

# Leadership 101:

## *Survival Skills for School Media Coordinators*

by Augie E. Beasley

**A**re you a proactive school library media coordinator? A library leader constantly promotes the school library media program and services to the students, faculty, administration, and parents. In addition, the proactive media coordinator serves on various school committees and is considered a department head and attends departmental chairperson meetings.

Yes, we have all heard this, and there is a need for the theory of leadership in the school library profession. But what many of us need are the nuts and bolts of being a leader. We need survival tips — tips on: public speaking, writing goals and objectives, media/curriculum coordination techniques, (d) negotiating skills, stress management, and time management.

### Public Speaking

One step to becoming a leader is learning to share your ideas, and so a practical and needed survival skill is public speaking. Public speaking allows you to explain the importance of the media program in the school curriculum.

Speak to groups other than media coordinators, or as my mother says, "Don't preach to the choir or the deacons." Contact your local Chamber of Commerce to see what organizations would be interested in having outside speakers. Use these speaking engagements to "sell" the media story.

Public speaking is an important part of the proactive media coordinators armory. However, many media coordinators avoid public speaking, using such

excuses as "I'm not good at public speaking," "People will laugh," or "I get too nervous." Consider, however, that one of the greatest orators of the twentieth century disliked public speaking. James C. Humes's article, "Churchill on the Stump," notes that Winston Churchill worked hard to become a great speaker: he had a stutter and a congenital lisp. Humes quotes Churchill as saying, "I never say 'it gives me great pleasure' to speak to any audience because there are only a few activities from which I derive intense pleasure, and speaking is not one of them."<sup>1</sup>

By being prepared, however, you can channel this nervous energy to work for you. Planning is the key to being calm at the podium. When planning your speech, you need to know three things:

- (1) What is the objective of my presentation?
- (2) Who is the audience?
- (3) How much time do I have?

The optimum time for most speeches or presentations is 20 minutes. Always remember, a speech or sermon can never be too short. Any good speech has an introduction (about 20% of your time), a body (about 70%), and a closing (about 10%). Arrange your points in a logical sequence and then begin to write your speech. As you write your presentation, check the number of times the words "you" and "I" are used. The ratio should be about ten "you's" to one "I." The audience wants to know how it can do things, not how well *you* do them. Write your presentation in a conversational tone. Do not use long, complex

sentences. You are writing to be heard, not read. As you work on your speech, refer often to your objectives because they will keep you on track.

At the end of your talk, do not say "thank you" and sit down. Let your audience know you are finished by saying something like "in conclusion" or "let me summarize." If you have a question and answer period at the end of your talk and you do not know the answer to a question, say so. By being honest, you add verisimilitude to what you have said.

In the final copy of your speech, triple-space your copy, highlight key words, and note where visuals will be used. Also, print your text in large, easy-to-read type. Learn from my mistake, and number the pages of your speech. If you drop your speech and the pages are not numbered, you are in big trouble, especially if your audience is walking in the door.

Memorize only the opening and closing of your presentation. A good start will boost your confidence and lead into the strong finish you want. Use your written speech as a guide. Do not attempt to memorize your entire talk. If you have practiced, the text will act as a prompt.

Practice is a must for good presentations. Practice. Practice. And more practice. Practice standing in front of a mirror, using an audio tape recorder, or preferably a camcorder. Review your presentation to improve your performance.

As you walk to the podium, walk confidently. Remember that your audience wants you to succeed. At the po-

dium, use the following tips to improve your presentation:

- Use a comfortable stance, not a rigid one
- Use eye contact. Throughout your presentation, look directly at different members of the audience. This way, you seem to be speaking directly to almost everyone in the audience. Talk to your audience and not to some vague point in the back of the room
- Use gestures to highlight important points in your talk
- If you lose your place, pause until you find it. Listeners perceive pauses as signs of assurance and control
- It is normal to feel stress. Put it to work for you. Use your nervous energy to energize your audience

No, having strong public speaking skills is not the definitive answer to becoming a strong leader in your school, community, state, or nation. It is just one of the many survival skills that you need to master.

## Writing Goals and Objectives

Another important leadership skill is the ability to develop goals and objectives for the school library media program. Strong leaders have strong planning skills. Each year, develop goals and objectives for the media program and distribute these to the administration. Long-range goals, as well as short-term goals, should be developed. Some areas in which goals can be developed are:

- media skills instruction
- media production for students and teachers
- public relations
- organization of materials
- media center atmosphere
- professional activities

An example of a short-term goal for a school year would be planning with teachers to develop independent research activities for students. An example of a long-term goal for several years would be implementing computer applications for library management.

Be sure to include specific indicators that show the activities that are being used to meet the goals or the methods that will be used to evaluate progress or completion of the goal. Give copies of the goals to the principal and evaluate progress on a regular basis during the year. At the end of the year, write

another report for the principal on the goals reached and future strategies for accomplishing long-range goals.

## Media/Curriculum Coordination Techniques

Unlike public and academic librarians, and unlike other media professionals such as videographers and audiovisual specialists, the school library media coordinator is first a teacher. Media/curriculum coordination emphasizes the planning and teaching of media skills in conjunction with classroom instruction. The media coordinator and the classroom teacher work together to ensure that students have the opportunity as well as the need to use media resources and services. Communication (written and oral), cooperation (teacher and media coordinators), and planning are the keys to the success of the concept. The process may begin with an individual teacher, but the goal is cooperation with all faculty members.

Cooperative planning is a wonderful idea, but how does one implement curriculum in the school? The following seven-step process will work, given enough time.

### 1. Make the First Move.

Begin with one or two teachers who appear receptive to new ideas. Map out your ideas ahead of time. Show them the services that you have available. Offer suggestions of possible ways that media skills could be integrated with their instructional units.

### 2. Find Out What's Happening in the Classroom.

Distribute planning sheets that teachers may use to keep you aware of their activities. Schedule time for planning with teachers as well as talking informally with them. Attend departmental, grade level, or curriculum meetings. This will show them that you are sincere in your efforts. Of course, visiting the classroom is another way to learn about what is happening. Make sure, however, that teachers understand that your visit represents a genuine interest in classroom activities and is not a spy mission.

### 3. Determine Needs of Students.

With the teacher, determine what media skills should be taught, based on an assessment of student needs. Develop a media skills test or use one of the available standardized tests.

### 4. Plan! Plan! Plan!

Use the state curriculum plans for media as well as other subject areas when deciding which specific media skills to teach in relation to classroom concepts being taught.

### 5. Choose Best Format/Technique.

Decide on the best format or techniques for presenting media skills to classes, such as transparencies, sound/slide presentation, multimedia, hands-on, learning centers, or video production.

### 6. Provide for Evaluation.

Develop a method of evaluation to be used by students, teachers, and media coordinators.

### 7. Try Different Approaches:

#### **Once is Not Enough! Be Persistent.**

Remember that it takes time and effort to make cooperative planning work. It may take several contacts before teachers will agree to try.

## Negotiating Skills

School library media professionals and other educators are not used to negotiating, or as some people call it, "the art of compromise." But, they should be. It is a necessary leadership skill.

Be aware of the types of bargaining you will be doing. Fisher and Ury's book, *Getting to Yes*, speaks of several common but unproductive types of bargaining.<sup>2</sup> One of the most common is positional bargaining, a tactic that should be avoided because it tends to lock you into positions. The more you defend your position against attack, the more committed you become to that position. The classic example of positional bargaining is the haggling for items at such places as car lots, attic sales, and the ultimate minuet: buying a house.

When you engage in positional bargaining, you often try to improve the chance that any settlement reached is favorable to you by starting with an extreme position and then making small concessions only when needed to continue the negotiations. Positional bargaining becomes a contest of wills where each party says what he will and will not do. Each side tries to force the other to give in through sheer will power. When one side is forced to concede in such a situation, anger and resentment are the results. Families, friends, co-workers, and neighbors have been split asunder because of such attitudes.

What, then, is the answer? Do you



become what is known as a "nice" bargainer, who makes offers and concessions in order to avoid confrontation? This type of bargaining emphasizes the importance of building a relationship, but any agreement reached using this method runs the risk of being a sloppy agreement. Furthermore, if you pursue a soft or nonadversarial type bargaining style, and you are negotiating with a positional bargainer, you are at a disadvantage — much like playing a high-stakes eight-ball game with a crooked cue stick.<sup>3</sup>

So, which method do you use? Neither. Try another method.

Fisher and Ury have devised a method called "Principled negotiation" or "negotiation on the merits." This method can be divided into four points:

- 1) People: separate the people from the problem
- 2) Interests: key in on the interests and not positions
- 3) Options: discuss options or possibilities before deciding what to do
- 4) Criteria: make sure the decision is based on an objective standard<sup>4</sup>

When you use this method, remember that people have feelings and desires and are not computers. You must, therefore, work on the problem. The "people" problem should be dealt with separately. The second point will be hard: focus on the interests and not the stated positions. The negotiation process often obscures what you really want. The third point is to be sure to have options available in any negotiations. Options are better than hard-line positions. The fourth point may be hard to do in a school setting, for you are not dealing with a union or an adversarial-type position.<sup>5</sup>

Although this is excellent information, as school library media coordinators, we must also be realistic. How often do you go into a negotiating mode when you are asked to do something by your principal? If your principal or superintendent asks you to do something that is inimical to the school library media program, try to explain how the decision will affect the students and teachers as they try to use the media center. Never say, "Not in my media center!" Bad PR, bad career move, and just plain dumb.

Do the best you can, and accept that you will not win every discussion. For example, for years, my own media center was closed for the blood drive. And, yes, a blood drive is important, but is closing the center during the middle of term paper frenzy the best time? So

the teacher and I worked out a compromise. Since the media center was kept open with reduced services by the media assistants when the professional staff was away at conferences, the teacher was given an option of having the blood drive during the NCLA/NCASL conference in the fall or during the NCAECT conference in the spring. Not a totally satisfactory arrangement perhaps, but it was a win-win arrangement for both sides. The teacher — since the blood drive remained in the media center — became a strong advocate for the media program and was even heard complaining about another teacher wanting to close the library for a luncheon when her students needed to do their research. Because of her intercessions, the library was not closed. As a footnote, this year the blood drive was moved from the media center.

It is important to remember when negotiating, whether about the blood drive or funds from the site-based management team, to stress that the media center is everyone's center and that the funds will go to help all students and departments.

## Stress Management Techniques

Of course, becoming a proactive leader in your school and your profession may increase your level of stress. Consequently, managing stress becomes an important skill for would-be leaders.

In *Coping with Job Stress*, Herbert Greenberg argues that all of us are susceptible to stress and that stress can kill by triggering heart attacks and strokes.<sup>6</sup> Some people even believe that stress causes cancer cells to begin their murderous replication.

Stress is bad for us. When we are stressed, we act irrationally and unreasonably. Stress lowers our intellectual ability and affects our relationships with other people at work. If we are angry, we are unable to think clearly and we say things to our co-workers and students that we would never say in calmer moments. After we calm down, we wonder why we did or said what we did. In other words, stress can affect our performance. We must learn to control stress or we may become the chaff discarded during winnowing.

A few simple techniques can help us to control our stress levels. Better time management, reducing clutter, and controlling interruptions will lower our stress levels. Most of us resist getting organized because it requires an investment of time and energy, and

we do not feel that we have the time or energy.

It sounds so simple, but the easiest and simplest thing to do to lower our stress is to walk when you get home. Walk for one-half an hour or an hour. Not only will it lower your stress level, but you will lose a few pounds also. In addition to walking, you should exercise at least three times a week. You do not need weights. Either jump rope, hit a punching bag, or do sit-ups — anything to get the heart pumping and the stress level down. Keep a spring-loaded hand exerciser in your desk and use it throughout the day.

There are no easy answers to alleviating stress levels, but step back and really look at some things that trigger your stress attacks. Is the noise level so bad that it raises your blood pressure? Should the fact that Ms. Smith brings her class in without telling you trigger a stress attack? In other words, relax. Enjoy the kids and enjoy the job.

## Time Management Techniques

Finally, you will need good time management skills in order to become a leader. In her workshops on time management, Gloria Miller, Media Program Director for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, says that to better manage your time, you must know how your time is spent.<sup>7</sup> She recommends that you study the use of your time for a week from the following five perspectives:

### Action taken

Write down everything you do with your time. You might want to make a notation every half hour or every hour, but list all activities.

### Time spent

As you complete each small chore or large project, indicate how long it took to finish the task. For example, did it take you 15 minutes or 35 minutes to check in magazines? How long did it take you to work up that lesson plan? You may want to use a timer or a stopwatch.

### Purpose

Before beginning each activity, indicate your purpose. If, for example, you choose to call a sales representative at 2 p.m., what would you hope to accomplish? Do you want to relay information, or do you want to schedule a visit? Or perhaps you are making a call simply to avoid a more important but difficult task.

### Results

Critique your work or activity. Did

you accomplish what you set out to achieve? Were you unhappy with the results? Could you have done it better? How long did it take? Were the results worth it? Did you reap any rewards?

#### **Emotional response**

This is very important. Describe how you felt about each activity. Did you enjoy the way you spent your time or did you detest it? Were you resentful of interruptions?

Ms. Miller then gives the participants a list of things to do to improve the use of their time. The following are a few of her recommendations:

#### **Clear your desk**

The only items needed in your desk are a small notebook, a planner, a calendar, post-it notes, an "in" and "out" box, and a "to do" list. Having a clean desk will save time and help you focus on goals and priorities.

#### **Handle each piece of paper only once**

Go through the mail and the memos from the office at once. Don't stack them on your desk. If you can get the information from someone else, toss the item. If you need to file an item, mark the upper right hand corner with a file name. If you can't get to filing or delivering the mail, place it in the "out" box to be handled by a student or volunteer. Handle each piece of paper only once. Experts say that 80 % of what we file is never used again, so when in doubt, throw it out!

#### **Make "to do" lists**

Take three to five minutes to determine the most important priorities of the day. Assign priorities to tasks. Start with the most important task and then tackle the less important ones.

#### **Control phone calls and visitors**

Let the school secretary help with this type of interruption. Leave times with the secretary when you will return calls. Also let the secretary know who should be able to contact you immediately. You can let sales representatives know when you are available. When meeting with a visitor or a sales representative, try to arrange the meeting in the main office or some other space where you can leave when you need to go. Talk standing up so that the guest can be walked to the door in a very nice way.

#### **Delegate tasks**

Delegate tasks that you perform on a regular basis. Volunteers and student assistants are great at these tasks. Choosing the delegatee carefully, outlining the task clearly, and checking progress frequently will make delegation more productive.

#### **Use sign-up calendars**

Have a sign-up calendar that teachers can use without having to interrupt you for AV equipment.

#### **Avoid perfectionism**

Do not spend an inordinate amount of time on unimportant details.

#### **Be action-oriented and avoid procrastination**

Take action and do it NOW. Make sure all reports are in on time. Do the most difficult tasks first. Try breaking them into smaller segments so that you can feel that you have accomplished something.

#### **Develop teaching materials**

Plan long-lasting resources for formal classes, small groups, or centers, and organize your lessons by skill. Add to the file each year.

#### **Use the computer**

Prepare letters to parents, bibliographies, policies, and publicity items, and save them for future modifications.

#### **Summary**

Six important survival skills have been discussed in this article: public speaking, writing goals and objectives, media/curriculum coordination techniques, negotiating skills, stress management, and time management.

As professionals, we should be competent in public speaking. Who knows when you will be asked to do a presentation at your school, school system, or even at the state professional meeting?

Goal-setting skills are a must if we are to have quality programs. Without

media/curriculum coordination, however, goal-setting skills have no context in which to operate. The coordination between the teacher and the media coordinator is what drives a quality media program.

We also need to learn negotiating skills, but we must learn to accept that we will never win all negotiations. This realization may lead us to value stress management. Again, we will never have complete control of our lives. We shall always be prey to the demon of stress, but we can learn to control our stress levels. Practicing time management strategies helps by giving us control over more of our time.

These techniques do not guarantee a tranquil, stress-free environment where everything always goes according to plan. But they will give you a feeling of control over your life that, in turn, will show in your media program.

#### **References**

<sup>1</sup> James C. Hume. "Churchill on the Stump," *Civilization*. (January/February 1996): 44-45.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Fisher, and William Ury. *Getting to Yes*. New York: Penguin Books. 1981.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert M. Greenberg, *Coping with Job Stress*. (New York: Prentice Hall, 1980), 7-34.

<sup>7</sup> "Time Management" Workshop, presented by Gloria Miller, December 11, 1995.

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