

LIBRARY ISSUES

BRIEFINGS FOR FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS

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How to Develop Leadership Skills: Selecting the Right Program for You

By Irene M.H. Herold

This institute has given me confidence to take advantage of leadership opportunities and to work from a place of strength. It has also connected me to a network of creative, intelligent and thoughtful peers in the profession. For me, this was every bit as important as the content of the institute itself. Thank you, thank you, thank you.¹

The Purpose of a Leadership Development Program

The purpose of a leadership development program may seem obvious, as it is to develop leadership. Leadership is something often spoken of as if everyone has the same definition, but like most things that are actually complex, it has been conceptualized in a variety of ways such as skills, traits, or knowledge. John Kotter's definition is offered as a reference point: a leader is someone who establishes direction by creating a vision, aligning people to carry out that vision through communication and the creation of coalitions of support, motivates and inspires people to overcome barriers to change whether political or resource-based, and achieves dynamic change.² Kotter also states that a manager works within given guidelines, budgets, and staffing, to produce expected results, and that both management and leadership are needed in a leader.

From an examination of over a dozen leadership development programs, all of which state that their purpose is to develop leadership, one may conclude that perhaps that is not their actual purpose. Many programs tout providing a self-assessment to facilitate participants' understanding of their strengths and areas to develop, exposure to leadership theories, discussions on topics of leadership, inspirational guest speakers, and mentoring.

There is no consistent assessment of whether these approaches actually result in leadership development. This does not mean that the programs are unworthy or valueless, but rather that an astute administrator needs to reflect on what the outcome of such program attendance may be before sending their early career librarian, mid-level manager or leadership team member off to a program. On the whole, attendance at a one-day, three-day, or even a week-long leadership development program will probably create a greater awareness of leadership in the participant. It would be unrealistic, however, to expect enduring change from a one-off experience, unless the participant is required to apply such awareness back home.

There are multiple venues in higher education which provide professional development opportunities, such as professional association sponsored conferences and content-area focused workshops. When seeking out leadership development most campus leaders are familiar with the dean's workshops sponsored by the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences or program's offered by Harvard University's Graduate School of Education through their Institutes for Higher Education. The latter offers programs for presidents, developing leaders through sessions referred to by their acronyms MDP, MLE, ILE, and several for academic librarians. In addition to these opportunities, for academic librarians there are other options. Sometimes academic

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administrators go to what is familiar and known without considering what is to be gained from the program besides a leadership development experience.

What is a Reasonable Expected Outcome?

Academic librarian attendance at a leadership development program may result in several reasonable outcomes that will have value to the chief academic officer. First, having a team member with a greater awareness of leadership means there is someone who understands what foundational components need to be in place to accomplish dynamic change. Second, the attendees may have been exposed to tools and resources through the workshop which can be applied at their institutions. Having assessed their strengths, leadership development participants may return more confident in their abilities and thus step up to accept further responsibilities, such as chairing a committee instead of simply serving as a member, or initiating a program rather than supporting one.

Almost universally, participants in library leadership development programs report feeling supported. This feeling comes first from their bosses seeing the value in sending them to a program. Second, participants return from the experience with a list of other developing leaders and the program content deliverers who form a resource network with whom they may consult. This network continues to provide value long after the workshop ends, and may not only help by providing a knowledge bank from which to solicit approaches to issues in common, but also new ideas to strengthen library services and keep them relevant to changing student needs. Many programs provide a listserv. Sometimes the listserv is just for the cohort and other times includes all past participants. Examples include: Leading Change Institute, formerly Frye, which provides two listservs -- one for the cohort year and another for all years together; ACRL/Harvard Leadership for Academic Librarians Institute has a listserv by cohort year; and the College Library Director Mentor Program, includes all past participants and mentors on the closed listserv.³

Consider the Structure of the Leadership Development Program

While the first kind of program mentioned is a one-off workshop, there are a variety of structures to academic librarian leadership development programs. Those that participants report as having the most enduring value are more than just a one-time face-to-face experience, although having some kind of in-person component is also perceived as valuable. Program structures range from two-to-three week immersive experiences at a retreat location to a one-year to three-year program with residency requirements and exchanges.

Those who attended immersive experiences reported that being away from their daily work and just focusing on leadership topics helped them absorb and reflect on how to improve their knowledge and practice. They bonded deeply with their cohorts. They came away refreshed and with a plan of action to implement upon their return to campus.

Programs that are for a year's duration include a mix of face-to-face and virtual meetings and discussions. Some include a mentor, site visits, and readings. Most include a one- to three-day seminar usually attached to a regional or national professional conference. These programs have been useful for mid-level managers who are deciding if they are ready to apply to leadership positions within their field, and therefore are helpful in succession planning. Programs targeted at new head librarians have also been helpful in providing support and wisdom, especially for areas that are not common to other leaders on campus, such as vendor relations, intricacies of copyright, and collection management.

There is an institution-based program at the Library of Congress that reassigns leadership development program participants for a four-month period three times over several years to work in areas at a level above their normal work assignment. While unionized faculty may preclude the ability to place faculty in such positions, participants of this program report it as being life-changing. A more manageable model,

if funds are available to support it, is offered by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in the Leadership Fellows Program. This program runs over two years and involves attendance at up to five-to-six national association conferences, three day site visits, week-long topic-based institutes at three different academic institutions, and one-on-one leadership coaching.⁴ ARL is not the only model, but is offered as an example of such programs.

Programs that required participants to create a plan and report back after implementation were also perceived to have enduring value to attendees. Plans could be personal, such as career action plans, or project based, such as something to implement upon return to campus applying leadership. If the leadership development program did not require the after implementation report, many participants created, but did not implement their plan. This was the case with the former Frye Institute, where there was no follow-up with participants to see if the required projects were actually implemented post-institute. On the other hand programs such as, HERS (Creating & Sustaining a Community of Women Leaders in Higher Education), required participants to create a career plan during the institute, and participants stated this gave them clarity about where they were headed in their career.⁵ As noted on the HERS web site, the program "has provided a toolkit that any woman aspiring to a leadership position would give anything to have."⁶ For other programs the report out could be a simple e-mail to the program directors on results or the more complex poster session presentation at a national conference that the ARL Leadership and Career Development program requires.

Program Curriculum

The curriculum of leadership development programs is worth considering when contemplating what learning outcome a participant may desire. Programs that have inspirational speakers and large participant size may not lend themselves to engaged active learning. On the other hand, such large group programs may provide exposure to

a wide variety of higher education leaders and sizes of institutions. This can be useful in helping an aspiring library leader understand the needs and thinking across campuses. Programs sponsored by the Council of Higher Education Management Association and the Higher Education Resource Service encompass this across-the-institution population of participants.

Some programs have small group breakout sessions for topical discussions, case study consideration, or to work through problem-solving exercises where what was read or heard about is applied, resulting in theoretical application of leadership concepts. The Harvard/ACRL Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians relies heavily upon the case study method with small group discussions enhancing larger group sessions. Other programs as mentioned require the creation and application of a project, which provides the participants with the opportunity to put their leadership learning into practice. The ARL Leadership and Career Development Program requires participants to conduct a research project during the two year fellowship program and present it as a poster session at an ARL meeting.

Many academic librarian leadership development programs use foundational readings by authors such as Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal on frame flipping, which is viewing a situation through a different perspective such as political, human resources, planning, or symbolically, or James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner's the five practices of exemplary leadership.⁷ Still others focus on leading change as part of transformational leadership development, and delve into works such as the aforementioned one by John P. Kotter. Some programs explore Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee's work on emotional intelligence and resonant leadership which posits that leaders who are attuned to followers will inspire their team to greater achievements while also taking care of themselves.⁸

When considering which leadership program would best develop a library leader, thinking about the theoretical

framework of the institute may facilitate a positive post-program result. For example, a head librarian who already exhibits emotional intelligence may profit more from a program which focuses on leading change. A new library leader who is unfamiliar with a variety of approaches to issues may benefit most from exposure to frame flipping. Participants who are unsure what makes someone a leader may find exemplary leadership practices most helpful as they work to create and acknowledge their own leadership potential. No academic librarian leadership program contains identical curriculum, so a careful consideration of the program and its components is warranted for the best possible outcome.

How to Evaluate Whether Leadership Has Been Developed

Many programs use the post-program evaluation as evidence that they met their learning outcomes for participants. Other programs survey participants during and after participation with a few engaging in longitudinal surveys several years after someone has gone through the institute. This type of evidence collection only speaks to participants' perception of their leadership development. Of course no one wants to waste time or money sending someone to a program, so knowing that past participants found it to be of value is reassuring. However, it just does not provide evidence that *leadership* was developed as a result of attending a particular program.

A few studies have been conducted focusing on the position participants had upon entering the program and what position they have several years after the program. These are mainly from early and mid-career targeted programs. They use this to provide evidence that programs created to develop leadership in middle-level managers for succession planning have been successful and that early career programs have helped to retain talent in the profession. Of course there may be many other factors that need to be correlated before a conclusion of direct cause and effect from participation in a

leadership development program may be made regarding career mobility, but it is a measurable action that participants have taken, unlike self-reported perceptions on surveys.

Perhaps the most meaningful evidence of leadership development would be differences in the behavior of the person sent to the program. If the provost notices changes, this reinforces the positive outcome perception and demonstration of leadership development and the value of that program. Besides observation, a chief academic officer could ask the librarian to keep a brief log or journal of what they learned during the program. Then for a year after participation, have the person note when an action was taken or a procedure or policy was completed and how they applied their increased leadership awareness, knowledge, and skills to that event. During the next performance review a discussion of the year's leadership development activities could be included, reinforcing the value the chief academic officer placed in sending his/her librarian to the institute. Without this information of cause and effect, the best understanding of leadership development may only be self and others' perceptions of the participant appearing more confident.

Where to Find Program Information

Savvy librarians will want to approach their boss with information about which leadership program they want to attend. This should include justification as to why this particular program will be helpful, and what outcomes as a result of attendance the provost may expect.

Most librarians have only heard of a few programs, perhaps by word-of-mouth or via their professional association. Information about where to find a few of the many program possibilities follows. These are not intended to be an endorsement of a particular organization or program, but rather to give a flavor of the diverse offerings available for consideration.

Starting with a review of the literature, there is a current review of programs in progress by Katherine

Skinner and Nick Krabbenhoef, "Training the 21st Century Library Leader: A Review of Library Leadership Training 1998-2013," which may be helpful and is available under a Creative Commons license at http://libraries.idaho.gov/files/Training_the_21st_Century_Library_Leader.pdf. An older review article written by Florence M. Mason and Louella V. Wetherbee in 2004, may also be of assistance.⁹

The American Library Association (ALA) keeps a list of leadership development resources including programs on its web site at <http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/ala-general-leadership-resources>. The Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of ALA, sponsors or provides information about leadership discussion groups, programs at conferences, and institutes, which may be discovered through searching their web site at <http://www.ala.org/acrl>.

The Association of Research Libraries lists several leadership development opportunities at <http://www.arl.org/leadership-recruitment/leadership-development>.

Other higher education organizations, such as EDUCAUSE, sponsor a leadership development program (<http://www.educause.edu/events/leadership-program>).

Library specific organizations like the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions have teamed with a nonprofit library cooperative, OCLC, to provide an early career development program <https://oclc.org/about/fellows.en.html>.

Some programs are sponsored by a specific institution, although open to participants from across

the country and the globe. These include the UCLA Senior Fellows Program (<http://luskin.ucla.edu/content/senior-fellows-program>), the aforementioned Harvard University programs, and University of Minnesota's Minnesota Institute for Early Career Librarians for librarians from underrepresented groups (<https://www.lib.umn.edu/sed/institute>).

Give Your Librarian A Gift

Although the direct value of leadership development from participation in a program is dependent upon librarians' ability to apply the concepts explored in their daily practice, it is overwhelmingly clear that those who attended programs found the experience transformational. Whether from an immersive program or a workshop, representative testimonials are like these from participants in a new college library director program: "No program has helped me more in my continued professional development as a college library director;"¹⁰ and "The great advice and wonderful friendships that grew out of my new director's experience have stayed with me throughout my career."¹¹

Perhaps the value of a leadership development program is most powerfully expressed by Lisa Roberts when she said, "This program is a gift -- accept it!"¹² Provosts who send their librarians for leadership development not only give a gift of learning, but also receive a gift of a librarian leader who is more aware, knowledgeable, and ready to contribute to the campus.--heroldi@hawaii.edu

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