

LIBRARY ISSUES

BRIEFINGS FOR FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS

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The Mindful Library Leader

by Irene M. H. Herold

When hiring a new head librarian, a search committee strives to recommend the best candidate who they believe has the knowledge, vision, and skills to lead the campus library. While some positions attract experienced candidates with proven track records of leadership and management, others find mid-level library managers who are eager to move up.

Search committees usually do not think about whether good library managers make good library leaders. Mid-level library managers may not always have had the opportunity to develop leadership skills. It becomes incumbent upon the chief academic officer (CAO) to whom the library director or dean reports to find ways to help their librarian become a leader or enhance their leadership abilities. In a college this may be a provost, dean, or vice president of academic affairs, while in a larger university library it may be the university librarian.

Hired and Ready for Leadership

Many new head librarians are hired from positions of department head, from a larger institution where they may have had many supervisees, or from a different kind of library, such as government or corporate. They usually have solid managerial experience.

John Kotter (1990), talks about the difference between management and leadership. Leaders create an agenda, develop human resources, execute, and have outcomes that achieve a vision by establishing direction, aligning people, motivating and inspiring, and produce change, often to a dramatic degree.

This is as opposed to management where the focus is on efficiencies, processes, and meeting goals and targets with a degree of predictability and or-

der. Managers produce order following proscribed pathways, leaders realize their vision. The most effective leaders both lead and manage.

For example, one hire came from a United States government library where she was a department head. She was hired to lead a small college library. During her tenure she re-edited every document produced by her library faculty, instructed the former interim director to no longer have direct contact with faculty and administrators so she could establish herself as the head librarian, and intimidated staff by her affect of unfriendliness and disapproval. Within three years she had left her position, moving to another small college library, but after a short period of time there left the profession. She had attended a new library director leadership program, but did not reach out to other attendees or past participants for advice, assuming she knew how to manage her library. And perhaps she did, but she did not have a clear understanding of how to provide leadership which connected with her faculty and staff in a way that they felt self-compelled to want to realize her vision. She was not mindful of their emotional state.

No Magic Checklist

Of course everyone wants a magic checklist of leadership behaviors that will help hire the best library leaders and avoid someone like the example above. Leadership trait theory, developed from early leadership research, assumes that by knowing a

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list of attributes one can separate leaders from non-leaders. Numerous lists identify traits essential for leadership and include items such as:

- Achievement-oriented
- Agreeableness
- Charisma
- Creativity
- Cognitive ability (good judgment, analytical, and conceptual skills)
- Decision-making
- Emotional maturity
- Extraversion
- Integrity
- Intelligence
- Knowledge of business (libraries in this case)
- Openness

Determining how well a library leader “fits” these traits is very subjective. Does it mean someone is not a leader if they are creative, but not charismatic or extraverted? Does it mean someone is a leader if they know the business of libraries and are achievement-oriented? Library leaders come with a variety of personality traits and characteristics.

The combination that works for one individual may equate with leadership, while it would not in another person. Search committees could use traits to create a screening form applied to candidates after a preliminary assessment. They could ask candidates to describe themselves in terms of leadership traits, maybe four or five, identified as being most important to the position. This could be helpful in inviting candidates with potential or realized leadership qualities.

Defining Mindful Leadership

Current leadership theories are much more about what a leader does and the outcomes or the results of leadership than what a person’s personality is like. This is where development of mindful leadership, which describes actions and results of a leader, may be useful.

Sometimes when the label mindful is used, images arise of breathing exercises, yoga, and stress erasers (small biofeedback devices). While these strategies and tools may be helpful in easing stress, and helping a leader

focus to be mindful, they are not what mindful leadership is about.

In brief, according to the Institute for Mindful Leadership, mindful leadership is intentionally paying attention in a non-judgmental way and being present in the moment. This type of leader is thoughtful. A mindful leader can influence others, which implies a lot of power in the relationship dynamic. With such power, you want someone who is emotionally intelligent, so the person wields the power in a way to do good for and with people while advancing the institutional mission.

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Leaders who are emotionally intelligent display self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management abilities. The emotionally intelligent mindful leader motivates followers to do more than expected because the leader is perceived as being empathetic and caring.

Professor of management practice at Harvard Business School and former chair and CEO of Medtronic, Bill George states,

“The practice of mindful leadership gives you tools to measure and manage your life as you’re living it. It teaches you to pay attention to the present moment, recognizing your feelings and emotions and keeping them under control, especially when faced with highly stressful situations. When you are mindful, you’re aware of your presence and the ways you impact other people. You’re able to both observe and participate in each moment, while recognizing the implications of

your actions for the longer term. ... You must be able to quiet your mind.” (<http://blogs.hbr.org/hbsfaculty/2012/10/mindfulness-helps-you-become-a.html>)

A mindful leadership coach, Douglas Riddle, director of the global coaching practice at the Center for Creative Leadership, a top-ranked, global provider of leadership education and research, talks about mindful leaders being able to empty their minds of distractions, be non-reactive to what they are hearing so they keep their own emotions out of the way of the interaction/issue, and what he calls “permissive attention” where he draws the attention of the person to the situation for discovery of what is possible versus a prediction of failure (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/ccl/2012/01/23/three-keys-to-mindful-leadership-coaching/>).

What a Mindful Leader Does

According to research by Michael H. Dickmann and Nancy Stanford-Blair, mindful leadership is based in neuroscience. They posit six categories for behaviors of a mindful leader: physiologically, socially, emotionally, constructively, reflectively, and dispositionally (2009, p. 196). Physiological refers to brain fitness, social is cultivating common purposes with others, emotional stimulates the mind through ease and excitement, constructive justifies and extends ways of thinking, reflective challenges thinking, and dispositional is about creating habits of open-mindedness.

A mindful leader may do or provide the following to pay attention and be in the moment for their followers and him or herself:

- Physiological – access to water, as keeping the brain hydrated, keeps it healthy. Many libraries install purified water dispensers for their employees;
- Social – facilitating employees meeting others at nearby institutions who do their job to expand their relationship and expert network;
- Emotional – discuss the library’s mission and engage employees in strategic planning to help them

understand the groups' values and norms;

- Constructive – look for patterns and multiple ways of approaching issues to better understand how perspectives are formed so cultural roots of attitudes may be acknowledged;
- Reflective – emphasize problem reflection (not problem solving), challenge thinking, provide examples of best practice and experience; and
- Dispositional – encourage questioning, analysis, debate, and acknowledge many possible answers/options to consider.

The opposite of mindful is mindless. Mindless leadership creates stress, promotes isolation and confusion, generates passivity, limits access to information, encourages complacency, and cultivates closed minds. Clearly, mindless leadership is not a desirable outcome for the campus' library dean or director.

Erika Tierney Garms provides "several methods or practices that can lead a person to a mindful state. The practice of mindful leadership has four primary elements:

- mastery of attention
- clarity of intention
- optimization of attitude and emotional intelligence
- integration into every domain of daily life, work, and relationships."

(<http://www.astd.org/Publications/Magazines/TD/TD-Archive/2013/03/Practicing-Mindful-Leadership>).

In other words, mastering the art of paying attention and being present in the moment, communicating clearly about intentions, controlling your emotions so they do not get in the way of the interaction, and by doing this in all aspects of one's life, one can become more mindful. Leading from a mindful state equates with engaged and thoughtful influence on others who perceive you as being more effective because you pay attention.

Is your Leader Mindful?

You might already have a mindful library leader. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Has your library leader created an environment where her faculty and staff feel physically comfortable and intellectually stimulated? Do they pay attention to ergonomics in work areas, maintenance issues such as when an area needs paint, or protecting and honoring break times?
- Does your library leader promote appropriate social relationships, such as staff get-togethers or community service events? Is there a space within the building for staff to meet or eat lunch together? Does the library leader encourage participation in campus service events?
- Do the faculty and staff in the library appear to be energetic and engaged? Are they serving on campus committees and contributing to student life? Do they volunteer to do more than is expected?
- Does your library leader communicate information to expedite the construction of knowledge? Do library employees know what is going on in the library, on campus, and with larger initiatives?
- Does there appear to be a culture of reflection and continuous improvement in your library? Have changes been made in the library due to employee suggestions? Do annual reports include how improvements to practice will be made based upon the past year's performance?
- Do library employees appear to be open to new ideas and "reshaping the box" thinking? When a new initiative is introduced, is the first response one of curiosity and wanting to learn more?

If you answered yes, then your library leader is already engaged in mindful leadership. If you answered no, then the CAO can help them identify their leadership strengths and weaknesses using self diagnostic tests.

Tools, such as a Myers-Briggs type instrument, or leadership inventories, are designed to prompt thinking about preferences in style, and can be helpful in identifying areas of strength, but also areas needing development.

The Strength-based Leadership instrument, sponsored by Gallup, was developed over a 30-year period by psychologist Donald O. Clifton and administered to over seven million people. Once someone takes the test, they are given their top five themes with descriptions and ideas for action. The results are more descriptive than proscriptive, but a mindful library leader will take advantage of the self-assessment to develop in areas of weakness to strengthen leadership abilities and qualities.

Mentors/Mentoring

Another leadership development approach for a CAO to consider, if the CAO believes the library leader needs to develop more mindfulness, is mentoring. Connecting the head librarian with an external mentor may be helpful. A mentor who is an experienced library dean or director can:

- Facilitate a new hire's introduction to regional business practices;
- Connect the librarian to state associations;
- Listen reflectively to the head librarian's concerns in a safe, confidential, and non-judgmental environment where voicing concerns will not affect perceptions of the librarian's abilities to perform the job; and
- Act as a consultant and/or serve to validate/increase the credibility of the librarian's approach to problem-solving influencing the campus perception of the librarian's effectiveness.

Experienced library leaders may be encouraged to serve as mentors to further develop their mindfulness. There is nothing like explaining to someone new to a leadership role what *your* thinking is and what you have tried in order to engage in reflective practice. Many mentors report feeling renewed and invigorated by the mentoring experience, which leads to an important concept of resonant leadership.

Being emotionally intelligent and mindful can exhaust leaders if they are not also resonant. Resonant leaders manage their emotions, read individuals and groups accurately, and create a climate to move everyone together

in a positive direction. The flip side of resonance is dissonance, which is burnout and falling into feelings of self-sacrifice, but is countered by the concept of renewal. Renewal includes experiences of mindfulness, hope, and compassion. Therefore, to be resonant, the leader must also be mindful. Serving as a mentor can provide an avenue of resonance for the experienced library dean or director.

Modeling Mindful Leadership Behavior

If you have discovered that your library lacks a mindful leader, then the CAO may view it as an opportunity to help the library dean or director develop this part of his or her leadership. This may be accomplished most effectively by connecting the librarian with a supervisor modeling mindful behavior – i.e., a campus leader who creates a stimulating environment where the librarian feels invited and valued to share, reflect, and be open to reshaping the organization. Mindful leaders create a culture of engagement and energy. They are aware of the emotional state of employees and can help to head off issues from becoming problems. They also take care of themselves and know when renewal is important for their own wellbeing. Mindful leaders take time to take vacation so they can be attentive when they are at work.

Once your librarian has experienced a mindful leader model and been encouraged to apply mindfulness to their leadership practice, it is important to check in on the librarian's perception of results. This not only demonstrates empathy, but also awareness in an encouraging way, making the CAO part of the librarian's extended network.

Benefits Beyond the Library

Beyond the library, mindful library leaders contribute to the campus' work. Because the mindful leaders are creating and extending networks, they are in a position to communicate the campus norms and speak excitedly about the institution's mission. They can be ambassadors to alumni, business leaders, and potential donors.

For example, whenever a medium-sized university library dean travels on institutional business, development gives her a list of people to contact ahead of time. These are usually alumni who have never given to the institution or have given at a low level. By reaching out to and reconnecting alumni with a college representative this may re-engage them with the campus. In the case of this particular library dean, she was able to speak about, but more importantly listen to, the alumni's experiences. Using her skills as a mindful leader, she helped the campus cultivate friends, resulting in donations of time as mentors to undergraduates, in-kind materials to the library's special collections, and monetary donations to endowed scholarship funds. Alumni have also visited campus for the first time in many years, just to meet with the dean after she invited them to coffee during a conference. Being a mindful library leader she listened, engaged, and excited the alumni, and they became active friends of the university. We can all use more friends.--*therold@keene.edu*

Resources on Mindful Leadership

Garms suggests the following resources for further information on mindful leadership:

Websites

The Institute for Mindful Leadership: www.instituteformindfulleadership.org
Wisdom at Work: www.wisdomatwork.com

Mindful: www.mindful.org
(meditation guide: <http://bit.ly/UZnnGK>)

Dan Siegel on YouTube: <http://bit.ly/Y5Hfg0>

The Mindfulness Institute: www.themindfulnessinstitute.com

Books

Wherever You Go, There You Are by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Buddha's Brain by Rick Hanson

Your Brain at Work by David Rock
(<http://www.astd.org/Publications/Magazines/TD/TD-Archive/2013/03/Practicing-Mindful-Leadership>)

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