

LLAMA President's Message



Jeff Steely

Over the past few months I have been preparing to move and take on a new leadership role. This has provided the opportunity to both reflect on some previous leadership development training and to explore some new literature. One book I dusted off is one I have used repeatedly, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* by Lee G. Bolman and Terrance E. Deal. *Reframing* encourages a leader to look at a problem from multiple perspectives, or frames, rather than relying on one familiar, comfortable approach. I know that I have a natural inclination to use the “structural” frame, looking to solve problems through logic, org charts, and the like. I also know that I have developed strength in the “political” frame, using empathy and a knowledge of others’ motivations to make a more persuasive case. These will serve me well in my new position. However, I had for many years enjoyed the luxury of relying on a colleagues with strength in the “human resources” frame to provide that lens to issues we faced together (Thanks, Beth!). I knew I would need to discover the colleagues in my new workplace who can serve as the “corrective lenses” in my new setting. The fourth frame in Bolman and Deal’s framework is the symbolic frame. Having worked at one institution for more than 19 years, the symbolism of anything I said or did was, I hope, viewed in the context of relationships developed over years. If I said something stupid, I could at least hope that my teammates would realize that I thought it was stupid, too, and would expect me to set things right. In a new workplace, with a heightened symbolic role, I knew that my early actions would carry additional symbolic import.

This realization led me to a new-to-me book, *The First 90 Days: Proven Strategies for Getting Up to Speed Faster and Smarter* by Michael D. Watkins. I’ve read and reread several sections as I work to apply Watkins’ insights to the new workplace that I am learning about. One of the key ideas of the book is, in many ways, a reframing approach. The author asks one to assess the workplace in terms of five general situations, the “STARS” framework: start-up, turnaround, accelerated growth, realignment, and sustaining growth. While the book is written for a business context, I found reflecting on my new organization in light of the STARS model a useful exercise

for developing a strategy for my first few months (time will tell whether I read the situation correctly!). I don't think this type of exercise is only relevant for a leader in a new situation. Stepping back from the day-to-day to analyze a familiar workplace might provide new insights – or spur one to move in a new STARS direction.

In addition to thinking about my new job, I have also been reflecting on the work of LLAMA. What leadership development does LLAMA need to provide? What are the gaps in the opportunities for current, emerging, and aspiring leaders? At a conference this fall I was on a shuttle with three colleagues who are all relatively new to the role of library dean. They discussed a perceived lack of development opportunities for those in the situation that I, too, now find myself in. Is this a gap in the professional development opportunities in our field? If so, is this a gap LLAMA should fill with new programming?

I frequently hear in LLAMA planning meetings that we need to make sure we develop programs to appeal to people in all types of libraries and related professions, in all areas of library work, and in all stages of professional careers. Based on the literature I'm reading on professional organizations, this thinking may, in fact, be diluting our products and consequently providing *less* value to our members. Whatever future direction we take in terms of who we target as members, we may need to narrow the scope of specific opportunities to make them more relevant.

As I consider the leadership development experiences I've had the opportunity to participate in, I am skeptical that our current approach to programming is adequately capitalizing on LLAMA members' expertise and our small but talented staff. We like to talk about the strength of LLAMA's conference programs and webinars – and they are consistently of good quality. To play devil's advocate, however, I have to ask how many of us have experienced life-changing webinars. It seems to me that longer, more intensive learning experiences have much greater potential than even the half-day workshop. Research shows that learning is much stickier if the learner is able to apply that learning in the real world. I've also found that I learn more when I have a more intensive personal investment. How can LLAMA create needed, high-impact, and accessible professional development opportunities? We have pretty much maxed out on our capacity for conference programming and webinars, so how can we refine that content to keep strengthening what we offer in those contexts? What other contexts should we consider to have an even greater impact on the profession, so that we can live up to our aspiration to be the go-to society for leadership and management development? I and the rest of the LLAMA leadership would welcome your ideas!

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