



# Learning the Legacy Collection: From Rookies to Living Indexes

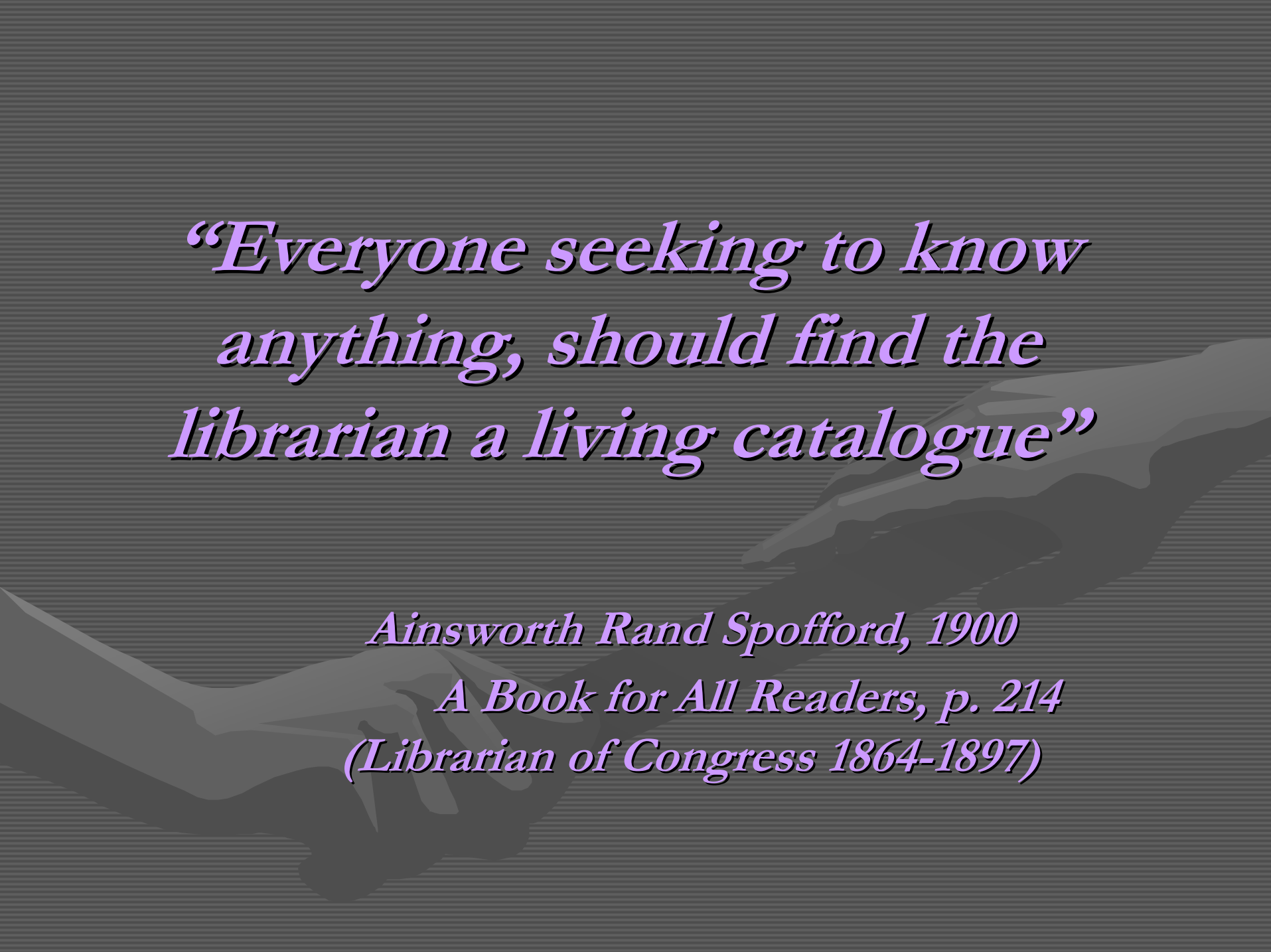
Presented by:

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*“In 1895, Dr. A. R. Spofford stated that the public documents of the United States would be several thousand sealed books to people and officials alike, if it were not for half a dozen ‘living indexes’ in Washington”*

Tables of and Annotated Index to the Congressional Series of United States Public Documents (1902) p. 11

The background of the slide features a grayscale illustration of two hands shaking. The hands are rendered in a stylized, layered manner, with the fingers and palms overlapping to create a sense of depth and movement. The overall tone is professional and symbolic of agreement or partnership.

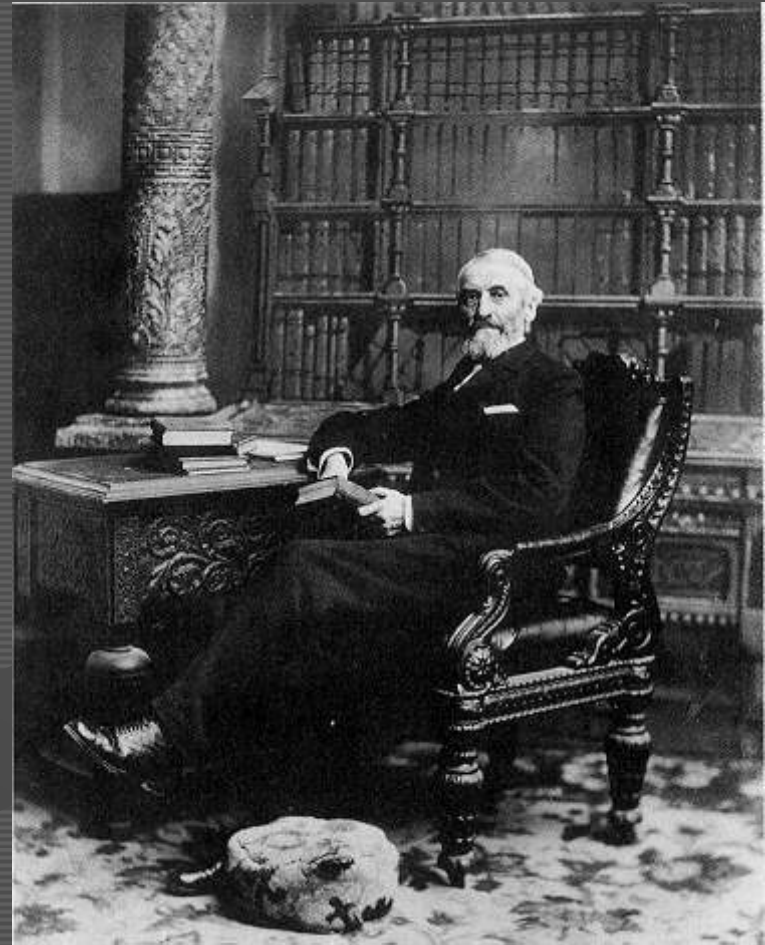
*“Everyone seeking to know  
anything, should find the  
librarian a living catalogue”*

*Ainsworth Rand Spofford, 1900*

*A Book for All Readers, p. 214  
(Librarian of Congress 1864-1897)*

# Spofford & Government Documents

- Was an acknowledged expert in the problems of government documents-their publication, acquisition, distribution and use. (Cole, p. 80)
- Presented a memorandum in 1874 before Congress for an index to documents and debates of Congress ; was forced to abandon the idea in 1877 but kept campaigning. (Cole, p. 80)
- Thus was influential in the creation of our early indexes – Poore, Ames, the *Tables of and Annotated Index to the Congressional Series of United States Public Documents* and ultimately the *Checklist*.
- <http://www.loc.gov/loc/legacy/spofford.jpg> (photo source)



# Why Spofford now?



- “If I had to name a role model for myself, it would be Dr. Spofford. He is noted for having an incredible memory, the ability to go directly to the source to answer any question, and for knowing his collection thoroughly.”  
John Phillips, 2001

# Questions to ponder:

- How is a rookie government documents librarian to become a living index?
- What does a rookie do when the living index for her legacy collection is on the Appalachian Trail?

No cell phone towers here!



# Informal Surveys

- Interagency Conference Attendees
- Questions to Ponder from a Rookie
- Leaders in Our Profession





# 2000 Interagency Conference

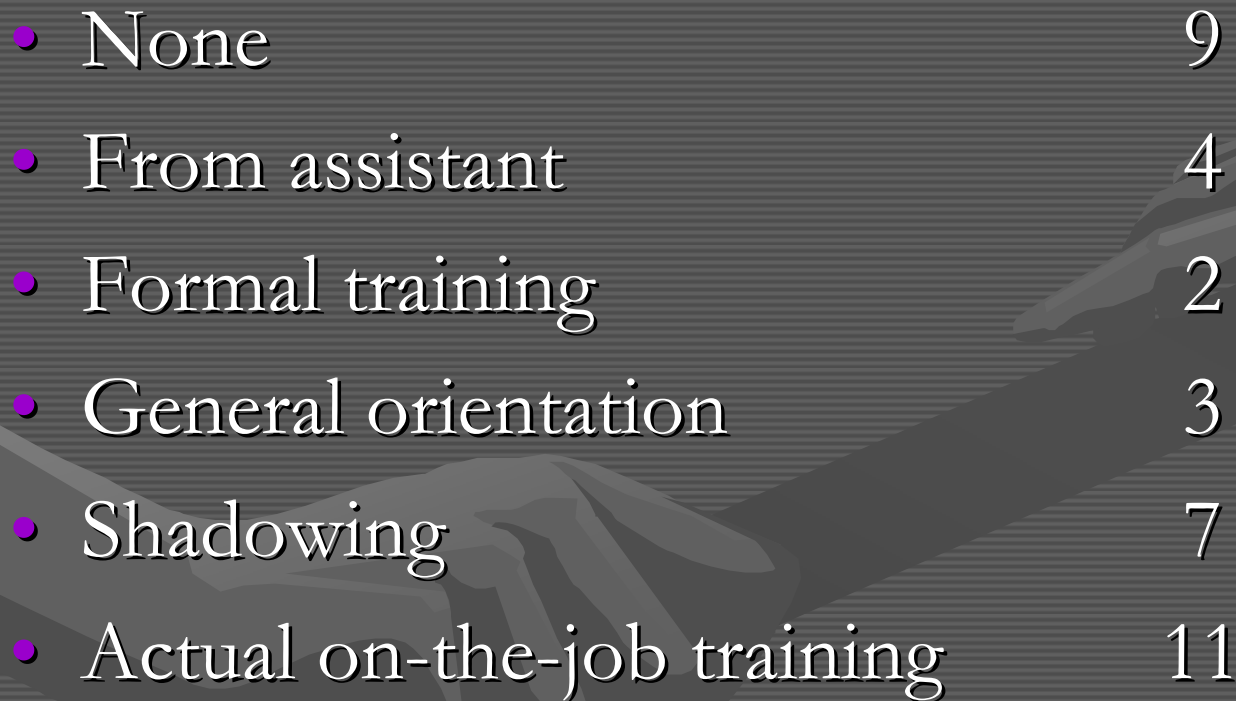
- 36 attendees responded (out of 60 registrants)
  - 13 had earned MLS between 1995 & 2000; 8 had earned MLS between 1990 & 1994
  - First career - 21 attendees
  - Second career – 15 attendees
  - History and English were most often held undergraduate degrees
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# How did you prepare for librarianship in government documents?

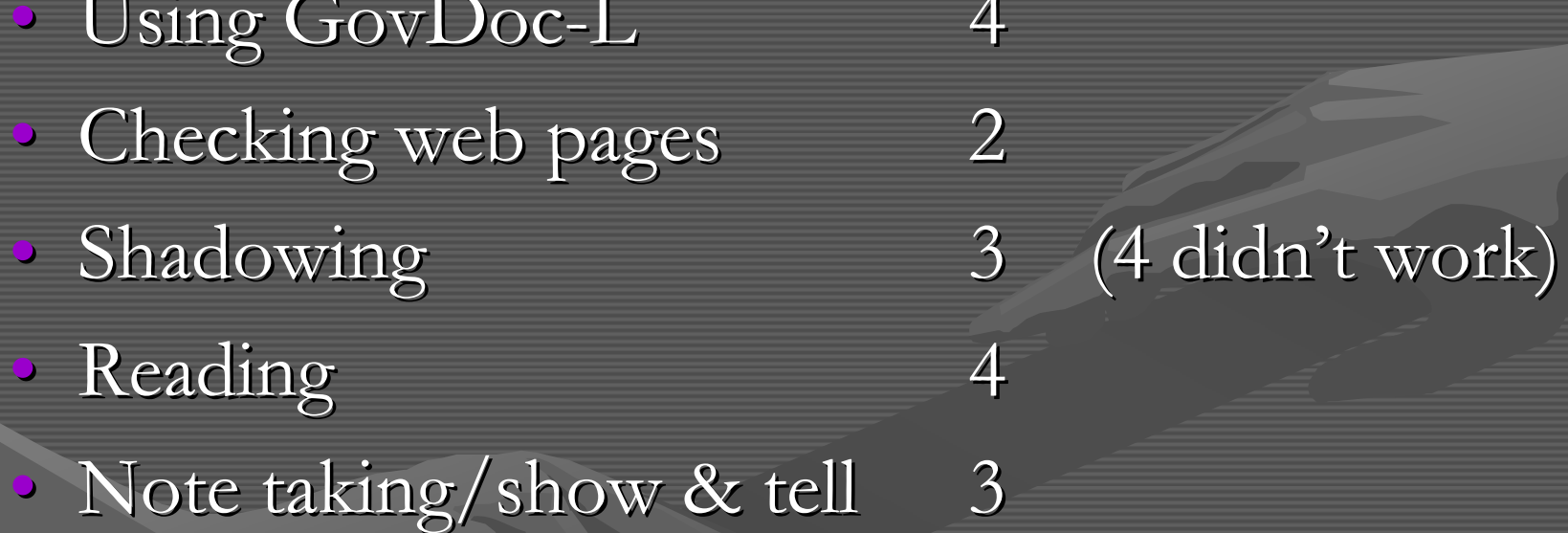
- Graduate course 20
- On-the-job/self taught 14
- No answer 2



# What, if any, training did you receive once hired?

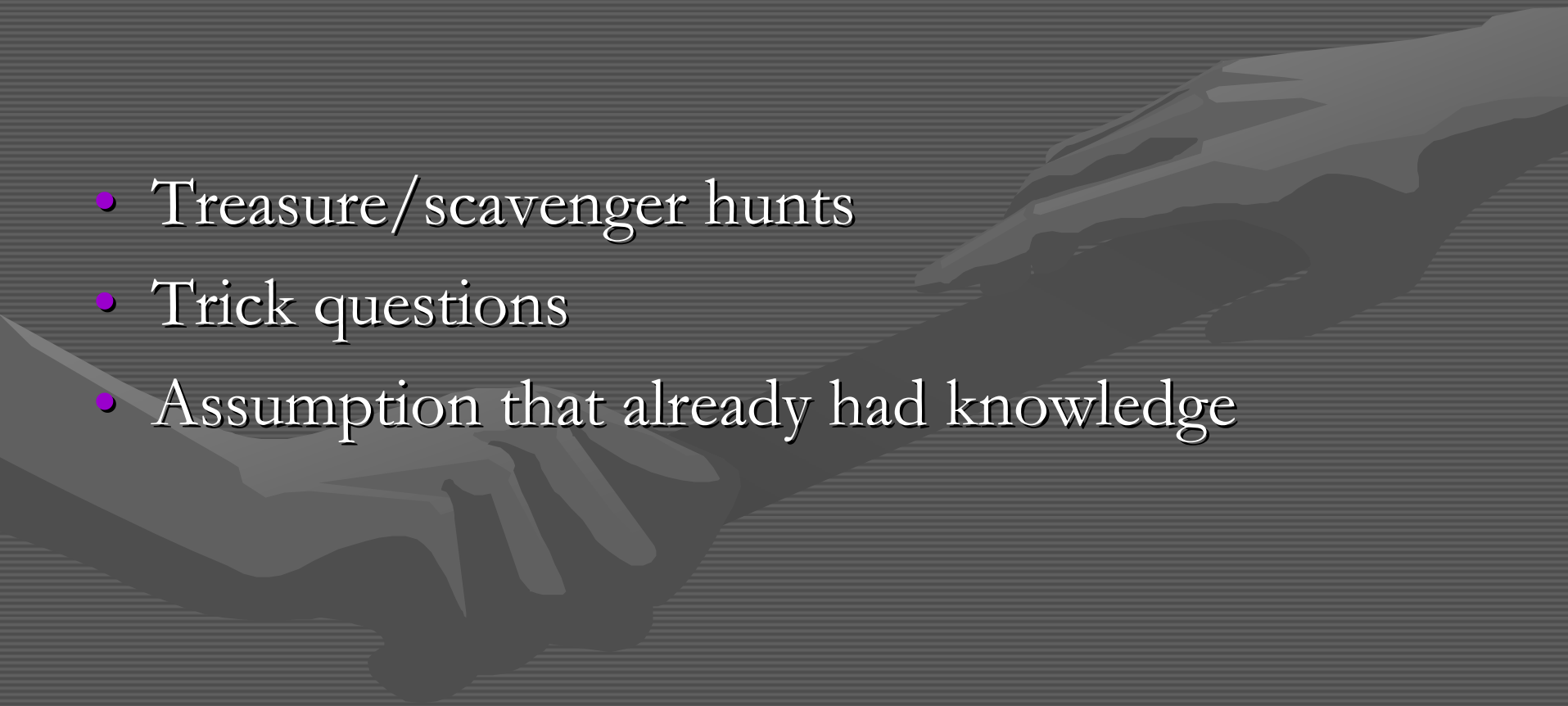
- None 9
  - From assistant 4
  - Formal training 2
  - General orientation 3
  - Shadowing 7
  - Actual on-the-job training 11
- 

# What training approaches worked?


- On-the-job 11
  - Using GovDoc-L 4
  - Checking web pages 2
  - Shadowing 3 (4 didn't work)
  - Reading 4
  - Note taking/show & tell 3
- 

# Approaches that didn't work

- Treasure/scavenger hunts
- Trick questions
- Assumption that already had knowledge



# 23 reported having a Role Model and shared Qualities of a good role model:

- Patience
  - Knowledgeable
  - Passionate
  - Service oriented -\*  
answer given the most
  - Promotes collection
  - Enjoys teaching
  - Perseverance
  - Good communicator
  - Detail oriented
- 



# Questions to Ponder ... from a Rookie

(via GovDoc-L with 21  
responders)

# How did you learn your collection?

- Weeding the collection
- Memorization – sources, locations, etc.
- Shelved documents – “handle” the collection; set aside time each week “to get to know your materials”
- Continue to go through new mail trucks
- Reference work-answer any and all questions
- Read, read, read – Admin. Notes, old and new textbooks, etc.



# In Ridley Kessler's words...

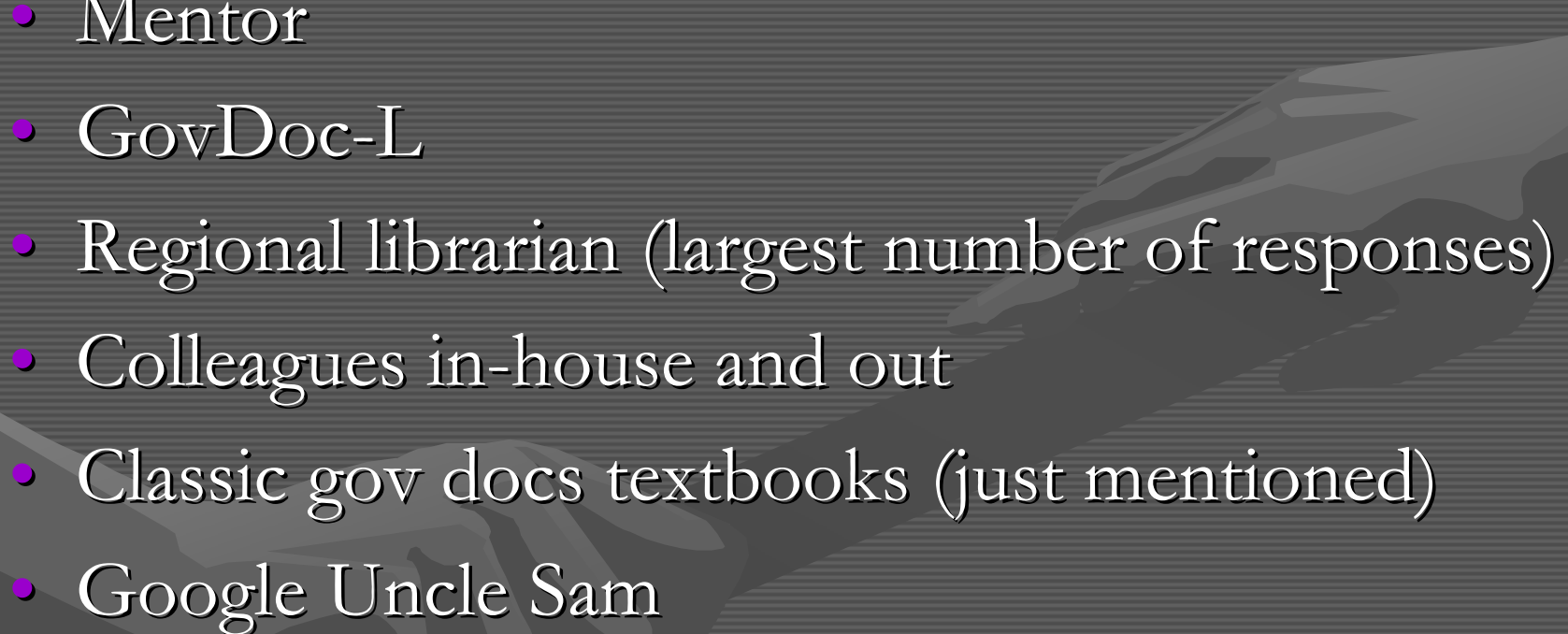
“When I first started, the bibliographic tools you needed to know were only a few shelves of different titles. Now these tools take up ranges of shelves. Yet we still need to know how to operate these older, more traditional sources because the new electronic ones never quite replace them.”

(DTTP v.32 (1), p.14)

# What textbooks do you recommend?

- Joe Morehead's *Introduction to United States Public Documents* (7)
- Robinson's *Tapping the Government Grapevine* (7)
- Schmeckebier's *Government Publications and Their Use* (6)
- Andriot's *Guide to US Government Publications* (4)
- Sears and Moody's *Using Government Information Sources* (3)
- Boyd and Rip's *United States Government Publications* (1)

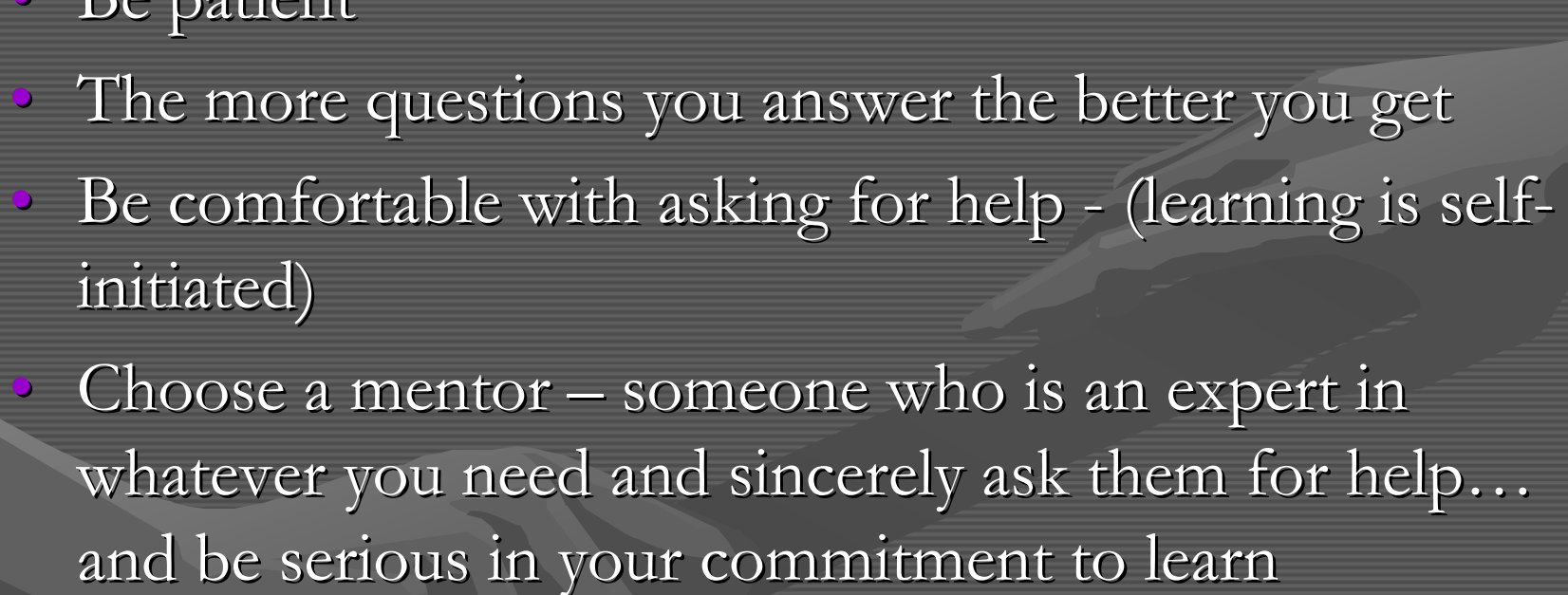
# Where do/did you turn for help with difficult questions?

- Department head
  - Mentor
  - GovDoc-L
  - Regional librarian (largest number of responses)
  - Colleagues in-house and out
  - Classic gov docs textbooks (just mentioned)
  - Google Uncle Sam
- 

# What would you have a new hire do to learn the collection?

- Process new items
- Shelve items
- Attend the Interagency Conference
- Take time to simply browse the collection
- Learn traditional paper indexes
- Shadow an experienced librarian
- Network with other gov doc librarians
- “Cruise” through agency websites

# Words of wisdom

- Think of yourself as a patron
  - Be patient
  - The more questions you answer the better you get
  - Be comfortable with asking for help - (learning is self-initiated)
  - Choose a mentor – someone who is an expert in whatever you need and sincerely ask them for help... and be serious in your commitment to learn
- 

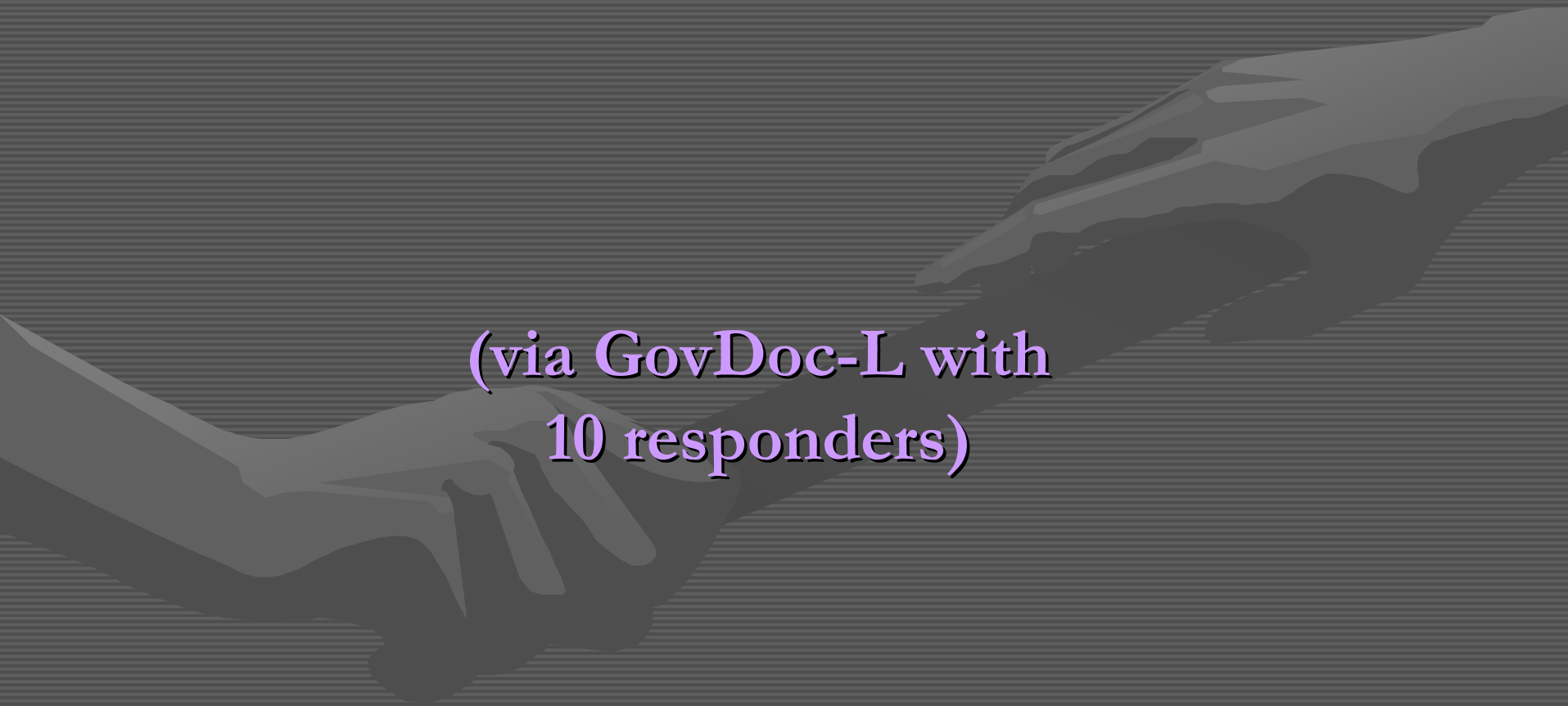
# Additional hints:

- When you know the answer is in a source, it usually is
- Depend on no one's prior research for accuracy or completeness
- Keep a list of where you have looked and the result
- Take your time
- Try various entry points
- Cite your source, do not rely on your memory.

Katz, p. 192

# Leaders in Our Profession

(via GovDoc-L with  
10 responders)



# Leaders and Living Indexes

Effective leaders are known by the actions they take, the practices they demonstrate, the results they achieve and by the relationships they forge.

There are a few people who are effective leaders as well as excellent examples of 'living indexes.'

Not all leaders are 'living indexes' and visa versa. We have many living indexes who know government documents thoroughly but have not published or led major projects. We have leaders who do not focus on service to patrons but instead on service to the profession.



# Qualities of a Leader: a sampling

- Believes in our history as well as our future
- Contributes to librarianship literature
- Tirelessly advocates for the public's right to know
- Innovative and provides leadership on new initiatives
- Ability to teach
- Works to stay up on current issues
- Understands the complexity of all the issues surrounding federal documents

# Can you guess who...

- “\_\_\_\_\_ has probably casually forgotten more than most of us will ever know about documents.”
- “\_\_\_\_\_ is the goddess of state documents. She has done more to ensure that the public’s right to the information they’ve already paid for hasn’t stopped with the feds.”
- “\_\_\_\_\_ is the past, present, and future of documents librarianship all wrapped up in one compact Energizer bunny.”
- “\_\_\_\_\_ mentors everyone she meets, a terrific role model and never the least afraid to say she doesn’t know a particular answer, but will find out... an essential quality in a good documents librarian.”

# We are not alone ...

“My first day on the job I felt like a deer caught in the headlights, and on my last day, thirty-three years later, I was still bewildered at the complexity and immenseness of the government information field.”

*Ridley Kessler*

DTTP, v. 32(1), p. 13

# Role of memory...

“Early in my career I somehow managed to develop the knack for tracking in my head large numbers of documents along with their exact locations on the shelf.”

*Walter Newsome*

DTTP, v.32 (1), p. 16

# Spofford's "Faculty of Memory" in *A Book for All Readers*

- "We must set down a good memory as a cardinal qualification of the librarian" (p. 226)
- "The principle of association of ideas is doubtless the leading element in a memory which is not merely verbal" (p. 227) – i.e. associate a book with its time, color, place on the shelf
- "The oftener you have been to a place, the better you know the way" (p. 230) – i.e. a well developed local memory is a great asset!

# Ways to strengthen a weak memory according to Spofford:

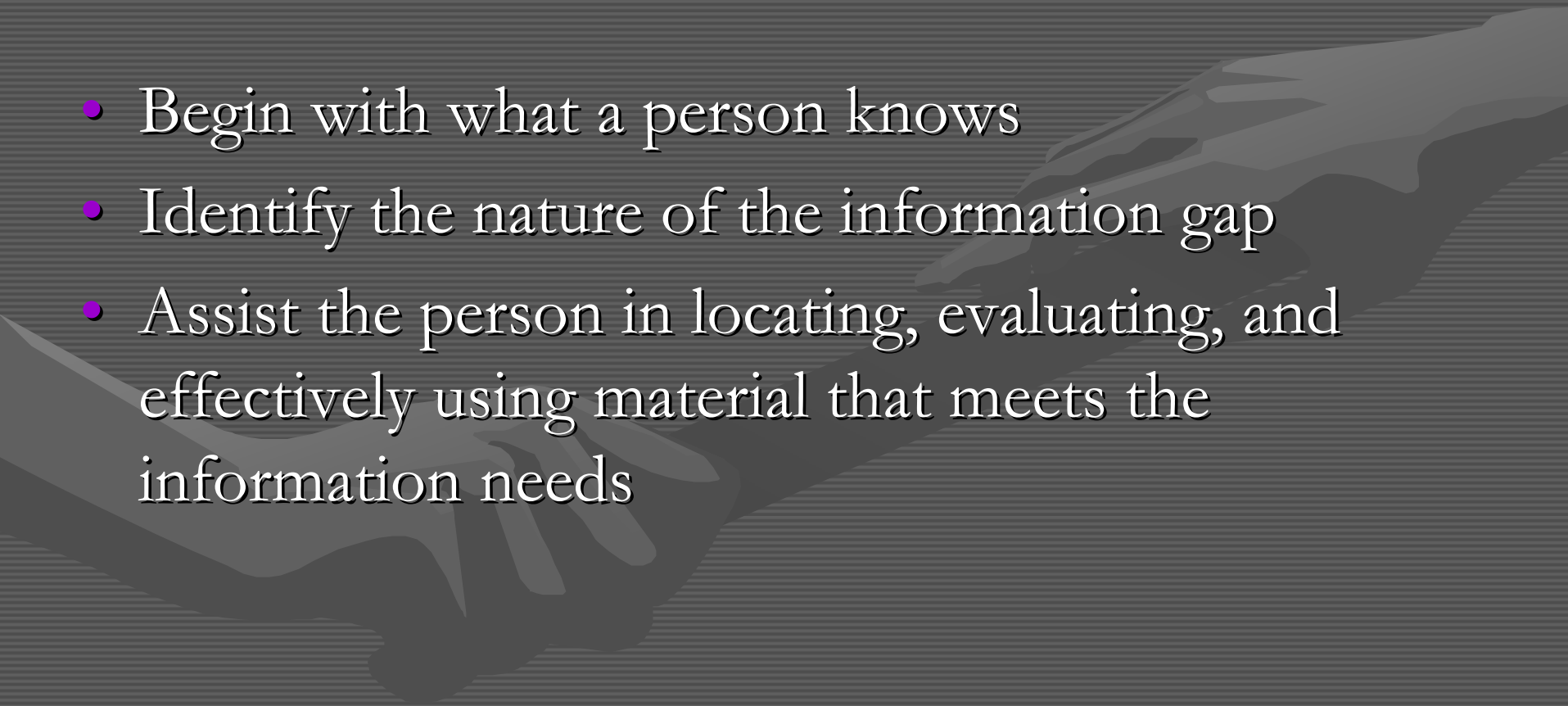
- Constant practice (habit of attention)- one strategy is to chunk or organize information into groups or patterns, commit to memory in parts – build on a foundation.
- Cultivate the habit of concentration of thought – persistently think of only one thing at a time.
- Take up every subject with fixed attention, one at a time, excluding every other for the time being --- constantly exercise this will power!

(Spofford, *A Book for All Readers*, p. 236-238)

# Fostering Memory Capacity and Skills (Merriam)

- Provide both verbal and written cues when introducing new materials
- Give opportunities to apply the new material as soon after the presentation as possible
- Build on some existing knowledge so that new information can be connected to it – nothing is learned in isolation from prior experience & experience becomes the adult learner's living textbook
- Develop a structured checklist for learning a new skill or series of sources

# When teaching a patron ... or a rookie librarian:

- Begin with what a person knows
  - Identify the nature of the information gap
  - Assist the person in locating, evaluating, and effectively using material that meets the information needs
- 



# Spofford's *A Book for All Readers*

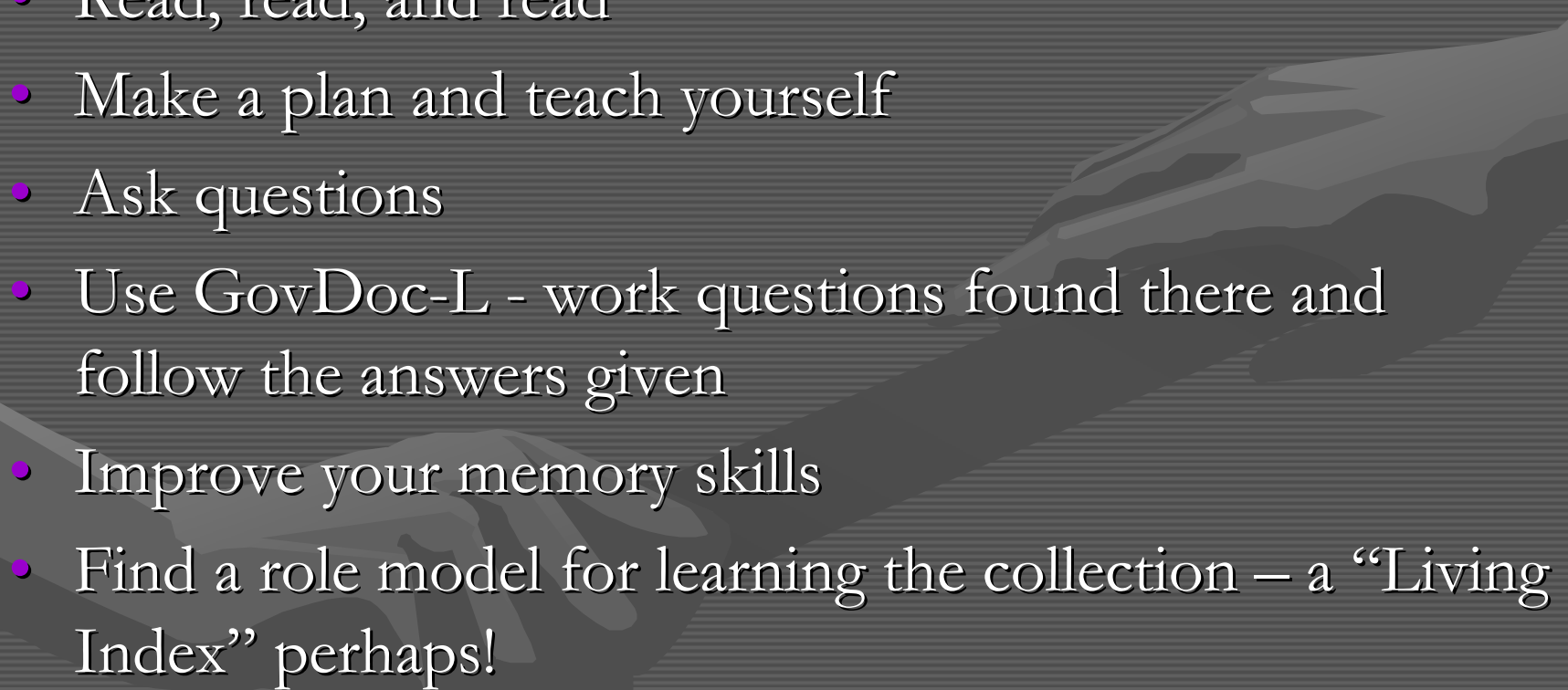
- “It is enough for the librarian to act as an intelligent guide-post, to point the way; to travel the road is the business of the reader himself” (p. 204)
- “Practice alone can make one perfect in the art of search and speedy finding” (p. 205)
- “None of us were made to sit down in despair because we are not endowed with an all-embracing memory, and do not know all mysteries and all knowledge” (p. 238)

*“A great library is the scholar’s dictionary...not to be read through, but to enable him to put his finger on the fact he wants, just when it is wanted.”*

*Ainsworth Rand Spofford, 1900*

*A Book for All Readers, p. 246*

# So what is a rookie to do?

- Take a government documents graduate course
  - Read, read, and read
  - Make a plan and teach yourself
  - Ask questions
  - Use GovDoc-L - work questions found there and follow the answers given
  - Improve your memory skills
  - Find a role model for learning the collection – a “Living Index” perhaps!
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# What's the game plan when...

You aren't sure

“Who” is on first? (*agency websites*) or

“What” is on second? (*Traditional paper sources*)

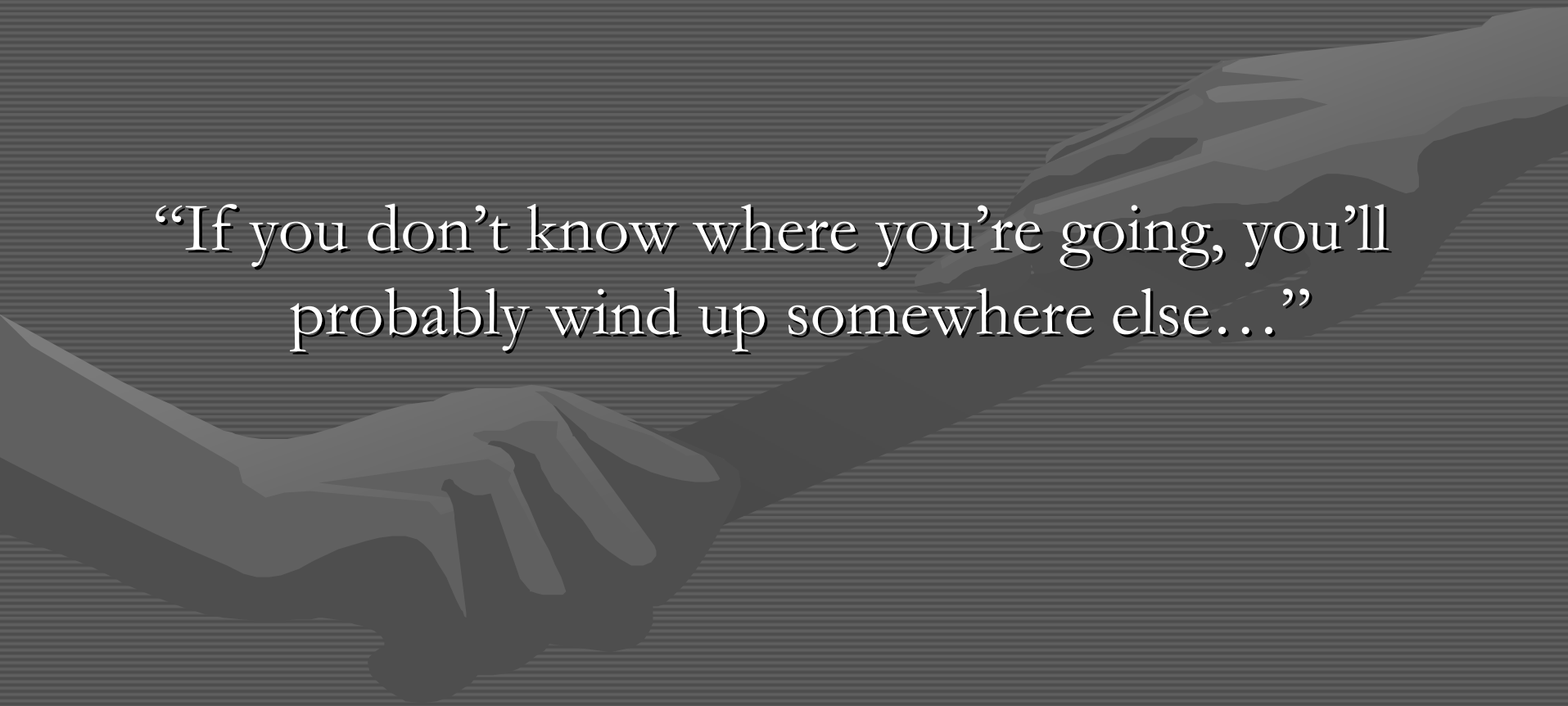
... and you're the

“I don't know” (*rookie*) that is up to bat

And the coach (a.k.a. “*living index*”) has been ejected from the game (i.e. gone fishing, retired, etc.)???

# Develop a plan for moving yourself forward ...

“If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll probably wind up somewhere else...”



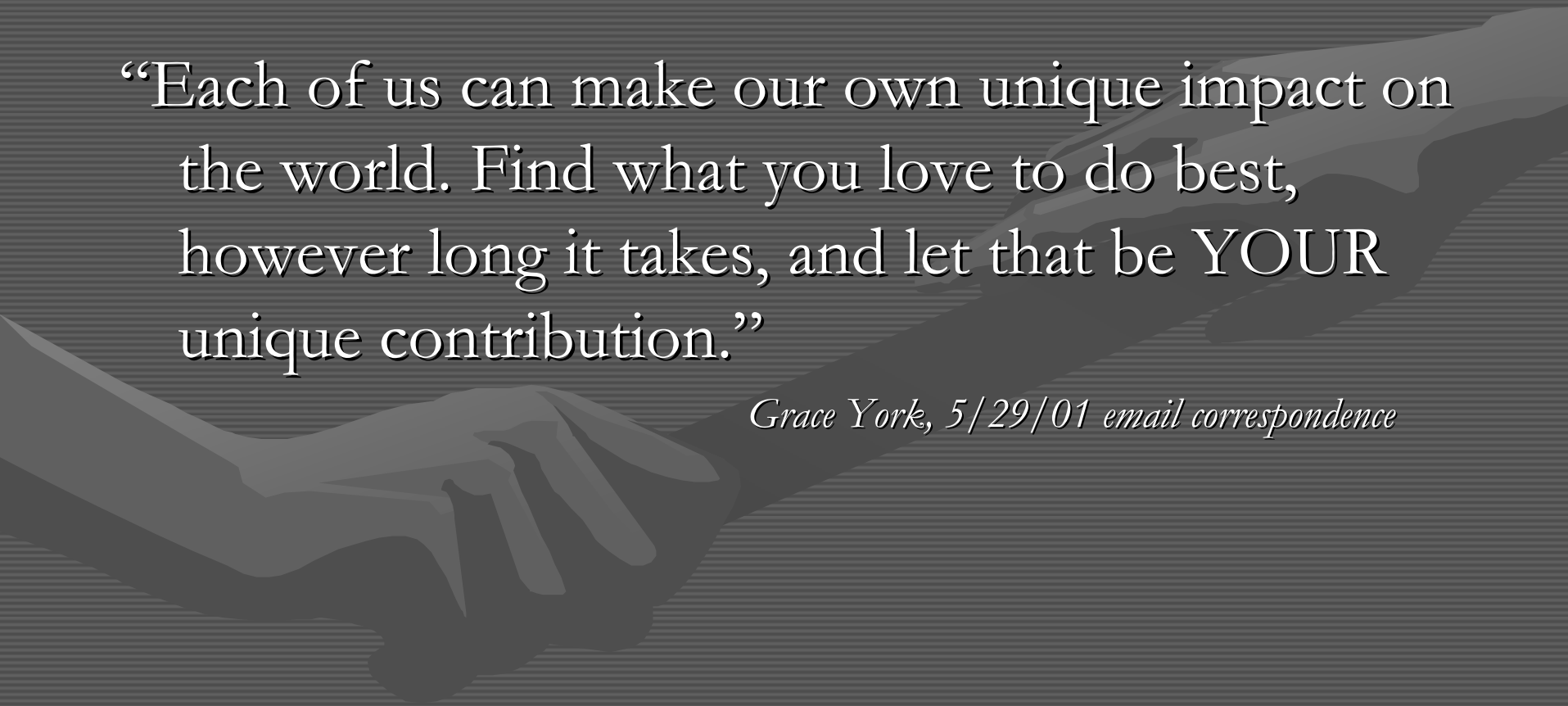
# Steps for a learning project

- Have a self-awareness of your strengths and weaknesses
- Decide what detailed knowledge/skill to learn
- Set specific deadlines or intermediate targets
- Decide when to begin a learning episode
- Decide the pace at which to proceed
- Estimate current level of knowledge & progress in gaining new knowledge
- Evaluate current process and alter anything that's not working
- Have needed resources
- Find TIME for learning – perhaps the biggest challenge!

# A Point to Ponder Indeed!

“Each of us can make our own unique impact on the world. Find what you love to do best, however long it takes, and let that be YOUR unique contribution.”

*Grace York, 5/29/01 email correspondence*



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