

EEI... ENERGISE, ENTHUSE, INSPIRE

Inspired or expired...

Anne Lahey asks are we adequately training our potential library and information sector (LIS) leaders to be ready for the expectations of the future?

Leadership

As I sat down to write this article, I thought about the various library and information services where I've worked and tried to recall what sort of training or preparation was provided to staff in terms of leadership or management development. Wasn't there...? Didn't we...? Actually, no there wasn't and no we didn't. No training. No preparation. Leadership? Haven't even heard the word mentioned. It strikes me as unusual that as a profession, there is very little discussed and offered in the way of management and leadership training for our next generation of library managers.

And by the way, management is not synonymous with leadership. Within and without the LIS profession, I have experienced exceptionally good, and exceptionally bad, managers. It is often said that librarians want to be librarians, not managers. For the most part, this is most likely true. However, at the lightning pace at which the profession and its needs are changing, it is no longer sufficient for us to look to someone else to do the leading. There is no one else. The 'greying' of the profession forces us to look at our next generation of managers, and offers us the opportunity to influence how this changing of the guard will play out.

Management

As I look around the workplace, I can identify a number of colleagues with the qualities needed for strong leadership, but who would never have contemplated a senior leadership position. A lack of development opportunities captures employees in a routine and strata from which they feel unable to break free. Without the skills required to fill a managerial vacancy, many long-term staff would not even consider themselves as fit to apply for such a position, merely due to a lack of knowledge in basic managerial duties, such as budgets and report writing.

To a certain extent, management can be taught, but leadership requires personality traits that already exist – fortitude, honesty, drive and the will to make a success of their staff, themselves and their workplaces. It seems to me that many long-standing staff have long ago lost the will to achieve anything more than the status quo. As a new graduate, where do I look for leadership and inspiration? It may sound corny, but I want someone to look up to; I want to be inspired.

Barriers

A situation particular to those of us in more remote areas is lower rates of staff turnover. As a result, there is little exposure to external influences in regard to role models – managers have learnt management from their predecessors, who may have had little or no formal management training of their own. This fact imposes a commitment to self development on us all - pursuing our own opportunities, developing our own networks that are capable of not only

inspiring us but also sustaining and fostering that inspiration.

If we are to avoid the passive managerial practices of the past, we must be proactive in developing ourselves as leaders of the future. How can regional areas attract and grow inspired and dedicated leaders if we don't take charge of our own professional futures? We cannot rest on our laurels waiting to be given the tools to take over tomorrow – they may never arrive.



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Succession planning

The list of a good manager's responsibilities includes a commitment to succession planning. Contemporary LIS management must have a firm commitment to succession planning in order to meet the needs of the LIS organisations of the future. This commitment means managers must create an environment where staff will thrive and retention rates will prosper. By supporting and fostering passion and ambition in their employees, our current leaders are laying the foundations for the future.

A practical and achievable avenue for developing the leaders of tomorrow is by encouraging employees to engage in professional development opportunities such as conferences and workshops. Engaging in professional development activities ensures LIS professionals remain inspired and passionate about their profession, resulting in an innovative and enthusiastic next generation of leaders who will have the ideas to ensure libraries of the future do not expire.

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Anne Lahey is a Liaison Librarian at James Cook University Townsville and has worked in libraries throughout regional Queensland since 2002. A former police officer, Anne shifted her focus to librarianship and gained her Bachelor's via external studies through Charles Sturt University in 2010. Anne has a keen interest in the future of librarianship, specifically how contemporary libraries plan for, and cope with, change management.