

OLA Quarterly



**The
Opportunities
and Obstacles
of Assuming
Leadership**

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Please refer questions and input regarding the *Quarterly* to:

Kari Hauge
OLA Quarterly Coordinator
Portland, OR
503-381-6516
Haugeorama@gmail.com

Graphic Production:
Tobias Weiss Design
7345 SW Deerhaven Drive
Corvallis, OR 97333
phone 541-738-1897
julie@tobiasweissdesign.com
www.tobiasweissdesign.com

The Opportunities and Obstacles of Assuming Leadership



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**Upcoming
Issue**

Summer 2012
Advocacy



Introduction

Leadership is not a destination, it is a journey. Good leaders develop the skills they need for success throughout their careers. This is why librarians, dedicated to the concept of life-long learning, can be such good leaders in many aspects of their lives.

In this issue of *Oregon Library Association Quarterly*, we have five library leaders who share aspects of their journeys with us. Four are relatively new library directors and one a two-time interim director. Some were promoted from within; some came from outside their organizations. They represent a variety of library types, backgrounds, generations, and experiences. What they have in common is a passion for helping their respective libraries be the best that they can be.

Perhaps the dominant theme of their very different experiences is that of balance. A good leader needs to balance a clear view of the big picture with the appropriate attention to detail that ensures things don't crash and burn. Clear, effective communication must be weighed against required confidentiality and good timing. Confidence in oneself and one's talents butts up against the insecurity that is natural with taking on a new role. Each of these five talented individuals shares the ways that they try to strike these and other balances as they succeed in learning and accomplishing their roles as directors.

Some leaders actively strive for positions of authority, building the skills they believe they will need for success. Others are approached to take on leadership roles when the need arises and their talents are recognized. Whatever the case, being successful when the opportunity arises requires flexibility, determination, a collaborative spirit, and an understanding that the world we live in is in constant flux.

There is no road map for the leadership journey. Continuing along its path is more the effort of painting a picture than laying a road. The pictures these five individuals provide for this issue come together to provide a compelling mosaic of inspiration and experience. We hope you will enjoy them and learn something about where your personal journey may take you.

Guest Editor

Robert Hulshof-Schmidt

Librarian At Large

rbhs.ola@hulshof-schmidt.net

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Blueprint for a New Leader

by **Abigail Elder**
AElder@ci.tualatin.or.us
Director,
Tualatin Public Library
and
President,
Oregon Library Association

Any good leader will spend the first six months in the position with a severe case of self-doubt: there is no way that you are capable of doing this job. Any accomplishments in the past must have been due to timing, happenstance or just dumb luck.

It's natural to feel incompetent in a new position, especially a leadership spot where others will be interpreting every gesture for hints about what the future might hold. Despite the box on the organization chart, you are starting at the very bottom in authority. People follow a new leader because it is required, not because they have any faith in you. This can be a tough adjustment for a new leader; you had plenty of authority in your old job, where you possessed considerable expertise and had developed excellent relationships.

Unfortunately, a new leader does not have the luxury of creating all these levels of trust and authority overnight. In most organizations, a leader cannot possibly be the expert at all things, and people need a little time to warm up to a new face.

For my first few months at my library, I jumped at every chance to check in books or work at the reference desk. I told myself that it was an opportunity to work alongside my new colleagues (which it was, and I loved working with them), but I eventually had to admit to myself that these tasks were the equivalent of a library security blanket. These were jobs that I had previously held and been successful at; what's more, that success could be measured, unlike the mysterious piles of paperwork waiting on my new desk. I was so eager to prove my work ethic, my willingness to pitch in, and my library credentials, that I was ignoring the very work for which I had been hired.

So where can a self-diagnosed incompetent find the professional equivalent of a Powdermilk Biscuit, those imaginary treats that "give shy persons the courage to go out and do what needs to be done?"

First, look yourself in the mirror and acknowledge that at least some of the nice things that people say about you are true. Reinforce and grow those skills by teaching them to others. Find ways to contribute your expertise to the professional discussion, such as offering an opinion on a listserv, serving on an OLA committee, or talking to people interested in librarianship as a career. Positive feedback in these small steps begets more confidence, which enables you to share even more, which raises your reputation, which in turn produces more opportunities to contribute.

Of course, that mirror is also going to remind you of everything that you don't know, too. List those items and seek out ways to improve your knowledge. Subscribe to business magazines; attend a League of Oregon Cities conference; read books (how cool that part of the answer is to *Read Books!*)

Most of all, seek out individuals outside of your organization to be your colleagues. It can be lonely to be a leader. There are many confidential decisions and pieces of private information that you must carry alone for long periods of time. Finding people outside your immediate work group can alleviate some of that isolation. These external colleagues don't need to know every gossipy detail of your work life; quite the opposite. These are the folks who help you see the bigger picture and put your work and library in perspective.



Make sure that some of these connections come from the world beyond libraries. Budget concerns, personnel issues, and bureaucratic frustrations are not unique to libraries, and it can be helpful to share those experiences with someone outside your normal circle.

In my case, a long-established book club keeps me energized and informed. One of my former MPA professors recruited former students to read non-fiction, often biographies, and discuss the leadership lessons within those books. The biggest benefit, however, is often the first hour, when we commiserate about our jobs in public agencies. My book club colleagues serve as my release valve and my reality check.

Once you start sharing experiences with professionals from other libraries and other fields, you'll realize that your self-diagnosed incompetence is misplaced: you've got this library leadership thing handled. And once you've got everything figured out, it's probably time to look into the mirror again and start planning your next career move, something that will make you feel the terror of incompetence all over again! 🌿

A very quick survey on Publib provided these suggestions for keeping perspective:

What we do outside of the library

- Join service clubs
- Volunteer for community organizations
- Have coffee with retired library directors
- Seek out directors from other non-profits
- Patronize local businesses and get to know the owners
- Attend Chamber of Commerce social events
- Participate in listservs
- Seek continuing education and leadership programs

What we read

Periodicals (paper or online)

- Fast Company
<http://www.fastcompany.com/>
- GOOD Magazine
<http://www.good.is/>
- Wired
<http://www.wired.com/>
- Governing
<http://www.governing.com/>
- Harvard Business Review
<http://hbr.org/magazine>

Tracking Tools

- Paper.li
<http://paper.li/>
- Google Alerts
<http://www.google.com/alerts>
- Tweetbeeps
<http://tweetbeep.com/>



Here Today, Gone Tomorrow:

Observations of an Interim Academic Library Director

by Lynn Chmelir
lynn.chmelir@pdx.edu
Interim University Librarian,
Portland State University Library

It was never my intention to be an “interim” anything, but I find that two times I have more or less accidentally served as an interim library director, first at a community college and again at a university.

A colleague, who was about to retire, recently asked me how he might find interim work. I didn't have any good suggestions because interim positions are not common and are rarely advertised. Many interim directors are appointed from within the staff when the director leaves. In my case, though, I was a newcomer to both institutions.

The first job was advertised on a local jobline after a search for a permanent director had failed. It happened to be located in the town where I already owned a house, bought in anticipation of upcoming retirement; so I applied. The search was very abbreviated—just a couple phone calls, a brief visit with the VP for Academic Affairs, an hour-long meeting with the library staff, and a talk with the head of HR.

The second time around I had already retired and received a phone call from the current interim who had just accepted a job elsewhere. Again, the hiring process was rapid and informal; I e-mailed a resume with the names of references and had brief meetings with the Provost, the outgoing Interim University Librarian, and the library leadership team.

One might be tempted to think that an interim position would be an easy gig: attend some meetings, turn in the paperwork on time, monitor the budget, attend ceremonial functions, meet important donors, and enjoy watching the library run while the powers that be recruit a new director. I'm glad I wasn't tempted by such notions because serving as an interim at both institutions has proven to be very challenging work. The information landscape is changing much too fast for even one year to pass without confronting decisions that will have far-reaching, long-term effects. These challenges are, of course, exacerbated by the budgetary pressures that impinge on all academic libraries. I find myself agreeing with Gail Munde, author of one of the few articles on the interim academic library director position: “The interim director never sleeps” (Munde, pp 416–7). Or at least not much!

The goal for any interim academic library director is to bring a measure of stability to the library during a time of transition and organizational change. This needs to happen even though the interim is always on the steep end of the learning curve. There isn't a lot of time to get up to speed. Every scrap of previous experience and knowledge is useful and the more the better. Although each library presents unique challenges, there are commonalities that ease the transition to a new institution.


An interim recruited from outside who has already been an academic library director may have some advantages. Experience working with academic vice presidents, fellow deans, faculty library committees, development officers, and donors makes it easier to assume the role as principal advocate and spokesperson from the library to the academic community and its supporters. Familiarity with budgeting, academic personnel administration, recruiting, faculty governance, promotion and tenure procedures, accreditation, and institutional administrative structures helps with the rapid uptake of new responsibilities.



On the other hand, an interim appointed from within to a new leadership role has the advantage of familiarity with the functioning of that particular library and the idiosyncrasies of local campus procedures and personalities that are necessary to be effective. In either case, a sound understanding of the rapidly changing academic library environment is important for the interim director. In our region, the Orbis Cascade Alliance academic library consortium plays an important role in supporting core academic library functions. Previous experience with the Alliance at other member libraries helped ease my own transition in both interim assignments.

The interim period must be a time for progress, yet the interim must also be mindful that permanent leadership is imminent and try to preserve maximum flexibility for the incoming director. It's a balancing act to know when decisive decision-making is required and when decisions can safely be deferred. If key positions are vacant, library administration may be operating at less than full strength during the interim period in order to let the new director have input into building a new leadership team.

One experience that every interim encounters is the process of recruiting a new library director. Many interims, especially those promoted from within the library, may be interested in the permanent appointment. Others plan only to serve until a new librarian is hired. It is important that the library staff and university administration are clear about the interim's intentions when it comes time to do the search. Institutions vary on the role of the interim in the search process. Although I did not seek a permanent appointment at either library, I was asked to chair the search committee at one place and not appointed to the search committee at the other. In every case, the interim can provide a unique perspective for the candidates during the interview process. After the hire is made, the interim will likely begin to include the incoming director in decision-making in anticipation of her/his arrival. Perhaps one of the most important responsibilities of the interim is to be sure that plenty of institutional knowledge is passed on to the new director. Finally, as the interim heads for the door, it should be with a sense of satisfaction that the enterprise has made progress and is well positioned to chart a new course under new leadership.

Unanticipated as they were, I have immensely enjoyed my two stints as an interim academic library director. For me, the real pleasures of the interim assignment are the chance to understand the cultural differences among libraries, to observe the academic library mission through a different institutional lens, and to work with a new cohort of library and institutional colleagues. Organizational structures and communication patterns vary widely and an administrative strategy that works well at one place may backfire at another. Adapting to a new environment—and quickly—is a challenge. The interim appointment is lifelong learning in action! 

References

Munde, G. (2000), "My year as interim: Six things I learned for free," *College and Research Libraries News*, Vol. 61 No.5, pp. 416-417+.





Distance Education Is Closer Than You Think

Emerging technology has transformed our lives, including how and where we learn. No longer do we have to leave jobs and relocate our families to pursue our educational dreams. Now, from the comfort of our homes, we can participate in online courses and even earn a degree without ever setting foot on campus.

Graduate students at the San José State University School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) live across North America, and most never visit the campus located in the heart of Silicon Valley. SLIS offers a fully online Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree, with a convenient approach to learning and an ALA-accredited program rich in choices.

Early on, SLIS recognized the benefits of delivering its courses online, including introducing students to the emerging technology they'll encounter when working in the rapidly changing LIS field. As they interact with peers and faculty from a distance, SLIS students are

immersed in sophisticated technology, preparing them to serve clients and collaborate with colleagues who live across town or around the globe.



"We know that tomorrow's information professionals will need to interact with virtual teams and use emerging technology to serve clients," said Debbie Faires, SLIS assistant director for distance learning.



"We're excited about providing students with skills that will make them more employable in today's challenging economic climate."

Technology has opened up a world of opportunities for SLIS students. They present at virtual conferences and participate in research projects, all without leaving their homes. They gain hands-on experience as virtual interns, interacting with host institutions that may be located anywhere on the continent. For example, a student who lives in Oregon may intern at a high-tech Silicon Valley company without traveling to California.

The San José State University School of Library and Information Science offers two fully online master's degrees, a fully online certificate program, and a doctoral program: Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS), Master of Archives and Records Administration (MARA), Post-Master's Certificate in Library and Information Science, and the San José Gateway PhD Program.

Let the learning begin:
slisweb.sjsu.edu/oregon



SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE



Rebirth and Renewal:

How a Year of Closure Benefited Hood River County's Libraries

by **Matthew "Buzzy" Nielsen**
buzzy@hoodriverlibrary.org
Library Director,
Hood River County Library District

The adage that misfortunes come in threes was unfortunately the case when it came to library closures in Oregon. Three county-run libraries closed and subsequently reopened, each under different governance models: Jackson County Library Services in 2007, Josephine County Library in 2007, and Hood River County Library in 2010. When the last of those libraries, Hood River County, reopened, it was perhaps the most watched management change among Oregon libraries in several years. This attention came because the Hood River County Library District, the phoenix that arose from the ashes of the county-run library, is the first of the three to reopen with permanent, stable funding.

Hood River County Library's closure and subsequent reopening created an invaluable opportunity to re-envision it in light of what the community wanted, an opportunity of which I find myself fortunate to be part. The library's rebirth is filled with many amazing leaders—dedicated library board members, staff, Friends, Foundation, and volunteers. These leaders who spearheaded the library's reopening had a new vision that required difficult choices, choices that ultimately placed the library on a path to a better future.

Saying no before saying yes

Hood River County was hit hard by declining revenues from sale of timber from County-owned forestland. This loss, combined with mounting Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) costs and a flagging economy, forced the County Commissioners to make tough choices. One of those choices was to de-fund the library. The Commissioners placed a measure on the ballot in May 2010, to create a special library district, funded at \$0.70 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Despite valiant efforts, the measure failed. On July 1, 2010, the doors of the three County libraries—in Hood River, Cascade Locks, and Parkdale—were shuttered.

The failure of the measure shocked many. The measure, with its \$0.70 tax rate, was designed to provide ample library services and hours. As library staff and supporters, we might wonder, how could a community not want a good library? The closure forced many in Hood River County and around the state to realize that, while those who use them fervently support libraries, they may mean little to large portions of their service populations. In Hood River County, the library measure proved too expensive. No library wants to face that reality.

At this point, some people may have given up. The community had spoken, and it did not want libraries. However, that reality allowed a new group of leaders to ask, what is a library that the entire community can support? What needs to change? What needs to stay the same? This new group of leaders included not just activists from the previous campaign and members of the library's Friends and Foundation, but also new individuals who perhaps never thought of themselves as library supporters. These people were horrified at the thought of living in towns with no libraries.





Ad for Save Our Libraries.

They rallied together to place another measure on the ballot in November, 2010, and made the difficult but necessary decision to ask for less funding, \$0.39 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. The measure passed by a thin margin, 53 to 47 percent. There were many amazing individuals responsible for helping pass the new district. However, with the passage of the measure came five new “official” leaders of the library: Paul Blackburn, Mary-Ethel Foley, Mike Oates, Sara Duckwall Snyder, and Heather Staten, the infant district’s independent governing board.

Debt: Not the way to start a library

With no staff and the need to reopen three libraries under new governance, the new Board and many volunteers had to undertake another monumental task right on the heels of the difficult campaign. They had an unusual opportunity to learn the nuances of how to run a library. While many of the volunteers had worked in particular aspects of library operations, and one Board member was a retired special librarian, nobody had a complete understanding of what it took to run a public library system. Reopening one would mean a steep learning curve.

Thanks to a Library Services and Technology Act grant from the Oregon State Library, the new Board was able to hire consultant Michael Gaston to advise on reopening the libraries. Gaston directed the Deschutes Public Library when it changed from being a county department to a special district. Gaston’s assistance paved the way for critical decisions such as establishing financial procedures, delineating board governance, and hiring a director.

However, one of the Board’s first major decisions was to reject one of Gaston’s recommendations, a suggestion to go into debt. In order to reopen the libraries in July 2011, money would be needed before tax revenues would be received in November. The simplest way to get these funds would be Tax Anticipatory Notes, in which the new district would borrow against its future tax revenue. Instead, library supporters decided to raise the funds for “early opening” from grants and private donations.



Once again, this decision required fortitude and a certain degree of audacity: raising this money would require asking a community that had approved the library only narrowly to reach into its pockets and give more. The community once again stepped up; it raised over \$215,000 to support library operations from July to November, 2011, thanks to support from the Meyer Memorial Trust, Miller Foundation, Oregon Community Foundation, Wichita Falls Area Community Foundation, unspent funds from the Ready to Read grant program, and over \$110,000 donated by private individuals.

But who will change the light bulbs?

The campaign and fundraising efforts highlighted the advantages that district libraries have over their municipal counterparts. Hood River County Library District no longer has to compete with other departments for limited funds. County commissioners and city councilors are faced with the unenviable job of distributing limited funds among many worthy needs: roads, public safety, courts, emergency response, etc. By passing a library district, the citizens of Hood River County devoted funding exclusively for libraries.

The library district also now had a governing board completely dedicated to it. Just as their funds must be distributed, so too must be the attention of county commissioners and city councilors. A special district board is able to focus singularly on the library, allowing members to better understand its operations. This focus also benefits library users: if they are displeased with the Board, they can elect—or even become—new board members.

However, the planning process for the new district also highlighted disadvantages. The library itself would now become responsible for tasks previously done by other County departments: finance, human resources, information technology, intergovernmental relations, maintenance, and more. Who owns and would maintain the beautiful Carnegie building in Hood River, including its nearly two-acre park? How would staff computer and phone networks work, given their inextricable link with the County's? How would items be delivered among branches when the library previously relied on a County-owned vehicle? All of these issues needed clarification before the libraries could reopen.

The Board also found itself getting a crash course in library district management. Within a few months, members learned about public meeting law, contracting, insurance, budgeting, financial procedures, intergovernmental agreements, and more. They had to learn these fundamental governance skills along with teaching themselves about library operations; the Board had to act as the governing board and the library director simultaneously. Among the most momentous of the decisions was selecting a library consortium, choosing for models among Fort Vancouver Regional Library System, Libraries in Clackamas County (LINCC), or the Sage Library System of Eastern Oregon. The decision would affect dramatically the library's patrons and future staff. Due to its low costs, open source mindset, and connection to Hood River's previous consortium, GorgeLINK, Hood River County Library District is now part of Sage.

New library, now featuring actual staff!

The Board and volunteers planned and raised funds with no staff until they hired a director in June, 2011. They considered this one of the most important decisions they would make, and I am still thankful and amazed that they chose me. Now I was to become a part of this incredible story.



The open opportunity in Hood River County is what attracted me to the position: how often do you have the chance to start a library anew and re-envision what it can do for its community? While the opportunity was monumental, so too was the challenge. I was responsible for reopening three libraries within a month. We had no staff, a skeletal budget, bare bones policies, and only basic administrative systems. What we did have were passionate, hardworking people on the Board, Friends, and Foundation.

I am extremely grateful to these dedicated, knowledgeable people because I most certainly was not prepared for this job, although the Board thought otherwise. How can you prepare for such a position, really? Most librarians are fortunate enough, despite the opportunity it provides, to not have to reopen a library system after a year of closure. I only had four years of library management experience, a year and a half as director of the Langlois Public Library and two and half years as assistant director of the North Bend Public Library.

Despite my lack of preparation, I have found myself continually thankful in these last nine months, not for my library degree but rather for my degree in public policy/administration. Reopening a library under a new governance structure has required writing policies, hiring personnel, establishing intergovernmental agreements, selecting contractors and vendors, and much else. The coursework and practica I took in public policy helped me navigate these processes. Just as the Board of Directors in a library district can be *more focused* on library governance, the director of such a district is *less focused* on library-specific duties because s/he acquires many administrative responsibilities: human resources, finance, etc. The combination of library and public administration training allowed me to tackle this variety of duties.

Like the Board's decision on hiring a director, I knew that my most important decision would be hiring staff. As has happened often in these past few months, I was placed in an enviable position of being able to ask and answer very fundamental questions: if you could hire your library staff completely anew, whom would you hire? What would their responsibilities be?

This openness had its difficulties. The previous library had employed nearly twenty highly qualified staff. What was the new district's responsibility to those former employees? Ultimately, I chose not to prefer previous staff over other applicants. As an outsider, having never worked at the previous library nor even visited the Columbia Gorge before accepting the position, this decision was likely easier for me. I considered previous library experience and sought three main qualities: a patron-focused attitude, excitement about starting a library anew, and eagerness for new ideas. Staff would need to be jacks-of-all-trades, for in the early months, everyone would need to do a bit of everything. And we would all have to do so while learning a new integrated library system on the fly.

We are now a small but mighty twelve-person staff. Although not by design, our staff in some sense represents the new start that the Board sought: we are a mix of old and new, experienced and inexperienced. Half of us worked for the previous county-run library. Many of us are Gen Xers or Millennials. For the first time in Hood River County Library history, we have staff specifically devoted to cataloging, technology instruction, and outreach to the Latino population that comprises a third of our county. The staff's diversity and opportunity to start fresh allows us to take what people loved about the previous library and integrate new ideas to make it better.





New hours.

A new beginning

As of February 2012, our libraries are going strong. The Hood River Library is open forty-three hours per week, while the Cascade Locks and Parkdale Libraries are, at twenty per week, open more hours than they have ever been before. We have a full complement of library services, collections, and programming, and are expanding them continually. We are going out into the community to spread the word about what the library has to offer. And, most importantly, the public is using us, with our statistics on track to return to pre-closure levels by the end of the year.

But we still have much to do. We still need to reach out to that 47 percent of the population who did not vote for the library district. Recently, our Board established strategic goals for the next four years. Among the most important of these is getting staff out of the literal and figurative brick-and-mortar of the library and into the community. We need to let people know what a twenty-first century library has to offer.

Our work continues. Every month, the Board, staff, volunteers, and I find ourselves writing new policies, creating new procedures, brainstorming new ideas, and doing many other tasks associated with reopening. And while these never-ending responsibilities seem daunting, they also reveal the true silver lining of the closure of the Hood River County Library: an opportunity to reassess what a library can and should mean to its community. Often we find ourselves so caught up in maintaining our libraries that we fail to pause to ask ourselves whether what we are doing is what is best for our entire community. In Hood River County, we were forced to pause and reconsider, and that reconsideration allows us to create libraries that truly reflect our diverse community. 🌿



Earning a Tarnished Tiara

by **Maureen Cole**
mcole@ci.oregon-city.or.us
Director,
Oregon City Public Library

There is nothing like moving to a new city and starting a new job to remind you of how to learn at an accelerated pace. You'll remember what that's like if you think back to when you were learning how to walk or picking up language for the first time. Remember that? This is what I have been doing, off and on, since August of 2009, when I bade farewell to my buddies in Eugene and found myself on the mean streets of ... Oregon City. Oh, and Portland.

Our youngest son had just graduated from high school and it was time for me to join my husband in Portland; he had been working there during the week and commuting to Eugene on weekends for six years. I got the job as the Library Director at Oregon City Public Library (OCPL) and, like the Beverly Hillbillies, we sold the house, loaded up the truck and moved to downtown Portland. Why? Because we were empty nesters and we could. And, like many people in this metropolitan area, I work in one place—Oregon City—and live in another—Portland. This doubled the adventure and challenges of my move north. The lights! The bridges! The traffic! The traffic! The traffic! Always the traffic!

As librarians, we are always talking up that “lifelong learning” thing, right? I'm so on board with that. During the first months of my new job/home undertaking, I could feel the neurons mapping new territory in my brain. All this learning must be a great recipe for preventing Alzheimer's, I thought. The thing about uninterrupted, accelerated learning is that it is exhausting! I've not been this tired since I had two toddlers, and let's face it, that was some years ago.

In order to cope, I ensured that red wine was always available, strictly for medicinal purposes, of course. To survive the commute, I took up listening to audio books, the fluffier the better. And for purposes of rejuvenation and rest of the new brain cells, I quickly became addicted to iPhone mahjongg and Word Warp. I threw in a weekly yoga class and long walks to help stave off the stress.

At work, I was finally in the position which I had long believed suited me: Library Director. However, I was hardly the queen of the castle of my imagination. OCPL was housed in a leased, concrete block building in a shopping mall and was in need of renovation. The Library had no windows except for the glass entryway. It was dim, crowded, and had been without a professional director for eight years. My job was to build a new library. But first, I had to learn everyone's name, wrap my head around the new and strange city/county/district funding/governing arrangement, and figure out my new community/service area/world. My tiara was sweaty and tarnished within the first two days and I was prepared to give it away for the price of a pedicure.

And then it got worse: I learned we would have to move the library. Yikes! What's a library director to do?

This is when I added ‘patience’ to my vocabulary and my attitude; and a good thing too, because really, the fun was just beginning.

Here's some background on my new work environs. LINCC (Library Information Network of Clackamas County) is a relatively new county service district covering almost the entirety of Clackamas County. FY 2009 marked the first distribution of funds. Prior to the formal District, the libraries in Clackamas County had worked together for years, had established service areas for each library, and had centralized some functions in addition to other co-operative activities, but many of the city or county-run libraries were on the brink of clo-



sure due to funding problems. Supporters organized, a district was passed, and voila! several libraries were invigorated with a substantial and stable annual shot of funding. The goal of the district was to fund the libraries to be able to achieve threshold levels of the OLA Public Library Standards. The Standards include having a degreed professional in the position of Library Director/Manager; hence, the desire for Oregon City to replace its previous organizational structure with an in-house Library Director; hence, my new and wonderful job.

There are 13 libraries in LINCC. Two of them are County libraries, while the remaining are City libraries. Each is governed by its corresponding governing entity, but because of the new funding model with the District, we also enjoyed the oversight of the County, primarily in the form of a Library District Advisory Committee.

Oregon City's library had suffered from under-funding for years and was seriously close to closing prior to the passage of the District. It had also been trying to build a new library for years, but the funding was never robust enough to act on those efforts. The District saved OCPL and now that its survival was ensured and I was hired, it was time to consider that new library again. OCPL had moved out of its Carnegie Library in 1995 to leased space. The landlord of the leased space was eager to redevelop his shopping mall and felt confident that—now that I was on board—he could ask us to move in order to get on with his project. And so it was that within four months of my start date, I learned that we needed to be moved by June 1. No longer was I looking for a site; now I was looking for a place to move. We had to make a critical decision. Would we 1) move into another leased space and spend money getting that all fixed up as a library, 2) move into a city-owned facility and get to save on rent for awhile, or 3) buy an existing building and remodel it? The search for a site suddenly intensified; during this time we started talking to the school district about the possibility of purchasing a former school from them. These talks were progressing well and therefore we decided to temporarily move *back* into the Carnegie Library (now called the Carnegie Center), and work towards the purchase of the school building.

This is how I found myself coordinating the move of over 120,000 items to three locations: donated space at a school, donated space at our Friends bookstore, and our new temporary home, a 6,000-square-foot building, the former Carnegie Library (here we go again). We reopened the Carnegie Center as a library on June 21, 2010, ironically 97 years to the day that it first opened as a library. We continued investigating the school property as a future site; unfortunately, after due diligence was completed six months later, we decided that this was not going to work out as a remodel. We walked away from the deal and started over.

I must mention that since I've been in Oregon City, the following events occurred:

- The City Manager who hired me left within my first eight months and I had to get used to a new City Manager while I was still getting used to the City Manager/Council form of governing.
- A project called "The Rivers" became a focal point of voter disagreement between the "no growth" and "jobs" people. I was still getting used to attending City Commission meetings (part of my role as a department head), and the behavior that took place at these meetings still takes my breath away.



- A commissioner was recalled, quite specifically for his work against “The Rivers” development. While he probably was not single-handedly responsible for its demise, by then it did not matter.
- Our County Network manager retired and was not replaced for several months.
- One of our Library Managers retired and we restructured the Library organization.

One of the main themes is clearly a shifting cast of characters. Another theme has been juggling people and groups of people. You could call this managing, but on many days it is not clear who is the manager and who is the managee. There is staff. I’m lucky, they’re fabulous. But after having no money for years, morale was a bit of an issue. There is the Library Board. I’ve never dealt with one of those before. Again I’m lucky, mine is also fabulous. But, wow, what do you do with an advisory group who wanted that new building years ago and would really like to feel like they are “doing something”? There are the Friends of the Library. More luck, more fabulousness. But, wow, they have a much larger bookstore than most Friends I know. So, that’s interesting. And then there is the Foundation. I’m lucky, they’re amazing, but aren’t you guys some of the same people in the other groups?

As I write this, I have been library director for 2 ½ years, the Library has been located in the Carnegie Center for over 1 ½ years, and I feel like I am finally getting to really know people here Oregon City. It takes time. At least, for me it takes time. And I had to give myself permission to take the time, to do it my way, and remember they hired me because I’m me, so trusting myself is ok. Not that I’m the end all, just that people will let me know when it’s not ok; in the meantime, continue doing what works.

Another thing I have I learned: this is a marathon, not a sprint. At the end of the day, can I say yes to the question, “Was progress made today?” If so, then it was a good day. I go home, rejuvenate, and return to continue the marathon.

Another thing I’ve learned is that while you keep your eyes on the prize, you can’t forget about the details. I was hired to pay attention to the big picture. I must specialize in the “out of library” stuff, but not paying attention to the in-house stuff could be my demise. Besides, it’s what got me into libraries in the first place. And, in a small library like mine, everyone does a little bit of everything. So, in addition to trying to get that new building built, I stay connected to all aspects of the library. It’s a necessity and a joy.

And, most of all, I have had the best time finding support and learning from my department head colleagues and city manager, my LINCC colleagues, my staff, my library colleagues outside Clackamas County (thank you OLA, PLD, Libs-OR, State Library, etc.), community members and volunteers, Library Board, Friends, Foundation, Clackamas Community College, Oregon City School District and all of the people who have agreed to collaborate with me and the Library. It’s been FUN!

As you can tell, the challenges have been many. The opportunities, however, are endless. I love my job and I feel that it is a perfect fit for me. I go to work each day optimistic and knowing that I matter to my community. Can it really get any better than that?

You know what? I think I’ll keep that tarnished tiara. For me, it’s just right! 🌸



Changing Leaders and Changing Leadership

by **Faye A. Chadwell**
faye.chadwell@oregonstate.edu
Donald and Delpha Campbell
University Librarian,
Oregon State University
and
Director,
Oregon State University Press

The phrase “changing leadership” brings two meanings to mind. For one, it can mean a change from one leader to another. As a newish academic library director, I certainly identify with that context, having experienced the excitement and adventure that changing leadership represents. I also recognize that changing leadership can be fraught with challenges and obstacles.

Before my appointment as University Librarian, I served as the interim UL. Another interim leader told me, “Your job as interim will be tougher because people liked and admired your predecessor.” My friend was right. Regime change always seems easier if the previous regime was somehow faulty. However, a new library director needs to be aware: as a new leader, you embody change, and change, even when it is positive, can engender anxiety.

I am familiar with an institution that brought a new leader on board after years of enduring a harsh administration that didn’t treat employees respectfully and wasn’t particularly forward thinking. The organization seemed primed for change, but eventually the new leader met with failure. I suspect that the individual never recognized that repeated attempts to bring about change required kid gloves rather than boxing gloves. One outcome was to occasionally hear staff wishing that the former harsh administration would return. It’s like the organization had become subject to a phenomenon akin to Stockholm syndrome but on an institution-wide basis.

A new director needs to establish herself as the new leader, articulating her ideas, motivations, strategies, decision-making processes and, most importantly vision. But this can be a delicate balancing act that has to take into account the impact of change and also has to understand the foundation upon which to build success as a leader.


In the context of changing leaders, I would counsel new leaders to remember that too much focus on the internal operations and relationships can be detrimental to the equally, if not more, important focus on the external. Even as library directors or library leaders, we are part of some administrative food chain. We must do the work to communicate our value and vision up and down that chain and make the necessary external connections that can benefit our libraries.

The other thought that “changing leadership” brings to mind involves changing or altering leadership itself. “Changing leadership” can signify transforming or altering the functions or processes of leading. Haven’t we all dreamed of how we would lead, manage, or administer differently if we were in charge of libraries? My motivation for leading differently is born out of my intellectual and professional involvement, and interest in social change, leadership, and management theory. It’s influenced by my passion for academic and intellectual freedom and by my readings in feminism, queer literature, and other issues of equity and diversity.

I think it is possible to approach leadership (and management) without relying on the centuries-long approach that established hierarchies and emphasized authority. I think it is necessary. Respondents in a survey by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) noted the need for future leaders to place greater emphasis on “building relationships, collaboration, and change management” (Martin, 13). It is crucial to understand that the “library scene” involves a great big world; a leader can no longer rely on knowing everything there is to know even about librarianship.



A leader does have to do the work to stay on top of issues, but a leader also has to be open to ideas from all levels and even seek those ideas. CCL's report also described an emerging trend in leadership whereby leaders are asked to focus "more energy on creating an environment where others can help them succeed" (Martin, 3).

Being a new leader affords the opportunity to bring about change because the leader literally changes from one person to another. But a new leader also brings her own vision and direction into play that is informed by her personal and professional sense of values, relationships, excellence, and motivations, and rewards. Changing leadership also challenges a new leader to change herself. It will be uncomfortable as you are called out of your comfort zones. So expect growth, but acknowledge that growth is often a forceful activity. Just consider the oak seedling that splits rock. Acknowledge also that growth for a new leader can ultimately be fruitful. 

Sources Consulted

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OLA Quarterly Publication Schedule 2012

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Vol 18 • No. 2 Summer 2012	<i>Advocacy</i>	June 1, 2012	July 15, 2012	Kim Read, MLS Student, Oregon College of Oriental Medicine
Vol 18 • No. 3 Fall 2012	<i>Libraries and Museums: Preserving and Exposing Oregon's Cultural History</i>	September 1, 2012	October 15, 2012	Nancy Slight-Gibney, Director, Library Resource Management and Assessment, University of Oregon Libraries
Vol 18 • No. 4 Winter 2012	<i>Professional Development, an Update from 2008</i>	December 1, 2012	January 1, 2013	Steph Miller, Librarian, Multnomah County Library

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