

LAMS Letters

A Newsletter of NCLA's
Library Administration & Management (LAMS) Section

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FROM the CHAIR:

By Laurence Gavin



North Carolina
Library Association

One of the staff training workshops I conduct on developing job and career programs begins with a Power Point slide showing the golden ratio spiral with the word "Why" at the center of the spiral. It is taken from a recommended youtube video I watched before attending the 2012 Leadership Institute called How Great Leaders Inspire Action. In the video, Simon Sinek demonstrates a "simple but powerful message about inspirational leadership". For libraries and librarians the answer to the why of it is that we believe people should have valid, accurate and unbiased access to information. The product we provide, or the what, is excellent customer service and part of the how is accomplished through continual staff training and new experiences. In this issue, Cabarrus County Public Library Director Dana Eure and Cumberland County Public Library Branch Manager Meg Smith explain their views on the benefits of training and creating new experiences through involvement in professional organizations.

Tell us what you think! Take our survey on the last page!



Embracing the Concept of TEAM: Transferring Newbery Committee Leadership Experience

By Meg Smith

When we strengthen our leadership skills by serving on professional committees at the state or national level, we provide better service to our libraries and also steer our own professional development. I experienced the benefits of library committee work firsthand as I served on the 2014 Newbery Medal Selection Committee. The Newbery Medal is the oldest children's book award in the world and is given each year to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children. The Medal is awarded by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association. My service on the Newbery Committee provided me with advanced skills in leadership and team-building, skills that I now apply to my work as a branch manager with the Cumberland County Public Library & Information Center. I have learned there is so much value to leadership within the word team.

T = Take Advantage –As leaders and managers, we often receive additional projects that require a shift in our responsibilities, just as serving on the Newbery Committee required me to adjust my priorities. We need to take advantage of the skills and assets of our co-workers and supervisees to ensure we are maximizing our collective work efforts. This allows our supervisees the opportunity to take ownership of projects and to take responsibility for the direction of tasks. We must utilize staffers' skills and strengths and delegate applicable work that will allow us the time necessary to focus on our own specialized projects.

E= Embrace Change – The Newbery Committee experience challenged me to examine my preconceived notions and to gain skills in adapting to change. As managers and leaders we need to examine our own assumptions and embrace these values. If we find ourselves struggling with change, we must consider what factors or fears are inhibiting us from moving forward. We need to examine all changes to ensure the best intended outcome, but overall, we must remember as managers that we don't want to remain stagnant or complacent. Change is synonymous with growth.

A = Actively Listen – As a Newbery Committee member, it is required that we actively listen to the comments of our Chair and our fellow committee members to ensure we participate in fruitful discussion. This skill is critical in our leadership positions as we must take the time to stop and actively listen to our supervisees. This is a requirement if we are to best assess any problem or complex situation. If our minds are already thinking of our response before the person communicating has finished his/her sentence, we are not actively listening; we must fully address the question, comment, or concern at hand instead of focusing on our own immediate response.

M = Maximize the experience –As a manager, we need to maximize our professional experiences instead of becoming complacent in our daily work. When we work on a committee or task with a clear objective and timeline, it is necessary to consistently assess how the work is progressing to ensure we are producing our best efforts. If we approach each work week with a sense of purpose and urgency and plan to maximize our position within our libraries, we will lead with confidence instead of hesitancy. This intentional decision-making creates possibilities to advance our library services.

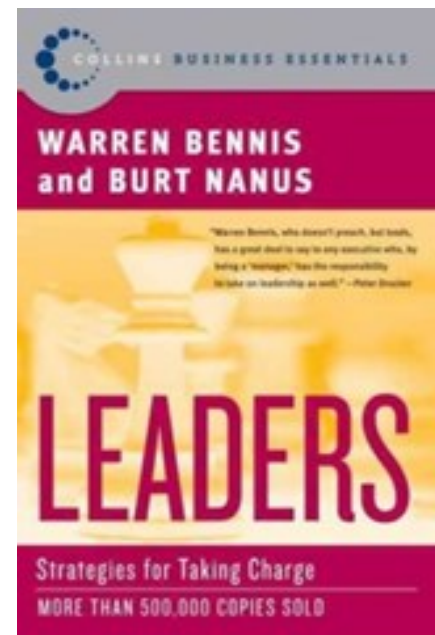
In a leadership position, we must take advantage of the skills and strengths of others and work collectively instead of in isolation. We need to embrace the possibilities that change can bring and actively listen to others before we contribute to the conversation. We need to maximize our professional expertise within our position. Embracing these team values of leadership will ensure we develop the skills required to be of the best service within our libraries.

Meg Smith is Branch Manager of the Hope Mills Branch of the Cumberland County Public Library & Information Center in Fayetteville, NC. In addition to her work supervising a talented staff at a busy community library, Meg reviews children's books for School Library Journal. Involved with the Youth Services Section Board of the North Carolina Library Association, Meg also works with librarians across her state as a Youth Services Mentor with the State Library of North Carolina.



Book Review: Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge

Drawing on organizational studies, interviews, and other research, Warren Bennis and his co-author Burt Nanus, two authorities on leadership discuss the special qualities of successful business executives and offer advice for managers on how to develop leadership skills. In this illuminating study of corporate America's most critical issue, Leadership, the authors reveal the four key principles every manager should know: Attention through Vision, Meaning through Communication, Trust through Positioning, and The deployment of Self. It is an indispensable source of guidance all readers will appreciate, whether they're running a small department, a library branch or in charge of an entire library system.



Bennis, Warren G., and Burt Nanus. Leaders: strategies for taking charge. 2nd ed., 1st HarperBusiness Essentials ed. New York: Harper-Business Essentials, 2003.

Moving Forward: Focusing on the Basics by Dana Eure

The Cabarrus County Public Library was unfortunately one of those libraries hit hard by the recession in 2010. Seven months after I was hired as the library director I was faced with laying off all 24 of our part-time staff and reducing hours at all of our libraries.

The cuts were sudden and I was a new library director, so it was particularly crushing to me. It would have been so easy to withdraw and lick my wounds while waiting for the recession to be over. Instead I saw it as a challenge to regroup and make sure we had a good solid foundation and were delivering the best service possible. More than four years later we have a strong, solid foundation and are still using the same methods to evaluate and deliver services, provide training opportunities for staff, and ensure we are providing the best possible library experience to our patrons.

One of the first things that we did was to systematically look at each and every thing we were doing to see if we could not only make tasks more efficient, but see if it were truly necessary and did something to meet our mission. This end result was that staff had less “busy” work, tasks that had “always” been done were eliminated or streamlined, and more time was devoted to delivering direct public services to our patrons. We were also doing things in a consistent manner not only from staff member to staff member, but from library to library. Patrons were treated consistently and customer satisfaction grew.

So often I hear library managers say that they wish that they had time for staff training. In my opinion staff training is nonnegotiable – it is our responsibility as library managers to provide the training and tools to ensure that our staff can perform their duties well. If we don't provide training – or at least time for training – we are not only failing our staff, but our patrons as well. We started (and continue) with Customer Service training – not just so staff delivers great customer service, but delivers it in a consistent way. Without training everyone has their own version of what is good customer service and as a result patrons are not treated consistently. Staffs have also been given time and opportunity to attend training they needed or desired. When given the opportunity staff will learn all sorts of new things and feel empowered to introduce new or different things to the library.

Most importantly we made sure that we were providing the services that our patrons wanted. How did we know what patrons wanted? We listened to them! Through conversations, program evaluations, surveys, social media and more. We created programming guidelines that ensure high quality, well planned programming that meets our mission. We increased the eResources we had available so that those who could not make it to the library during our somewhat limited hours would have options. We maximized available resources by streamlining and centralizing collection development. As a result (measurable) satisfaction with library services has continued to grow.

In short, it is that solid foundation that has positioned us to provide the best service possible to our patrons. While the cuts of 2010 were devastating, they gave us the opportunity we needed to excel.

Dana Eure began her career as a reference assistant while working on her MLIS. After completing her degree, she was head of reference for a few years at the Union County Public Library before being promoted there to assistant director. She became Director of the Cabarrus County Public Library system in 2009 and was named 2012 Director of the Year by the North Carolina Public Library Directors Association for building community capital, overseeing an award-winning branch renovation and focusing her staff on what matters most—customer service.



LINKS!!

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LAMS Section Webpage:

<http://www.nclaonline.org/lams>



New Co-hort to be named soon!