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Learning Leadership

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Learning Leadership

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It is hard to talk about leadership without sounding clichéd, but it truly was “a dark and stormy night” that began my recent trip to the American Association of Law Libraries’ 2014 Leadership Academy. Fortunately, although the rainy drive to Chicago seemed an ill omen, the Leadership Academy turned out to be engaging, instructive, and replete with networking opportunities.

For this year’s retreat, thirty-four law librarians from law schools, law firms, and public law libraries across the U.S. gathered in Oak Brook, Illinois, for a 2-day intensive seminar. Gail Johnson and Pam Parr of Face-to-Face Communications led the group through topics ranging from communication styles to values. Gail and Pam were dynamic instructors. Their talents and the group’s manageable size and coherence gave rise to an energy that is rarely felt in conference rooms. Conversations came easily, and ideas bounced from one person to another.

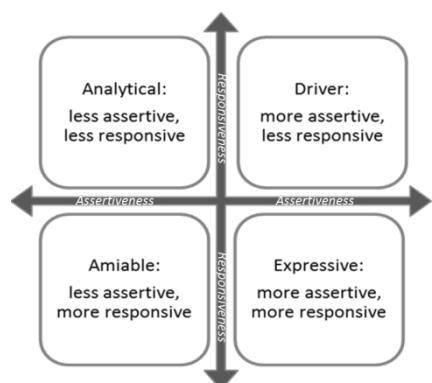
Communication Styles

One of the most interesting activities of the first day was an investigation of communication styles. In any communication, we derive 55% of the meaning we glean from what we see, 38% from what we hear, and only 7% from the actual words. This means that how we carry ourselves, how our facial expressions change, how our hands move, and how our tone of voice and volume modulate have far more impact on the meaning we convey to others than our actual words do.

To understand more about what we are conveying to people, we were each given a list of approximately 20 sets of two alternatives to choose from regarding our communication behaviors. Examples included: Do you tend to lean forward when you talk? Or backward? Do you talk quickly or more slowly? Do you make more statements? Or ask more questions? The results were tallied, and the scores indicated where each of us falls in a matrix of communication styles. The matrix has two axes. The x axis is for assertiveness; the y axis is for responsiveness.

In addition to our self-evaluations, Gail and Pam had also gathered assessments by our co-workers, and we compared our findings to those from people who work with us every day. I was not surprised to find myself in the Expressive quadrant, nor my colleague, also attending, in the Driver corner. What was intriguing were the conversations that ensued as we began to explore how to temper our own communication styles as well as how to be aware of others’ styles and what to

expect from them because of their styles. I was able to think about my colleagues – not only my interactions with people but also their interactions with each other – in a new light. It was suddenly easy to see why some conversations work and others lead quickly to conflict.



One of the important endnotes to our work on communication styles was that every style adds value to a team of coworkers. Not surprisingly, we talked about using communication skills assessments to build understanding among librarians working closely together, but we also discussed using them in hiring decisions. For example: have

plenty of Analyticals (people who are data-driven and methodical but have a hard time pulling the trigger)? Hire a Driver; they're more assertive and excel at making decisions and ushering projects to completion.

Values

It's difficult to talk about "values" without adding to the clichés, but the discussion of values was a vital part of the Leadership Academy. While I found it hard to choose just four out of a list of 50 possible "most important values" (children who pick up after themselves was not on the list!), the salient point of the discussion was that people are miserable when their values are in conflict with those of their organization or even their boss.

In the profit-driven world, it has long been assumed that people value money most. Organizations have used financial incentives as motivation, but people go on being miserable. Studies have shown that people actually value relevancy, pride in their work, ownership of their work, and job security more than money. In addition, some people value flexibility because of commitments outside their jobs. Some people value opportunities for personal development, recognition, learning, and service.

Most of us are not in librarianship for the money, and prioritizing these alternative values plays a significant role in effective library leadership. The challenge for a leader is to listen to what truly motivates others, i.e. what do they value?, and respond accordingly rather than imposing the leader's or organization's own values. Leaders who can do this are "Multipliers." See *Liz Wiseman. Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter (HarperCollins 2010)*. Multipliers imbue others with capability because they believe that everyone can contribute. They create an environment where new ideas can be tried, where people are given what they need to succeed rather than set up to fail, and they enjoy the thinking and debate that goes on when everyone is involved. In short, they listen and they provide according to what people value.

Diminishers, on the other hand, believe they have to do all the thinking and impose their will and values on others. No one enjoys working for or with a diminisher, and yet I suspect many people find it easier to be a diminisher than a multiplier. Becoming a multiplier takes mindful work; being a diminisher is an easy fallback mode. We did an exercise to prompt development of multiplier skills in which we divided into four groups. Two groups were asked to brainstorm and develop ideas for a product that would help alleviate a social/economic problem along with a logo and slogan while the other two groups observed them. Unbeknownst to the product developers, those of us in the observing groups were each watching one person in particular. When the brainstorming session was complete, the observers took turns reporting on each observee's contribution to their group in only positive terms. Quiet members were described as "thoughtful" and "refraining from unnecessary comment," while more boisterous members were described as "engaged" and "dynamic." Although evidently exaggerated, the positive observations were powerful, and you could see faces light up around the room – and not just the recipient of the praise but others hearing the praise seemed to share the glow.

Conclusion

I left the Leadership Academy with a new awareness of how much feelings matter, even when we do not want them to. All of us communicate in ways that seem appropriate to us individually, act according to our own values, and react to others from our own emotions. Anyone wanting to be a more effective leader, regardless of rank or responsibility, can improve through vigilant awareness of what others truly think and feel and foster capabilities and opportunities accordingly.