



## HOW LEADERS EMERGE IN REALTIME

*Deb Zott describes the process of creating a team and allowing leadership traits to emerge.*

Discussions about leadership training generally raise the objection that leadership cannot be taught or learned, because true leaders are born. While there is an element of truth in this, training programs can be effective in developing library professionals who aspire to management roles, or who wish to increase their strategic awareness.

In October 2008, I attended the Universities Australia Leadership Program at Deakin University in Geelong. This was a five day residential course for higher education staff such as tutors, lecturers, librarians, research assistants, human resources and administration staff. The program is now run by the LH Martin Institute as 'Moving into Management'. Through participation in this program, we gained an understanding of how the development of a task-focused team can produce leaders and the key qualities those leaders will demonstrate.

The program was highly participatory, with attendees grouped into teams of eight to ten to work together on project briefs. Each day offered a range of activities and sessions, typically beginning with a networking breakfast, followed by an all group session that recapped on the previous day and presented the outline for the current day. During these sessions there were opportunities for group discussion and presentations from leaders in higher education. The seating arrangements provided an excellent opportunity to meet new people as name cards were rearranged daily to encourage wider networking. This was also an exercise in dealing with change and building a quick rapport with a new team.

Each day, we each received a project brief to work on with our team, and were given an hour to brainstorm and prepare a presentation for the larger group. The topic might be unfamiliar to most of us but nevertheless we had to come up with a coherent presentation and a set of recommendations. It was important to make the most of every minute and to pool our resources. We were strangers with a common goal and it was essential to discover each others' strengths very quickly so that team roles could be assigned effectively. Someone had to make the first move in bringing the team together, to initiate introductions, and set some team objectives and guidelines. Once the ice was broken and we had some terms of reference it was possible to move forward with our task. We needed a range of skills and we each volunteered for a key role within the team so that we could work together effectively to achieve our objective.

The team exercises provided valuable experiences such as time management, delegation, negotiation, brainstorming and thinking on our feet. We also needed to motivate and support each other, consider the organisation of our key points and practice our presentation skills. In order to consider our topic adequately and make recommendations, we had to think laterally and connect our ideas to real world situations. We also had to select points that best supported our recommendations, and review responses to our argument.

Team-base practical exercises, which required similar skills to the team projects, were held outdoors. Roles were alternated so that responsibilities varied.

It was not always clear who the leader was, or if indeed there was a leader, but the team dynamic was strong and focused on our common objective. In informal



discussions, we extrapolated from these exercises some key characteristics of leadership. We found that a leader sees the bigger picture and recognises his/her own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of the team. A leader motivates and supports others to work together for a common goal, usually in line with a bigger strategic goal. A leader also negotiates with stakeholders and achieves consensus or compromise. Effective communication and sound decision making should be hallmarks of an effective leader. Effective leadership also requires the leader's ego to be kept in check and finally, a leader should remain open to learning.

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