't want it on the bill that comes in, for whatever the reason, and I don't have an answer. I don't know the way to separate it. I think that we spent a lot of money, I'm disappointed, not in the results but disappointed we had to spend so much money to find out the membership wasn't going to vote for it. I mean that seems to me, kind of crazy. You know, it just -- you learn by your mistakes and hopefully we've learned something. I'm not sure what we're going to learn from it.

The other side of it is that the Association has been going for 100 years and you know, it's still afloat and it's still got, I don't know, 10,000 members. It's not going to be perfect for everybody. There are a lot more library students now, as I understand it, the schools seem to be doing really well. I think our student membership is up. There's a lot of opportunity to bring on new members. I think we could structure the programs or add programming that would be appreciated or needed by the members that

want the "Library" word out of there, to give them the opportunity and continue hopefully, for another 100 years.

I don't have any magic.

TP: That's a great note to close on, and just let me thank you again on behalf of the Fellows, for taking the time.

BB: My pleasure.

TP: Have a happy New Year.

BB: Thank you.

TP: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]