

Librarians daring to lead and learn

One future librarian's opinion

by Denise Davis

Leadership. Learning. Librarians. Librarians leading in learning. Leaders are learners. Librarians learning to lead. "Leadership through the lens of learning."¹ These concepts now reverberate like mantras as I delve into leadership literature and comb the Web for sites that enlighten the symbiotic relationship of leadership and learning. The opportunity to work—to *learn!*—with President Maureen Sullivan's program planning committee during my final semesters of library school has widened the lens through which I view leadership and learning. It is our hope that your own lens broadens with the year's emphasis on this dynamic duo of ideas.

John F. Kennedy stated, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other," a quote sprinkled numerous times amidst the hits produced from my Web search. Leadership. Learning—"... indispensable to each other." I dare you to not only believe in this idea, but to convey your belief, to live your belief. Share your belief with colleagues in the library and across campus. I dare you to go to your library every day with the childhood excitement you carried to kindergarten, buoyed by the expectancy of new learnings.

As academic librarians, we are fortunate to find ourselves immersed in environments so naturally conducive to learning, to lifelong learning. In challenging ourselves, our colleagues, and our constituents to learn every day, we inevitably will be leading on campus—"leadership is something we experience in an interaction with another human being."²

As I draft this column, I recall a lecture given by Virginia Mathews during my first term of library school. Her words daring us to be positive "Typhoid Marys" and to subsequently "infect" others with our passion for librarianship resonate still. I dare you, at whatever stage you are in your library career, to "infect" others with your zeal for learning—and sharing—something new. Suffering from burnout? I dare you to get "reinfected!"

"Leadership is a relationship,"³ and infecting your working relationships with zest for learning is just another form of leading! New librarians can infect their new colleagues with fresh skills and perspectives; seasoned practitioners, by telling their stories, can infect the less experienced with knowledge and wisdom gleaned over time.

I dare you to think of yourself as a leader. I am reminded of Patricia Senn Breivik's theme as ACRL President (1995–96): "Every librarian a leader!" Breivik challenged, "It is clear that all librarians, not just library directors, need to see themselves as leaders within whatever constituency they normally work."⁴ Dare I, a novice, a librarian wannabe, consider myself a library leader? Indeed, as one column, titled during Breivik's tenure, encouraged, "There must be 50 ways to be a leader"⁵—the only limit is your imagination.

New kids on the block, let us start now. Infect your immediate co-workers with your positive attitude toward learning in libraryland—I dare you! Veterans, if you haven't

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About the author

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The Nature of the Book, by Adrian Johns (753 pages, October 1998), is a richly detailed examination of the rise of print culture, the philosophy of intellectual property, and the early dissemination of scientific knowledge in 17th- and 18th-century England. Though scholarly, Johns's narrative is filled with lively anecdotes and insightful analysis. His underlying point is that what we assume to be the inviolable characteristics of a book—consistency, veracity, authority—were not necessarily the case and had to be forged by the founding fathers of print culture. The lives of a few of them are profiled here: John Streater, who founded one of the largest printing houses in London; Joseph Moxon, who saw print, design, and typography in purely mathematical terms; Sir Thomas Browne, who compiled a history of plagiarism; and the British Astronomer Royal John Flamsteed, who was one of many voices expressing an opinion on how scientific knowledge should be acquired and perpetuated. Perhaps the most engrossing chapter is on the "physiology of reading," which examines what 17th-century men and women thought actually

happened in their brains when they read. \$40.00. University of Chicago Press. ISBN 0-226-40121-9.

Wars of the Americas, by David F. Marley (722 pages, October 1998), takes an unusual approach to military chronology by restricting its scope to conflicts in the Western Hemisphere since European landfall in 1492. This leaves more room for Indian wars and lesser-known hostilities in Central and South America, such as King Philip's War in Massachusetts, the Mexican Pastry War, the conquest of Jamaica by the British, the Riel Rebellion in Manitoba, and the Araya massacre of 1605 in Venezuela. A mere 70 pages are devoted to 20th-century military actions: only the Aleutian campaign, the *Graf Spee*, and the U-boat war are in scope for World War II, allowing expanded descriptions of the Mexican Revolution, the Chaco War, the Nicaraguan Civil War and other Latin American unrest, the Falklands, Grenada, Panama, and Haiti. \$99.00. ABC-Clío. ISBN 0-87436-837-5. ■

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already, drop your guard or turf concerns and embrace leading with learning—I dare you! Managers, lead via your promotion of "learning as a way of being"⁶—I dare you! There are plenty of rungs on the ladder of leadership and learning for all of us to be climbing at the paces best suited to our situations and styles. It is never too late to step up to the first rung—I dare you!

I remember, gratefully, a speech given to graduates by an officer of my school's alumni association. He challenged the newly christened librarians to be aware of the increasing opportunities for leadership at earlier levels in their careers, as they can lead much of the continuous learning necessary in today's libraries with their recently acquired technological skills.

It was inspiring to hear the alumnus promote the idea of leadership in this learning context! As for the polemical "L" word in our current professional education? I propose we all strive to attain degrees in Masters of Lifelong Learning as we lead libraries and our constituencies into the next century. I dare you! The digital age needs librarians to be lively, leading links to learning.

Watch the ACRL Web site at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/c&rlnew2.html> for future

links to sources on leadership and learning as we focus on this theme during Maureen Sullivan's presidential year. Meanwhile, read Meg Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science*⁶ or Peter B. Vaill's *Learning as a Way of Being*.⁷ On the Web check out Leadership Communications for the 21st Century at <http://www.LC21.com>. It invites you to "think of this Web site as a place to encourage you to lead by example." I dare you!

Notes

1. Maureen Sullivan. "Leadership through the lens of learning," *C&RL News*, 59 (October 1998): 673-674.

2. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. *Credibility* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993): 11.

3. Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility*, Chapter 1.

4. Patricia Senn Breivik. "Becoming beyond-library-walls librarians," *C&RL News*, 56 (July/August 1995): 469.

5. Judy Reynolds. "There must be 50 ways to be a leader," *C&RL News*, 57 (April 1996): 208-210.

6. Meg Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science* (Berrett-Koehler, 1992, 1994)

7. Peter B. Vaill. *Learning as a Way of Being: Strategies for Survival in a World of Permanent White Water* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996). ■