

Library Leadership in Action

Eric C. Shoaf

Leaders lead, and leading is part of the mix of activities we call leadership. Here is a quick look around the profession at some of the things library leaders and their institutions are doing that demonstrate leadership. An assortment of librarians from across the profession were sent an e-mail asking a simple question: “What is one example of library leadership at your institution?”

The answers are fascinating in both variety and scope and come from academic and research libraries, medical libraries, public libraries, and special libraries. They provide valuable insight into how libraries are taking clear leadership roles at their institutions.

Leadership is challenging the status quo when we think the status quo is wrong. Leadership is speaking up in group discussions, because “group think” does actually occur all the time. Leadership is volunteering to lead an effort. Leadership has almost nothing to do with standing in the organization. One can see leadership in the lowest levels in the organization. Leadership is empowering those below us to make suggestions, speak out on issues, and challenge decision making. Leadership is about putting in a good day’s work. Leadership is about using one’s power and authority to better the organization, not to better one’s own position or standing. Leadership is about concentrating on substance not fluff. Leadership is about lifting up our employees, not putting them down. Leadership is about thinking positively but also realistically. Leadership is about making the sum of the parts greater than the parts themselves.

–Frank Allen, University of Central Florida Library

We are currently working on creating electronic document delivery for students who will be able to have chapters from books and journal articles sent directly to their inbox. This is an example of leadership because the library has realized that in the age of the Internet and computers, students will often just find it on Google as opposed to

going to their library. By giving them remote access to a wider selection of scholarly journals, we are providing them with more credible sources whenever they want them. As leaders we need to adapt to our users.

–Lee Anne Hooley, Harvard University Library

We have a section head at the state library who not only knows every job done by his subordinates but does these tasks regularly. Some of these tasks include emptying dehumidifiers on a daily bases. This is leadership by example.

–Caryn J. Carr, Bureau of the State Library of Pennsylvania

One example of library leadership at our facility is in regards to assessment. In 2006, the library established a new position, assessment librarian, based our need to oversee and coordinate the collection and use of data, including data from and about clients. In 2008, the library received a request from three of the local degree-granting institutions to join the re-accreditation team in completing the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The library’s emphasis on assessment and its role in demonstrating value proved crucial to the success of the QEP.

–Kelly Gonzalez, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center Library

Empowering staff to resolve or participate in the resolution of issues affecting service and performance.

–Alicia Miller, George Washington University Library

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Strategic delegation is one sign of progressive leadership at our library. Leaders in our library create opportunity for staff at all levels to achieve success; our leaders share responsibility and authority and celebrate individual and team achievement and success. Our leaders strive to create a library work environment that has less restrictive boundaries; calculated risk taking is encouraged and rewarded, independent judgment is expected. Our leaders actively and consistently communicate with all levels of the library and with all stakeholders.

–Susan L. Considine, Fayetteville (N.Y.) Free Library

We have librarians working on the front lines in several areas that support our institution's lofty goal to become a top-twenty public research university by the year 2020. In challenging initiatives such as general education reform; clinical medical reference; translational research; and increased engagement of the university with state schools, businesses, farms, and communities, our librarians are playing important leadership roles.

–Gail Kennedy, University of Kentucky Library

The library staff has helped to lead the way with active learning. We have done this in a number of ways such as the creation of a faculty development resource area, cofounding the campus-wide faculty development committee (we have no teaching and learning center on our campus), helping plan and presenting at faculty in-services, and perhaps most significantly, through our information literacy efforts. The literacy program emphasizes students grasping critical concepts especially as they relate to evaluating information. More specifically, as library director my role has been to push hard for the faculty who have not yet embraced active learning to do so by cochairing the faculty development committee, providing committee updates at our dean's council meetings, and doing presentations for faculty. Library staff has helped by doing presentations, meeting with faculty, and sharing what we do.

–Richard Moniz, Johnson & Wales University Library

Library leadership at my institution is centered around the adage about doing the thing you are afraid to do. A quote from Eleanor Roosevelt captures it well: "You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you

really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

–Loren McCrory, Yuba County (CA) Library

The downtown campus came together very quickly. As a result of this, departments had to make the best use of the space available to us and the library must maintain two "service" desks. It became clear that we needed to focus more attention and offer more services on the new desk near the entrance. There were a lot of grumblings and concerns about the changes this would require. In this same time frame, I hired a new library support staff supervisor. He very quickly came on board with this new focus and started a series of initiatives to improve the quality of service we provided at that desk. Instead of worrying about the problems, he focused instead on the possibilities to make it work. He demonstrated leadership by his positive can-do attitude and his willingness to embrace change and he set an example for the staff he supervises.

–Scott Muir, Arizona State University Library

At the student multimedia design center, we took two existing units, microforms and copy services and the computing site, and combined them into one unit that manages all of the new services along with the existing services. It has been a challenge, but it has been a success.

–Shelly McCoy, University of Delaware Library

In the mid-1990s, as the Web was coming together, a reference librarian on my staff became interested in what the Web was all about. She explored existing websites, taught herself HTML, and began creating webpages for in-house use. So before anyone knew what was happening, the library had created and taken ownership of the company's intranet. We are still in charge today.

–Marilyn Bromley, The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc.

The dean of libraries put together a mentor/mentee program that matches tenured senior librarians with tenure-track, newer librarians. The dean meets periodically with the mentor and mentee groups separately, but also individually, in order to track progress and give guidance. Formally, the entire group meets once a month to discuss a topic of importance, usually led by one of the mentors or a campus official that is subject matter

expert in that topic. Assessment of this program reveals closer collaboration between peers and a higher sense of understanding among librarians seeking tenure.

–Michael Crumpton, *University of North Carolina at Greensboro Library*

We have a philosophy of leadership that rests on four questions:

- Is it the right thing for the community?
- Is it the right thing for the library system?
- Is it ethical and legal?
- Is it something you are willing to be accountable for?

If the answer is YES to all of these questions, they don't have to ask for permission . . . just take the lead and do it!

–Eva Poole, *Denton (Tex.) Public Library*

Librarians here are facing many challenges with a new service model concept about to be implemented. The new model is a test for everyone involved with leadership skills. A coordinator has been appointed to work with committees of unit heads and librarians to ensure that the transition moves smoothly. The coordinator holds bimonthly open forums where library faculty and staff can learn more about what's going on in their units. I think the library employees are generally in agreement with the need for change and supportive of the process as it unfolds. The university librarian has shown great leadership skills in taking this on. Like many other libraries, our finances are dwindling and decisions on collections, staff, and hours are critical for the library.

–Joyce Wright, *University of Illinois Library*

Library leaders from around the state convened to discuss the future of Texas libraries and to shape a vision for the vital, innovative, and dynamic library of the twenty-first century. Veteran library leaders, as well as new professionals, joined forces to draft a vision and document to stimulate thinking and creative action throughout the state. This process involved stakeholders from local and state governments, public and higher education authorities, museums and cultural organizations, and lay supporters. As a result of this effort, we have seen programs, workshops, and staff development days designed to help librarians begin the transformation at home. The end goal is to make our librar-

ies as responsive to the needs of our customers as possible and to help us take an aggressive, strategic position in shaping our future. This work has been challenging, engaging, uniting, and most importantly, renewing. The initiative has captured the highest goals of the profession and embodies what association networking is all about: making libraries and librarians stronger and outward-focused by collective and strategic work.

–Patricia H. Smith, *Texas Library Association*

In times of economic crisis and change, working to keep moral high and staff focused on what's essential but also providing the support necessary to help them explore the possibilities and think about innovative ways to meet objectives.

–Yolanda Cooper, *University of Miami Libraries*

Several years ago our library pioneered the use of print management software on our campus. We installed print management software on our public workstations and saw a dramatic decrease in paper usage, because the print management software gave students better responses about print queuing, thus eliminating documents being printed more than once because students thought the first request was lost. It prompted students about length of proposed print jobs, which alerted students that what they thought was going to be a one or two page screen print of a webpage would actually be more like seventy pages. Our experience was so successful we helped install the software in other campus computer labs, and we maintain a campus site license and server for the software.

–Bede Mitchell, *Georgia Southern University Library*

We take pride in anticipating our patrons' needs and finding innovative ways of meeting their needs and exceeding expectations. Providing reference assistance, programming and collections in multiple languages, teachers in the library for homework help after school, teaching patrons to navigate the rich and constantly changing resources on the Internet, hosting world-class authors, encouraging early literacy and traditional children's programming; all are roles at which our talented staff excel. Our patrons depend upon us whether they wish to read, learn, or discover.

–Karen Danczak Lyons, *Chicago Public Library*

Development of the National Digital Library in the mid-1990s by the Library of Congress, including very successful fund-raising to reach a goal of digitizing ten million items by 2000.

–Roberta Stevens, Library of Congress

I meet many senior information professionals. The true leaders in the field are looking for every possible way to save their organizations money. They recognize the need to look at every resource and its contract to determine if the materials (usually online) are absolutely necessary to their organization. They are reopening contract negotiations to reflect the downturn in the economy. The leaders are not fearful of change and work hard to reassure their staff.

–Carol L Ginsburg, Consultant for BST America

Librarians are full members of all faculty governance committees and are also included on university-wide administrative committees such as the university budget advisory committee. Some currently serve as chair of a committee and others have served as chairs in the past.

–Teri Switzer, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs Library

We have become risk takers. We didn't want to look like other library institutions. We just started using Evergreen open-source software for all our major functions. It is free and works well. Another risk we took was to leave a consortium after a couple of decades because membership wasn't serving our needs. We have changed our collection development to better resemble our user population. For us that means more African American and Hispanic literature. We made it easier for young adults to get a library card, and our focus now is more on getting the materials out for use rather than just keeping and protecting them.

–Marcia Warner, Grand Rapids (Mich.) Public Library

One of my librarians cochairs F&M Votes, a campus-wide coalition to encourage voting. It is important that librarians become recognized as leaders on their campuses outside of the expected library arenas.

–Pamela Snelson, Franklin and Marshall College

Leadership at my institution would be exemplified by individualism—among the faculty, for example. The students exhibit individual leadership in their initial explorations of the field and through their involvement in student chapters.

–Loriene Roy, School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin.

The director of the library has ensured that the university takes a leadership role in questions of open access and improved scholarly communication. With his leadership, the faculty voted unanimously to adopt a policy of open access. This was followed by a new charge from the university to the library to establish its office for scholarly communication.

–Thomas Schneider, Harvard University Library

In fall 2008 we opened the LINK, a new teaching and learning center, within the library. Occupying most of a floor, the LINK contains five classrooms, six seminar rooms, and eleven group studies, all well-equipped technologically, featuring glass walls, expansive whiteboards, and modular furniture that can be configured as the professor wishes. This space was originally destined to be the home of library technical services, but in the wake of dramatically increased popularity of the expanded and renovated library buildings, deans, the provost, and university librarian decided to create an entirely new space in this location, thus offering formal learning spaces (registrar-assigned classrooms) alongside the informal learning spaces of the library. This has been a very fruitful collaboration among the libraries, Arts and Sciences, and the Office of Information Technology. Their main help desk is also located in the LINK.

–Deborah Jakubs, Duke University Library

We are podcasting information about citizenship resources for the new United States citizenship exam in five different languages.

–Marcia Schneider, San Francisco Public Library

The library dean is cochair of the Marquette University community campaign, an annual employee giving program, raising funds each year for scholarships, local performing arts agencies, and local United Way services.

–Julie O'Keeffe, Marquette University Library

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.