

# Perspectives on Leadership

*Editor's Note: Leadership perspectives provide insight and lessons from leaders in the field as they share experiences and offer advice on leading libraries through a period of particularly rapid and unyielding change.*

## Interview with Mark Winston

By Jan Kemp

**M**ark Winston is assistant chancellor and director of the John Cotton Dana Library at Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey. In addition to the responsibility of directing the library, as assistant chancellor, he coordinates various aspects of academic affairs for the campus, in the areas of faculty development, diversity, research centers and institutes, and community-based (service) learning. Winston earned his undergraduate degree in business management from Hampton University in Virginia, graduating summa cum laude. He received both his master's of library science and his PhD in library and information science from the University of Pittsburgh, where he was a doctoral fellow and teaching assistant. Prior to his appointment at Rutgers in 2008, Winston had been associate professor in the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill since 2006, and prior to that, taught for seven years at the Rutgers School of Communication, Information and Library Studies. Since 1997, Winston also has been a consultant and trainer in management, diversity, and leadership. He is author or editor of three books and has published numerous articles in refereed journals and other publications, many addressing equity, multiculturalism, and diversity issues in library studies, information services, and teaching.



Mark Winston

### **Q: If you could tell library leaders one thing, what would it be?**

Tough question to offer a comment to library leaders who are both very conscious of the mission of libraries and the societal context in which we operate, and are introspective regarding our place in our larger organizations (of

universities, local governments). I would suggest that for library leaders, competition is our greatest challenge and our greatest opportunity. Thinking in terms of what we do well and whether we'll survive and in what form is interesting. However, I think that our survival and prosperity will be based on how we think of and define ourselves and our roles in a very dynamic environment with competitors. While there is often reference to keeping pace with and supporting rapid technological advances, the budgetary climate, or the increasingly diverse and demanding user populations, the central challenge for those in leadership roles in libraries is that of articulating the value of what libraries and librarians offer in an increasingly competitive environment.

In all of the areas of technology, the economic and budgetary climate, and diversity (a key area of focus in my own scholarship and professional activities, along with my work in the area of leadership in organizations), vision is critical in addressing important societal needs and circumstances. And, in some cases, our competitors are ahead in the vision and application of that vision. In the area of diversity, for example, there are examples of corporate diversity programs that reflect not only organizational commitment but also the investment of substantial financial resources, in support of organizational goals, as well as documented accomplishments, which are also substantial. Ultimately, competition helps to define the context in which we operate, provides one measure of how we're doing, and provides one source of best practices, as we determine how to be most competitive, in support of our particular societal mission.

### **Q: Some librarians may be considering a role in management, can you share thoughts for those who are considering or apprehensive about library management?**

Library management is always interesting. There is no doubt that I love what I do. And, I think that that sentiment is widely shared among library managers. I would not say that it's easy. However, I'm convinced that there is tremendous societal value associated with what we do.

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Management (being a manager) provides the opportunity to shape the direction of an organization. There are opportunities to envision what's possible, to work with others to develop an organization that can work toward fulfilling that vision of what's possible, and to support the development of others in realizing that vision and their own potential. Particularly, in the library context, there is satisfaction in knowing that the overall professional vision—that I would define as ensuring access to information so that individuals can be full participants in society—could not be more important.

Also, the research indicates that recent graduates of library and information science programs are often surprised to learn that they needed greater preparation in areas, such as budget management, conflict resolution, and strategic planning, for their first professional positions. The reality is that the mechanics of management can be learned and taught. Leadership, a much broader concept than management, includes the opportunity to have influence from anywhere in the organization, including, but not limited to, management. More important than having all librarians become interested in management is the goal of having librarians feel prepared for and interested in exerting influence in their organizations and in the profession. My response represents two points, but they're related!

### **Q: What can early and mid-career librarians do to prepare themselves for leadership roles?**

First, I would suggest that early to mid-career librarians not dismiss what they learned and were exposed to in the management coursework in their graduate school programs. Those of us who teach management often discuss the fact that so many library and information science (LIS) students do not see themselves as managers (or leaders) and take management courses only if the courses are required. This is somewhat understandable considering the large representation of LIS students who were liberal arts or social sciences majors and considering the sense among so many of us that management is both difficult and not really pleasant work. (Who wants to make those tough decisions and be so far removed from the “fun” work?) In addition, the leadership research for so long focused on the idea that only a small segment of the population was destined for leadership roles (those who are “born leaders”).

However, preparation for leadership roles can include participation in formalized leadership training programs or graduate courses in leadership, having a mentoring relationship with an established leader, and taking on roles that can foster leadership development in one's employing organization, professional associations, or outside of one's work life, in volunteer roles, for example. In addition, one's professional development should include the reading and development of familiarity with the literature and research

in the areas of responsibility and interest. It is very much the case that leadership has been studied for thousands of years, under various names, and in various contexts, although frequently in the corporate and political contexts. In addition, within library literature and beyond, the societal and professional issues that impact and, to a large extent, define our work and our context, are often well-documented. Leaders who possess a substantive base of knowledge are far better able to evaluate and respond to actual issues, in an informed and thoughtful way. Also, essentially, leadership is about vision. Thinking of oneself as a leader involves seeing the big picture, regardless of one's title or position on the organizational chart.

### **Q: As someone who has studied leadership extensively, did you have any surprises when you assumed the role of library director?**

When I began my current appointment, I had been an assistant university librarian, essentially an assistant director, and had taught management for ten years. With an understanding of management issues, as well as management principles and research and theory, I was “prepared,” but I was somewhat surprised to see both the number of moving parts associated with being a library director and the need (the requirement) to be aware of, monitor, and address all of those moving parts directly or through managers. As an assistant director, I experienced this in relation to the need to be continuously aware of and active with regard to all aspects of public services. However, you might say that I saw that the order of magnitude is greater, not only based on the addition of other aspects of library operations to my portfolio, such as technical services and information technology, but also in relation to general aspects of running the organization, such as the overall budget, facilities, communication and PR, and development. There is the reality that, as a director, one is ultimately responsible for everything that happens in the library, including all of the decisions that are made and that have to be made, and evaluating all of the opportunities that do or might present themselves.

### **Q: Who are your leadership “gurus”—writers and researchers who have most influenced your thinking about leadership?**

This is such an important question and one that I am happy to answer. In a general sense, I think that there is tremendous value in acknowledging that the types of questions and issues that we encounter in leadership roles have often been considered and subjected to research. And, the research can and does often have value in practice. In

2008, I wrote an article for the *Journal of Information Ethics*, entitled “Research in Society: Valuing Research in Concept but Not Always in Practice,” in which I noted that many in professions and society often don’t value research as relevant to the work that they do. However, I’m convinced that making decisions that don’t reflect the body of knowledge that already exists and with the assumption that one’s individual context is so completely unique can be detrimental or limiting. Certainly, the context may be somewhat unique, but the nature of management, leadership, human relationships, and communication provides many overlapping contextual components.

My thinking about leadership has certainly been influenced by the work of Peter Drucker (who studied many facets of management and coined the term “knowledge worker”), Warren Bennis (whose work focuses on management, leadership, and change), and Daniel Goleman (emotional intelligence and social intelligence). Not only is their work substantive and supported by research and real-world circumstances, but their work reflects the ability to communicate the relevance of their ideas in academic and practical terms. In addition, Deming’s work on quality (total quality management, continuous quality improvement), which is more management than leadership, is always very central to my work and my thinking. Many of the principles that he defined met with resistance initially, in the corporate and then the not-for-profit sectors, and then in higher education. However, focusing on the “customer,” the use of data in supporting decision making, and empowering staff (and training) are universally valuable and applicable. Motivation theory, defined by Maslow and others, has been studied and refined over many years, and points out the fact that understanding the needs of individuals, where they are, is critical to effectively ensuring that motivation and individual fulfillment of needs are achieved.

### **Q: How can leaders develop an organizational culture and/or develop the people within the organization to be open to continuous change?**

I would suggest that it’s critical for leaders to both acknowledge the human response to change, which is inevitable, and to focus on communication. It’s so important to acknowledge that, as human beings, we are far more comfortable with the familiar. Researchers James Bugental and Elizabeth Bugental, in their article “Resistance to and Fear of Change,” said that, “Human beings fear change because it appears to threaten the structures that we take to comprise our lives.” I think that it’s both the fear of the unknown, but also the fact that the structures, the coping mechanisms that individuals put into place to deal with the chaos of the world, are difficult to see dismantled. Also, when change happens in an organizational context and individuals’ jobs (the requirements, the expectations,

the reporting structures, for example) or organizational environments are changing, there is real concern that the knowledge and skills that contributed to their success or perceived worth to the organization may no longer be valued. It’s daunting for people to imagine that what they did before and what worked in an environment that they understood may not work or be valued in the new world order.

There is always the need to acknowledge that what might be the leader’s very clear vision of what the future holds and where the organization should go is both informed by his or her perspective (based on information to which other members of the organization may not have access) and less clouded in mystery or ambiguity because he or she, as the leader, has thought through the complexity and sees his or her own place in that new context. The patience to acknowledge that others require time to “see” and become comfortable with that new vision (and possibly have a role in shaping the vision) is important. However, from a leadership perspective, the enthusiasm for fulfilling that vision may often overshadow the need to allow others the time to see themselves in that context. Buy-in is important in the context of organizational change. And, the type of culture that really embraces and supports changes is likely one in which individuals have a clear sense that they are valued not only for the very specific skills sets and knowledge that are tied to positions, as they are currently defined, but that they possess (and/or are allowed to develop) the skills and knowledge that are broader and more transferable. For example, communication skills, analytical skills, and the ability to see the big picture allow one to prosper in a changing organizational context and to be rewarded and valued. Certainly, this philosophy would suggest that organizational commitment to professional development should be substantial, reflecting the reality in which libraries operate, but also a balance of developing job-specific technical (not only technological) skills and more broad, more widely applicable knowledge and capabilities.

## **An Interview with Frank Allen**

**By Eric Frierson**

**E**ffective leadership isn’t just a set of best practices—it’s a way of thinking and behaving that inspires confidence and trust. For Frank Allen, associate director for administrative services at the University of Central Florida, earning that confidence and



Frank Allen

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trust is accomplished through a “participative and hands-on” leadership style.

Hands-on leadership isn’t Allen’s invention; throughout his experience in the business world and in libraries, he has served under people that use it. Early in his career working at a wholesale distribution company, he was under the supervision of Ernest Rodriguez—“Rod” as he was known to customers and employees. Rod’s leadership was “totally customer focused,” and he “would literally drop everything to take care of a customer. Occasionally a customer would need an item ASAP, and I would see Rod striding out of his office, walking the order to the front of the line, sometimes going into the warehouse himself to fill it, and then making sure it was delivered.” Rod’s passion for customer service and his willingness to take on any duty to ensure customer needs made an impression on Allen; however, it wasn’t necessarily the things Rod did, but rather the manner in which he did them: “You always knew who was in charge, but his was an authority with utmost compassion, like the good shepherd taking care of his flock. He possessed that magical quality of empathy.”

Rod wasn’t the only supervisor that influenced Allen. Barbara J. Ford, Allen’s former library director, had directness and attention to detail that energized people, and was often the one to say what everyone was thinking, even when others were reluctant. Her strength was in her ability to challenge the status quo, but maintain a grounded perspective of her organization. Similar to Rod, Ford provided a formative experience for Allen:

One Monday morning my mail clerk and his student assistant called in sick. This was in the peak years of print serial subscriptions, and the incoming mail was piled high in the mail room. Next thing I know Barbara says, ‘we’re going down to do the mail,’ and before I knew it she and I were sorting mail. The director of the Library was sorting mail!

Allen has had many shining examples of effective leadership, and he has made his own strides as an effective leader himself. Although he occupies a position of authority, Allen values the work done by everyone in his building. When asked about his greatest accomplishment as a leader, he picked the complete overhaul and repurposing of his library’s first floor, recalling the countless tasks and risk-taking it involved. Despite his individual accomplishments, though, Allen shared his real thoughts on the project: “Much of the brain and leg work was done by others. We are fortunate in our organization to have some strong managers with excellent project planning and logistics talent, whose tireless efforts made the project possible.”

A respect for others, perspective and participation all are characteristic of Frank Allen’s leadership, and these are what make him successful.

## **Q: How do you define leadership?**

Leadership is a choice. There are natural born characteristics for leadership, but it is mostly a decision. Leadership is about courage and not being afraid to make mistakes. Leadership takes energy, patience, and empathy. There is no shortcut to true leadership. People can see through phony leadership gestures, like stating the obvious or gathering the low hanging fruit. Leaders tackle the big issues. Former president George W. Bush once said, “I don’t believe in small ball,” a baseball analogy to dinking the ball around the bases. I disagree with many of the previous administration’s actions but I do very much like that statement. An elected leader should operate partly on conviction, and not strictly according to this week’s poll. True leaders often do not make great politicians, as evidenced by the political careers of Woodrow Wilson, Jimmy Carter, and Winston Churchill. There is a difference between vision and leadership. Vision is more an inborn gift, as it requires the ability to “see around corners.” Leadership is often the opposite—seeing the obvious and being willing to act decisively. Leadership is about sacrifice of our time and sometimes personal financial resources for a good. Leadership is about being willing to operate out of our comfort zone, in hopes of breaking into something new and exciting.

## **Q: As a senior library administrator what are ways in which you demonstrate leadership?**

Good leadership is being willing to challenge the status quo, or the way the tide is flowing. I constantly watch out for “Groupthink,” which occurs when a group thought process strays away from common sense, and everyone gets swept up in the momentum in order to maintain unanimity and avoid conflict. A good leader watches out for this by asking lots of questions and tactfully suggesting redirection when necessary. Often when one person speaks out against the flow, others will also begin to speak up and the course of discussion changes in a healthy way.

## **Q: What personal attributes do you consider essential for a leader and why?**

Leaders have a penchant for action and results. Their presence energizes those around them. Leaders set the very best example and are not afraid to get their hands dirty. Leadership is about making good decisions. There is a thin line between taking the time to make an informed decision and being indecisive or afraid to make a decision. Leaders, once they determine a course of action, are quick to move forward. Leadership is about creating accountability for one’s self and for others around us. Lack of accountability is demoralizing. If an employee can get away with something,



why should others make that extra effort? The motivation to achieve starts to break down and the organization becomes demoralized. A leader needs to look like a leader and dress appropriately. This does not mean we need to spend a lot of money on our wardrobe, but a leader should demonstrate a sense of authority in outward appearance.

### **Q: What lessons do you take from the business world that help shape your leadership style?**

That is a tough one. I used to admire the degree of accountability in the private sector due to the system of checks and balances with shareholders and boards of directors. These days I am not so sure of that statement! The profit motive does however instill a sense of focus and goal orientation. The closest such construct I have seen in the public sector is the concept of the balanced scorecard, which creates a dashboard to measure visually how well the organization is achieving goals. A heightened sense of accountability is something I'd like to see more embraced in university culture.

### **Q: What would you say is the most transformative change taking place in libraries today?**

Without a doubt the single greatest transformative influence is the ongoing migration to electronic access, which is drastically changing society, not just libraries. Electronic formats remove the limitations of print materials—assets that are place bound, take up valuable physical space, and can be accessed only in sequence. E-access is not without its challenges however. The biggest issue will be in migrating data to new storage formats, and managing this exponentially expanding body of information. It will become impossible to carry all of this digitally born data forward and the question will be which to leave behind. Libraries can play a role with this.

### **Q: Will the library continue to function as the “heart of the university” into the next decade? Why or why not?**

This, like leadership, is a choice. Libraries can choose to maintain their position as the heart by removing barriers to content; focusing on information literacy; creating ease with electronic navigation; and providing attractive physical spaces for study, research, collaboration, and creation of new knowledge. If we embrace this future, libraries will actually enhance their position, as the digital era provides exciting opportunities we have not seen since the invention of the printing press.

### **Q: In a time when budgets are shrinking, how do you help justify the value of your library to campus administration?**

Libraries are increasingly an extension of the classroom. As more and more course time is spent online, students still need a physical space for academic study, research, collaboration, intellectual discourse, consultation, or just a quiet place to work and read. Interestingly, at UCF many of the traditional computer labs are either closing or have low usage. At the same time, quite often the vast majority of library public PCs are in use. What is going on here? Students do not desire just a PC, chair, and desk. They desire an environment that is conducive to academic work and offers a sense of scholarly community. Libraries offer that sense of place without taking on the “shopping mall” atmosphere of the student union. P.S. I still believe in the future of the desktop PC. Even as more students carry portable devices they will continue to seek a desktop PC for extended work.

Libraries are also about connecting people to information in a logical way. First, we provide literacy instruction on how to distinguish quality information from the milieu. Second, we select resources that connect the student to that quality information. It's a two-step process, and the literacy element is perhaps more important than ever before.

Libraries are also about preserving and making unique collection materials available to the world. Technology is allowing researchers across the globe to access special collection and archives as never before. This ability distinguishes our libraries from other libraries, and our collections from other collections. Libraries with digitization efforts move beyond the role of content provider and into a role of facilitator of intellectual discovery. We are not just putting books on the shelf; we are creating the mechanism for scholars to view the material. We become more integrally involved in the process of creating scholarly content. That is very exciting!

### **Q: What are the most important aspects of leadership in times of significant change?**

One of the most challenging tasks in any organization is to figure out what to stop doing. Libraries are wonderful at initiating new services. Where we struggle sometimes is deciding when to let go. Do we need to bind all soft cover material? Do we need to provide full cataloging for every item that comes in the building? Do we need to staff our public services desks exclusively with degreed professionals? Do we need to retain print materials that are clearly obsolete or occupying more real estate than their worth justifies? Letting go of old practices frees up resources to allocate to new opportunities.

**Q: What leadership opportunities does the library have in the academy that need to be fully utilized? In other words, where do you see libraries missing opportunities on campus?**

We need to be more engaged with the faculty and more visible. Librarians should probably participate more in graduation exercises. Libraries should think more retail. How about putting new and notable books out on display in the lobby? Or better still, how about putting book jackets of the *New York Times* bestsellers on display, with a sign that refers the reader to check out a Kindle, iPad, or Nook with that title loaded. How about having students routinely critique our websites to make them the most user friendly sites possible? Or better still, host students for quarterly hands-on sessions in which we observe them marching through our webpages and discussing with them what they like and dislike about the site. The library's website is now our second (or perhaps primary) front door.

**Q: What is the most successful tool you've used to manage change in your organization?**

About a year ago when the second floor project was in early planning, the library held focus groups with students, faculty, and administrators to seek what they wanted in a remodeled library. These were half-day affairs complete with lunch, and were quite successful. One student had built a "Transformer" looking creature from Lego pieces scattered on the table, and gave it to the workshop leader at the end of the day, saying "I really hope the library does this project and this day is not just a bunch of talk." I kept the Lego figure, which has sat on my desk the past ten months acting as an inspiration to accomplish the project regardless of obstacles. Symbols can be helpful in keeping our eye on the ball. Too many times organizations write up goals and objectives that go into nice reports that gather dust. We need more visible ways of attaining stated goals.

**Q: What leadership skills or training do you look for and expect your managers to look for when filling librarian positions?**

Number one in my estimation is a comfort level with change. We need experimenters who like to pilot new service initiatives and are open to new ideas. Subject expertise is also important. Content knowledge complements navigation skills and tech savviness. Professionals with whom I have the most respect invariably are skilled in both subject expertise and technology.

**Q: How do you inspire and motivate middle managers and produce a culture of participation in change?**

One trick I heard a few years ago is to call every new initiative a pilot project. That way if it fails, it was just a pilot and no one feels the worse for it. People fear change partly because they fear failure. We don't have to view failed experimentation as failure if we label it properly.

**Q: Is there a particular model of planning that you find works well for you and your library?**

Adopt three to four major organizational goals per year. Have a well-defined mission for every endeavor. Charge the endeavor with a project chair, and a deadline. Avoid cochairs if possible. Ask the taskforce to make recommendations. Implement something from each project. Rethink and repeat if necessary.

**Q: How are you using leadership principles to transform the University of Central Florida Libraries?**

I would like to see us adopt more of a brand management approach. A good friend of mine is a senior manager for a large consumer products company. I am fascinated by our conversations. Their whole approach is empirical and extremely pragmatic. They come up with ideas and try them on the consumer. They keep what works and ditch what does not work. They repeat endlessly. I will be the first to agree that a research library has as part of its mission to look beyond the immediacy of the moment and to value its role regarding preserving access and content for future generations. But we need to balance those interests with the immediate needs of our patrons. It's also a matter of survival. I am not sure how much I am transforming the UCF Libraries, but my philosophy is to be as patron focused as possible, stay relevant to the needs of our constituents, thus keeping us relevant to the mission of the university.