

In Step with Library Leaders

Practice Part 1: Understanding Your Leadership Style

Welcome back! Thank you so much for your feedback, comments, and kind words. I had two questions from the first column: “How do you know if you should work in libraries when you may think you are settling for work that just seems interesting or easy?” The second question is, “How do you continue to move forward when you just feel stuck?”

There are always a few lucky ones who know from a very young age, or before college, exactly what they want to do in life and how to become it. For most of us, life changes, and we roll with it; sometimes, it can get a little off course, but we recreate ourselves and keep going. Change is difficult because it pushes you to do more to grow. To give some insight into answering the first question, there is nothing wrong with being interesting or easy. Ask yourself, do you enjoy what you are doing? Don't worry about what others think. It may be difficult to answer because of peer pressure, but also because librarianship can be vague. There are so many places to land, so many types of libraries to work in, different types of positions to secure, and a myriad of things to do. We have become more sophisticated with our approach to librarianship, and it gives us meaning to do this work.

I tell everyone that it is sometimes difficult to be true to yourself. Once I found out about library school and the types of librarians that I could choose to be during school and training, I knew that I could not be a cataloger. There is nothing wrong with becoming a cataloger. I had to ask myself, am I looking at this because it pays more? It seemed safe, but you need this type of wizardry to create records and find a place for the books! I felt that I was not smart enough and did not have enough patience or even discipline to do that job well, as intended. I decided that I was not wasting anyone's time when I could take something else. So, I decided that I had to look at all types of positions and departments. It was easy at first because I was already volunteering in

a large regional public library in the children's room and working in a new community college library that needed a director. Past jobs were department heads and leaders of units in non-library companies and roles, so after working and visiting different types of libraries and interviewing everyone there, I knew that I was going the academic route.

Look at your background and then journal what it is you really like to do and take some time to contemplate where your joy comes from. Make lists. If you like children, then a public library or even a school or media position may call you. Determine the skills you need, then visit and volunteer at those places. If you don't like the noise or the quick change of activities, decide that particular role may not be for you, and it will be ok. While you journal, you may also want to visit other employment agencies that test you to see what other things you may be interested in doing. And if you start and don't like the work after six months, no one will tell you that you must stay. But you must put in the work to go to the next level, step, or job to find your career. Look deeply into what you enjoy. If you are interested in science, you could also investigate special libraries in hospitals or industries that support healthcare, etc. I went to library school with someone who loved wrestling, and off he went to be a librarian for one of those businesses. Like writing and news media? They have libraries there, too. Sports, no problem! Now, to try to determine if you are stuck, you have to do pretty much the same. Ask yourself questions; research new opportunities. What would you love to be doing to become unstuck?

So, let's talk about leadership and some of the types of styles there are. Leaders are visionary. They think of ways to steer and forecast the future for the good of those who use their resources wisely. Among the leadership styles that are available, I will mention Transformational leadership, Servant leadership, Participative leadership, Achievement-Oriented leadership, and Coaching.

“Transformational leadership is the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower. This type of leader is attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential” (Northouse, 2022, p. 186).

Librarians think, “How do we not become obsolete with all of the competition out here?” I remember a friend with two small children between the ages of 3 and 5 years old. They used to love to go to the “library” called Barnes & Noble. She argued with them all the time that it was not a library. I used to ask her why not? We know it’s a store, but all they see are the books, counters, people sitting down reading, their children’s play area, etc. All of which may have changed the way we look at the library’s new architecture. You see that type of transformation in many businesses that keep moving forward and understand how to evolve. Leadership is the same in the library. When she was tapped to join a committee on new construction spaces in her public library, she could see the vision of what the new one could be based on retail experiences and the joy her children felt while visiting Barnes & Noble. User experience data informed library service and space improvements, leading to more enjoyable experiences in several departments and eventually better funding.

Let’s discuss a few more leadership styles as defined by Northouse (2022). I will start with my own style. I have a willingness to help people from start to finish and anywhere in between. I want everyone to be successful together. I am a people person identified by Myers-Briggs, which categorizes individuals based on their preferences in four dimensions: I love social interactions and prefer engaging with others, but I am not the life of the party, choosing to be the dependable worker bee. I focus on information that is practical and use logic in decision-making, valuing everyone’s input. While I prefer structure and organization while working toward goals, I want everyone to walk away with something from the process, which makes me a servant leader. There is lots of coaching and training in this style.

“...**Servant Leadership** is an approach focusing on leadership from the point of view of leaders and their behaviors. Servant leadership emphasizes

that leaders be attentive to the concerns of their followers, empathize with them, and nurture them. Servant leadership puts followers first, empowers them, and helps them develop their full personal capacities” (Northouse, 2022, p.253).

Now, depending on the time you have for project management, for resources, strategic goals, and library planning, or creating policies where there is team buy-in that have a direct impact on what the group wants to accomplish, Participative leadership may be your leadership style. These are usually Reference librarians, Instruction liaisons, and Outreach team members. It takes into consideration the entire group developing the next steps. This leader may have to step in to ensure that the project does not stall while trying to get everyone on board with the decision-making.

“Participative leadership...consists of inviting followers to share in the decision-making. A participative leader consults with followers, obtains their ideas and opinions, and integrates their suggestions into the decisions about how the group organization will proceed. This particular leadership style may also result in increased group performance through member participation and dedication to shared group goals” (Northouse, 2022, pp. 135-136).

For a leader who wants to really ramp up success as it relates to innovation, ideas that support assessment, continuous quality improvement, stretch goals that are over and above meeting expectations, identifying and moving high-potential employees and library workers to pursue leadership development opportunities to enhance their careers, Achievement-Oriented Leadership may be your type. These may be technical positions, working in new areas such as E-Sports, data or digitization, Makerspaces, and any area where there is a need to be forward-thinking, to modernize and improve resources and services through creativity in the library. This could be you!

Achievement-Oriented Leadership is “...characterized by a leader who challenges followers to perform work at the highest level possible. This leader establishes a high standard of excellence for followers and seeks continuous improvement. In addition to bringing significant expectations

for followers, achievement-oriented leaders show a high degree of confidence that followers are capable of establishing and accomplishing challenging goals” (Northouse, 2022, p.136).

When you are working through what you need to do or are working toward what you think you are really ready to do, this model slows down everything going on around you so that you can receive the support and time that you need to determine if you are on the right path. You learn new skills, have time to discuss questions and goals, and build employee confidence to grow your independence, which supports you during the discovery process.

Coaching (high directive-high supportive style)

“The leader focuses communication on both achieving goals and meeting followers’ socioemotional needs. The coaching style requires that leaders involve themselves with followers by encouraging and soliciting follower input. However, coaching is an extension of S1 [situational leadership] in that it still requires that the leader make the final decision on what and how of goal accomplishment” (Northouse, 2022, p. 110).

These are just a few types of leadership examples and strategies. Please keep in mind that in the library, there may be several different departments, with a leader in each one of them. Eventually, we get back to where we are supposed to be on this journey, and I only hope you have time to enjoy this next step. Spend time journaling what you like about what you do, and what you don’t. Research how to make it better. Ask users what they would like to see next. Think of a stretch goal that would make you feel proud of what you are doing. If you have 5-10 minutes each day, please continue reading about leadership and practicing what you could do differently. The best advice I can give you is to find someone whom you admire and focus on learning what they did to get there. Ask questions! Visit other types of libraries. It may make all the difference for you in librarianship. Was this dialogue helpful? What other suggestions would you try and please feel free to share with the QR code. Thanks!



QR Code: Article Evaluation Survey

References

Northouse, P. G. (2022). Leadership, theory and practice (9th Edition). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Author Notes

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