



LEADER OR FOLLOWER: WHAT IF YOU'RE NOT THE CHOSEN ONE?

In J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, the eponymous character is the Chosen One, fated to vanquish the evil wizard Lord Voldemort. Throughout the first six novels Harry fights his nemesis and other evil doers with the help of his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger as well as others. At times Ron and Hermione take on leadership roles too. Collaborative leadership rules. But at the end of the series Harry must face Lord Voldemort alone. After all, he is the Chosen One.

Sometimes it seems, even in libraries, that the only 'right' kind of leadership is that of the charismatic leader, the great person, the one individual who can get an organisation to not only work but to blaze into the future.

But what if you're not super special? What if you do a great job but you're not, well, the Chosen One? Because how can we all possibly be chosen and special when part of what makes that particular brand of leadership stand-out is because it is rare?

The fact is, no leader can lead without followers. Followers are generally not lemmings leaping off cliffs, sheep tag alongs, or cult members. Really. And yet sometimes, looking at job descriptions, a disregard for anyone who is not deemed a leader lingers - even if the person is employed to shelve or process books, or has a maintenance role like that of an electrician. Try running a contemporary library without electricity sometime and you'll find the electrician role essential regardless of how the electrician fits into the library leadership schema.

In 2008 Barbara Kellerman introduced the 'followership

theory', which proposes followers are becoming more important than ever. Yes, leaders are important, but leaders and followers have a near symbiotic relationship. By the way, followership theory is not a blandishment that everyone who merely turns up is therefore a 'winner' - school children and workers have always been aware of the real pecking order. Followers are not default leaders, but followers are important and influential to leadership.

Libraries are often collaborative. Think of document delivery, national and international virtual reference teams, and publisher-vendor-library triads. If every single person in every single team assumed a leadership stance - in the sense of the 'great individual' - the library system would fall apart.

Do we need leaders? Absolutely. But we need many more followers. And there's no shame in that.

So if you're not the Chosen One, take heart: Ron and Hermione followed, led and co-led with Harry Potter through six of seven novels. Although he conquered Lord Voldemort, he wasn't alone in his mission until the very end. And libraries seldom have to battle iniquity as colossal as Lord Voldemort.

We need library leaders and followers for the amazing leaps forward, and for the everyday.

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LEADERSHIP: WHEN'S THE PARTY?

Chris Roberts subscribes to the party leadership style.

There are many aspects to leadership, but one I personally subscribe to is the 'any excuse for a party' aspect of leadership. This means lots of fun and food, gifts and good times are scattered throughout the busy working world that is a school library. I have found from years of interaction with staff that creating special occasions and taking time out for celebrating enhances team spirit and builds connections between staff that quite possibly would not happen any other way.

Our library workroom is now well known in the workplace as a place of food, fun and special occasions. We decorate with balloons, flowers, and signs, we use pretty tablecloths and china, give gifts, and generally take time out to enjoy the special times. These times mainly centre around birthdays but if a birthday is not conveniently coming up, we will create an alternative 'occasion'. Our most recent event was a 'getting on our feet' party, to acknowledge being given some extra staff hours to open an adjacent library, but just until we 'got on our feet' - hence photos of feet decorated the morning tea table.



A party to get us on our feet

These events do not need to be expensive, as we generally each bring a plate. There is always enough left over to party-on through the day, and share with colleagues.

Gifts and cards are an integral part of most celebrations. We each try to write a personal message in a card, to make a personal connection with the recipient. And often we will each contribute a few dollars to buy a small gift, often flowers or a pot plant.

Dressing up can often be part of the celebration too, with outfits for book fairs or Book Week being paraded around the school, and a focus on decorations in the main part of the library. On very special occasions, a poem will be written or a song sung.

The result is very positive - a team who have played together, and been acknowledged for their contributions, are generally more ready to put in the extra time and effort when next required. Taking time out to celebrate is not time wasted - it is a great investment in vital team players.

Regular acknowledgement of staff contributions, either verbally or in writing, is also a strategy for lifting staff morale and letting team members know they are special, noticed and appreciated.

So - when's your next party?

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