A career educator and librarian, Sherry Gick served as a special education teacher, a community librarian and a classroom teacher before she became the librarian for Rossville Consolidated Schools in Indiana, and then the district’s K-12 Library and Instructional Technology Specialist. Today, Gick is Director of Innovative Learning at Five-Star Technology Solutions.

Q: As 21st-century library programs go, yours was considered a leader at Rossville Consolidated Schools. How did you become a leader and elevate the library there to its current stature?

A: I never set out to be a leader beyond my own school or library, and I’m not sure I even think of myself in that light. The school library community is inclusive of all. Through the power of Twitter, I found my tribe of teacher-librarians who are doing amazing things in their school libraries every day. Once I connected and began to share on Twitter (and then through other social media platforms like Instagram and Blogger) what I was doing in my library, my circle of influence increased. I’ve always said Twitter is the birthplace of all good ideas, and I believe it has been a game changer in my career. Now that I am a consultant, I have the privilege of working with many different teachers, librarians and administrators and can advocate for innovative learning in classrooms and libraries all over.

Q: In your opinion, what makes a librarian a 21st-century leader?

A: A future-ready librarian should be a 21st-century leader in their school building. They should be the person who makes things happen for both teachers and students by being an advocate and a liaison for both! A future-ready librarian is visible not only in their library, but in classrooms around school, coteaching and collaborating with teachers.
Q: Is there a moment when you knew you became a leader? What was the aha moment?
A: My aha moment was when I was named a Library Journal Mover & Shaker in 2015. It remains one of my proudest moments to be recognized with such a prestigious award.

Q: What factors enabled your library program to transform into what it is today?
A: I transformed my library program for my students. I didn’t have to convince administration as they hired me to do my job to the best of my ability, so I made changes in the library based on student needs and desires; their voice was pivotal to me in making the library theirs! I started by genrefying the collection to make it more student friendly. Next we added self-checkout, which gave students independence and power. Then we added comfy seating, thanks to Donors Choose and a student-led fundraiser for the library. The last major changes involved getting rid of the computer lab after going 1:1 and rearranging tables to create student collaborative areas. The funding of Makerspace materials came from our ed foundation; almost none of the changes made in the library required money. We made as many changes as possible by using what was already available in our school and reimagining/repurposing.

Q: What lessons did you learn from the journey?
A: The journey of transforming a library program taught me to listen to my students. They have amazing ideas and are not asked for their input enough in education. If you want the school library to be student friendly, talk to students.

Q: Words of encouragement for a struggling librarian who wants to transform his/her program? What ideas can you share?
A: Connect! The power of a PLN cannot be matched. Follow #TLChat, #ISTELib, #FutureReadyLibs hashtags to find teacher-librarians sharing about their libraries and programs. Reach out and ask questions. Get involved. Don’t just consume information – interact! There are so many amazing teacher-librarians sharing their journeys of transforming libraries on blogs daily. Read and follow along, tweaking ideas for your own school library space and program. Twitter is a game changer for this immediate sharing of ideas.