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“Oh wind, if winter comes, can spring be far behind?”

Oddly, one of the most calming reassurances about life is also one of the most frightening realizations – nothing in life is permanent and everything can change. This truth carries over to the library world where libraries of all types must constantly evolve in order to meet the needs of their communities. This continuous evolution includes the necessary relationship between libraries and vendors – whether it be testing new vendor products in our collections, developing new relationships and partnerships with different vendors, or expanding established relationships. The statement “Oh wind, if winter comes, can spring be far behind,” exemplifies the fact that libraries, particularly funding for public, academic, and special libraries, are often under pressure from a number of avenues and this can directly affect our relationships with vendors.

The central take away from this statement is that just as life revolves in a circular fashion, so do the changes and funding pressures that affect both libraries and vendors. The winter may bring with it difficulty and struggle, but the spring is the light at the end of the tunnel when there is rebirth and new possibilities. Some years are harder than other years and budgets are flat or severely reduced, causing libraries to make incredibly difficult decisions regarding what they can reasonably afford to purchase. This does not mean, however, that these difficulties are always permanent. Just like nature finds a way to adapt to the changing seasons, preparing for the next unknown, libraries can also do the same and ensure that their relationships with vendors do not suffer as we work together to increase usage and provide library patrons with valuable resources. These “winter storms” are times during which we can still strengthen our relationships with one another through established common goals and a shared vision.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this concept is that the key to good, mutually beneficial relationships, particularly during times of disrupt or change, is to maintain transparency and open discussion with one another. It is extremely important to foster dialog between libraries and vendors so that we can continue to benefit from each other and more effectively serve our communities. In the grand scheme, vendors are able to provide libraries with unique and valued resources for their patrons, while vendors are able to gain and grow from the knowledge and best workflow practices that libraries can share with them. This open dialog and understanding of separate and mutual goals can help develop new technologies, new products, and lasting relationships that can establish a strong foundation to carry us through difficult times together.

In 2017, the current federal administration’s budget proposed the elimination of the Institute of Museums and Library Services and consequential federal funding for libraries. This “winter storm” is exactly the type of situation in which libraries and vendors can work together toward their combined benefit and the overall benefit of entire communities. Soon after this proposal, several diverse vendors, including Baker and Taylor, Overdrive, Gale, and ProQuest signed on to the American Libraries Association letter to U.S. senators, urging them to support full funding for the Institute of Museums and Library Services, the Library Services and Technology Act, and the Innovative Approaches to Literacy program. When libraries, vendors, publishers, and patrons stand together, our force and strength against adversaries is amplified and we can carry through to the “spring.”

The Charleston Conference is the ideal venue at which to create the types of lasting relationships that can withstand the winter storms that give way to spring. In a time where ideologies are strong, the Charleston Conference offers an open, professional yet informal, learning environment where libraries and vendors can continue to grow together to meet the needs of those they aim to serve. Personally, I come from a family of librarians. My grandmother, brother, sister in law, and husband are all librarians. I was unsure if I wanted to follow in these footsteps but took the plunge and obtained my MLIS in 2009 – just in time to feel the effects of the 2008 recession on the workforce. People told me that I would never find a librarian job and that libraries were dying. There is no doubt that those times were hard for not only myself, but for libraries as well. Yet, in general, those statements were not true then and they are not true now. I did find a library job and spent many years working in interlibrary loan, where I was able to see patron reactions to the amazing resources that libraries and vendors together can provide. I recently accepted a job as an acquisitions librarian within the same university, where I hope to continue to play a role in bringing the very best resources to our campus. Percy Shelly asked, “Oh wind, if winter comes, can spring be far behind?” No, it is certainly not far behind, and with a little patience, it will always come.