

# What Was Said

# Library Leaders Institute

## Written Group Notes of the Library Leaders Institute held October 15 to 17, 2006 in Muskoka Ontario

To begin, each participant was asked to consider:

### 1. "ONE KEY THING YOU WANT TO GET OUT OF THE INSTITUTE"

- . To get out of the "box": How to continue to contribute
- . Learn from others facing similar dilemmas
- . Talk with others as to where to take career
- . Ideas re profession: Where are we going?
- . Discussion of leadership with others: issue of diversity of leadership styles
- . Talking with people in other environments
- . Useful methodologies to work with people "lower down"
- . To be inspired
- . Conversation outside of library: collaborative relationships with other professionals
- . Preparing the leaders for tomorrow
- . How to bring leaders into profession
- . Role of schools in identifying leaders coming in
- . Helping to create "change"

### 2. "WHAT ARE YOU PREPARED TO GIVE TO THE GROUP?"

- . Honesty
- . Experiences
- . Questions
- . Ideas/Solutions
- . Fun
- . New perspectives
- . Feedback

### 3. "OUR 'RULES OF ENGAGEMENT'"

- . Confidential
- . Non-judgmental
- . Constructively critical
- . Good listener
- . Self-aware
- . Respect/Compassion
- . Openness



photo by Gillian Hallam

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## 4. “The CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD LEADER”

- Patient and helps others (younger generation) to be patient
- Manages expectations from those above
- Knowing how to work with political situations
- Sense of humour about self and job
- Not taking self too seriously
- Leader has to be ethical: how do we measure ourselves and others regarding our values?
- Personal integrity
- Flexibility: being able to change things v. rigidity
- Consistency: power of convictions
- Someone who can give direction daily
- Knowledge of field, able to learn from others
- Able to make decision after appropriate consultation
- Good listener
- Respect for others in order to have people respect you
- Persuasiveness
- Change agent
- Good communication: Sharing up and down
- Self-assured/confident
- Ability to let go and give autonomy to others
- Courage: make decisions that are unpopular
- Not afraid of risk
- Able to handle conflicting situations
- Encourage/motivate others
- Relationship understanding
- Walk the floors: be visible
- Encourages leadership in others
- Allowing self and others to make mistakes and learn from them/reflect on them
- Compassionate
- Having a life outside of work
- Manages work-life balance



photo by Gillian Hallam

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**Before arriving at the Institute, participants answered the following questions:**

## **IF I COULD CHANGE ONE THING ONLY, IT WOULD BE....**

- Turnover and retention of good people who feel that they are properly recognized and compensated
- I would recruit the best and the brightest while forcing those staff members who are tired and/or 'burned out' to move on
- Getting people to adapt to technology change: change management
- Add staff member
- "managerial courage": Do we have the courage to make the tough decisions and communicate with staff about being accountable? Does this need to be in place before a library can support a culture where everyone is encouraged to play a leadership role?
- Increase equipment
- Develop better project management skills
- Learn to write effective business plans
- Change the Board's/management's/users understanding of the library from a fundamental, philosophical point of view
- 'tweak' our classification system
- Improve the way we find the people who know 'why'
- Slow time down in order to develop strategy, coach others properly, take in the full context when prioritizing library initiatives
- Find another position for a staff member who feels stuck in her job classification
- Change the perception of the library
- Eliminate staff whining: take more time with staff, listen patiently, act on complaints when can, give staff more responsibility for solving the problem
- See librarians take on a more confident and forward-thinking attitude: "you shouldn't complain about anything that you're not willing to put on the table and work on"
- Directors/managers more active/working together across the organization as a whole
- The stereotype that beleaguers our profession: Take a proactive stance with the necessary bodies to establish our profession as a recognized profession
- Change my workload: divest myself of some of the time-consuming, non-interesting tasks that fill my work week (need staff that I trust to take on these tasks)
- Looking at the big picture, talking about the future and listening to each other falls by the wayside because we have too much to do. Need not to fall into this trap myself. (I have a feeling of being too busy very deep in the organizational culture)



photo by Gillian Hallam

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## WHAT KEEPS YOU AWAKE AT NIGHT?

- Bridge skills gap between current staff and skills needed in future
- Preserve appropriate information for our clients, 50-100 years from now
- Future of the profession: how best to position ourselves with (and stand apart from) those who offer competing services (marketing, MBAs offering CI/BI services, IT professionals, knowledge management “experts” who are not librarians)
- My immediate supervisor
- Wondering where my career is headed
- From the 8Rs Study “Libraries must develop and support a culture where every individual is encouraged to play a leadership role in whatever position they hold. Institutions need to communicate what leadership looks like, what is expected of staff, and how staff will be recognized in their organization.” Am I capable of supporting such a culture? I have self-doubts about my capacity as a leader. Do we all have the ability to be a good leader?
- Understanding of value of research/impact of Internet and Google and the desire to get things quickly (instant gratification)
- Small staff complement
- My library Board:
  - Understanding
  - Taking responsibilities
  - Political appointments
  - Value of our profession
- How to ensure that the resources I have are the best possible for my clients and how to ensure that my clients are maximizing their use of the resources
- Do we work together the way we should?
- We put up barriers, e.g. OPACs are complicated: need to make it easy to access information
- We need to harness resources the right way
- How to motivate groups to innovate and produce
- Not enough budget to do what we need to do: the library is “non-essential”
  - Banging my head against a brick wall with Finance: don’t get honest answers
  - Am I in the wrong organization?
  - They don’t understand our vision/goals
  - Time needed to get things done and get them done right
  - Too much work, not enough time
  - Where do I go from here? Leading/managing/visioning for the future
  - Keeping staff motivated
  - Being more strategic in my job
  - Downsizing of my library
  - Organizing my boss: impact overall on the organization



photo by Laurie Scott

# What Was Said

- Making the best use of resources to be proactive and relevant
- Addressing wide-ranging preferences and capabilities in using technology and accessing information among clients

## IF I COULD SOLVE ONE PROBLEM

- Staff who need constant supervision, who don't work well on their own
- I would make it possible (and easy) to find out why:
  - Certain decisions are made
  - A policy/rule/regulation/statute reads the way it does
  - We do things 'this way'
- Fostering *true* collaboration with departments outside of the Library (in order to properly integrate our services, expertise and resources into the whole learning, teaching and research environments)
- Redesign staff work descriptions (what they should be doing instead of required to do)
- Find the right organizational structure and the right combination of staff to ensure a workable, sustainable and innovative website that meets clients' needs
- Resolve tensions between my staff
- Get the attention of the executive office
- Staff who need constant supervision



photo by Gillian Hallam

## WHAT ARE YOU EXCITED ABOUT?

- Changes in the learning environment and adjusting the service environment accordingly
- Changes that have come up in technology (Web 2.0)
- A web project I am doing
- My burgeoning speaking career
- Getting students involved in librarianship
- Creating my own vision of an effective library service
- Learning to write effective business plans
- The potential of my library: tremendous potential as an exemplary public library and a significant community service
- Redesigning of the delivery of our current awareness
- Change to educate a new crop of library users each year
- Finding ways to connect people to information and resources
- Expanding peoples' expertise in using our resources (teaching them to 'fish')
- Reorganizing my colleague's files and to develop information management guidelines

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- Realizing the vision of the 'seamless' library or 'ubiquitous' library, ensuring the library has 'ubiquitous' presence on campus by harnessing technology and the creativity and expertise of our staff and collaborating as full partners across campus
- The potential of new technology to enhance the library experience
- Succeeding in the personal challenges of my job
- Working with a Director who understands and fully supports our mandate
- The revitalized Ontario Government Libraries Council
- I'm not excited about anything
- Change
- A province-wide licensing initiative for Ontario's health care providers
- Travel
- Something that brings about a positive life change, e.g. buying a new house
- Something that is a big challenge or daunting to do but where you see potential for a major accomplishment, e.g. buying new library system, partnership project, Knowledge Ontario
- Mentoring an employee or student and seeing them become accomplished in their jobs and career development.



photo by Laurie Scott

**The group identified four overarching themes from the answers to the above questions. These themes were topics for small group discussion:**

- 1. The perception of the profession, and issues around recruitment and retention**
- 2. How we can get the leaders we deserve**
- 3. How each of us can demonstrate Managerial Courage**
- 4. How best to manage change.**

**The group's thinking ...**

## **1. RETENTION/RECRUITMENT/FUTURE OF THE PROFESSION**

- Library students: some doing it as a second career. Average age of graduation is 29. What impact does this have?
- We have transferable skills
- Advantages to having people come with knowledge from other professions
- Issue of foreign credentials is important: How much to train either those with foreign credentials or own staff: support to assist getting a professional degree.

# What Was Said

## 2. HOW WE CAN GET THE LEADERS WE DESERVE

### Objective

- Create environment where we are recognized and supported to ensure the progress and evolution of the service by the institutional leadership

### Why do we consider this important?

- Combating ignorance of the value of information
- Believe we should have an informed citizenry
- Believe library has a role in enabling the transfer of information to knowledge

### If we don't, consequences are....

- Masses of ignorant masses
- Poor decisions
- Sound bites and clichés
- Impoverished library resources, financial, physical and human
- Failure to maintain credibility and viability of institution
- Library leadership stagnates

### If we address issues...

- Masses of INFORMED masses
- Better decisions
- More informed debate
- Improved resources (library), financial, physical and human
- Viability: library will play integral role in institution
- Thriving library leadership and succession planning



photo by Donna Burton

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## How urgent?

- Critical
- Continuous process
- Because..
  - We need to maintain the competitiveness of our organization
  - We need to keep with evolving technologies and learning environment of 'upcoming' generation
  - We are TOAST.....

## How to proceed

- Political influence
- Networks of advocacy
- Formal and informal marketing
- Align with and extend corporate objectives
- Assume a place at highest level
- JUST DO IT
- Generate excitement and motivation

## Who should be involved

- Everyone: students, clients...

## Obstacles

- Conflicting values

## 3. DEMONSTRATING MANAGERIAL COURAGE

- An issue for managerial courage is that we want to be liked
- Move out of comfort zone: do what needs to be done for the "good of the organization"
- Letting oneself learn from our experiences
- Don't take the process personally
- Networking with other professionals within/ outside of the organization
- Practical example: difficult conversation with a challenging employee
- Recommendation to read: Chambers, Harry. *The Bad Attitude Survival Guide*. Basic Books, 1998. Basic Books. ISBN 020131146.



photo by Vicki Whitmell

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## 4. LEADING CHANGE (Not managing it)

### What

- Change is constant: be ready for it, anticipate it, embrace it
- Help others see the bigger role and be proactive
- Library is competing for attention within the organization
- Be patient (there is no magic bullet)
- Accept change even if you cannot embrace it (staff)
- Recognize fear and emotional side of change (failure)

### How

- Need to have champions (internal and external)
- Communications, be transparent, no hidden agendas
- Plan how you will deal with resisters
- Consulting must be real: people must feel a part of decision-making
- Enthusiasm: lead by example
- Involving people in the process and decision-making
  - Assigning roles so that they have some ownership

### Resources

- People
- Time
- \$ (could be important)
- Outside facilitators or neutral person
- SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
- Find similar models/examples/success stories

### Who

- Senior management/middle management
- Staff
- Determine stakeholders
- Who will pay and who will administer?



photo by Donna Burton

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## Obstacles

- Naysayers – passive aggressives
- Senior management can be helpful or NOT

## When

- Patience (like a home reno) takes longer than you think
- Prioritize; some things are more important than others

## Completion

- Sometimes easier to recognize failure as opposed to success
- Need to have measurement instruments of success both internally and for clients
- Secret shopper idea
- Are things implemented?
- Are there new or improved services?
- Was change on track (intended result?)



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**This being the first Library Leaders Institute, it was important to evaluate our success and make suggestions for future Institutes.**

## **WHAT WENT WELL?**

- . Diversity of group
- . Wine/cocktail hour
- . Intimate experience
- . No laptops/cell phones
- . Centered experience
- . Openness
- . Our own agenda
- . My small group of learning partners
- . Accommodation: not corporate
- . Amount of work we did: Good stuff
- . Muskoka setting: Felt like a retreat
- . Sense of space
- . Opportunity to meet with others
- . Free evenings
- . We listened
- . Size of group
- . We were the only ones here
- . Everybody shared ideas/honesty
- . Walk and exercise break
- . Action learning
- . Flexible program



photo by Donna Burton

## **WHAT COULD BE CHANGED**

- . Larger conference room with round table
- . Location
- . More attendance of younger people/students/new grads/millennials
- . Leadership development institute vs Developing Leaders Institute (a change in focus?)
- . Leadership styles exercise
- . Input of tools individuals have to offer
- . Another half day
- . Assessment of process mid-stream: determine where to go with the assessment