



***“...as a leader you can never say thank you enough, but even more important is the idea of serving the people you are leading. Being a leader can be a very humbling experience.”***

## ***Leadership Qualities for Future Library Leaders:***

### ***Carol’s 10 Steps to Being a Great Library Leader***

*Carol A. Brey-Casiano  
Director of Libraries, El Paso Public Library*

It was a real pleasure for me to speak at two of the Thinking Outside the Borders institutes in Allerton Park, Illinois and Phoenix, Arizona. It was good to re-visit the University of Illinois where I received my master’s degree in 1980. Some of us thought that Allerton Park was a bit rustic, but by today’s standards so was everything else about my college education in 1979—I typed my papers on an electric typewriter, spent hours reading journal articles on microfilm, and the only library records I could access via computer were less than one year old—part of the University of Illinois’ brand new online computer project. Perhaps surprising given my later involvement with the American Library Association (ALA) and others, I was not a member of any professional organization, although I was invited to join Beta Phi Mu.

I got my first job less than three months after graduation—and began serving as the Bookmobile Librarian for the Ozark Regional Library in southern Missouri. I drove that bookmobile over the country roads of a rural, four-county area, where the largest town had a population of 5,000 people! All I really wanted at that time was satisfying work—in fact, studies have shown that’s what most of us want. I never really thought about being a leader in this field, nor did I come close to dreaming of being ALA President—or president of any other organization for that matter. I was fortunate to have some wonderful mentors along the way who helped me to hone what leadership skills I did have, and develop new skills to meet the challenges that always come when you make the decision to step out of your comfort zone.

As I think about the great mentors I have had over the years, I realize that some of them are nearing retirement, and some are no longer with us. The fact is, our profession is aging, although the promise of retirement looming on the horizon is certainly something I am looking forward to! The challenge for us Baby Boomers who might be retiring within the next

10-15 years will be the recruitment of our successors. Not only do we need to recruit librarians, we need to recruit leaders to our profession!

In a recent paper entitled “Library Retirements—What We Can Expect” by Denise Davis, Director of the ALA Office for Research and Statistics, Ms. Davis finds that estimated retirements from our field are already outpacing Library and Information Studies graduations in the U.S. today, even with the reduced number of jobs in public and academic libraries. She also estimates that we will not see a surplus of graduates to retirements until the year 2019, and that it may take until 2023 before we recover the loss due to all the estimated retirements. And, Ms. Davis notes, “the issue is not [just] having LIS graduates in the marketplace, the issue becomes having qualified librarians to promote into the positions vacated due to retirement.”

*The Armijo Branch of the El Paso Public Library is located within walking distance of the U.S./Mexico border, in the area of South El Paso known as the Segundo Barrio or Second Ward. According to the 2000 Census, 95.5% of the population in this neighborhood is Hispanic/Latino and 87.7% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. There is no doubt that El Paso is an international city...it is obvious as soon as one steps outside.*

I am already seeing a shortage of qualified librarians available to take front-line and mid-level management jobs in my own library, the El Paso Public Library in Texas. “What do I mean by qualified?” While there are the usual minimum requirements for most of these positions, how many years of experience you have is not nearly as important to me as the leadership qualities you exhibit. I discovered, deep down inside my young library soul some twenty-five years ago, that I had the passion to be a library leader. But it took some great mentors, a variety of experiences, and some real challenges along the way before I could truly say that I had come close to becoming the leader I wanted to be.

We need real leaders if our libraries of the future are to thrive and grow. I know that you must possess the passion, the enthusiasm it takes to be a leader or you

would not be at this Institute, but now the question is: how do we develop the seasoned leaders we will need to move this profession well into the 21st century? In thinking about this, I have developed “Carol’s ten steps to being a great library leader,” which I will share with you now in the hopes that it will be of some help as we think about succession planning for the future.

### **Step #1: Find a good mentor/ BE a good mentor**

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote “Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be.” For me, Marilyn Hinshaw was that person. She was the one who hired me for my first Library Director’s job at the Muskogee (Oklahoma) Public Library when I was just 24 years old. Marilyn saw something in me that I didn’t recognize myself. As my boss and mentor, she gave me advice, but also encouraged me to develop my own management style. She also sent me to my first ALA Conference, staying home so that I could attend, in 1983. Marilyn always seemed to believe that I could do more than I believed of myself. I remember when she called me in 1988 or so to ask me to chair the Program Committee for what was then called the Small and Medium-Sized Roundtable of ALA, which she was chairing that year. “The Committee Chair resigned and I need someone who can get the job done—fast,” she told me. I, of course, said yes!

My relationship with Marilyn proves that a good mentoring relationship never grows old. I still receive encouraging e-mails from her about recently posted library director's jobs... "Now Carol, this is one you really should consider!" she'll say. And, I, in turn, have reached out to people who need mentors, in my Association work in and my home library.

### **Step #2: Learn how to follow first**

It's been said that "You cannot be a leader, and ask other people to follow you, unless you know how to follow, too." No matter what leadership position you hold, there is probably still someone you have to report to. When I became President of ALA, I found it fairly easy to get some of the things accomplished that I wanted, but there were also many things that the ALA Staff and membership expected of me! Sometimes, I had to know how to follow the lead of others if I was to succeed.

### **Step #3: Be Visionary**

I have always believed that the mark of a good leader is one who can articulate a vision for his or her organization and then motivate others to share and accomplish that vision.

*The "America's Most Literate Cities 2007" study conducted by Dr. Jack Miller of Central Connecticut State University has ranked the City of El Paso second to last among literate cities with a population of 250,000 or more for the past several years. Libraries in El Paso, however, have risen several notches in the study to 59 out of 69 cities, demonstrating that libraries can make a difference! This change in the status of libraries can be attributed to the construction of three new branches and an expanded Main Library by the El Paso Public Library System.*

The El Paso Public Library serves a community that has been ranked last or close to last in literacy among major U.S. cities. Yet, recently our City Council set a goal for our library to become "among the best in the nation." I guess I was one step ahead of them, because I had already told our staff we should strive to be the best in the world! Even though our funding levels are low for a community our size, the quality of our staff, facilities and programming has helped us to establish benchmarks that will enable us to achieve a higher stature in the years to come—and achieve our goal of being "among the best libraries in the nation."

Peter Drucker described it this way: "Leadership is not magnetic personality, that can just as well be a glib tongue. It is not 'making friends and influencing people,' that is flattery. Leadership is lifting a person's vision to higher sights, the raising of a person's performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations."

### **Step #4: Be a Good Servant**

In his book *Leadership Is an Art*, Max DePree states "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant." I read that book about 15 years ago, but I've never forgotten DePree's words. Of course, as a leader you can never say thank you enough, but even more important is the idea of serving the people you are leading. Being a leader can be a very humbling experience. You learn that, while the buck may stop with you, it takes the work of every team member to be successful.

Lao-tsu said that "As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence.... When the best leader's work is done the people say, 'We did it ourselves!'"

## **Step #5: Take risks**

As a leader, I have always subscribed to the old adage “It is easier to ask forgiveness than permission.” And, if the risk I am taking is well-calculated, I usually can give an acceptable explanation even if I do have to ask permission! This is an especially important adage for those of us in government work—whether it is on the local, state or national level. Most of us have probably learned by now that if you ask for permission to do something at the government level, you will involve a team of lawyers for at least a month and by the time you get your answer, it may be too late to move forward.

## **Step #6: Take care of yourself**

Whenever I hear of a friend or colleague who is taking on a new leadership position, the first thing I do is encourage that person to start an exercise program as part of a healthy lifestyle. Being a leader takes stamina. I’m sure most of you know something about the need for stamina. Dee Hock, Founder and CEO Emeritus of Visa, takes this idea a step further by saying that “If you seek to lead, invest at least 50% of your time in leading yourself—your own purpose, ethics, principles, motivation, conduct.” I am always amazed by how much the people I lead pay attention to what I do—the good, the bad, and the ugly. I am a role model, whether I like it or not, and need to remember that at all times.

## **Step #7: Maintain a positive attitude**

While serving as Director of the Oak Park Public Library in Illinois, I was once named the “Perky Librarian” by members of the Library staff. At first I thought people might not take me seriously if I was too positive all the time, but I have learned that, when you are out in front, the people you lead appreciate a positive attitude—particularly when times are tough. Napoleon Bonaparte once said that “A leader is a dealer in hope.” That was particularly true in his case, but I think still remains true today.

## **Step #8: Never turn down a leadership position...even if it means managing your kid’s soccer team.**

You will always learn something new about working effectively with other people. People are always asking me how to get appointed to an ALA Committee. And my answer is—be willing to serve on a committee that isn’t one of the top five in popularity. The first ALA Committee I ever chaired was one called the “Policy Monitoring Committee.” Sounds exciting, doesn’t it?! However, by serving on this Committee I learned a great deal about the inner workings of ALA, which served me well later as I took on more leadership positions.

## **Step #9: Learn how to motivate people effectively**

I think I am still learning how to do this step correctly. There are so many ways to motivate people, and yet it is easy sometimes just to say, “Never mind, I’ll do it myself.” George S. Patton once said, “Don’t tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results.” Or, as Dwight D. Eisenhower put it, “You do not lead by hitting people over the head — that’s assault, not leadership.” This is probably the greatest challenge for me—I love the process, and it is so tempting for me to get involved in many aspects of the day-to-day operation. But any truly great leader has to trust the people she is leading to do their best. And they will not let you down. “The task of leadership is not to put greatness into people, but to elicit it, for the greatness is there already.” — John Buchan once said.

## **And last but not least...Step #10: Keep your sense of humor!**

I try to keep things around my office that make me laugh. These come in handy, particularly whenever I am tempted to take myself too seriously. I once made an especially difficult budget presentation to my staff holding an inflated pink flamingo! Or, if I am working on a tough project, I might put on a funny hat just to keep things in perspective. I am positive the ability to laugh will reduce the stress in your life, lower your blood pressure, and in general make you feel better.

Let me close with this simple thought: Great leaders are the ones who care about the people around them. I feel blessed to work in this field—and I love my job—although I tell people that some days I love it more than others! As librarians, we have the opportunity to shape the future of our profession, one life at a time. These words written by Admiral James B. Stockdale sum it up nicely: “Leadership must be based on goodwill. Goodwill does not mean posturing and, least of all, pandering to the mob. It means obvious and wholehearted commitment to helping followers. What we need for leaders are men of the heart who are so helpful that they, in effect, do away with the need of their jobs. But leaders like that are never out of a job, never out of followers. Strange as it sounds, great leaders gain authority by giving it away.”

I encourage you to write these words on your hearts, go out there and change the future of libraries forever! You can do it, or as we say in El Paso, *Sí, se puede!* Thank you.