

Highlights from Aurora Leadership Institute 2002

Each Aurora Institute holds surprises! We participants, mentors, and facilitators are all actors in the drama called Aurora, which reveals itself as we explore what the concept of leadership holds in our personal motivations and fears. Leadership is such a personal journey that it is difficult to identify events as highlights. It is the interaction of the multi-level mix of participants' experience, expectations, and behaviors that creates the mystery — and the opportunity for searching, learning, and growing that often leads to life changes.

Of course, there is a well orchestrated structure that both supports and challenges; but that is the playing field for what is at the core of Aurora — leadership development. In some ways, it is like the story of the three blind men who happen upon an elephant. One man explores the animal from the front and says, 'an elephant is all big floppy ears and hard, curved columns with a large round vacuum tube attached.' The second man approaches from the side and exclaims, 'an elephant is a massive building with a very low and rounded ceiling.' The third man approaches from the rear and, discovering the tail, declares the elephant to be leathery and snake like. For each blind man their experience is real and true. Im-

agine the debate when the three men meet to decide the true meaning of elephant; or, in our case, the true meaning of leadership. That's Aurora. The leadership journey is both a collective experience, and an intensely personal one. It is the conversation about diverse personal experience that illuminates the collective wisdom.

So for us, it isn't about highlights, but about moments. It's the moments when individual participants step up to challenges, see them as opportunities, and take responsibility to lead.

- One group struggled with a member who filled the air time without taking them anywhere. Their challenge was not about who was right or wrong; but how to focus, get results, and get over 'the polites' to allow each group member to work deeper, produce more, and learn from their team experience.
- Another moment was the struggle some participants engaged when confronting mentors and facilitators who at first wouldn't give enough, and later seemed to judge too harshly. Courage to take on a powerful figure is a part of leading; and some found the voice to do just that.
- There were 'Aha' moments as personal assessment tools shed light on positive

and negative habitual — engendering commitment to be more 'awake' and intentional in future leadership situations. Many participants were confronted with the realities of how others saw them; and used this information to alter their behavior and enhance their leadership skills.

- There were fascinating moments in the conversation between mentors and participants, as they broadened our collective awareness of the critical issues facing the profession.
- A moment for us was watching the excitement and passion as participants articulated, (some for the first time), why they chose this profession, and where they hope to lead it in the future.
- Some took risks to share their insights and talents, fearless of the 'tall poppy' syndrome. Early competitiveness gave way to mutual respect of divergent views. Watching master story-tellers and dancers do their thing — those were bonus moments.
- There were moments of deep appreciation for the generosity of spirit and openness of the mentors — from their thought provoking 'real issues' to their caring hand extended across the table, letting us know we do not have to stand alone.

Some asked for feedback and got it, while others struggled with a fierce need to give it to others. Ultimately, there were many moments of personal breakthroughs shared when individuals 'got' how limiting their beliefs about themselves could be, leaving no doubt that with each clarity, we were all encouraged to be better leaders and truer friends. And so, Aurora evolved for five intense days.

You might ask, were the Australian and New Zealand library professions enhanced by Aurora 2002? Our answer is a simple one: you bet! There were thirty-nine new Aurora alumni who intend and, more importantly, expect to make a difference. They may not always have the best idea, the perfect strategy, or the broadest vision; but you can count on them to courageously engage the process, and to exert influence that deepens the conversation and opens wide the realm of possibility. For any of you worried about library leaders for the future, we can assure you — they are already here and moving fast.

Becky Schreiber, Aurora Leadership Institute leader

About the Aurora Leadership Institutes

The mission of the Aurora Leadership Institutes — sponsored by ALIA, the National Library of Australia, and EBSCO — is to assist future leaders in the library and associated cultural and information industry to maximise their leadership skills and potential. We want to position leaders to be proactive and effective voices in a dynamic and sophisticated information environment. The Institute programme includes exploration of leadership concepts including vision, risk taking, creativity, communication, and styles of leadership. It is a demanding, challenging and exciting experience.

The Institutes are led by Becky Schreiber and John Shannon of Schreiber Shannon Associates in the USA, who have facilitated previous Snowbird Institutes in the USA and our Aurora Institutes.

Mentors are a key part of the Institute. They act as facilitators, guides, sounding boards and role models, and work closely with the participants throughout the Institute. Mentors share their professional and personal experiences, participating on a voluntary basis which is an expression of their own professional commitment.

Due to the high demand for places, Aurora Leadership Institutes will now be held annually. If you would like to take part in the 2003 Institute in Thredbo from 7–12 February, apply now. There will also be a New Zealand recall from the 22–25 February 2003. Check the Aurora website at <http://www.alia.org.au/~aurora/> for details. ■