

Welch in the Wasatch

Lee Welch discovers that leadership training is a magnificent uphill adventure for librarians from three continents

'PACK YOUR passport, sunglasses and your Aussie song book. You're off to America!

Not that dozens of Australian librarians have not been to America already, but this was different. This was in the nature of a grand experiment.

It was an invitation to attend the second Snowbird Leadership Development Institute in the magnificent Wasatch Mountains, Utah.

In August last year I was privileged (there is no other word for it) to be supported to attend this seminar. My passage was eased by support from the Snowbird Institute and by my then employers, Business Information.

Snowbird breaks new ground in its ambition to provide an environment in which librarians with up to five years experience in a librarian position explore the dynamics and skills of 'leadership'. That knowledge is then combined with a solid grounding in the workings of organisations. It takes five exhilarating, exhausting days, 30-odd participants and 8 experienced, dedicated and visionary mentor librarians. It results in an extraordinary set of skills that come into play every day of your working life.

'Leadership', as a concept, is relatively new to Australia. Leaders are described not as bosses, but as people who have vision, and can draw others to that vision to progress the aims of the organisation. Leaders know how to achieve goals and they know how to work effectively with groups of people in achieving them, and they



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can be found at all levels of an organisation, in all sorts of jobs.

Snowbird devotes five days to working out just what sort of leader the participant is, and how to get the best from yourself and others. To that end the seminar covers issues such as interaction styles, power and influence, change, chaos, responsibility, creativity and risk-taking. Its organisers see this as a way of empowering young librarians with the skills to match their professional passion, and avoid the 'burnout' syndrome so common after 4-6 years in the field.

And all this occurs within the shadows of the shaking aspen and blue spruce, 8000 feet up in the mountains, with ground squirrels darting under the tables to pick up crumbs. If that's not a lifetime experience, I don't know what is!

1992 marked a new experiment for Snowbird when a participant from Australia and one from the United

Kingdom were invited to attend. Neither the organisers nor the participants were certain that the cross-cultural differences would not sabotage the objectives. Despite some jargon and occasional confusion—being flummoxed by references to 'pages' until I worked out we were actually talking about library attendants—we were all delighted when this did not prove to be a problem. (In the interests of cultural exchange, the American contingent showed some dedication in learning the words to *Waltzing Matilda*.)

The skills of leadership are already an issue for librarians. We have recognised that management skills form an essential element in our continued survival and development as a profession, now we must differentiate and add leadership skills as a separate and equally vital element. The Snowbird Leadership Development Institute aims to do that, and does it superbly well. □



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