Developing Excellence
in Leadership and Followership:

A Bibliographic Essay

by *Janet L. Flowers*

Albert Einstein reportedly said, "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."[1] Today's challenges require more from each of us, whether as leaders or followers. As Bennis and Nanus pointed out in *Leaders*, "The truth is that leadership opportunities are plentiful and within the reach of most people."[2]

All organizations that intend to thrive, including libraries, must deal with changing environmental conditions requiring a higher level of leadership and followership skills. A host of external forces affect libraries, from the information explosion (including the Internet) to other technological innovations. Competition from other information providers is increasing. Funding agencies are demanding greater accountability. All of these forces have led to increased demands upon libraries and library workers for additional services, skills, and expertise.

Many libraries have responded to these demands by placing greater emphasis upon customer service and by downsizing operations. These changes have resulted in flatter organizations with increasing responsibilities for both support and professional staff.

The management literature is filled with articles and books on all aspects of management and leadership. One can find many definitions of leadership in them; how-ever, these definitions usually list attributes rather than provide a true definition. For this essay, the following definition of leadership is used: "The leader is someone who can attract and retain followers."[3] By extension, a follower is defined as someone who is influenced by a leader. Virtually anyone who is willing and able to develop the skills that would attract others to him or herself can become a leader. Furthermore, the ability to follow, or "followership," is important to the health of an organization. Followers play important roles in organizations, roles that involve the use of leadership skills.

Libraries and library workers, therefore, face two major challenges related to leadership and followership. First, library leaders must tap the staff's vast potential to deal with the various forces affecting libraries. The entire institution benefits when it uses the staff's intelligence, knowledge of operations, and understanding of customer needs. "If there is anything that the nineties have already taught us, it's that most people are both leaders and followers. The roles of leaders and followers are no longer as clearly demarcated as they used to be."[4] One needs only to think quickly about one's acquaintances to realize that the library clerical worker also might be the President of the local PTA! Or a Library Technical Assistant might be a noted poet. It is fortunate that these creative and organizational capabilities are available in libraries given the abundance of issues and tasks crying for leadership attention. It is apparent that these staff members and others express themselves more fully in other areas of their lives outside the library. Could it be because of lack of opportunity and/or an unsupportive work environment in the library? Administrators can encourage staff to develop leadership and followership skills by encouraging them to take advantage of training opportunities, and by making such opportunities available.

Second, all library workers need to

Library workers know that, although the formal mechanisms for widespread leadership are in place in an organization, much leadership takes place informally.

develop leadership and followership skills that will enable them to participate actively in making organizational improvements. Those who study human behavior have noted that most individuals do not use their full creative or cognitive abilities. However, this does not have to be the case. Louis Ravenhill in *The Last Days Newsletter* tells about a group of tourists who were visiting a picturesque village. As they walked by an old man sitting by a fence, one tourist asked in a patronizing way, "Were any great men born in this village?" The old man replied, "Nope, only babies."[5] The fact that experts now commonly accept the fact that leaders and followers can be trained is cause for optimism.

Robert Kelley, in his book on followership, contends that "Leaders are partners who simply do different things than followers. But both add value and both contributions are necessary for success. But one is not more important than the other."[6] This has become increasingly evident in the library environment as we rely ever more upon the paraprofessional staff to run the daily operations and the systems staff to provide technical support. Paraprofessional staff form a large percentage of our work force in libraries and perform many vital services. As Larry Oberg reports, "Today, few areas of library work are off limits to paraprofessionals, and they perform most of our traditional organizational and archival tasks."[7]

Library workers know that, although the formal mechanisms for widespread leadership are in place in an organization, much leadership takes place informally. Everyone is familiar with the formal organizational charts and the informal based-on-personal-experience with "who gets it done" channels used by those knowledgeable about the local system. "In reality, followership and leadership are two separate concepts, two separate roles. They are complementary, not competitive, paths to organizational contribution. Neither role corners the market on brains, motivation, talent, nor action. Either role can result in an award-winning performance or a flop."[8]

Characteristics of Excellence

Given the increased demands upon libraries and workers, award-winning performances are required. As those who watch the Olympic competitions know, certain factors clearly lead to excellence in athletic accomplishments.

The overriding one is the carefully defined and usually specific goals established by the athlete when preparing for the event. This theme of clearly defined goals or mission statements is found in much of the management literature. Leaders *and* followers must consciously evaluate and establish their personal and work-related goals to achieve excellence in either role.

Warren Bennis and Brent Nanus, in their ground-breaking work on leadership, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*, identified four areas of competency in great leaders. The first is attention through vision, which involves creating a *focus* for the followers. The second is meaning through *communication*, which means that leaders invent the images and models through which this vision is to be reached. The third is *trust*, an essential ingredient in any leadership role. Followers must know the positions (or more importantly the values) of leaders and be able to predict their behavior to feel comfortable in following that leader. Finally, they point out that leaders must have *positive self-regard*, which "consists of three major components: knowledge of one's strengths, the capacity to nurture and develop those strengths, and the ability to discern the fit between one's strengths and weaknesses and the organization's needs."[9]

In *The Power of Followership: How to Create Leaders People Want to Follow and Followerers Who Lead Themselves*, Robert Kelley identified one primary characteristic of followers who exhibit excellence. "What separates an exemplary follower from someone who does really good work is the notion of 'value added.' ... It means making a positive difference in accelerating the organization toward its goals."[10] A good example is the difference between a library worker who continues to perform the same, perhaps no longer necessary, service. The excellent follower, after checking with library customers, would propose a more relevant service. Exemplary followers are focused and committed. They learn as much as they can about the organization and its customers. They ask questions about how their work fits into that of their unit, their department, their division, and the library as a whole. They check with their supervisor to see how their work contributes to his or her work and success. They develop competence in tasks critical to the organization's success, such as expertise in bibliographic control or

computer skills. They show initiative by learning new skills, by taking on new responsibilities, and by sharing new ideas that would enhance the organization's effectiveness.

Ways to Acquire Excellent Leadership and Followership Skills

As shown in the preceding descriptions, acquiring excellence involves commitment, energy, and a dedication to learning and growing. Whatever our current roles and circumstances, we must strive toward development of those skills that will enable us to do the best job possible. There are three sources of information to help us reach our potential.

First, we should look to those staff members who have made the transition from "follower" to "leader" and learn from them. This transition could result from a change in position or even just a change in attitude and growth in understanding of how to make a different contribution. From the examples cited above, obviously those individuals making these transitions accept the challenge of skills development and risk taking. We can learn from those who have been in one role previously to gain perspective on "the view from the other side" and to help others who wish to make the transition. As Joan Bechtel states in her article, "Leadership Lessons Learned from Managing and Being Managed,"

> The experience of 'being managed' and subsequently of 'managing' have led me to the conviction that effective leadership is best understood as a service role or occupation .... The leader's role is to nurture cooperative relationships among the workers while making sure they have what they need to enable them to do their jobs most effectively. The major focus is neither on the leader, nor on the lead [sic], but rather on the mission of the library.[11]

Shelley Rogers also notes in "Out of Theory and Into Practice: Supervising Library Employees," that "... management is an acquired art — and one that usually improves with practice."[12]

Secondly, we should consider membership and active participation in the Library Administration and Management Section of the North Carolina Library Association (LAMS/NCLA), whose

mission is to provide "an organizational framework for improving the practice of administration in libraries and for identifying and fostering administrative skill."[13] LAMS/NCLA is not just for administrators and managers; it is for all library workers who want to improve their management skills. The Section's recent workshops targeted a broader audience. In 1992, LAMS/NCLA sponsored the workshop: "Empowerment: Tapping Everyone's Creative Potential" and, in 1994, "Out of Bureaucracy into Leadership: Getting Things Done Whether or Not You are in Charge." Both workshop themes recognize that leadership occurs at all levels in an organization and the section has a responsibility to provide training for all interested staff.

Third and finally, all can benefit from wise use of the best general management literature to adapt and then adopt the most relevant parts for practice in their own situations. From the multitude of choices, this essay focuses upon three areas to develop expertise in leadership or followership: self-assessment, influential skills, and the empowerment process.

Skills Development: Self-Assessment

To improve as a leader or follower, one must first examine oneself to develop a greater self understanding. Gilbert Brim's book, *Ambition: How We Manage Success and Failure Throughout Our Lives*, is an excellent starting place for a general understanding of our common striving, struggling, and resolution of skills issues throughout our lives. As Brim states,

> We have a basic drive for growth and mastery that is expressed in a variety of specific ambitions. This is a universal characteristic of humans …. We prefer to live in a way that keeps us at a level of 'just manageable difficulties.' We want to be challenged. If life is too hard, we try to ease back; but, if life is too easy, we try to create greater challenges and put more demands upon ourselves.[14]

A good starting point is to examine the successes and failures in our own lives and how we have adapted to them.

As Larry Holman points out in *11 Lessons in Self-Leadership*, "Moving to-

ward positive expectations and beliefs about ourselves and our work — and, by extension, about our teammates and their work — is a process … The first step toward raising your expectations is the same first step needed to form many of the habits of success: **Determine what you want to do.**"[15]

Stephen Covey, one of the most eloquent writers on excellence in leadership, urges readers to move from management of their time around priorities to management based upon principles at four levels: personal, interpersonal, managerial, and organizational. Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, also outlines habits, which, if internalized, can lead to greater effectiveness as a person and an employee. He believes that "from [the seven habits] an individual can effectively solve problems, maximize opportunities, and continually learn and integrate other principles in an upward spiral of growth."[16]

An additional approach would be to take continuing education courses. Experiences such as those described by Kathryn Deiss in her article, "Paying Attention in Greensboro: The Executive Women Workshop Experience," are good indicators of a staff member's willingness to grow and change with the organization. Deiss attended a workshop at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina, to strengthen her self awareness and establish goals for her personal life and career. She reported that

> Part of this [program] asked that we develop a few goals (professional, personal, community, or family-oriented) and that we establish a specific plan to accomplish one of the goals … It forced us to think about what it would take, how long it would take, and about how we would recognize completion."[17]

Opportunities like these challenge us to re-examine our own values, beliefs, and goals and put them into the perspectives not just of our work but of our lives.

Skills Development: Ability to Influence Others

Stephen Covey's provocative work, *Principle-Centered Leadership*, includes a chapter entitled "Thirty Methods of Influence." He submits that there are three basic categories of influence: 1) to model by example (others *see*); 2) to build caring relationships (others *feel*);

… with flatter organizations, fewer of us will be in charge, but we will still need to know how to influence change.

and 3) to mentor by instruction (others *hear*)."[18] He clearly believes that we influence by example, through relationships, and by teaching.

Denis Waitley explains how individuals at every level in organizations must reinvent themselves to maximize their potential. According to Waitley, effective self-leadership has become essential as we live in an increasingly knowledge-based world with rapid societal change. He emphasizes individual responsibility. "… those who are aware that they have the power of decision — that they exert control over what happens to them — can choose more effective responses to change and to life's offerings …. The 'Why Me?' so often heard today should be 'Try me!'"[19]

For those who consider themselves followers, Geoffrey Bellman's book, *Getting Things Done When You are Not in Charge*, provides valuable insights. Bellman assumes that, with flatter organizations, fewer of us will be in charge, but we will still need to know how to influence change. He also presupposes that even those in charge have limited power. As Bellman says, "If you are at all like most of the other able people I work with in the middle of large organizations, you are leading a lot less than you proclaim you want to, and less than you know how to. You have the potential to do much more for your organization and yourself than you are doing now. You frequently hold yourself back from action."[20] Bellman's book offers advice on getting other staff to support your cause, obtaining greater

support from management in initiating change, and dealing with organizational politics and power. Furthermore, it points out ways to increase your job performance and personal satisfaction at work.

Skills Development: Empowerment Process

Much has been written about team-based management, TQM, and other approaches involving greater staff participation in the decision-making processes in organizations, including libraries. However, while some organizations report great success with these approaches, others are abandoning or modifying them for their local situations. Both leaders and followers have very important roles to play in the successful empowerment process.

At its heart, empowerment involves letting go of control by the management of an organization. This letting go, however, is not an anarchy. It is the development of a process of mutual partnership to meet an organization's goals. We can learn a lesson regarding empowerment issues within organizations from sandhill cranes. These birds, which fly great distances across continents, apparently have three remarkable qualities. They rotate leadership. No one bird stays out in front all of the time. They choose leaders who can handle turbulence. Finally, while one bird is leading, the rest are honking affirmations of the others.

From organizations still entrenched in hierarchy to those on the cutting edge of TQM, there are some fundamental skills that must be developed and used to be successful. The first is the building and maintenance of trust and respect between the leaders and followers or team members. Often, how-

... empowerment involves letting go of control by the management of an organization. This ... is not an anarchy. It is the development of a process of mutual partnership to meet an organization's goals.

ever, even the most well-meaning leader will revert to old-style management by instruction rather than by results, thus undermining the follower's opportunity to expand his skills. *The Leadership Trapeze* by Wilson, George, and Wellins aptly describes the way that managers and supervisors often feel during these times of transition and how they must dare to let go. "The leadership transition isn't merely a matter of numbers and bottom-line results. It's also about profound personal change. It involves much more than getting skills and competencies; leaders must learn how to think and feel differently."[21] Leaders must learn to move from being a commander to a coach. This book diagnoses the stages that teams, team leaders, and team members (read followers) go through in the transition from a traditional to being a team-based environment.

Second is the development of a win/win attitude. Covey describes this as "a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions. It's not your way or my way; it's a *better* way, a higher way."[22] In his book, *Leadership is an Art*, Max DePree suggests that followership and leadership involve intimacy and personal covenants that people make with each other at work. Harking back

to the original meaning of the word 'leader,' he believes that leaders don't inflict pain; they bear pain."[23] Neal Whitten, in *Becoming an Indispensable Employee in a Disposable World*, advocates that individuals use the following measures to increase their empowerment:

1. Understand your job
2. Take more responsibility for technical and business decisions
3. Take ownership of your own personal development and career .... Believe that you can make a difference.[24]

Third is the creation and maintenance of a supportive work environment in which risk taking and initiative are encouraged and rewarded. As Covey proposes, "Helpful organizational systems greatly facilitate the fulfillment of win/win agreements. Their systems might include strategic planning, company structure, job design, communication, budgeting, compensation, information, recruitment, selection, placement, training, and development. In a helpful system, people receive information about their performance directly, and they use it to make necessary corrections."[25]

Future Challenges: Incorporation of New Skills into Personal and Organizational Life

Given volatile internal and external environments, library managers must recruit new staff who exhibit the willingness to change and grow to help institutions move successfully into the next century. As managers look for these individuals, credentials become less of a predictor of success. Factors such as the individual's attitudes toward change and personal growth can be more revealing barometers of success.

Furthermore, as library workers move toward greater participation in leadership, current leaders must find ways to change their assumptions and paradigms about their roles, the roles of others, and the organization itself. In *The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practive of the Learning Organization*, Peter Senge has provided excellent context for organizations that must constantly

> ### *... the work of leaders and followers is inextricably intertwined.*

assimilate new paradigms to survive. He explains that "Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing the 'structures' that underlie complex situations, and for discerning high from lower leverage change .... All [of the disciplines in his book] are concerned with a shift of mind from seeing parts to seeing wholes, from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in shaping their reality, from reacting to the present to creating the future."[26]

Managers and supervisors also must develop new habits to replace the old ones used in their relationships with their followers. William Byham has exposed the "starts and fits" that accompany changes when an organization is moving toward empowerment. His book, *Heroz*, tells the story of factory workers making arrows for knights to use in their fights with dragons. It illustrates how to go about either distributing power more evenly among staff or taking more proactive roles as a worker not in charge. Among many tips in this fable are the following three

rules for how leaders should behave toward others:

1. Maintain or enhance self-esteem.
2. Listen and respond with empathy
3. Ask for help and encourage involvement."[27]

Followers have responsibilities to help their organizations in more vital ways. Kelley advises followers to develop two critical skills: independent critical thinking and active engagement.[28] The exemplary follower thinks for himself or herself separately from the leader or other members of the group. He or she also takes the initiative in meeting the challenges despite other staff's level of followership or the bureaucratic restraints. Kelley sees followers as providing additional value through becoming more goal-focused and finding ways to make contributions to the organization. These individuals develop their expertise in areas beyond the scope of their present assignment, volunteer to take on new duties, and champion creative ideas. As Kelley often declares, followers can play absolutely vital and transforming roles in their organizations. To do so, they must choose to look beyond the narrow perspective of their own tasks and become actively involved in the success of their organization.

Conclusion

This essay has posited three points: (1) leadership and followership roles are equally important; (2) staff can develop skills in these areas; and (3) the work of leaders and followers is so closely related that they are mutually dependent upon one another to achieve the excellence needed in our organizations today.

Both leadership and followership are valuable contributions to our organizations; library workers can be influential while reaching their own goals, those of others, and those of the organization. Most individuals can develop the skills needed for excellence in leadership and followership by paying particular attention to the experiences of those who are in followership roles because these individuals have unique perspectives to share. Another approach is participation in organizations, such as

LAMS/NCLA, and attendance at workshops to learn from others who are facing the same skills issues. A third approach is through attentive reading and consideration of the best in the current general management literature and how it might be applied to library workers and library environments. Besides the wide variety of resources cited in this essay, new ones are produced daily, including ideas on listservs such as *LIBADMIN* and *LIBPER-L*. Continuous learning is essential for excellence in both leadership and followership.

Finally, the work of leaders and followers is inextricably intertwined. Both roles require many of the same skills. Indeed, most of us move back and forth between the two roles depending upon the circumstance. Followership is anything but a passive role. At the level of excellence, it is a very active one, which greatly supports the efforts of the designated leader. Both roles are essential and interdependent. Ultimately, the level of skill, motivation, and enthusiasm we each bring to our organizations will determine both our own personal and the organization's success. Given the high quality of library workers in this state and the willingness of many to stretch to reach excellence in leadership and followership, North Carolina libraries are in good hands.

References

[1] Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 42.

[2] Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 222.

[3] Robert Kelley, *The Power of Followership: How to Create Leaders People Want to Follow and Followers Who Lead Themselves* (New York: Doubleday Currency, 1992), 46.

[4] *Ibid*, 9.

[5] John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993): Introduction, unnumbered.

[6] *Ibid*, 227.

[7] Larry R. Oberg, "The Emergence of the Paraprofessional in Academic Libraries: Perceptions and Realities," *College and Research Libraries* 53 (March 1991): 100.

[8] Kelley, 41.

[9] *Ibid*, 61-62.

[10] Kelley, 130-131.

[11] Joan M. Bechtel, "Leadership Lessons Learned from Managing and Being Managed," *Journal of Academic*

Librarianship 18 (January 1993), 357.

12 Shelley L. Rogers, "Out of Theory and Into Practice: Supervising Library Employees," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 19 (July 1993): 154.

13 North Carolina Library Association. Library Administration and Management Section, *Bylaws* 2 (January 1994): 17.

14 Gilbert Brim, *Ambition: How We Manage Success and Failure Throughout Our Lives* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 3.

15 Larry Holman, *11 Lessons in Self-Leadership: Insights for Personal & Professional Success* (Lexington, Kentucky: A Lessons in Leadership Book, 1995), 254.

16 Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, 52.

17 Kathryn J. Deiss, "Paying Attention in Greensboro: The Executive Women Workshop Experience," *Library Administration and Management 7* (Fall 1993): 235.

18 Stephen R. Covey, *Principle-Centered Leadership* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), 119.

19 Denis Waitley, *Empires of the Mind: Lessons to Lead and Succeed in a Knowlege-Based World* (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1995), 20.

20 Geoffrey M. Bellman, *Getting Things Done When You Are Not In Charge* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 16.

21 Jeanne M. Wilson, Jill George, and Richard S. Wellins, with William C. Byham, *Leadership Trapeze: Strategies for Leadership in Team-Based Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 38.

22 Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, 207.

23 Kelley, 35.

24 Neal Whitten, *Becoming an Indispensable Employee in a Disposable World* (Amsterdam: Pfeiffer & Company, 1995), 68-69.

25 Covey, 195.

26 Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday Currency, 1990), 69.

27 William C. Byham and Jeff Cox, *Heroz: Empower Yourself, Your Coworkers, Your Company* (New York: Harmony Books, 1994), 68.

28 Kelley, 125-26.

To subscribe to *LIBADMIN*, send the following electronic mail message to: **listproc@list.ab.umd.edu**
subcribe LIBADMIN Your-First-Name-and-Last-Name

To subscribe to *LIBER-L*, send the following electronic mail message to: **listsserv@ksuvm.ksu.edu**
subscribe LIBPER-L Your-First-Name-and-Last-Name

Instructions for the Preparation of Manuscripts
for *North Carolina Libraries*

1. **North Carolina Libraries** seeks to publish articles, materials reviews, and bibliographies of professional interest to librarians in North Carolina. Articles need not be of a scholarly nature, but they should address professional concerns of the library community in the state.

2. Manuscripts should be directed to Frances B. Bradburn, Editor, **North Carolina Libraries**, Media and Technology, State Dept. of Public Instruction, 301 N. Wilmington St., Raleigh, NC 27601-2825.

3. Manuscripts should be submitted in triplicate on plain white paper measuring 8 1/2" x 11" and on computer disk.

4. Manuscripts must be double-spaced (text, references, and footnotes). Macintosh computer is the computer used by **North Carolina Libraries**. Computer disks formatted for other computers must contain a file of the document in original format and a file in ASCII. Please consult editor for further information.

5. The name, position, and professional address of the author should appear in the bottom left-hand corner of a separate title page. The author's name should not appear anywhere else on the document.

6. Each page should be numbered consecutively at the top right-hand corner and carry the title (abbreviated if necessary) at the upper left-hand corner.

7. Footnotes should appear at the end of the manuscript. The editors will refer to The Chicago Manual of Style, 14th edition. The basic forms for books and journals are as follows:

   Keyes Metcalf, Planning Academic and Research Library Buildings (New York: McGraw, 1965), 416.
   Susan K. Martin, "The Care and Feeding of the MARC Format," American Libraries 10 (September 1970): 498.

8. Photographs will be accepted for consideration but cannot be returned.

9. Upon receipt, a manuscript will be acknowledged by the editor. Following review of the manuscript by the editor and at least two jurors, a decision will be communicated to the writer. A definite publication date cannot be given since any incoming manuscript will be added to a manuscript bank from which articles are selected for each issue.

10. **North Carolina Libraries** holds the copyright for all accepted manuscripts. The journal is available both in print and electronically over the North Carolina Information Network.

11. Issue deadlines are February 10, May 10, August 10, and November 10. Manuscripts for a particular issue must be submitted at least 2 months before the issue deadline.