

LLAMA President's Message

John Spears



As the President of the Library Leadership and Management Association, I often receive questions from people asking me to define the terms that make up the name of our association. “Management” is fairly easy, but as you work backwards through “Leadership” and “Library” it can become increasingly difficult to define exactly what each of those words, at its core, truly means. The concept of leadership is not one that lends itself to a simple definition, and trying to describe a library in words that encapsulate the breadth and diversity of libraries is nearly impossible without rendering the description almost meaningless. With thousands of libraries serving public, academic, school, corporate, government, and countless other types of communities, each with disparate needs, aspirations, and expectations, what common characteristics apply? We have core principles that we strive for and that unite us, such as intellectual freedom, inclusion of divergent viewpoints, and open access to information, but as our individual institutions continue to evolve – sometimes in tandem and sometimes in wildly divergent ways – to meet the needs of those we serve, what else is it that makes the work we do similar?

I believe that the one thing that truly unifies us is that we seek to enable understanding – understanding of our communities, the broader world, those with whom we may differ, and ourselves. We are emerging from what has been the most divisive election in modern history, and we are more polarized than ever. It may seem that the problems our country faces and the differences we have with one another are intractable, but this is a time for libraries to show true leadership. As a society we have balkanized ourselves into homogenous groups that simply reaffirm the beliefs that we already hold and allow us to exist in hermetically sealed bubbles of assurance that our views and beliefs are correct. As libraries, we are uniquely positioned to combat this, and we are one of the few institutions that is still capable of bringing people from

these different spheres together. This is not a responsibility that we should take lightly, and it is not one that we should shirk from.

As a profession, we lean left. This is not to say that there are not librarians that are conservative, but it is often assumed by many within our ranks that to be a librarian is to mean that you are also liberal. Our communities embody people of all ethnicities, sexualities, and political beliefs, and we need to provide a venue for all to seek that understanding. The feelings and beliefs that led people to vote for their preferred candidate in this elections – whether Trump, Clinton, Johnson, Stein, or another – are complex, and if we are to escape the anger and resentment that now festers in our country, libraries need to embrace their role of allowing people to understand “the other.” This is truly a time for libraries to lead within their communities, to provide an arena for understanding to occur, and to live up to our stated ideal of inclusion.

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