

# *Seeing the Big Picture*

**Presented by Joan Frye Williams**  
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**Both views are useful**



# Why add this task when you're already so busy?

- More “yes” answers
- Clearer priorities
- Fewer surprises
- Less work in the long run
- Greater sense of connection
- Improved chances for promotion





# Today's discussion



- ✓ Six important big picture perspectives
- ✓ Things to consider before you act
- ✓ Barriers to big picture thinking
- ✓ Inspiring big picture thinking in others
- ✓ What you can do when people get bogged down in the details

# 1. Look beyond library processes to community results



# Observe and learn



- Patterns of library use over time
- What people do after they come in contact with your services
- How specific services connect to the library's stated mission



## Visualize before you act

- What difference you want to make to the people you serve – the “big why”
- How this action moves you in that direction
- How you will evaluate progress
- What else you can try if this doesn’t get you there

*Don’t stop at “If we’re happy, they’ll benefit.”*

**Don't overlook the need for a  
shared vision**





## 2. Look beyond your immediate team to your stakeholders



# Internal stakeholders

- Other library departments
- Union
- Board, friends, foundation
- Library users



# External stakeholders

- Elected officials
- Other city/county/campus departments
- Partner agencies (current and potential)
- Vendors
- Neighbors
- Non-users
- Media



# Observe and learn



- Different groups' stated priorities
- Their patterns of action
- Their preferred vocabulary
- What gets them excited
- What they do well
- Where their authority begins and ends





## Visualize before you act

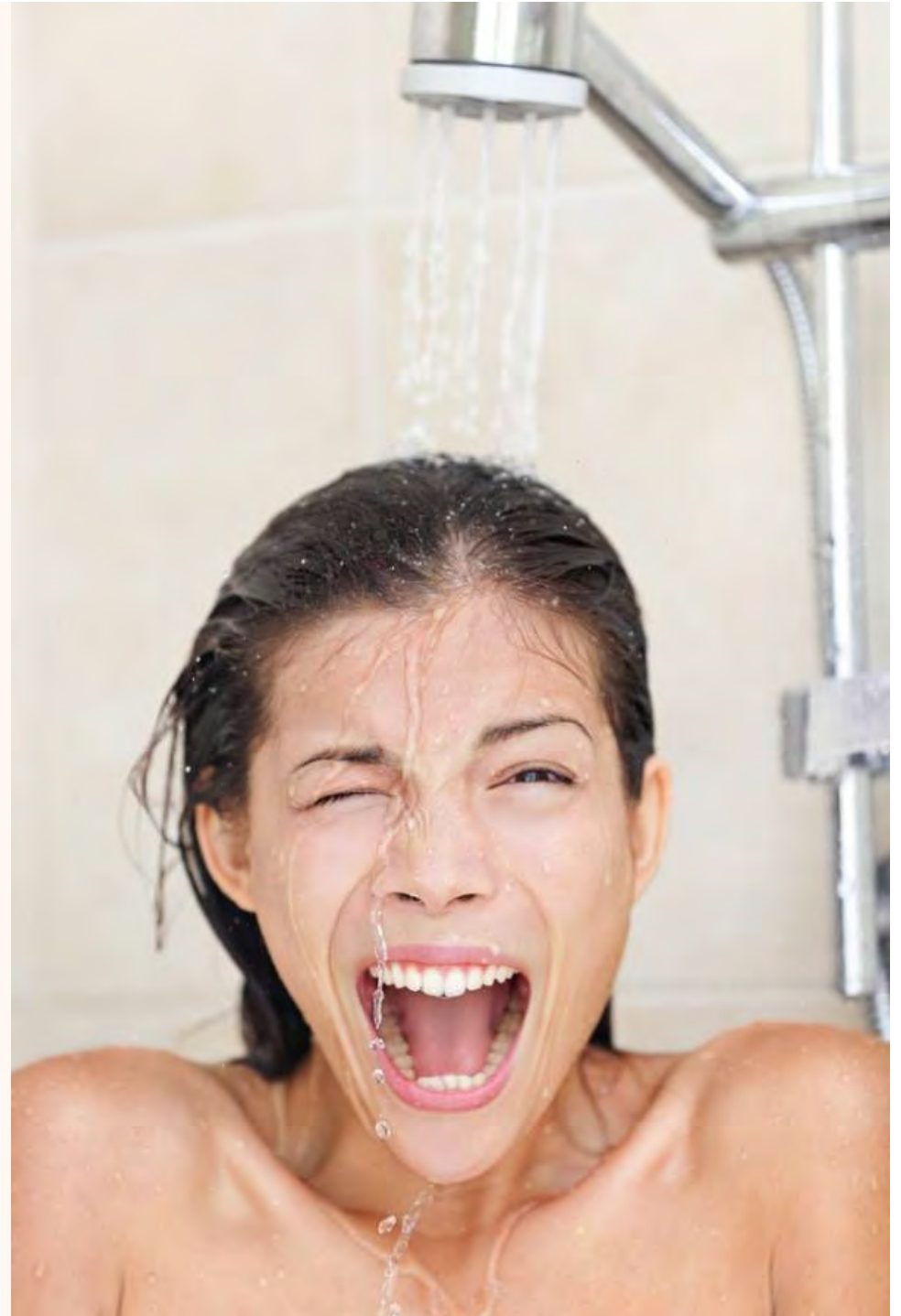
- Who will be affected by your action
- How your work aligns with their interests
- How your path might be smoothed by bringing them into the process
- Questions they'll have, and how you'll answer

*Don't stop at "They don't get it."*

Don't  
overlook  
the people  
you don't  
usually see



**3. Look beyond  
situations  
to causes  
and consequences**



# Observe and learn



- How workload, information, and decisions move through your organization
- Who's responsible for what
- How failures happened, and what was learned
- Triggers for conflict or resistance





## **Visualize before you act**

- What problem you're trying to solve
- Who else is having the same or a related problem
- How your action will eliminate the problem, not just move it elsewhere

*Don't stop at "They need to change."*

**Don't overlook preventive measures**



## 4. Look beyond out-of-pocket expenses to actual costs and benefits



# Observe and learn



- Which tasks take the most staff time
- Which projects take the most calendar time
- Which specialized resources are already stretched too thin
- Steps and deadlines in annual budget and grant cycles





## Visualize before you act

- The service payoff for taking this action
- The strategic payoff for taking this action
- How important this is, compared to what you're already doing
- What it would cost to take a new approach instead of struggling to fix the one you have

*Don't stop at "Without new resources we can't do anything."*

**Don't overlook what won't get done  
while you're working on this**



**5. Look beyond  
your immediate needs  
to the library's  
broader commitments**



# Observe and learn



- The basics of relevant laws
- The basics of relevant contracts
- Library policies
- City/county/campus policies
- Long standing arrangements and traditions
- Go-to resource people on these topics





## Visualize before you act

- What this action says about the library and its priorities
- How this action aligns with the library's existing commitments
- Where higher level permissions or negotiations might be required

*Don't stop at "It's management's job to worry about that."*

**Don't overlook  
the need to prep your boss**





**6. Look  
beyond today  
to the future**



# Observe and learn



- How the community you serve is changing
- Where demand is increasing, and whether you have the capacity to respond
- Where demand is decreasing, and how you might scale back to make room for new priorities
- Trends and fresh practices in customer service, technology, and collection development

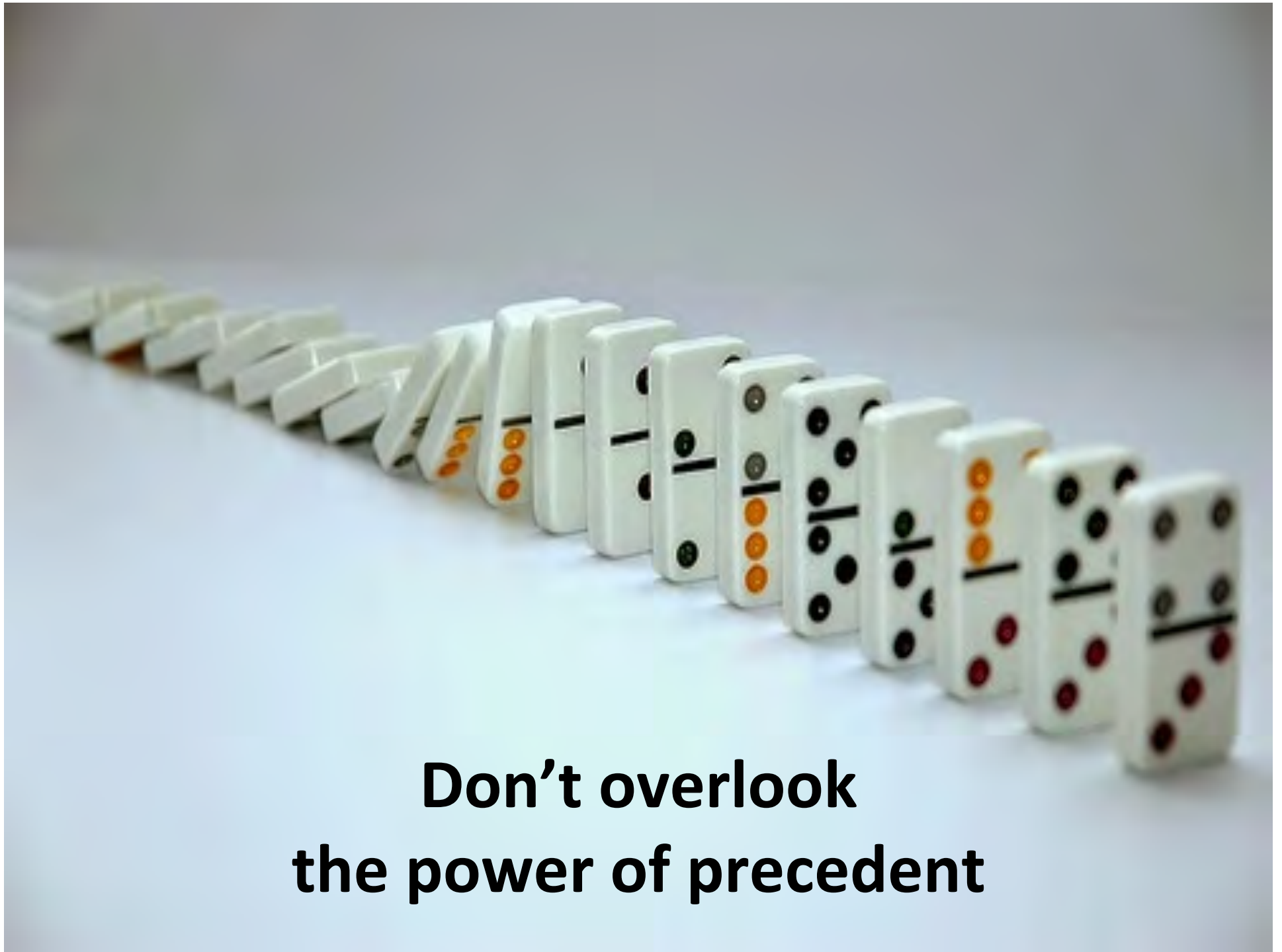


## Visualize before you act

- Likelihood that the library will be dealing with this (or a similar) situation again in 10 minutes, 10 days, 10 months, or 10 years
- How you'll cope if your action is a roaring success and you don't get any new resources
- How you can package this work for others to use

*Don't stop at "I just need to get (person or group) off my back."*





**Don't overlook  
the power of precedent**

# Barriers to big picture thinking

- Perfectionism
- Procrastination
- Pessimism
- Fear of conflict
- Complacency



# To inspire big picture thinking in others, communicate

- Fit
- Trust
- Caring
- Openness
- Development
- Ownership



# If you get bogged down in the details

1. Acknowledge – *“Good point”*
2. Step back – *“I’d like to look at that in context for a minute”*
3. Visualize (start with one of the points outlined in previous slides)
4. Reframe – *“In light of what we just discussed, how can we...”*
5. Repeat as necessary



It's wise to see the task you're doing  
in its larger context





***joan@jfwilliams.com***



**Let's continue  
the  
conversation...**

Photo by Martin Helmke

***Debuting this summer:  
Joan Frye Williams'  
new Infopeople podcast series***

# **The Practical Iconoclast**





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