Collaborative Leadership

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Introduction

For this column, I'd like to take a step away from my usual list of collaborative technologies and talk a bit about some things I've been reading and some leadership techniques I think we should be implementing in our libraries.

Like all of us I've had some great managers, some not so great managers and some managers who should have never taken a job outside the home. The fact is that not everyone is made to be a leader, not every-one has the right people skills to manage others and not everyone has the same idea of what a "good" manager is. I personally find that the managers I worked the best with were open and listened to what I had to contribute; they realized that they couldn't possibly always be right. It's for this reason that I have been enjoying reading *Open Leadership* by Charlene Li.

Leading Openly

Open Leadership isn't a library science professsional development title and might be overlooked by many library managers, but it most certainly shouldn't be! Charlene Li does an amazing job of showing how open leaders produce not just efficient companies but companies that people want to work for. You've read it everywhere lately (including my own columns), libraries are struggling due to budget cuts, and those cutbacks can have a major impact on morale. Open leaders, who work closely with their staff, can make library staff feel like they're still important to the institution even if the money isn't flowing their way.

One of the cornerstones of open leadership that resonates with me is the importance of collaboration:

The second core mind-set of an open leader is a disposition toward collaboration. The problem is that as a society we do not value, teach, or encourage collaboration—it's simply not part of most leaders' DNA until fairly late in their careers … Person after person, leaders that I interviewed echoed this viewpoint—that collaboration was a hard skill for them to learn and that the practices that made them successful in the past were not necessarily the skills and the mind-set that will allow them to be successful going forward. They learned that they had to include others in the process, because they can't assume that they know every-thing needed to be successful.[1]

Li continues by stating that "having the confidence to let go of total control, to be more open, and to still get things done" is the key to being an open leader. Whitney Johnson backs up Li's theory in her article entitled *Collaboration Is Risky. Now, Get on with It.* when she urges us to **"**[r]emember that our collaborators are competent." [2]

Being a Collaborative Leader

How then do we translate what Li and Johnson are talking about to our libraries and to being collaborative leaders? The first step is to think of your staff as your team instead of assuming that being in charge means that you have to work alone. The mentality that only you can have the right decision isn't going to cut it in today's climate of crowdsourcing, open sourcing and shared information. The open and collaborative leader needs to listen to his or her staff and work with them to provide better services.

Our staffs are being cut and it's becoming harder and harder to provide exceptional service; why not poll your staff and see what ideas they have for providing better services on a budget? Try turning to your patrons to see

what they'd like to see and what help they can be in making changes in the library. Ask your staff to work on more group projects. Take advantage of social media both in and outside of the library to share and gather information. Using various technologies I've mentioned in previous columns you can easily gather information from your fellow librarians and community members and lead in a more open and collaborative fashion.

Endnotes

[1] Li, Charlene. *Open Leadership: How Social Technology Can Transform the Way You Lead* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010). http://www.charleneli.com/open-leadership/.

[2] Johnson, Whitney. "Collaboration Is Risky. Now, Get on with It," *Harvard Business Review*, June 7, 2011. http://blogs.hbr.org/johnson/2011/06/collaboration-is-risky-now-get.html.