

Perspectives on Leadership

Continuing our series of interviews on leadership, presented here are the perspectives of four professionals from library educator to practitioner to academic dean and beyond.

Interview with Ginnie Cooper

By Mary Augusta Thomas

Don't panic." As the leader of the public library system for the nation's capital, Ginnie Cooper believes these are powerful words in the midst of budget turmoil. Recently we spoke about her thoughts on being a library leader and on her specific challenges at the District of Columbia Public Library (DCPL). Cooper served as the tenth executive director of Brooklyn Public Library. In her three-and-a-half-year tenure, Cooper said, she emphasized literacy programs. Prior to that, as head of Multnomah County's (Ore.) library system in Portland, Cooper oversaw the complete renovation of a central library built in 1912. Since 2006, she has served as DCPL's chief librarian.



Ginnie Cooper

Q: How do you define leadership?

"Someone once defined 'leadership' as being in front of where people are going . . . and this definition works better for me than some kind of idea about leadership being magic somehow!" Cooper says.

Where are people going? For Cooper, it depends on who you are watching. Library staff want to be better at what they do, offer more consistent services, and make changes to meet library user needs. Local government cares about creating public value. A leader needs to know what the civic priorities are and what the library can provide that addresses them directly. In Washington, D.C., providing decent schools is a critical issue. The public library must do directly what it can to support educational efforts. The library-going public may define its needs differently. Local advocates want greater hours and enhanced collections and they bring valuable experience to the table.

"I do think that leadership is about setting the agenda," Cooper says. How does she frame the agenda locally?

Cooper relies on experiences, both her own and that of her professional colleagues. She has watched trends come and go, and identified several constants in broad areas—access, primarily through open hours; a library that is friendly and welcoming; providing services to children and young adults; and keeping collections relevant and up-to-date. People who come into the library are free to choose what to read, making a current and innovative collection a priority. Technology also plays a role in good library management, both in ease of use and in the information that it supplies. Beyond personal experience, Cooper relies on her professional associations for development and insight. LLAMA, the American Library Association, the Public Library Association, and particularly her board service on the Urban Libraries Council offer her regular discussion of professional issues and rich resources of new ideas.

"For me, it is about assuming that people want to work well and hard . . . and that they do mean to do their best," she says. How does one shape conversations with staff? Cooper believes that library staff members strive to do good work, but their roles and responsibilities have not been identified carefully, their good work recognized and praised, and that, frequently, no one is held accountable or assisted in improving. Cooper and her staff are working to get systems in place that keep things moving forward. This involves identifying priorities both for the system and for herself and stepping back from making decisions that should be made at different levels. Cooper focuses on what she can do that no one else can do for the library. She freely admits that it would be easy, after a long career, to get back into the operations of the organization, but it's not the best use of her time and talent. Decisions on budget, collections, and daily operations are handled at the appropriate levels of management. As chief librarian, Cooper recognizes the need for constantly keeping the bigger picture in front of the staff as well as the city council, and board of library trustees who have their own concerns.

Q: What does transforming the D.C. Public Library mean to you?

In a May 26, 2006, article in *The Washington Post* on her appointment, Cooper's record rebuilding major library sys-

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tems made her stand out. “This is not just running a library,” said John W. Hill Jr., president of the library board of trustees. “It is rebuilding an entire library system and managing an infrastructure project that could cost as much as \$400 million.”

From the start of her tenure, Cooper knew one of the primary challenges facing the library was the sheer number of issues raised when library advocates became involved in the detailed operations of the system. The first week on the job, she visited every neighborhood library, and then in the second week, every department. Getting to know the specific people who can make a difference, the leaders that can make things happen, was important. Cooper concentrated on setting goals, providing focus, asking questions and translating the board/public/elected officials issues to staff who have to take action.

To attack the daunting list of concerns, Cooper and her staff divided the issues into five big buckets that could be useful daily in decision making: service to children, youth, and teens; library as a community place; collections of books and other materials; technology; and adult literacy and learning. Her philosophy is to assemble the right team with varied skills and give them the opportunity to do the good work of which they are capable, back them up, praise what is good, and encourage even more. The direction was to develop a firm, even baseline before planning anything new. The five areas are an organizational structure for statistics for the board when forming budget priorities, and Cooper uses them when talking with staff on all major decisions.

DCPL staff are proud of their culture of meeting the needs of people who come into the library. Now they are also developing a culture of assessment that gives them benchmarks and service metrics to evaluate more fully the impact of their work on the community in general. Cooper places importance on the sharing of information more widely in the system to build a common vision for service. The board and the city have supported filling vacancies, some early funding increases, and beginning seventeen capital projects, including renovations and improvements to the landmark Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library. Listening to the community and learning what works in other systems has resulted in big improvements including an 80-percent increase in collections use.

Q: What is the role of middle management?

“The hardest job in the place!” Cooper says. “How do you develop more leaders at the library?” Last year, Cooper began a leadership program. The first group of thirty-five new managers spent one day each month working on real problems in the system which promoted cross-departmental collaboration that is already returning great results. As they identified blocking points, the group could take action that

moved them forward, developing a culture of working together on mutual problems. A second group will be chosen by the first and the effort will continue to build qualified staff. Cooper hopes that similar problem-solving conversations are happening across the system. Recently, staff has organized brownbag luncheons that Cooper sees as a source of planning for the future, and coming from staff. Her role is to help guide these conversations, staying out of human resources, managing schedules, and daily operations. Cooper relies on senior managers who see mentoring and guiding those who work for them as one of their key tasks.

Q: What is your strategy for leading through times of crisis?

Cooper, like the leaders of most public institutions, is facing severe budget challenges, and again, she cites her long view based on professional experience as underpinning her leadership style. Her professional colleagues offer her different models and their solutions might not be the ones she would choose for DCPL. She advocates working hard to determine what differences the library will still be able to make to the public—and then responding. Energy will be directed to the high-need areas; her instinct is that serving more of the community and expanding the audience for the library are crucial. The system is trying to reach more people, so the roles of the branch libraries and that of the central library are being redefined. A higher percentage of library materials now go to the neighborhood libraries. Through more rigorous analysis of usage, Cooper hopes to be able to target improvements to specific community needs. This includes providing more nonprint material that supports adult learning and literacy.

This brings us back to “don’t panic.” Cooper stressed that leaders need to realize they set the mood for the staff. It’s vital to keep a positive outlook because no matter what happens to you personally, you are perceived as the boss. Your bad day is going to be misinterpreted. It’s also crucial to frame situations positively, taking the “glass half full” stance.

Libraries have been her passion for thirty years. Cooper ruefully admitted that if she didn’t love what she was doing so much, and didn’t want it to be better, life might have been easier. In Multnomah County, the library survived eleven bond issues in thirteen years, proving the resilience of the value of what libraries do. Her frustrations come from wanting to change things and the effort it takes, but she stays keenly aware of the difference libraries make in communities and lives. As her mother told her, “I am not responsible for everything good and not responsible for everything bad.” The words she selected as representing leadership provide a good framework for her style: focus strategic opportunity, support, and passion, and don’t panic.

Interview with Irene Owens

By Eric C. Shoaf

Irene Owens is dean of the School of Library and Information Science at North Carolina Central University (NCCU) in Durham. Over the course of a distinguished career in librarianship, she has been an elementary school teacher, classification record assistant at the Library of Congress, and has held several positions at Howard University, including a stint as head of the reference department. Owens has served as a consultant in several capacities, including the Triangle Research Libraries Network, a Library Evaluation Project with Tribal Librarians, conducted in conjunction with the University of Wisconsin, and for the U.S. Embassy in South Africa. Since 2005, she has served in her current position at NCCU, leading one of the top library and information science (LIS) education programs. Previously she was a member of the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin.



Irene Owens

She is the recipient of numerous awards including an Outstanding Service Award from Howard University, the Texas Excellence in Teaching Award, and is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi honor society. She is also a Junior Fellow in British Studies and a Faculty Fellow at the University of Texas at Austin. Owens has published widely, including entries in *International Information and Library Review*, *College and Research Libraries*, *Bulletin of the American Society of Information Science*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Library Administration*, and *Library Management*. She edited the volume *Acquisitions and Collection Development in the Humanities* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Owens is currently at work on a number of research projects including one entitled “Empowerment and Democratic Process in the Management of Community Libraries: Haiti and South Africa.” Throughout her career she has honed the special skill set that is required in a leadership position. Here she discusses the role of library science education in developing leadership skills, and how leadership is an important part of her everyday work.

Q: Are LIS schools doing all they can to teach leadership skills at the graduate level?

A: It is very difficult to answer this question without having data to support an informed response. However, I do feel that schools overall are aware of the importance of leadership skills for our profession and are by and large taking good advantage of many opportunities for leadership as

well as creating others. Leadership and management have evolved over the years incorporating business principles, practices, and approaches, incorporating research in to the practice of LIS. Also, practitioners and academicians are participating in this research and contributing to its growth and development. For example, when I was teaching management/leadership, the students and I enjoyed the use of the case-study approach to problem solving and learning. Students were also very adept at thinking through problems and also integrating what they had learned about management and leadership principles, theories, regulations, and laws, as well as policies and procedures.

Teaching leadership skills in LIS programs over the years has been focused in several ways. Based on my own experience, management classes are usually expanded to include leadership. Most schools, I feel safe in saying, afford students opportunities to learn management/leadership in different types of settings and these can vary from one situation or environment to another. Therefore classes in academic, school, public, and special librarianship would focus on these differences, which are usually also complementary to each other, providing students with a more broadly based learning experience. Moreover, schools that offer students a chance to learn through membership in student professional organizations such as the American Library Association (ALA) or the Special Libraries Association (SLA) do expand student learning experiences and exposure. There are also special leadership training opportunities in other organizations such as the Association of College and Research Libraries or the Library of Congress.

Q: Where does leadership fit into the curriculum in the SLIS program at NCCU?

A: Leadership is a necessity in the curriculum at NCCU, although we would like to do more, especially since we are the only LIS program in an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). We include leadership in all areas of specialization in types of libraries (academic, public, and special) as well as among our student chapters of ALA, SLA, and the American Society for Information Science & Technology (ASIST). SLIS graduates have been especially successful in producing leaders on the local and national level in the various student organizations, especially SLA where we have had an SLA president, board members, etc. There is a critical need for leadership in general, and even more so among minorities who can serve as role models and mentors to all persons in general, and for minorities in particular.

Drawing from the general body of leadership, as well as drawing upon the literature of our field, some of the

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guiding principles of leadership that we convey to students are:

- leadership is a measurement for advancement in the organization;
- leadership is a part of good stewardship to an organization and to the profession; and
- leadership is appreciated as “service” to an organization.

In speaking with LIS faculty, it is clear that we would like to play a larger role in the profession and in society by acquiring a leadership grant to produce a more focused group of graduates with skills needed to help effect change. We would also like to expand our “International Library Systems” course to focus more on leadership. It is important for students to understand diversity and leadership at a local and national level and also from an international perspective. We are making a lot of progress in this area. Last year, one of our faculty implemented a pilot study abroad course to Denmark. It was a tremendous success and we are planning to repeat the course again this year with a greater level of participation.

Two of our faculty members have served as president of the North Carolina Library Association (NCLA). Their service to NCLA has been a big boost for the school. We also encourage attendance at the NCLA biennial meetings, to join the organization, and to serve at that level. The upcoming president elect of NCLA is an alumna in the School of Library and Information Sciences. Former President Robert Burgin made an attractive offer to our students by affording joint membership in NCLA and ALA (as students) for the same price. That was a great impetus for increasing membership in both organizations and creating more experiences for our students!

Q: As dean of the SLIS, how is leadership a part of your job?

A: Leadership is the core essence of one’s responsibilities as a dean, not only of the school but within the university and beyond. One of the most critical roles within the university is to create and maintain good visibility of the school—to be collegial, cooperative, and to collaborate with other colleagues and disciplines—and that is occurring. The dean takes on several roles in the university. I have a commitment, responsibility, and opportunity to promote the profession and to show its relevancy for all the disciplines in the information and digital age. I have a responsibility to make sure the program is visible in a very positive sense, that the dean and the faculty of the SLIS are collegial, open to new ideas, collaborative. I am also responsible for recruitment, retention, and placement of our graduates and for showing the importance of keeping lines of communications open, and that we are progressive, and that our graduates are be-

ing prepared for today’s market, and that they are very competitive. Accountability and stewardship are also important factors for the dean to be constantly aware of, and to put into practice. Another role is to make sure that the library, technology, and all information services are culturally appropriate for all the citizens of our society.

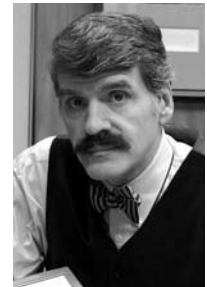
Q: What sort of continuing education opportunities are available from the SLIS for librarians who seek better leadership skills? Is this a role for professional library educators?

A: This is a need which we are currently addressing. There are many graduates of our school who have been out for a while and desire to update their skills or expand their studies who do not necessarily desire another degree. There is a particular interest in digital librarianship and archives, so we need a rubric under which more training can be made more accommodative. We do have some solutions under consideration.

Interview with Mark Y. Herring

By Jane Duffy

Mark Y. Herring is dean of library services at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Prior to serving there, Herring was dean of library services at Oklahoma Baptist University, and library director at King College in East Tennessee. His



Mark Y. Herring

doctorate is from East Tennessee State University in educational leadership and policy analysis. He has worked in librarianship for three decades.

Herring has written numerous articles, books, and reviews for magazines and journals both in and out of the library profession. His most recent book, *Fool’s Gold: Why the Internet Is No Substitute for a Library* (McFarland, 2007), and his article “10 Reasons Why the Internet Is No Substitute for a Library” have been reprinted dozens of times and in more than six languages. Other articles have appeared in *American Libraries*, *Library Journal*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *College and Research Library News*, *Weekly Standard*, and *Policy Review*.

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Q: How do you define leadership, and can you offer some examples?

A: Leadership is a process whereby “followers,” either self-defined or hierarchically defined, are empowered to accomplish stated goals and objectives within their ken as defined by the organization. Simply stated, it’s a process where one influences another to accomplish a shared goal or objective. As *Bass & Stogdill’s Handbook of Leadership* by Bernard M. Bass notes, it’s much more complicated than this, being involved in personality, influence, compliance, behavior, persuasion, and so on. James McGregor Burns’ *Leadership* identifies it as two or more individuals engaged in a relationship. But both get at the entirely human aspects of leadership. Burns goes on to reduce it to two types, i.e., transactional and transformational. I like that reduction. Once you define it beyond more than two or three ideas I think you lose sight of what it really is, or you define it so cerebrally that it becomes just another academic meme rather than a human interaction. The process involves a great deal more than this—it’s far more complex involving, again borrowing from Bass, goal achievement and differentiated roles, motive, resource, headship, and so on (there are more than a hundred definitions for it) but these two forms of leadership have for me been the easiest upon which to hang most of this discussion. A leader isn’t necessarily always only transactional or only transformational (though at the end of a career one may be able to assess a preponderance of one or the other), but uses both depending on the goals sought or the objectives pursued.

Q: In your role as dean of the library, what are ways in which you demonstrate leadership?

A: There are the quotidian and the commonplace activities that keep the organization running well. And empowering people to do their jobs, and do them well, is one regular way in which I demonstrate leadership. As most would say in my place, I try to lead by example. I never require of anyone something that I would not require of myself (and often never ask someone to undertake something I haven’t done myself). Honesty is a very important ingredient but even this isn’t as easily transacted as most think. A leader must often exercise honesty with those over whom he or she is set, and also in the larger leadership calculus of which he or she is a part. Many think this should be a “black or white” issue but it isn’t always that easy. Information is never withheld but its release is often a matter of timing and place. From one vantage point this may appear as so much persiflage; from another, leadership in fine detail. Integrity is also very much a way in which I exercise leadership. For example, saying what you’re going to do and then doing it, or allowing that there are things that you cannot do or accomplish and telling people that from the outset. I see

setting goals and achieving them on time and under budget is a part of leading with integrity as, too, is the honest assessment and evaluation of staff.

Q: Tell us about some opportunities that middle management staff in your library have to be active leaders?

A: My view of leadership with middle management has always been to hire the best you possibly can and then get out of their way as much as possible. Some oversight may be required initially in order to insinuate them into the organizational culture, but over time a good leader will surrender to those whom he or she has hired the space in which to accomplish it. Context is everything, and a leader may find the context messy and unkempt upon arriving and so have to make room for leadership to flourish; conversely, he or she may find it in a salubrious condition and ready to act immediately. I have always seen the dean’s role as *primus inter pares*—first among equals—and tried to live that way so far as context allows. Middle management here has as much latitude as they are willing to exercise and I always try to make sure failure is never an obstacle; merely a possibility. It’s okay to fail if one is trying to achieve a new and better way to build the proverbial better mousetrap.

Q: How is leadership important during times of shrinking budgets, and how is leadership during difficulties different from less challenging times?

A: I like to think leading in good and bad times are the same, but bad times bring out the worst in everyone so it does in fact matter. When budgets are flush and no cutbacks present, everyone works well together. But insert the first cut and suddenly everyone thinks some evil fare is at work. For example, this past academic year, all Winthrop faculty took nine—that’s nine—furlough days owing to severe cutbacks in higher education in South Carolina. While the deepness of the cuts is related to the economic downturn, a good portion of it is endemic to the way South Carolina funds education. (For example, a few years back our governor tied state revenues to sales tax, which is highly dependent upon tourism instead of property tax. When both the economy and tourism tanked, state budgets revenues plummeted). The cutback this year is equal to almost 15 percent of our entire state funding. State appropriations have dropped from 44 to 18 percent, and may yet go lower than that. The matter is further compounded in that our governor has also chosen not to fund the statewide consortium Partnership Among South Carolina Academic Libraries (PASCAL) (even though for each \$1 the state spends on it, it returns \$8 in goods and services). This means that cuts in the library’s budget are further diminished owing to a potential PASCAL fund-

ing disaster. Add to this our governor's unwillingness to accept stimulus money for K-12 and higher education and you have the recipe for a gigantic budget mess. Such draconian cutbacks have meant that we in higher education in South Carolina have had to retrench all across our campus, and leadership skills are required in surfeit to help keep everyone on task, quell rumors, encourage and strengthen morale, and so on. It isn't a happy task but a necessary one. I am lucky in that I work with a highly professional group of people who may not like what's happening here in the Palmetto State but who understand that what has happened is beyond what anyone here did or can undo. This is true not only for our library but all across the campus. We are under duress, of course, but we are doing some incredible things owing to the can-do attitude of everyone on board.

Q: Which sorts of activities or workshops do you currently find most professionally rewarding in the support of your administrative work?

A: Those activities and workshops that are to the point, stay on topic, and begin and end when they say they will, are the ones I find most useful. The conference in Charleston, South Carolina (once called the "Acquisitions" conference), is one of the best and most useful for all sorts of things, not the least of which are the excellent speakers, the on-task presentations, and the review of technological innovations it brings to conference goers. I have rarely been to one in the last decade from which I did not come away with something I could use. I have yet to find a really good podcast or webinar (and include those where I have been the speaker/presenter) that I have found useful, but I still look. If the quality can be improved, these have the potential to be quite useful, especially during these very tight financial times. Colleagues tell me the Innovative Users Group (IUG) conference is also very good but I have yet to attend. One area I think many younger (I'm in my fifth decade) librarians overlook is professional reading. While I do read a good bit of professional reading that ends up not being practically useful, I always find something every week to which I can put to good use.

Q: How would you recommend library leaders manage transparency and accountability in their leadership communications and planning activities?

A: Let me begin by saying that I am reminded of a survey done more than twenty years ago now in which library leaders were asked to assess their leadership style. Most said "participative." Researchers then asked their staffs who replied almost to a person "dictatorial" or "autocratic." The point is, one's coign of vantage makes a big difference and

both sides have to account for their biases. Having said that, I believe if library leaders are committed always to keeping the lines of communication open, then they'll have a good beginning. Administrators have two parties to answer to: their staff and their superiors. Sometimes these groups are on different wavelengths, not for nefarious reasons but because of their different coigns of vantage. "Transparency," while a new term, is an old idea that we used to call trust. In order to build trust, both sides of the relationship equation have to work hard at building it and make generous allowances for each other and the contexts out of which they must work. When administrators withhold information about raises, coming terminations, or budget amounts, they breed distrust. On the other hand, when staff members believe that the administration can only be the new Freddy Kruger, no amount of information provided by the library leader is going to help. We've got to come out of our us-versus-them boxes and think "we." In other words, we're all in this together but we have different roles to play. Our different roles do not always mean we're trying to hide something from each other. None of us acts at home the way we do at work but that does not automatically mean we're hypocrites at one place or the other, or have something to hide. It does mean that we have different roles to fill and that requires—as any good actor knows—a different persona for each. Treat people the way you want to be treated, tell them the truth, act as much as you can on their recommendations and any library leader will gain the trust of fair-minded folks. When things go wrong, accept the responsibility yourself. When they go right, give your staff as much the credit as possible. I haven't always done this well in my career but it is something I always try to do.

Q: Based on your experience, do you recommend a "research profile" for emerging library leaders, and how would you advise an emerging library leader go about developing a research agenda?

A: I do recommend one, but I would steer clear of the stridently theoretical. Too much library research is the blindly theoretical with lots of graphs and formulas but little real substance. I'm not discounting good, solid research. But student satisfaction surveys based on a sample of ten isn't really anything but what those ten students like. You can't really extrapolate from that small population any significant outcome for a larger population. I think too much of our research—even research that gets extensive press—is built on flimsy frameworks. As far as developing a research profile, I think the more the library leader reads what's going on in higher education and surrounding areas, the more likely she will be able to develop a solid research agenda. Building one is not an "either/or" proposition but a "both-and" one. One must become acquainted with what's going on in all the fields that touch librarianship: reading, technology,

student learning and development, and so on. Something in that reading will ineluctably lead to a profitable research profile.

Q: What is the single most important personal skill that you've developed to survive tough times as a library leader?

A: A sense of humor.

Q: What is the single most important lesson you have learned throughout your experience as a library leader?

A: A sense of humor. We often take our profession and ourselves much too seriously and we have to get over that. I wrote a piece a few years ago on just how dreadful we librarians dress. I got a lot of hate mail on that and it struck me as both instructive and risible. Much of what I wrote was satirical but pointed. It was also very true. We don't dress professionally and it isn't a matter of money but a matter of both taste and sensibility, both of which can be improved. That so many librarians didn't get it means we're too much "into" ourselves. I remember talking to a well-know pundit thirty years ago and he told me a story that I found startlingly illuminating. He had worked for the McGovern campaign. When it was over, he and others were assessing what had happened. As they sat around a table bemoaning their loss, one individual said, "I don't know how we lost. I don't know anyone who voted for Nixon." My friend thought, "Yeah, I don't either." And then he said it struck him: How could they not know anyone? About 98 percent of the country had voted for him. Partisan politics aside, this happens a lot in every profession, of course, but I find it especially true of librarianship and higher education. We have to get out among others not at all like us so we can see and understand ourselves better. And we need a good sense of humor so we won't take ourselves or our profession so seriously. We can learn from other professions without being so defensive about our own.

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

A: No, not really. I use whatever works and this has changed for me over time. I've used just about every planning model out there but as economic conditions change, as needs change, as I have changed jobs, so have I change planning models to fit the landscape. I have found that what works at one place doesn't always work at another, or what worked last year may not be the right choice next year or years

later. This is only logical if you think about it. As people, places and conditions change, so must the leader's style and models vary.

Q: What professional publications do you read on a regular basis, and what websites are "must follows" for the library leader?

A: "Must" is a bit strong for me. These are publications and websites I follow regularly but each person has to find those he or she gets the most help from. I have found help in these for various reasons but obviously not all will apply to all readers. The point here would be simply to find what works for you. I have excluded all those are not specifically library-related. I look at many others that are only tangentially (or not at all) library-related and often find many useful things in those as well.

Publications of interest to me:

New York Times Book Review, New York Review of Books, Library Journal, American Libraries, Library Leadership and Management, College and Research Libraries, College and Research Libraries News, Journal of Academic Librarianship, Library Information Research, Library Resources & Technical Services, Library Trends, Reference and User Service Quarterly.

Selected Websites of interest to me:

<http://home.learningtimes.net/library>
<http://hurstassociates.blogspot.com>
www.ala.org
www.lii.org
www.freerangelibrarian.com
www.lisnews.com
www.blendedlibrarian.org

Q: Do you blog or communicate professionally using any other Web 2.0 application?

A: I'm on Twitter (and I still don't quite "get" its value), Facebook, and I lurk around a good many other places to determine if we'll implement them. We will start a library blog this summer off the library's Facebook site. It will be written by a number of library faculty on a wide-ranging number of library issues. In *Fool's Gold* I wrote disparagingly about some aspects of the Web and still feel quite strongly that way. But in the same way you can complain about health care and still get an annual physical, I use the Web while complaining about its lesser (and, at times, evil) qualities. I still firmly believe that the Web is hastening the end of reading, or at least will significantly curtail it to the extent that we'll all be the worse for wear because of it. I worry that Google and others are (inadvertently perhaps) hastening the end of libraries and demise of librarianship. It's not that I am envious that the Web et al. is doing it better because I don't think the Web or its glories can. What I fear is that it

will “suffice” for now, budgets will grow tighter and tighter until libraries are cut so much “sith neither the interior nor the exterior resembles that which it was.” That’s when, like the dotcom bust, the center no longer holds and things fall apart. By then it may be too late to rebuild and we’ll have to live with the flotsam and jetsam. But perhaps I’m merely a chronic worrier, or just getting too old?

Interview with Peter Northouse

By Wendi Arant Kaspar

Peter Northouse literally wrote the book on leadership. His volume, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Sage Publications, 1997), is widely used throughout academic and corporate organizations in all industries and disciplines and is in its fourth edition. As the title implies, Northouse bridges the gap between academic scholarship and practical application of leadership principles. He has also extensively researched these issues in the context of the fields of health and medicine and published *Health Communication: Strategies for Health Professionals* (Appleton and Lange, 1998), now in its third edition.



Peter Northouse

His books are foundation texts for university curricula in management, educational administration, leadership, public administration, and other departments at hundreds of institutions of higher education. He publishes in academic journals related to interpersonal communication, empathy, trust and control, transformational leadership, and conflict resolution. His recent publication, *Introduction to Leadership: Concepts and Practice* (Sage Publications, 2009), also examines leadership and communication theory and how it can be applied successfully to the real world.

Northouse holds his doctorate in speech communication from the University of Denver. He has taught for more than twenty years and currently holds a position as professor of communication at Western Michigan University and consults extensively on organizational communication, organizational development, and leadership.

Q: Leadership is often used synonymously with administration or management. What are the distinctions between them?

A: In short, I think leadership is similar to management in many ways but they are also different. Management has

to do with planning, organizing, staffing, and controlling. Leadership is a process of influencing a group of people to meet its goals. I treat the role of leaders and managers similarly and do not emphasize the differences between them. I stress that whenever one person is influencing others toward a goal, leadership is taking place. Not all of administration is about influencing others but much of it relates to and has an impact on how others reach the goal.

Q: What are the traits and/or skills of leadership?

A: Generally, I argue against a traits approach to leadership. Researchers have not been able to identify the definitive leadership traits. A traits perspective places too much attention on the leader. I think leadership is learned process and something all of us can learn to do better. When treated as a trait, leadership appears reserved for only a few. However, to answer your question—the research highlights intelligence, confidence, charisma, determination, sociability, and integrity as important leadership traits. Administrative skills include managing people, managing resources, and showing technical competence. Interpersonal skills consist of social perception, emotional intelligence and managing interpersonal conflict. Conceptual are more cognitive in nature, comprising problem-solving, strategic planning and creating vision.

Q: How does leadership manifest in different climates, i.e. academic, business, government?

A: It would take an entire book or PhD dissertation to address this question. In consulting, I frequently ask participants to distinguish between military and business leadership. Obviously, the context influences the leadership process. Some contexts are more rule-bound and others are less. Some have the goal of producing a product and others have education as a goal. Some provide more position power to leaders and others provide less. In all these contexts, I would argue that leadership is about influencing others toward a mutually agreed upon goal. It is not an amoral process. It includes values. Leadership does not occur in a vacuum. It includes the leader, followers, and the context.

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Q: Should organizations promote leadership among its employees? How can this be done effectively?

A: Organizations should promote leadership. All organizations need people to take on leadership roles. When people are effective in these roles, it makes the organizations function better. Mentoring is a good example of how people within an organization can learn to be effective when taking on leadership responsibilities. I teach leadership, but I do not try to make people into leaders. All of us are called upon at different times in our life to step into leadership positions. I stress teaching people about leadership and what it involves with the assumption that knowledge about the process will lead to more effective action. I do not tend to glorify leadership or talk much about developing leaders. I do stress what is involved in leadership and how each of us can learn to be more effective when we are asked to lead.

Q: How does leadership impact organizational culture and organizational communication?

A: Leadership has a huge impact on the culture of an organization and how people communicate within the organization. The leader is the role model for the organization. The leader sets the tone for the culture and the communication within the culture. Setting the tone and building community is one of the major aspects of leadership and it is critical to effective leadership. It demands that a leader provide structure, clarify norms, build cohesiveness, and promote standards of excellence. There is a lot involved in carrying out these functions, but, when done correctly, they have a very positive impact on the group or organization. The ethical climate a leader creates also strongly influences the culture of an organization. Leaders need to be aware and sensitive to how their character, actions, goals, trustworthiness, use of power, and values all influence the organizational culture.