

Paper or Plastic?

John Lubans Jr.

I'm writing this a few weeks ahead of the publication date for my book, *Leading from the Middle and Other Contrarian Essays on Library Leadership (LfM)*. It comes out June 30, 2010, from ABC-CLIO/Libraries Unlimited as a volume in the Beta Phi Mu Monograph Series under the editorship of Arthur P. Young.¹ While extensively revised, many of the book's chapters first appeared in *LA&M* and in *LL&M*.

First, some background on how this book came to be. Art and I were having lunch outdoors in San Diego and he suggested I do a collection of my writings for Beta Phi Mu. That was January 2004—six years ago—at the ALA Midwinter Meeting.

As we delved into the food and the book idea, a fog bank rolled onto the restaurant's patio and I could barely see Art across the table. In spite of what the fog might have portended—it had all the properties of a wet blanket—Art persisted with the idea and so we shook hands on it.

Once home, I eyeballed my “body of work”—user education, user studies, Internet use, management and leadership—and the *leading from the middle* theme came into focus. Perhaps it was that much of my thinking, writing, and leading over the decades has been about achieving productive organizations through followers taking on leadership roles.

Because much of my writing is inextricably linked to LLAMA, I thought it might be of interest for *LL&M* readers to know about the book's publication—it is coming out simultaneously in paper and plastic (*plastic* as in the megapixels on the liquid crystal display you're using to read this column).

And, I want to reflect on the publishing process—the old days of paper print and the new days of e-print—and how current publishing differs, if at all, from my first book of forty years ago. That book was on management, *Library Systems Analysis Guidelines*, coauthored for Wiley in 1970 with Edward A. Chapman, my first library boss. I have dedicated *LfM* to his memory.

Along with changes in publishing, the *LfM* experience allows me to reflect on how leaders spot trends. An

effective leader or manager is expected to be aware of trends, preferably to be ahead of the curve, to anticipate and prepare for what may be next. Too often this role is entrusted to pundits and other alleged visionaries who are rarely in leadership roles. Presumably, we do this because visioning is regarded as something more arcane than normal, as if a Delphic process. Or, most likely, we wait to see what others do. If they succeed, we copy.

The truth is that a regular person can spot trends and can be a “futurist”—it's a matter of objectivity and a healthy skepticism of the “promoters.” They're usually selling something—if not a product then seeking converts to his or her version of reality. By looking up and out from our desks, we can observe and surmise trends or non-trends through the simple things in front of us everyday. For example, we hear much about e-books and paper books, how one is inferior or superior to the other, how paper endures and plastic dissipates, how one costs or should cost less or more than the other. And, we hear much, perhaps bewilderingly, about self-publishing, e-publishing, and e-readers, like Kindle, Nook, and Kobo. But, when someone tells me that e-readers are taking over and that the book is doomed, this jars with what I see happening on planes, trains, and busses. Yes, a few have these devices, but they are far outnumbered by people reading paper books, magazines, and newspapers. Please note that I am not necessarily defending the paper book against its plastic competition—I confess to having lust in my heart for the iPad—I just want to encourage you to validate in your own way and with your own eyes the bold, unsubstantiated claims made by the promoters, the early adopters.

The microcosm of what I encountered as this book moved from start to finish might be suggestive of future trends; at the least, my experience with this one book will be a sliver of reality regarding the future of books, reading, and libraries.

What's Different? How Much has Changed in Bookland?

Well, as you can see from the incubation phase of *LfM* (six years!), little has changed. The author (me) and an editor (Art) had to develop (over time) a mutual interest in a



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proposed book, strong enough to convince a publisher (ABC-CLIO/Libraries Unlimited) to commit sizeable resources. Presumably, the author and the editor have a receptive audience in mind, so the eternal triangle of author, publisher, and reader persists—inexorably, or so it seems, even if the communication medium may alter. The author has to have something to say and someone has to want his or her book. Each book its reader, each reader his book, as someone said. Or, to paraphrase Shakespeare, authors without readers are like “sweet instruments hung up in cases, that keep their sounds to themselves” (*Timon of Athens*, I.2. 94–100).

Just like in days past, once the manuscript is in hand, a bevy of people became involved: copy editors, designers, composers, indexers, and marketing organizers. The June 2010 print deadline precipitated a flurry of e-mail forms and ideas, of questions and answers, of requests and permissions and of deadlines for each phase of the publishing process. An electronic author’s center, administered by ABC-CLIO, check-listed the multiple steps from initial idea to the bound and digitized book.

At the manuscript review, we (the editors and I) used paper and red ink to handwrite corrections and notes to each other. While I e-mailed ABC-Clio a Word file of my manuscript, the galley pages and page proofs came back in paper and I read and reviewed each page. There was substantial editorial guidance from Art and from ABC-CLIO. I was glad to get their pointers and corrections, having heard stories of publishers no longer copy editing text and taking other short cuts that can mar the finished product.

One large difference from my three books in the 1970s is copyright clearance—intellectual property ownership now needs to be established for everything in all formats. Even the paragraph-long encomiums from my previous *LA&M* and *LL&M* editors required copyright releases, as did the preface by my former boss, Jerry D. Campbell. The permission form could be signed electronically, but the signature had to be on the release form with its daunting legalese granting the publisher exclusive rights to do just about anything in any format at any time. Indeed, all of my previously published work, as collected in *LfM*—even when I held an explicit copyright—had to have the just-in-case go-ahead permission of the previous publisher. I revised all of the chapters in the book, enough so that much of the book was *new*, in my eyes, but I still had to get “permission” from the previous publishers.

Another change from yesteryear is that while retaining the copyright to *LfM*, I signed off on assigning to the publisher several exclusive rights “in and to” the work, including, “the right to incorporate the Work in whole or in part in *derivative electronic products* or their print equivalents, in all languages.”

The Electronic *LfM*

As I mentioned, *LfM* is both paper and electronic. I was curious to find out what being electronic meant. Would I be able to download it directly from Amazon and would I

be able to put it on my iPad (if I should succumb to my desire to possess one)?

The answers: yes, maybe, and however. ABC-CLIO assured me in an e-mail that:

The title will be available as a book via our ebook resellers (as well as on our own ebook platform: the ABC-CLIO eBook Collection). This includes the Amazon Kindle version ...only available for use on a Kindle or via the Kindle app for Apple or PC computers...

With the iPad things get trickier. As of right now, our titles are not available through Apple’s iBook store. So, in that way, they are not available on the iPad. However, it’s important to remember that the iPad is just a small computer. So, if an iPad user goes onto the Internet and accesses the website of any of our ebook resellers, that user will have access to our ebook titles on the iPad.²

Shameless Self-Promotion

My central involvement in promoting the book is far more than it was in the ’70s. Back then it was up to the publisher to get out mailings, catalogs, and review copies and wait for a response.

Multiple personal Web 2.0 applications evoke and facilitate the unstated expectation of the author’s being involved in marketing and promoting a book. After all, Web 2.0 (YouTube, Twitter, Second Life, and so on) is more “Me Generation” than the original *me generation* ever was. I have treaded gently down this path, with reservations, lest I am perceived like the man hired by a tax preparation agency to don a green foam rubber Statue of Liberty suit and wave at passing motorists.

Of course, there is much to be said for the author’s involvement in getting the word out. He or she probably knows the book’s audience better than a multidiscipline publisher. And, while print media still does some reviews, these seem few and far between, and slow to come out, if ever. A recent book to which I contributed a chapter got a couple lines in *American Libraries* and no other mentions. It was a good book.

I’ve rationalized that promoting my book is less about me than it is about getting people to recognize the book and its central theme of self-management, of self-organizing, and effective teams. While our profession may not seek to cultivate a willful ignorance of leadership and its research, there are moments when it seems we do not really want to spend too much time thinking about it or learning how to be better at leading. So, I am trying to reach those like-minded readers, outside the regular channels, who wonder about leadership and are willing to consider a peer librarian’s perspective.

Driving much of today’s author-involved marketing is

the ease of linking to and from Web 2.0 sources—to push the like button (why so few *not like* buttons?) with an immediate Tweet or link on Facebook. For example, I can link to a *New Yorker* article via Facebook and let my forty-four friends know that I like something I've just read. Not only does the *New Yorker* provide me with a live link from Facebook back to the article, it gives me a thumbnail illustration, a prepared summary, and a full citation! My doing so, no doubt impresses my forty-four friends more than it annoys them—and, of course, the *New Yorker* benefits most from my giving them an audience of forty-four people.

Speaking of Web 2.0, I have been writing about the book at <http://blog.lubans.org> since March. I use the blog to introduce new ideas and put up relevant items and links to supplement the book. Also, I can provide readers with the items left out of the book for reasons of style and space (for example, case studies and self-tests). I try to update weekly, and once the book comes out I will go to a daily update in anticipation that other library-land blogs may link to it once I reach out to them.

The blog's "hits" meter tells me there have been several thousand visitors, but I am leery of the symmetry of the daily increases. My suspicion is that most, perhaps all, of these hits are search spiders or bots, industriously, if mindlessly, indexing everything and anything.

My blog is but one of seemingly millions (remember in Web 2.0 it's about me and there are lots of us!) and the search engines did not cooperate at first, ignoring my painstakingly constructed utterances, my new URL. I was invisible—"off the grid"—for the first several weeks of the blog's existence. Apparently, Google and Yahoo index blogs differently from webpages. After I put a link to the blog on my decade-old webpage, my blog immediately came up as part of a regular Google search. Hmmm.

Other Author Marketing Efforts

ABC-CLIO's marketing person did send me an "assignment" to produce five hundred words and a photograph or two for the yet-to-go-live ABC-CLIO blog on what it takes for an organization to lead from the center. This task was about as close as I have come to the *New Yorker's* dystopic book marketing spoof, in which the author of *Clancy the Doofus Beagle: A Love Story* is encouraged by an intern/head of marketing to book himself on *Today* and *The View* and to keep them in the loop when he does! And, in the hippest of electronic marketing efforts to: ". . . spray-feed your URL in niblets open-face to the skein."³ In lieu of review copies, ABC-CLIO suggests I could offer, with their permission, electronic excerpts from the book to library and other blogs for them to post, along with links of a month's duration to content in the book for review by blog and print media.

Amazon.com has carried the book with its cover image well ahead of publication and I am one of millions with an Amazon author's page.



Anthony F. Chiffolo, co-author of *Cooking with the Bible: Recipes for Biblical Meals* and the author of the forthcoming "Cooking with the Movies: Meals on Reels" being taped by the publisher for YouTube.



Shameless self-promotion; the author with three copies of the book.

At the ALA Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., ABC-CLIO authors were interviewed and taped by a film crew for broadcast on YouTube.

And, more traditionally, I did author time at the ABC-CLIO booth during ALA.

Paper or Plastic? Both.

What I have learned/confirmed from publishing *LfM* is that we are still in transition with more definition (higher granularity!) of the outcome. We are experimenting with new technologies, some of which seem to work and seem to connect reader to information more smoothly than the

old technologies. As for which format will dominate, form will follow function assuring a future for both paper and plastic. If the function is to extract bits of relevant information, then plastic is preferable. If I want to feel a book in my hands, flip pages back and forth, get to know the author, agree or disagree with the book's argument, and either hurl the book against the wall or add it lovingly to my library, then paper rules. (Bright idea to make plastic more paper-like: A button on the Kindle to "Destroy All Known Copies" could be a bonanza for Amazon. Now that's my kind of not like button!)

References and Notes

1. The book is out! My five author copies arrived on June 21, 2010, from the printer in Ypsilanti, Michigan.
2. E-mail to author from Deborah LaBoon at ABC-CLIO: Re: ABC CLIO catalog copy. Etc. June 18, 2010 8:25:01 AM EDT.
3. Ellis Weiner, Shouts & Murmurs, "Subject: Our Marketing Plan," *New Yorker*, Oct. 19, 2009, www.newyorker.com/humor/2009/10/19/091019sh_shouts_weiner (accessed August 13, 2010).