



## Truly Effective Leaders Are Born, Not Made

by Benjamin F. Speller, Jr.

*"Leadership is the function of who you are."*

— Richard Ruhmann, "Leadership in a Changing World," *Business Leader* 7 (January 1996): 6.

**A**ccording to a December 9, 1995, editorial in *The Economist*, this basic principle is at the core of effective leadership. "In America, leadership has become something of a cult concept." The trend in assuming that everyone can be a leader has resulted in a significant vacuum of truly effective leaders. As a result, leadership training centers are being developed at a significant rate. Frank Freeman of the Center for Creative Leadership estimated for *The Economist* that more than 500-600 colleges in the United States offer some type of leadership program.

This estimate does not include commercial organizations or professional associations.

True leaders are born, not made. They generally are open and have never met a stranger. They have a sense of the importance of maintaining the self-esteem of others even in negative encounters or in light of philosophical differences. They have the ability to focus on the broader world and look for long-term impact. They can discern from what they hear the precise short-term and long-term needs of their communities. They learn intuitively, at an early age, that timing is everything. They are ready when a window of opportunity opens. True leaders are aware not only of their own motivations, but the motivations of their communities.

My professional experiences with individuals in positions of leadership, and those that I have read about in the literature of librarianship, business, and politics, can be grouped into three categories:

1. Those who possess the capacity to inspire others to undertake initiatives, but lack the self-discipline to translate their vision into sustained programmatic activity.
2. Those who possess exceptional practical discipline, but are unable to mobilize the communities or constituent groups.
3. Those who possess both the capacity to inspire their constituent groups with a vision to organizational transformation and the ability to lead a disciplined and structured business enterprise.

The libraries that impress me most are headed by individuals whose leadership skills place them in the third category. The leadership qualities most broadly evident include:

**Balanced competencies.** They are perceptive community leaders and disciplined business managers.

**Sense of vocation.** They come to their work with a strong commitment. They do not see what they do as a job or temporary activity.

**Personal integrity.** They operate aboveboard with a sense of personal integrity and have respect for the contributions of others. They always acknowledge personally and publicly the contributions of others.

**Determination to succeed.** They consistently make seemingly unworkable projects work because of a stubborn unwillingness to give up on something in which they have a strong belief.

**Collaborative work ethic.** They stress working in partnerships and cooperatively with others in their organizations and communities.

**Eye for winners.** They recognize an excellent resource, human or product, when they see it.

**Results-oriented.** They focus on finding solutions to problems rather than complaining about difficulties. They are more interested in long-term solutions.

**Visionary.** They focus on innovation and experimentation. Operational flexibility is also one of their guiding principles.

When we identify individuals in our library programs, libraries, or professional associations who are obviously born leaders, we should encourage them: (1) to acquire the knowledge and technical skills and (2) to enhance their diplomatic skills to become our next generation of effective leaders in a global environment.