



Then Let's Get Out of the Way!

by Harry Tuchmayer, Column Editor

The fact of the matter is, if Ben is right, and I tend to think he is, then we have a big problem on our hands. If truly effective leaders are really born and not made, then there is too much genetic engineering going on!

Now it's one thing in the world of politics. Spin doctors and deep pockets have much too much influence as it is to expect anything other than manufactured leaders dominating the field. But why are the rest of us still trying to create these leaders out of whole cloth? The truth of the matter is, librarians are spending too much time creating bad leaders, when we should be training good librarians.

Rather than wasting time on workshops and leadership institutes designed to build future leaders, doesn't it make more sense to focus our energies on preparing a core of properly educated and well trained professionals? Because the problem isn't with finding leaders with vision, but with making certain we are all working towards the same vision.

Well trained librarians should already know what the goals of the library are and where our profession is headed. And if they don't, then let's focus our energies on making certain that they do. Adequately train the people you have, and if they still can't do the job, get rid of them. Recruit intelligent and capable people to become librarians and information professionals. Pay them what they're worth. Then leave them alone to do the job they were hired to do.

The problem has never been one of identifying individuals with leadership potential, the problem is when we try to make them leaders. Because by definition, those who already "possess both the capacity to inspire" and "the ability to lead" don't sit idly by waiting for others to give them the reins of power, they take it.

The real problem is when we try to make a leader out of an individual who possesses only one or two of the many traits that Ben so aptly identified as component parts of the leadership personality. It doesn't work!

Encouraging individuals to grow and develop is a wonderful thing, but don't confuse development with destiny. Potential is just that, potential. It is neither a predictor of success or a guarantee of performance. Let the "natural leaders" come to the forefront on their own, and stop forcing others to become someone the rest of us will regret was ever created.

Let's be honest. Too many leaders are put in that position because they were once great librarians. But being a competent bibliographer, cataloger or reference librarian has no bearing on whether or not you can lead people into the future. And too often we make these very people the leaders of our organizations.

A good leader must be someone who is capable of creating an environment that lets the individual reach their full potential. He must allow subordinates to take informed risks, and if necessary, learn by their mistakes as well as success. And finally, he must trust that the vision he helped create, will be pursued by those who work in the organization.

Of course, it's the "vision thing" that causes most of the problems. Why is it that two dynamic and capable leaders can often have such varying views of the future. How do you ever correct for those charismatic individuals who are capable of leading us in the wrong direction, or quite possibly, on the road to ruin. What do you do when you have such a leader, and he is leading us all astray?

My feeling is we often get into these messes precisely because we are too busy encouraging those who have some of the qualities it takes to lead, without ever bothering to first determine whether or not we know where it is they will lead us.

Maybe, just maybe, we should leave well enough alone and let nature take its course.