



## President's Column

Molly Raphael

### A Time Rich in Leadership Learning Opportunities

We have opportunities to learn about leadership throughout our lives. As children, we learn lessons we may not recognize from those around us in leadership positions. Then, as we go through formal education and as professionals, we study leadership and observe leaders in more conscious ways. Rarely, because of geography and other circumstances, are we all able to observe the same leaders in the same course of observable events.

This past year afforded us the relatively rare opportunity to learn about leadership in practice by watching the presidential election season. As current and future library leaders, we all had the opportunity to observe the same players on the national stage as they sought the highest leadership position in the United States. No matter where one was on the political spectrum, it would have been nearly impossible not to see events and the unfolding of the election campaigns in terms of leadership.

During the primary season, which spanned an unusually long time, we saw candidates try to distinguish themselves in voters' eyes. We watched as early leaders sometimes faded; for example, Rudy Giuliani, who was a leader in one venue (New York after 9/11), seemed unable to move his leadership style into the national arena. On the flip side, we saw how a relatively unknown leader such as Mike Huckabee, who had not been on a national stage, seemed able to attract much more attention than many expected. Early followers of Barack Obama wondered if he could transcend many perceived barriers to this highest leadership position; they were certain he had the leadership qualities needed. Front-runners like Hillary Clinton had convinced many people well before the campaign formally started that they had the qualities necessary to lead the country.

This year, perhaps because of my Library Leadership and Management Association (LLAMA) position, I paid particular attention to the campaign, watching specifically for

leadership qualities exhibited by the candidates. I saw an opportunity to learn some lessons, to observe great leaders in times of trial, and to see whether the elements of leadership seemed to define themselves clearly.

With Obama's victory, I have been focusing on what we can learn from him about leadership. Here are a few observations; I imagine you can add to this list.

- If there ever was a shining example of Stephen Covey's advice—"The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing"—it was the Obama campaign. The candidate and his team never veered from the "main thing"—the message of change. The slogan was modified over time from "change we can believe in" to "change can happen" and even now to the transition website of "change.gov." During some of the most challenging times in the campaign, such as the stories around Obama's pastor or charges made by his competitors, Obama never stopped talking about change.
- Leaders recognize and seize opportunities to create desired futures. In 2004, democratic candidate Howard Dean used the power of the Internet to raise funds and attract followers. All candidates for the 2008 run had the opportunity to see the potential of the Internet in those areas. Only the Obama team seemed to capitalize on that lesson. Not only was Obama able to raise unprecedented funds, but he was also able to use the Internet to create direct, two-way communication with millions of people. He operated without being dependent on the establishment media, nor was he dependent on bloggers. He could get his own message out to his supporters—a powerful strategy in a world oversaturated with information resources.
- Great leaders must be great communicators to attract followers who want to be involved in creating the envisioned future. Obama excelled at delivering his message not only to voters but also to others around the world. This second element was not so important initially, but certainly will be to Obama in building support as a respected leader on the world stage.
- Leadership studies have identified the pitfalls of "groupthink." As Obama has been assembling his leadership team since the election, much has been made of his expressed desire to have strong, smart people

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The library created a website for students who are working abroad that allows the student to quickly and easily find websites for all the libraries in all the study abroad locations as well as contact information for help services. The website also has contact information for our own library, and for most research services so the student always has access to research help from home. We are engaged in a project to organize and manage all the documents and resources available to the accreditation team as well as the visitors. We have a collection development program designed to purchase library material for new faculty who happen to be working in a research or teaching area that has never been covered in our collections. This program

fills collecting gaps in a systematic way that helps with recruiting and retention and contributes to the campus process of creating hiring packages. The library is represented on many key leadership committees, for policies on curriculum, technology, research support, and university records. We have focused on liaison with key stakeholders, and have a structured program for faculty liaison as well as a new program under development for communication with and feedback from students and the campus student life division. Finally, we are offering digital production and repository services to faculty across campus.

—**Nancy Allen**, *University of Denver Library*

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around him. He certainly has demonstrated that he is committed to having a team of strong leaders around him and to creating an environment where groupthink would not be likely to occur.

There are many other observations that we could make about leadership in this presidential election season. I

encourage you to read the articles and columns in this issue of *Library Leadership & Management*, all focused on library leadership, and then seize the opportunities that are all around us every day to learn and build our leadership skills. Leaders never stop learning.

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**TS:** The potential is limitless! LLAMA is for every library worker. And, these people need not aspire to become a manager, an administrator, or a leader. They need not work in one particular type of library. We are a “one-stop shop” when it comes to providing the tools and skills that are needed to take on any type of leadership role.

**NC:** LLAMA has the potential to become synonymous with leadership in libraries. If it is not already, LLAMA could be thought of as the place to send one's library leaders in order to help them gain more experience and learn through networking. LLAMA should be so intertwined with leadership development that all libraries encourage their management to join in order to gain development.