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Presentation: Developing Leadership Skills  
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My experience within the ambit of leadership development was drawn from the groundbreaking and innovative South African Library Leadership Project which I had the privilege of managing for the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) during 2001-2004. This was a \$250 000 partnership project between LIASA and the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and funded by the Andrew Mellon Foundation. Twenty three senior and middle managers of library and information services (LIS) in South Africa participated herein.

The results hereof were:

- Sixteen of these participants subsequently took up leadership positions within the professional association, LIASA, ranging from President, President Elect, national Secretary, Treasurer, Branch Chairpersons and Committee Convenors
- Several experienced promotions within their organizations as well as taking up leadership positions within the formal LIS structures such as CHELSA (Council for Higher Education Libraries in South Africa)
- Professional acknowledgement – recipients of national awards such as Academic Librarian of the Year (2002) and the 2007 Librarian of the Year which confirms that *“Leadership is not an accolade you can accredit to yourself, but a privilege given to you by peers.”*

Having worked so closely with peers and colleagues on this transition from manager to leader within the library context, this presentation is therefore an acknowledgement of my colleagues who have shared their experiences and understanding of leadership. All have been unanimous about the fact that leadership is not about position. Therefore to enable one to emerge as a leader one needs to become aware of:

### **1. Attitude**

A **positive attitude** is the key to unleashing leadership potential and that is also the difference between a leader and a follower. The attitude of a leader is characterized as:

- purpose and passion
- initiative
- prioritizing
- goal setting
- teamwork
- innovation
- accountability

- persistence
- perseverance
- discipline

## **2. *Recognizing one's own potential***

An ability to objectively acknowledge one's strengths and weaknesses, existing abilities and potential for future development are indicators of emotional maturity, self awareness and self development.

## **3. *Synchronizing/aligning one's goals with the internal and external environments within which one is located***

Today most organizations function on the basis of a vision, mission, goals and strategies designed to ensure focus and maximum efficacy. So too with one's own professional goals! It is important to align one's personal goals with that of the organization within which one works. This alignment is also important for all the structures within which one chooses to engage such as teams; task groups; committees; etc. Where this synchronicity exists, there will we find job satisfaction and job security!

## **4. *Opportunities for personal growth***

The changing environment within the workplace necessitates one to be open to seeking new opportunities or taking up additional responsibilities when offered. Being open-minded, willing to learn and embrace change can only contribute to further personal growth and professional development. Furthermore, by sharing what you know and assisting colleagues when needed also conveys professional openness and maturity to colleagues. This can only enhance you as a professional in a world that is becoming frenetic about skills acquisition.

## **5. *Service to the profession***

It is not always about "what's in it for me?" When one enters a service profession, it is inevitably about the big picture. ***It's about how can I make a difference or contribute to the development of the profession?*** Depending on the sector within which one is located, the demands and needs will obviously differ. This "service to the profession" mindset is also closely related to aligning one's goals to the broader profession and being able to realize professional success and satisfaction.

Involvement in the professional association affords one the platform to engage professional structures and network; develop new skills; develop a profile within the profession; keep abreast with trends and developments; etc. One must remember that this involvement is most often voluntary and will require at times institutional support.

## 6. ***Environmental Scanning***

This entails the proactive scrutiny of the professional environment to determine the challenges, current trends and best practices that prevail. This also elicits the necessary skills sets (soft or professional) required for:

- effective quality service delivery;
- changing scenarios and environments;
- adaptability and flexibility

7. ***Mentoring*** - trapped within each follower is a **leader** waiting to be unleashed by a **seasoned leader**, who will share his or her knowledge and expertise. Mentoring is an effective tool for:

- transferring & sharing skills;
- succession planning;
- setting standards; and
- ensuring that new professionals embrace the overall ethos of an organisation or profession.

## 8. ***Continuing Professional Development***

- Distinguish between the concepts “lifelong learning”, “continuing education” and “professional development”.
- Lifelong Learning - refers to an attitude of *it is never too soon or late to learn*, realizing the importance of updating one’s knowledge and skills, because those acquired during the study years are not sufficient for a professional career spanning 30 - 40 years.
- Continuing education is a commitment to lifelong learning, and is the way of encouraging professionals to maintain a high standard of training and stay updated on new developments in their profession. It happens via courses, conferences, seminars, workshops, formal lectures and informal discussion groups.
- Professional development involves skills required for maintaining a specific career path, and refers to training to stay abreast of current and changing technology and practices in a profession. It also includes life skills, covering skills for successful living (e.g. how to combat stress), process skills (e.g. how to function in a team) and task skills (e.g. how to catalogue in MARC 21).

My colleague, Rachel More, the head of the University of the North Libraries, a participant in the first round of the SALLP, a former Academic Librarian of the Year and the current President-Elect of LIASA is guided by the spirit of leadership which she sees as:

- **the spirit of resilience**, which sees failure as a temporary step to success;

- **the spirit of courage**, which is the ability to transform one's fear into a motivation for action and change;
- **the spirit of strategic thinking**, which is the ability to plan rather than panic;
- **the spirit of self competition**, which is a spirit of never comparing yourself with others but with only what needs to be accomplished;
- **the spirit of compassion**, which is a sensitivity to the worth of others
- **the spirit of engagement**, which promotes communication and enables the leader to communicate with members at all levels.

Another colleague, Tienie de Klerk, who was also nominated for the 2006 Librarian of the Year award and who is involved with the LIASA Interest Group on Bibliographic Standards (IGBS) states that it is this very professional involvement which provided her with an opportunity for personal growth and fulfillment. Of the many new lessons she learnt, she experienced the feeling of "how to delight your customer" by creating professional learning opportunities for cataloguers. She also enjoyed the successes resulting from team spirit and commitment. She further said that "although committee work is hard work, the quality of one's life is enriched and enhanced by it - therefore, grab opportunities and get involved in professional activities to unlock the potential within yourself."

And this, colleagues, is the crux of leadership – the ability to unlock the potential within oneself. The challenge being faced by modern organizations is what Gifford Pinchot calls **Creating Organizations with Many Leaders**. This requires a mindset and paradigm shift away from the traditional concepts of hierarchy. It's about creating the space for everyone to lead when their special knowledge provides the key to the right action.

In conclusion, we should always remember the words of Harrison Owen, a leading organization transformation expert: "To manage is to control; to lead is to liberate."