



President's Message

Gina Millsap

Who Are Your Role Models and Why Are They Great Leaders?

America's Next Top (Role) Models

I've been very lucky in my professional life. I've had the opportunity to work with some truly exceptional people. I've learned from them not so much by listening to what they say as watching what they do. Their actions are powerful lessons and have helped me be a much better leader than I could ever be on my own.

We talk a lot about leadership and, good grief, is there a lot written about it! Google "leadership" and you get 141 million hits. That's quite a list, and I was interested to see where my gurus, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, fell in that 141 million. I wasn't surprised to see that their book, *The Leadership Challenge*, is number three.¹

Kouzes and Posner have developed a set of leadership practices that help leaders . . . lead, day in and day out. In their words,

The Leadership Challenge is about how leaders mobilize others to want to get extraordinary things done. It's about the practices leaders use to transform values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risks into rewards. It's about a climate in which people turn challenging opportunities into remarkable successes.²

The Leadership Challenge began as a research project in 1983. Kouzes and Posner wanted to learn what people did when they were at their personal best in leading others. Unlike other researchers, they didn't target star performers in excellent companies to discover best practices. Instead, they interviewed ordinary people and asked them to describe extraordinary experiences. Their assumption was that they would find patterns of behavior and consistent actions that led to success.

From these stories, they formulated a personal-best

leadership survey. The whole survey is thirty-eight questions. Here are a few.

- Who initiated the project?
- How were you prepared for this experience?
- What special techniques and strategies did you use to get other people involved in the project?
- What did you learn about leadership from this experience?

From these survey results they developed a leadership model they call the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. As I think about these practices (and, yes, I do know them by heart), certain people I admire come to mind. Here are some great library leaders.

Model the Way: Melissa Carr is the director of the Daniel Boone Regional Library in Columbia, Missouri. We worked together as "baby librarians" in the mid-1970s and for twenty years after that. She is the epitome of ethical and honest leadership. She is always focused on what's best for the library, its staff and customers, sometimes at great personal sacrifice. Over the course of thirty-five-plus years, she has earned a reputation for being politically savvy, knowing her community, and knowing the library business inside and out. Her credibility—with her staff, board, customers, community, and colleagues—exists because she tells the truth unflinchingly and always does the right thing.

Enable Others to Act: Rob Banks, director of operations for the Topeka and Shawnee County (Kans.) Public Library, will tell you that he spends his days talking to people. In a sense, that's true. He spends a lot of time counseling, mentoring and listening to the more than twenty managers who report to him. Because his office is next to mine, I can tell you that no matter how challenged people feel when they enter his office, they feel better prepared to deal with that challenge when they leave. His unique blend of humor, solid experience, strength, talent (did I mention he's a professional pianist, harpist, and singer?), and innate decency make him uniquely suited to help other leaders succeed.

Challenge the Process: Lynne Carey is the deputy director of the Ames (Iowa) Public Library. I worked with Lynne for almost ten years. She's always on a quest to make library services better. She helped transform the organization from a good library to one that wows its

Gina Millsap (gmillsap@tscpl.org) is Executive Director of Topeka and Shawnee County (Kans.) Public Library and president of LLAMA.

customers and is consistently listed in the HAPLR top ten rankings. To be honest, sometimes she drove me a little crazy, but she persevered in everything from developing programming for adults literally from the ground up to revolutionizing bookmobile service to turning the circulation department into a high performing department to helping youth services reinvent itself and become more relevant to young families to—the list goes on and on. Every library needs a Lynne.

Inspire a Shared Vision: Gene Martin was my first boss. He was the director of the Daniel Boone Regional Library (Mo.) for twenty-plus years. He had a vision for library service focused on customers, or patrons as we called them then, that he shared with a group of young librarians and we all embraced it whole-heartedly. How did he do that? I never remember Mr. M speechifying or being “bossy.” He talked to us, he listened to us with respect (even we if we were fresh out of library school and thought we knew stuff), he encouraged us to try new programs and make collections and services more user friendly, and he found the resources to introduce computers and Internet long before most libraries were using them. He died a few years ago and I miss him. When I’m trying to figure out how to facilitate change, large or small, I still think, “What would Mr. M. do?”

Encourage the Heart: Beverly Martin is the director of the Johnson County Public Library in Franklin, Indiana. I met her through ALA’s Junior Members Round Table fifteen years ago, and we continue to work together in LLAMA. She’s the consummate legislative advocate, knows as much about technology as any IT staffer, and has devoted herself to raising the quality of leadership through training, practice, and assessment in her organization. She knows how to get things done for her library and libraries throughout Indiana. She is also a committed community volunteer, having served in Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) and most recently helping coordinate the United Way flood assistance effort in her town. Most importantly, Bev has heart and she knows how to make her staff and everyone she works with feel that their contributions are valued.

These are my role models. Who are yours?

References

1. Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).
2. Quote from The Leadership Challenge® website, www.leadershipchallenge.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-131053.html (accessed November 10, 2009).