

From the President

Ross Holt, President

Ebbing Men Most Often Do So Near the Bottom Run

One of the finest bits of dialogue in any play occurs in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, when evil Antonio seduces lackadaisical Sebastian into attempting to kill the king. Sebastian, the king's brother, would claim the throne and Antonio would reap the benefits of royal friendship.

Antonio must pull off three verbal feats at once: he must make Sebastian aware of the opportunity that has presented itself; he must secure Sebastian's cooperation; and he must leave himself an out if Sebastian balks. Although his aims are nefarious, his selling of the plot to Sebastian is a masterpiece of logic, intimation, and metaphor.

After laying out the facts of their situation, Antonio hints at an opportunity and asks Sebastian if he will entertain a suggestion.

"I am standing water," Sebastian replies.

"I'll teach you to flow," Antonio offers.

"Do so," Sebastian agrees. "To ebb hereditary sloth instructs me."

"... Ebbing men, indeed, most often do so near the bottom run by their own fear or sloth," Antonio observes.

However evil his intentions, Antonio's observation is valid. Inertia spawned by fear or sloth can keep someone from reaching his or her potential; so too can it keep an organization in the mire.

That's not to say that people and organizations don't — or shouldn't — experience an ebb and flow; sometimes a bit of introspection is necessary. During the 1990s, NCLA spent a lot of time looking inward; we continued our regular activities and initiated new ones, such as the Leadership Institute, but we also dealt with an assortment of procedural matters that concerned the health of the organization. To resolve many of these problems it was necessary to see to our organizational structure, policies, and procedures. It led us to ask questions with an internal focus: how can we make our organization more efficient; how can we alter our structure to make membership more attractive; what's our vision for the future; how do we pay for our activities.

Necessary questions to be sure, but I submit that we need to proceed from a grander question: what does/should/can NCLA accomplish for North Carolina's libraries and librarians? Then we should wrap all the other questions around that core. We know what we accomplish for librarians — we offer opportunities aplenty — and those accomplishments ultimately benefit our libraries. But I'm not sure we're complete as an organization until we explore our role at a strategic level on behalf of the libraries of our state. That's why I'm so proud of the lobbying effort upon which we are embarking. The more we build on our limited, but surprising, success of 2002, the more influence we wield on behalf of all types of libraries. Lobbying is not the only avenue of influence, but it's one that is clearly indicated right now.

We must apply the same strategic logic to our money. While we must take care not to be profligate, we also must take care not to be parsimonious. Recently I've heard assertions about various NCLA activities suggesting that when an activity doesn't cover its costs, we should eliminate it or just not undertake it at all. I'd rather look at our expenditures as investments both in NCLA and in libraries at large. So the primary question should not be whether the program or project covers costs, but whether it serves a cost-effective purpose.

If we let the ebbing part of normal ebb and flow consume us, we will most assuredly ebb near the bottom run.

Now is the time for NCLA to flow.