

## Gratitude and Learning

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Library leadership and management is awash with information about how to be emotionally intelligent, utilize appreciative inquiry, lead from the heart as a concept related to servant leadership, and practice mindful leadership. A quick search in EBSCO's Library Literature & Information Science Index (LL&IS) on the term "emotional intelligence" generated 169 results, while "appreciative inquiry" gave twenty-one results. Searching on "heart" and "leadership" brought forth a 2005 article that, in the concluding section, titled "Leading with the heart," framed this kind of leadership as a way to "think creatively about, and respond appropriately to, the leadership opportunities and challenges that you face daily at work and at home" (Metros, p. 450). Another "heart-based" approach has been around since 1999: the Truebloods' book *Partners in Ministry: Clergy and Laity*, cited in Cassette 447-ALA, provided an approach to being effective when responding to conversations even when they are challenging (Trueblood and Trueblood). Searching on "mindful" and "leadership" in the LL&IS database returned twelve articles between 2007 and 2023 and did not include the two works (a co-authored book chapter and an article) that I wrote on this subject (Beverage et al; Herold). What has not garnered significant attention in the library leadership literature is the concept of "gratitude." A search in LL&IS on "leadership" and "gratitude" generated thirteen results with the terms in the subjects or as keywords in the text. Of those thirteen, five were a review of the same book, seven were expressions of appreciation or thanks for being part of a group or the support of groups and individuals, and one, a peer-reviewed article by Ginger H. Williams published in 2023, discussed the concept of gratitude as a way to enhance leadership. While Williams' article provides a definition of gratitude as being appreciated or being grateful, it also has a brief list of references about gratitude but not focused on leadership and the library profession. A separate search in LL&IS for "leadership" and "appreciation" returned similar results (fourteen items) to the search for "gratitude," including many of the same sources. Therefore, I started to ponder my leadership journey, what I am grateful for, and how I have learned and applied gratitude in my leadership.

When I started my post-undergraduate career as a classroom educator, I recall stating in my job interview that I wanted to make a difference in my students' lives. Today that strikes me as very Pollyannaish, but I was a twenty-two-year-old newly degreed English major with a Behavioral Science concentration who chose to read fairy tales, fantasy, science fiction, and

romance as my elective reading. I was energetic and optimistic. I probably still am several decades and a different career later.

It's rather ironic that when I was teaching, I took for granted the thanks of appreciative parents and notes and gifts of current and former students. I was immersed in the daily work of lesson planning, grading, and reading the history textbook to keep ahead of my students. It wasn't until I was teaching history that I took a college history course. I applied my creative energies to the lessons I taught—we did re-enactments of historical debates, sang songs and learned dances from different periods, cooked and ate historical dishes, and made crafts using historical techniques, while engaging with textual materials from poems to short stories to books that complemented the historical periods we were studying. In the nine years I did direct classroom instruction I had multiple siblings from the same family who intentionally requested or hoped to be in my class and eagerly looked forward to the interactive units I created. Because I was teaching a block program where I had students for three classes each day (Language Arts, Reading, and Social Studies), I often had opportunities to teach threaded curriculum where the content could reinforce and overlap. Looking back on this experience, I am grateful for the enthusiasm of my students, the appreciation of their parents, and that my colleagues at the same grade level were supportive of my approach. In reflection, there was a culture of appreciation as exemplified in what students wrote in my yearbook in addition to the aforementioned mid- and end-of-year notes and gifts. I still have a set of pasta bowls that a mother gifted to me when I was heading off to earn my masters in librarianship. It was a generous, enduring, and thoughtful treat.

The appreciation expressed to me during my library career has been different, but equally lovely and unexpected. As a new-to-the-profession librarian, I just thought everyone taught and wrote. One of my earliest articles was about how to utilize government documents in library instruction. I later discovered that article was part of a library graduate school's professor's government documents curriculum. It tickled me to think my approach was something others found worthy. At that point I was not aware that many librarians did not view themselves as teachers, had not learned how to do instruction, and how my early 1990's approach may have been ahead of the then current understanding of library instruction's place in academic libraries.

I have shifted between types of academic institutions, working in small private colleges, mid-sized public colleges, and research-intensive universities. When I made my first move to universities, I was humbled that many took the opportunity to send me personal notes. One poignantly told me that my writing on mentorship had been especially helpful to them. That anyone read and valued what I had published made my day.

My first book was a labor of love. One of my dissertation committee members encouraged me to just finish the dissertation and then write the book I wanted to write. It was incredibly helpful advice, and I am glad I took it. *Creating Leaders: An Examination of Academic and Research Library Leadership Institutes* was the result. The journey from dissertation to final publication was not a direct line. I received a terrific response from potential contributors, created a chapter template that I asked writers to follow (most did, but not everyone), and took some of the work of my dissertation and crafted my own chapter. I had just finished doing first-round editing of all received chapters when my house was broken into, and my laptop was stolen. This was in the days before the availability of cloud backups, and I had failed to back up my files to an external hard drive. Luckily, I had many, but not all, of the chapters and my revised versions in email. I had to recreate the book, which meant the original publication date was pushed back a year. It was a good lesson in saving scholarly endeavors in multiple locations. It also taught me humility in receiving the grace of my contributors and their work to help recreate their work and resubmit it to me. Almost a decade after the publication of the volume, I was told by a conference attendee that a presenter at a conference referenced *Creating Leaders*, called it a “seminal work,” and wondered when it would be updated. Just last spring I was at a national meeting and during a committee session on learning and leadership development programs the woman sitting next to me as the meeting ended, said, “What’s your name again?” I told her. She exclaimed, “I have your book on my desk!” Wow!

I have felt so fortunate to have received grace from others and their expressions of appreciation for my work and scholarly contributions to the profession. Now I want to turn to how others have taught me appreciative leadership lessons. Early in my librarian career at a small private college, I had a stellar example of how to lead from my first librarian boss. She had the opportunity to hire two librarians at the same time, and the other one started a month before I did so she had seniority. The two of us shared an office but had distinctly different responsibilities. I was hired to manage circulation, reference, instruction, and government documents. She was hired to manage cataloging, interlibrary loan, serials, and systems. After the first semester my office partner went to our boss to complain that she should have a higher salary than me because she worked longer hours—these were self-imposed, not required by the job, and she did not understand that longer did not equate with higher quality—and she told our boss I was a horrible manager of the student employees, but I couldn’t help it because I had an obnoxious personality (which opinion she formed from listening to and encouraging complaints from the circulation students I managed, often times in those extended hours she was spending in the library). My boss convened a meeting of the three of us, let my office

partner say her piece, and then did several brilliant things: she had us all take the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and discuss our different approaches, and she had us switch some of our management responsibilities. My office partner now was in charge of circulation, and I was doing serials, which at the time involved creating all of the records as we were migrating to an online system from a paper-based system for the first time. The MBTI really helped me to understand the personality style perspective of my office partner (not that I agreed with her conclusions) and after a semester of managing circulation my office partner came to me and apologized. She no longer believed the problem was me managing the students. She left her position for a new one after our second year and I assumed responsibility for systems, which turned out to be a terrific learning opportunity for me. I was forever grateful to that boss, who did not leap to conclusions upon which she acted in haste, but rather helped us learn.

While there are many, many moments of gratitude I could cite, I will end with the most recent one. I was visiting a city where I formerly worked and ran into a couple of people who had worked for me, although none of us were still employed by the same college. We kept running into each other over the next few days and finally ended up at a restaurant at the same time. We sat together and chatted, but when my food arrived, they excused themselves. As they were leaving the restaurant, one of them made a point of coming back to my table and, with strong emotion, thanked me for my mentorship. They had experienced some challenging situations when we worked together, but I had worked with them on approaches and awareness so they could be successful. I took others' complaints as a learning opportunity for this librarian. It was a highly meaningful moment to be thanked, and I carry it as a treasure in my heart. When I went to pay the bill, I found they had purchased my meal! This was a complete, delightful surprise. Many times, I have purchased meals anonymously for others (Valentine's Day or on my anniversary to share the love), but this was the first time anyone had purchased my meal. I ran into them one more time before leaving town, thanked them, and the other person also thanked me for my mentorship and how helpful I had been. The mentorship they mentioned was not formal, but just part of the coaching I routinely incorporate into my leadership. Knowing it has made a difference was exhilarating. Seeing it as passing along the grace I received from my first boss, who took complaints as learning opportunities makes me feel like I closed a circle from those who gave to me to me giving to others.

As I commence my thirty-second year of librarianship, I am so appreciative of those who let me know my contributions have made a difference. I also want to emphasize and share that it is important to tell those who have made a difference to you what you learned, valued, and have done as a result of them and their work. Incorporate gratitude into your leadership practices. I

have had too many friends and colleagues who are no longer on this earth to take for granted that there will be time to tell them how much you appreciate and learned from them. Do it now. Don't let it be an obituary that only provides comfort to those who remain with us. Let them know what they and their service, scholarship, guidance, and friendship mean to you. You will make their day.

## Resources

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**Published:** June 2025