LEADING
for SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

There Is No Other Option  HILDA K. WEISBURG

Foreword by Susan D. Ballard

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HILDA K. WEISBURG was a school librarian for over 30 years and is now an author, speaker, and adjunct instructor at William Paterson University (NJ). She coauthored fourteen books for school librarians (with Ruth Toor), including two for ALA Editions, Being Indispensable: A School Librarian’s Guide to Becoming an Invaluable Leader (2011), New on the Job: A School Library Media Specialist’s Guide to Success (2007) and School Librarian’s Career Planner (2013), which was her first work without Ruth who has fully retired. Hilda has since done a 2nd edition of New on the Job which has been an ALA best seller since its 2007 publication. For 35 years she cowrote and edited School Librarian’s Workshop, a bimonthly newsletter for K–12 librarians. She has given presentations at ALA, AASL, and state library conferences and given staff development workshops in many locations. A past president of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians, she is a past chair of AASL Advocacy, Chairs The Ruth Toor Grant for Strong Public Libraries, and serves on the ALA Professional Ethics Committee. Her YA fantasy novel, Woven through Time was a finalist in the International Book Award in the Fiction/ Fantasy category and has received ten 5-star reviews on Amazon. She is now working on the sequel.
To the School Library Leaders—past, present, and future:

To past leaders who were my role models and mentors, with my unending gratitude.

To current leaders who are my friends and colleagues, with admiration and love.

To future leaders who are emerging or considering taking the first steps, with the hope that this book will speed your journey.

Together we transform learning, our communities, and the world.
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Leadership—one word, yet endless impact. While there are many forms of leadership, as well as numerous variations on the theme of how to go about finding one’s own leadership style and learning what will work for us in the landscape and organizational culture in which we operate, Hilda Weisburg wants to make sure we understand one thing from the very beginning: Every librarian is a leader, and that means you, too. As she succinctly states up front in Chapter 1, “...leadership is not an option—it is a job responsibility.”

Leading for School Librarians is part history lesson, part master class, part cautionary tale, and always spot on in providing information and strategies that will illuminate the sometimes scary pathway to finding our own inner leader. Hilda shares her expertise and, yes, her opinions, too. But those opinions are educated, firmly grounded in experience, and the result of a lifetime spent in the pursuit of continuous improvement of program and practice. They count for something—in fact, they count for a lot! Throughout the many years I have known and admired Hilda, I have never, not once, seen her shirk a task or a responsibility. In fact, she steps up with tenacity and verve, even though she readily admits throughout this book that she hasn’t always seen herself as a leader.

As school librarians, we can identify with this acknowledgment, as all too often we don’t see ourselves as leaders, because we view our organizations as hierarchies in which we have low visibility and/or are marginalized. Don’t expect a pass from Hilda on that account. Empathy yes, but she’ll make you realize there is no excuse for not getting in the game. Early in her career she also had fears, doubts, obstacles, barriers, and the criticism of naysayers. So, how did she manage to take her first leap toward leadership? She stuck her neck out and by networking, getting involved, asking for help, and sharing her own story, as well as listening to and learning from others, a leader emerged. With deep understanding, she now challenges us to never stop reimagining the role and relevance of the school librarian to positively impact student achievement and to recognize our role as catalysts for teaching and learning in the contemporary
educational environment. In this book, she is reaching out to provide the same sort of assistance and guidance she has received along the way.

I love the fact that Hilda acknowledges those monsters in the closet and under the bed which keep us up at night, such as the effect of external factors we can’t always control but to which we need to respond (education reform initiatives, standardized testing, politics, etc.), as well as internal factors (school culture, stakeholder needs) that shape the daily context in the preK–12 ecosystem. Yet, again, she won’t allow us to use them as an excuse to stand on the sidelines. She promotes our understanding of, but not our dwelling on, the current and emerging learning environmental influences and how this understanding can help us to overcome barriers, even if they seem insurmountable. Hilda consistently reminds us that, despite the unrelenting impact of these factors, we must stay focused on alignment of the mission and vision of the school library program to that of the school, in order to maintain a steady course and maneuver around any obstacles.

The way the book is structured lends itself to the development of our own individualized personal plans for leadership. We get the lay of the land in Part I and gain a context for what on-the-ground school librarianship looks like, as well as learn about the characteristics of a leader and how we can begin to develop seedling strategies to cultivate these dispositions in ourselves. In particular, I found myself nodding in agreement at Hilda’s discussion of “imposter syndrome” (Chapter 5): those moments of self-doubt that creep up on you, distract your focus, and if not held in check, minimize your effectiveness. None of us is expert in everything, Hilda admonishes. This put me in mind of Voltaire’s observation, “Don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good.” Hilda and Voltaire—on the same wavelength, naturellement!

Part II provides next steps to ramp up our impact and build influence and relationships. We are exposed to solid theory about types of power and which ones we should seek to optimize, as well as how to inventory and leverage our strengths and personal skill sets. Additionally, there is focus on how to grow our leadership expertise vis-à-vis time and priorities management and to build capacity in various areas of communication. In this section, Hilda wants us to be cognizant of the potential to become complacent if we see ourselves as “good” practitioners and don’t constantly strive to become “great” at what we do. Again, no need to be perfect, but there is a need to be great and always striving! I don’t think it a fluke that throughout the book, and in particular here, Hilda models the conversational, yet respectful and professional tone she wants us to emulate in our relationships and communications with others because she knows it works.

In Part III, there is the opportunity to add things up and stretch our mindset, as Hilda introduces us to concepts that are standard operating procedure in the business world and which we need to modify and adapt to help serve, advocate for, and express the needs and the value-added aspects of our programs. Strategic planning, goal setting, establishing and delivering on our brand identity, and risk and gap analysis techniques are all brought into mix. In her discussions about empowering stakeholders, Hilda shows school librarian leadership as a collaborative, flexible process that blends the agency of various types of expertise.
within the learning community. It occurs when all those responsible for student learning accept leadership in their particular area of focus. It is also a social process through shared and active engagement to address situations and issues, and involves a commitment to reflective practice and continuous improvement.

As Part III concludes, Hilda evokes one of my very favorite words—“joy.” You will experience pure unadulterated joy if you heed her advice and pay it forward through involvement in state and national professional associations, through sharing expertise by writing and presenting about what you know and have learned in order to advance and improve our profession and education, and by living a balanced life in which you can set aside (though likely never forget) your passion for school librarianship when family, friends, and adventure call you! Don’t apologize or feel guilty for en“joy”ing your life.

I am also struck by the “Key Ideas” at the end of each chapter which is a bulleted list that can serve as a daily mantra. By my count, there are 317 Key Ideas—many of which bear repeating so that they add up to equal 365. Think about it—daily notions to reflect on and internalize throughout the year. The intellectual exercise is enlightening, to say the least, and helping to engrain these critical ideas into our professional consciousness.

Is it any wonder Hilda Weisburg is a recipient of AASL’s most prestigious award for individual contribution to our profession? This “Distinguished Service Award” honoree now honors us by sharing her vision for our future, which involves planning to reimagine roles and responsibilities and how to best leverage programs, expertise, and resources, to ensure students and teachers engage and participate more fully in the new learning landscape. Hilda’s message is for each of us to recognize the need to be future-ready, embrace our respective roles as leaders, and help move our learning communities forward. In the words of my fellow Granite Stater Daniel Webster, “There is always room at the top.” You are needed there because the future is now and we must all be part of it. Hilda expects no less, and we cannot disappoint her.

Onward!

Susan D. Ballard
Over the years, the library profession has evolved in ways beyond the awareness of most non-educators and many who are in the field. Technology is an obvious area. But another equally important one is the reaction to the wholesale loss of jobs and even libraries as a result of the economic collapse in 2008.

School librarians were the hardest hit as boards of education and administrators scrambled to cope with severe budget cuts. Working alone and believing that schools would always need and want librarians, they were totally unprepared for the calamity that ensued. Determined to forestall future decimations of programs, many library schools incorporated advocacy into their curriculum, recognizing that those in all types of libraries need to know how to develop supporters for their programs.

Burdened by a heavier workload (also a result of economic conditions) and the constant need to keep abreast of changing technology and government standards and requirements, school librarians have struggled with how to advocate for their program. It seems to many that advocacy is about begging to keep your job rather than recognizing that advocacy is becoming so indispensable to stakeholders, they fight to keep you.

The problem is that talking about advocacy is putting the cart before the horse. You can’t be an advocate if you aren’t a leader. Interestingly enough, library school courses don’t often address leadership, and for many, school librarians are intimidated by the thought of becoming a leader.

As stated in the subtitle of this book, the truth in today’s climate is that “There is no other option.” Librarians must learn how to lead in order for their programs to succeed and thrive. In other types of libraries, there is a way to advance. Librarians work with those who are further up the hierarchy and see what library leadership looks like. While not perfect, they have living models. And they aren’t alone.

The preponderance of school librarians are alone in their buildings. They have no models of library leadership. They have their workload and their fears.
Yet, their ultimate survival rests on their ability to be recognized as a leader in their building.

I have spent much of my career working to help librarians be their best and promote the value of their programs. For many years now, I have been writing, blogging, and presenting workshops on leadership. But I still meet so many librarians who don’t know how to get started and don’t believe they have what it takes to be a leader.

They look at national or even state leaders and think they never could do that. I realized they were looking at the finished product and didn’t see that many small steps preceded becoming a state association president or other recognized leader. Strongly believing that anyone who wants to become a leader can do it, I embarked on this project.

I hope you find truth in the Lao Tzu quote, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with one small step,” and begin your own journey with Chapter 1. If you gradually implement what is discussed and recommended, by the time you have completed the final chapter you will have embraced your ability to lead and will be seen as vital and indispensable. You will be a leader and have many advocates for your program.

Hilda K. Weisburg
School librarians have the best job in the world. They make their libraries a welcoming environment, promote twenty-first century learning, integrate the latest educational websites and apps into their teaching, and connect students to the perfect book, to build a love of reading. Through the library program, students become lifelong learners, as well as successful members and contributors in a participatory society that spans the globe.

Encompassing all that into one program would be an exhausting task in and of itself, but the realities of today’s school culture exponentially increase the daily difficulties and stresses. If you are an elementary librarian, you are probably chained to a fixed schedule with one class following hard on the heels of another. Many find they have little or no opportunity to meet with teachers. If you are a middle- or high-school librarian, you might have a flexible schedule but must work diligently to get past teacher resistance to bringing their classes to the library, while feeling the pressure of meeting the demands of state-imposed standards tied to testing and often your own evaluation.

At all levels, budgets have been slashed, leaving little money for new acquisitions and causing collections to be woefully outdated. Clerks who once were common at the secondary level have been eliminated in many places. Staffing has been cut, forcing many librarians to either serve multiple schools or leaving a single librarian in a school with 2,000 students. Technology (other than computers for testing) is hard to come by. Bandwidth limits the number of devices that can be used.

But listing what is wrong serves no one. This is the new reality, and you must learn to not only live with it but thrive within it. The question is, “How do you manage to be successful in this environment?” The answer is, somehow, you must become a leader.

For years, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) has been exhorting librarians to become leaders in their buildings and districts. Many have done so, but most librarians are still working hard at their day-to-day tasks,
unable to see beyond them. The concept of leadership seems to loom too large, yet it can actually be achieved by anyone who wants to become one.

In Chapter 1, you will walk through the initial steps and learn how to safely and successfully become the leader your students, teachers, and programs need you to be. It starts by guiding you through the core question, “Why be a leader?” that underlies the resistance to undertaking the challenge. One by one, you will eliminate the barriers you have erected, including the fears you have about taking on the role. By looking at the qualities of a leader, you will discover you have much within you already that you can use as you move onto a larger stage.

Chapter 2 reviews mission and vision statements, which I have discussed in previous books and are central to keeping you grounded when daily demands pull you in multiple directions. You will find suggestions on time management and how to deal with procrastination—the “thief of time” that happens to everyone (and thanks to the Internet, in so many easy ways).

Chapter 3 deals with managing classes in the library, which is a little-recognized challenge. Unlike a classroom, many people come into the library every day. Students come with their entire class or drop in as individuals to do work, teachers come looking for information or a quiet spot, and administrators might walk in with guests at any time. You might have parent volunteers to coordinate. If you are struggling to keep noise to an acceptable level, yelling at students for one reason or another, or having difficulty settling a class down, you will be judged as being incapable of managing the library.

Chapter 4 explores becoming an expert teacher, since you will be judged on that basis by your colleagues and administrators. Even if you started out as a classroom teacher, the library environment is radically different. What worked when the students were “yours” does not always translate when classes come in and out, and you don’t have the implied power of grades.

With these basics in hand, you are ready to fully step into leadership.
WHY BE A LEADER?

When the first Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965, administrators scrambled to hire librarians, frequently encouraging teachers to get emergency certification. Closets were turned into libraries to meet requirements of the act and benefit from the sums of money the Federal government was giving schools. The money dried up over time. Librarians complained about tight budgets, but everyone had become accustomed to school libraries and librarians as being part of the school community.

National standards encouraged having multiple librarians when school populations reached over 1,000. At the elementary level, principals discovered they could use librarians along with art, music, and physical education teachers to cover duty-free periods guaranteed in teacher contracts. High-school libraries and librarians were required as part of regional accrediting agencies. As long as you didn’t cause trouble for the administration, you could be assured you would get tenure and remain on the job until you decided to retire. No one worried. Budgets might shrink, but librarian positions were secure. The economic downturn in 2008 turned this way of thinking upside down.

We now have the latest iteration of ESEA. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is replacing No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Common Core is being challenged and revised, but some manifestation of it will remain. The pressure to reduce the amount of testing will lessen it to some extent, but it won’t disappear. The good news is that not since the original ESEA have libraries and librarians been incorporated into the act, although librarians need to know this and fight for their place within it. This is yet one more reason to step into a role as a leader.

ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE

Everyone seemed to be stunned when librarians were being eliminated from schools. A lone voice in the wilderness had sounded an early warning but few heeded his message: In 1997, Gary Hartzell wrote an article for the School Library www.alastore.ala.org
Journal titled, “The Invisible School Librarian: Why Others Are Blind to Your Value.” The article addressed the fact that principals did not learn about the role of the librarian in their teacher or administrator training, and librarians were not visible in nonlibrary organizations. Librarians sighed in agreement. They were not valued. But, they did nothing to rise to the implied challenge.

Librarians had become complacent. Suggestions would be offered in professional journals on becoming familiar with subject and/or grade curricula. Workshops might encourage them to work collaboratively with teachers. Some librarians responded and found new ways to become involved within the school community. They became building leaders, recognized for their contributions to students, teachers, and even administrators.

Far too many librarians decided the effort was just not worth it. After all, they had tenure and no one was complaining. Elementary librarians pointed out that their jobs were guaranteed, since they were contractually bound to cover teacher free time and by default, needed.

Then the economy crashed. School budgets were slashed. It soon was apparent that no one was safe. Administrators hungry for every dollar looked at library budgets and staffing, and saw a quick fix. No one knew exactly what the librarian did. Why spend precious money on a program and person no one thought was very important? Although the Great Recession was the major factor, librarians had contributed to their own misfortune. By staying within the four walls of their facility and not becoming vital to teachers, they were truly invisible.

When push came to shove and teachers were looking at increased class sizes, they had no reason to rally to the defense of the librarian. If the position had been kept open, their classes would have been even larger. Why bother? Librarians do nothing more than check out books. Volunteers could do the same job, if necessary. Besides, many teachers now had classroom collections, and there was the Internet. Anyone could use Google and Wikipedia to get all the answers at the click of a mouse. Who needed a librarian?

Across the country, libraries were decimated. Where libraries and librarians weren’t completely eliminated, they were stretched to cover several schools, and in the largest schools, they would be left with a single librarian to cover a huge load of students. All this was happening as changes in technology accelerated and librarians scrambled to keep current.

That historical review brings us to where we are today. Although the elimination of positions and programs is still happening, the pace has slowed considerably, and in some places, librarians have been restored. But the climate has changed irrevocably.

The bad news litany is complete. The past can’t be changed. But we can and must learn from it to be certain it isn’t repeated. The present is certainly far from perfect, but there is time to make the necessary changes.

You can no longer be complacent about your future. You must take responsibility to ensure that you will not be overlooked again. And the only way to do that is to become a leader. In short, leadership is not an option—it is a job responsibility.
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Few of you learned how to lead while in library school, and those who did found the task much more complex when confronted by a heavy work load, pressure from high-stakes tests, and teacher resistance to working with you. You might have looked with awe at some of the incredible programs some school librarians have created. The thought that you could do anything similar seems beyond the realms of what is possible.

Fear not. You are to be congratulated for having accepted the challenge of learning how to lead despite internal and external constraints. You and your program are not going to change overnight, but you are going to move into leadership in incremental steps. With each one, you will gain more confidence, become clearer in the direction you want to go, and move from being invisible to be perceived as indispensable.

ROADBLOCKS TO LEADERSHIP

Librarians love to tell stories. Story is at the heart of fiction. At the elementary level, librarians read stories to students to connect them to our literary heritage, begin building a love of reading, and attune them to the sound of English and the magic of language.

Stories are wonderful—except for the stories we tell ourselves. Many of you have told yourself stories to explain why you aren’t a leader and can never be one. Until you look at them closely and realize they are just stories, you won’t be able to move forward.

“I Don’t Have Time.”

This is one of the most common stories we tell ourselves. We use it often for many things, but when you use it to explain why you aren’t leading, it stops you in your tracks. Like any fiction, it is grounded in some truth. You have a very demanding schedule. Your workday begins the moment you open the library doors and doesn’t end until you close them. When work is over, you have a host of other obligations that keep you busy often until you go to bed. You obviously have no time to lead.

The truth you are not facing is no one has time. We all live at full speed. You must make time. And the only way you can do that is by deciding something is a priority in your life. For example, one of your children becomes active in a sport. This requires taking him or her to practice and back home. It means you will make time to watch games and perhaps learn more about the sport than you previously knew—or cared about. It became a priority in your life, and you figured out how to make it work.

The same is true with becoming a leader. Once you realize that being a leader is important for getting everyone in the school more aware of the library program and why it is indispensable, you are ready to begin taking the steps to become one.
Oddly enough at the beginning, being a leader won’t take much time. You will look for ways to showcase your program and make it visible. You will do more to connect with teachers and others, but really that has always been a component of your job. Now you will do it with greater focus. Only when you step up to leading on the state and national level will it take up a significant amount of time. At that point, you will also see that the returns you get more than outweigh what you have given up by making the time commitment.

“Leaders Are Born.”

Another common story, this is also a partially true statement. You can look at a kindergarten class and pick out the leaders. Other kids naturally seem to follow them. You look at yourself by contrast and know that you never have been a leader. You just weren’t born that way.

It is easy to be a leader if you do have that instinctive bent, but that doesn’t mean you cannot become one. From personal experience, I have learned that anyone can become a leader. All it takes is willingness.

I was not a leader when I was in school. As a matter of fact, when I was in high school I was definitely among the “outsider” kids. I wasn’t asked to certain parties nor did I hang around with the “in” crowd. I wouldn’t have had the first idea how to do it. I didn’t do much better in college.

After I graduated, my first job was as a high-school librarian with an emergency license, while I worked toward getting my master’s degree. Frankly, I was terrible, and I wasn’t rehired. I got another job in a school where there was a more experienced librarian. I learned a lot from her, but when she left the next year, I was unprepared to deal with a very difficult new boss and quit mid-year. Obviously, anyone could tell I had no leadership skills.

It was only when I returned to the workforce after my children were in school that I began to become a leader. Being a librarian in a brand-new elementary school designed on the British Infant School model, I needed to create a library program where there hadn’t been one. All of us were charting new territory. My teacher colleagues, fortunately, were all open to trying new things.

I began having successes. I took courses for a supervisor’s certificate and in the process met other librarians in my state who were leaders or on the path to leadership. My first book, The Elementary School Librarian’s Almanac, was an outgrowth of that course. I attended my state conference and joined committees. Eventually, I became active in AASL, extending into ALA committees. I knew leaders from around the country. I recognized my own expertise, and my vocabulary became fluent in expressing to others the value of school library programs. I had thoroughly evolved into being a leader.

While the specifics of my story are unique, the path is similar to that of many others. First, you become successful in your building. You do things and get involved in projects that make your colleagues and administrators realize that you can make an important contribution. Your confidence grows. You try more.
Hopefully, you begin to participate at the state and national levels. It's not an overnight transformation. It's a steady path of growth. One day you realize you have written a new story about yourself. This time, you are a leader.

“I’m Too Introverted to Be a Leader.”

This story includes the variant, “I can’t speak in front of a crowd. I freeze up.” You are not alone. Studies show many people are less afraid of death than public speaking. So this part is true.

What you are ignoring is you don’t have to address an audience to be your building’s leader. As a matter of fact, you will always do best by speaking one-on-one with people. And being an introvert can be an asset. Most introverts are good listeners. Extroverts can’t wait to talk, and that’s not the best way to communicate with others.

As you will learn, communication and relationships are the path to leadership. Neither one requires you to leave your comfort zone as an introvert. There are other places where you probably will feel somewhat challenged, but you will get there in small increments.

One day, after you are fully comfortable in your role as a leader, you might even find yourself speaking to the parent-teacher group at your school. You might feel a bit wobbly, but you will be so secure in your knowledge and be so eager to explain what the library program is doing for their children, you will get past it. You might even do a presentation for your state conference. Yes, it’s a long way off from where you are now, but once you take the first steps to leadership, you never know where it will take you.

Now that you realize your roadblocks are mainly caused by the stories you have told yourself, see what other negative stories you have permitted to become barriers for you. Start telling yourself new stories—positive ones.

QUALITIES OF A LEADER

You can find many leadership qualities if you do an online search. Some of them might seem beyond you at this time. Others you already have. This is a basic list with which to begin. We will expand on it as we go along and repeat some as new aspects of leadership are introduced. In this way, you will become familiar and comfortable with them.

Integrity

This is not usually placed first, but it’s a very important quality. You must be trustworthy if you are going to be a leader. No one wants to work with, let alone follow, someone they can’t trust.
If you have made your library a welcoming environment, teachers will drop in often. You can encourage this by keeping food and coffee available. When they are there, they naturally will talk. Sometimes it’s about nothing much. Other times they might complain or rant about another teacher, an administrator, a parent, or a student.

You need to be very careful. While it’s important to be sympathetic, you never want to agree with what they are saying. If they repeat your support—and they will—it will damage your reputation. On the other hand, you must not tell anyone what they have said.

The same is true when a teacher imparts a confidence to you. I have had teachers tell me very personal details of their lives. There is something about the library that seems to invite it—perhaps because, while you are a colleague, you are not one of the teachers in their department or grade level. You feel safe. And you must be.

Holding confidences makes a connection. It’s not always easy to know these details, but it is far better for you to keep them to yourself. In doing so, you will build your reputation for integrity and trustworthiness, while adding another building block to being recognized as a leader.

Team Player

It might seem contrary to logic to list team player as a leadership quality, but think of migrating birds. One takes the lead for a stretch, and then falls back and follows the new leader. You won’t take turns, but sometimes you will be in the lead, and other times you are part of the team.

You want your administration to see you as a team player. If you aren’t a team player, you are an obstacle, and you certainly don’t want to be viewed that way. This is not to say you want to be seen as being a “brown-noser.” What you need to do is listen carefully for what the administrator wants to achieve and think of ways the library program can advance it.

For example, the administration at the high school where I was working wanted to go to block scheduling. Although they claimed to want to hear from the teachers, I quickly realized it was a foregone conclusion. Their goal was to change the method of instructional delivery, ending the practice of teachers lecturing for an entire period.

Moving from a 45-minute period to 90 minutes would effectively do that. Despite the efforts to convince teachers, many departments remained opposed to it. What I did was locate resources to help teachers manage under the new arrangement. I spoke with the administrators and was given extra money to purchase these items, so they would be available as soon as possible. Then I worked with teachers, pointing out that the decision was made but the library had material to help them devise lessons that would work with the new schedule.

The other “team” you are on is the one with the teachers. As librarians, we often complain that we are not viewed as teachers, despite the fact that we teach so much of the time. If you want teachers to view you as one of them, be careful
to speak inclusively. Always say, “we teachers” as a reminder that you are on the same team. It will help.

In Chapter 4, you will learn more about how to be a team player. It’s not nearly as difficult as you might suspect.

**Sense of Humor**

This quality of leadership is not always mentioned, but it is well worth thinking about. The stresses of Common Core Standards, PARCC testing, concerns about ESSA changes, and the unease created by tight budgets have led to a negative climate in many schools. It’s easy to find something to complain about and criticize. Many feel—for good reason—that the joy has been taken out of teaching.

You have the same pressures, and the economic situation often puts your job in jeopardy more than that of teachers, but coming in each day with a negative attitude will not help. Good leaders take their work seriously but themselves lightly.

Sometimes the humor is of the M*A*S*H variety. You just laugh at the craziness of what is happening. Although misery might love company, constantly talking about what is wrong with education today doesn't make anyone feel better.

Putting a positive spin on life in the trenches will bring more of your colleagues to you than joining in on complaint sessions. This doesn’t mean you trivialize what is happening. You need to be real, but look for good things to focus on. Share funny memes from Facebook or other sources. This can be the easiest quality for you to exhibit.

**Visionary and Risk Taker**

Leaders see the big picture, which allows them to have a vision for the future. You may not think you have a vision, but you do have a larger perspective on the education program than the classroom teacher. On the most basic level, this is because you see students over several years and watch them grow. You also deal with students at different grade levels and/or subject areas, giving you an awareness of what happens throughout the educational experience of students.

In addition, you interact in large or small ways with virtually all teachers. You may have parent volunteers who bring you a sense of what the community thinks. Guests are invariably brought to the library, most often accompanied by the principal, and you get to hear what he or she thinks is important about your program and possibly the educational experience of students.

You should have a vision statement for your library program. Chapter 2 discusses the importance of it and how to craft one if you don’t have one. Even if you do, what you learn might show you some new aspects of what the statement needs to be and encourage you to tweak or rewrite the one you have.

Because leaders have vision and see the big picture, there are times when they are also innovators. Innovation can be a risk, as there will always be those who
don’t want change or the innovation doesn’t work as planned. Being a risk taker is one reason many librarians don’t want to be leaders. It is scary. A risk carries with it the possibility of failure. If it were impossible to fail, it wouldn’t be a risk.

For the time being, just accept it as one single element of leadership. By going in small incremental steps, you will see that you need not take this on immediately. When you do, the risks will be small ones. Slowly, you will build your confidence and reputation, so you will be in a good position to take on larger challenges.

MEASURING UP

There are many more qualities of a leader, and we will explore them. You will be surprised to discover you have many of them. You can also develop the ones that you feel you don’t have.

The list of leadership qualities, while far from complete, might seem daunting, but reflect on them for a moment. Integrity was the first one discussed. Do you feel you have that quality? Do your colleagues regard you as trustworthy? How can you tell? If you haven’t been as careful as you need to be in guarding the confidentiality of others, start now.

You undoubtedly are a team player to some extent. Most of you have always been careful not to “rock the boat.” Now you need to become more conscious of how you can quietly support administrators. For example, many principals want to see more tech integration into the classroom. So do you, and you have the expertise to do it. Some librarians send out weekly e-mails alerting teachers to apps and online resources. To get started, go to the AASL website (www.alastore.ala.org/aasl) and click on the tabs labeled “Best Apps for Teaching and Learning” and “Best Websites for Teaching and Learning.” You will find a host of possibilities.

If teachers begin using one or more of your suggestions, let your principal know. But don’t focus on you: Highlight the fact that the teacher tried it and is using the resource with students. This serves two purposes. If and when the principal lets the teacher know he or she is aware of the tech integration and is glad to see it, the teacher will recognize that you were the one to put him or her in a favorable light. At the same time, the principal is aware you were the one responsible for it.

Having vision and taking risks might seem beyond your current scope, but that is not completely true. Think of your facility. Have you been making any changes to it? Perhaps you have rearranged the furniture. Have you instituted a schoolwide reading program? Don’t minimize the small things you have done. Each of those required some vision and entailed a degree of risk. It didn’t have to be huge.

If you haven’t done something like that, consider what you might try. Would the art teacher want to display student work in the library? If so, you can post the information on your library website. Your principal is sure to notice, and once again, you have spotlighted a teacher. Slowly, you can build your ability to take risks, and as you do, you also become more visible, which is a key factor in being a leader. Obviously, leaders don’t hide within the four walls of their room.
Can you think of other leadership qualities? Look at a leader in the library field or a teacher leader in your building. What makes them leaders? What do they do? How do they behave and interact with others? Try to identify the qualities they possess and see how close you come to having them as well.

**FEAR FACTOR**

You might be thinking you will never be able to lead because you have too much fear of making a mistake and all the possible dire consequences of that. The good (and bad) news is that leaders are also afraid at times. Making huge changes, taking on challenges outside your comfort zone, and putting yourself out front makes everyone feel exposed and aware that not everything works.

The bottom line is that most mistakes are usually most obvious to the one who made them. In the course of my career, I led two library renovation projects and was among the first to automate my library. I was completely out of my comfort zone with all of them and a lot of money was involved.

For the automation project, I used my contacts with colleagues I had met at AASL conferences who had already led the way. With their advice, I crafted an RFP to get bids on the project and even figured out (with their help) how to phrase it, so that the vendor I wanted (who had been highly recommended) would get the bid. The same sources helped me determine what I needed for my file server and circulation desk computer. (At the early stage, we couldn’t afford many computers. My file server alone, which was pitifully small compared to today’s models, was over $9,000.) Once the vendor was selected, I had access to their expertise in completing the project.

The two renovation projects were far outside anything I had ever done. The first was the construction of an addition to the school. I had to work with an architect and the various contractors. While I caught the absence of sufficient outlets for the workroom, I missed the placement of the circulation desk over a floor outlet, which subsequently required altering plans somewhat since the checkout desk covered the outlet needed for the computer. Did I get into trouble? Absolutely not. So much was being done and the results were looking so spectacular, it was barely noticed. I, of course, was aware of my mistake and was upset about it for a while.

The second renovation aimed to increase shelf and floor space in a library that couldn’t be physically expanded. My superintendent thought movable stacks for the collection would be a good idea. Team player that I am, I went along with it. I contacted a company I knew from a conference exhibit and they drew up a plan that could be divided over three years.

I knew from my first project that I wanted more flexibility, so I had casters on all the tables. Wireless technology was still in the future, so the tables had grommets for future computers to plug into the many floor outlets. We also had an area for computers for when whole classes used the library. My big mistake was the grommets. They were supposed to lie completely flat. They didn’t. Worse, it was too easy to remove, so the kids did. I eventually took out all of them. That
left “holes” in the table that my male students soon saw as perfect for a game. They would flick a mini-paper ball to see if they could “score” by having it drop into the hole at the opposite end of the table. As long as they weren’t disruptive, I allowed it. It was part of making the library a welcoming environment, and they didn’t do it while working on projects.

No one but me regarded it as a mistake. The superintendent focused on the moveable stacks, which gave us 25 percent more shelf space, and with the changes in furniture, we also picked up about the same increase in floor space. Since the big goals of the project had been achieved, no one complained. Indeed, there was only praise.

The point of the stories is that our fear of failure far exceeds the reality of what happens. It’s important to face the small failures and acknowledge them. One of the lessons we want to teach our students is that failing in something is not to be feared. It’s part of the learning process. We need to begin learning that ourselves.

**KEY IDEAS**

- The growth of school library programs and librarians began with ESEA in 1965 and ended abruptly with the Great Recession in 2008.
- Few heeded the message of Gary Hartzell’s article on “invisible librarians.”
- To some extent, librarians were unwitting participants in their own fate.
- Leadership is no longer an option. It is a job requirement.
- Leadership can and must be learned.
- We tell ourselves stories and then believe them.
- No one has time to lead; we need to make time.
- Although some are born leaders, anyone can become one.
- Being an introvert can be an asset, not a detriment, to leadership.
- Integrity is a core leadership quality.
- Leaders need to be team players.
- Having a vision and being a risk taker might be scary, but they are necessary for leaders.
- A sense of humor is an important quality, particularly in today’s school environment.
- Reexamine the list of leadership qualities, and discover that you are on your way to having them.
- Our fear of failure prevents us from moving out of our comfort zone.
- When we do make mistakes as leaders, we are usually the only ones who notice or care about them.
- Making mistakes is part of the learning process.

**Note**


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