



## The 2014 Leadership Academy: Six Months Out

How are participants using what they learned?

Contributions by Valerie Aggerbeck, Patrick Butler, Susan David DeMaine, and Beau Steenken

*"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."*  
– John Quincy Adams

These wise words were one of many lessons that the attendees of the 2014 AALL Leadership Academy took home with them following two full days of hands-on learning this past April. Now, a little more than six months later, *Spectrum* catches up with a few of the Academy attendees to find out how they are using what they learned and the ways that the Academy has affected their professional (and personal) lives.

# On Spaghetti, Marshmallows, and Becoming a Better Leader!

By Valerie Aggerbeck, *Research Librarian, University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis*



Can you create a tower with nine dry spaghetti noodles and a marshmallow using only a few pieces of tape and string? After the AALL

Leadership Academy, this is one of my new skills.

Our goal was to create the tallest tower possible, which is harder than you might think. You have to think creatively, be patient and flexible, listen to your co-builders' suggestions, and implement changes as a team. Our team worked particularly well together—we won the challenge—and I owe it all to the Leadership Academy!

I attended the Leadership Academy in April 2014 with 33 other librarians from various backgrounds and institutions. During our stay at the Hyatt Lodge in Oak Brook, Illinois, we engaged in a variety of hands-on exercises designed to help us reflect on leadership themes. We discussed topics such as leadership styles, effective communication, navigating difficult conversations, and motivating others. At the end of the Leadership Academy, we were assigned a mentor, and since then we have completed several exercises with our mentor.

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I found the Leadership Academy rewarding, both professionally and personally. Indeed, many of the tools and techniques we discussed are applicable not only in one's professional life but also in dealing with personal relationships. Following are some examples of how the Leadership Academy has supported my leadership growth.

## I AM a Leader!

The Academy started by debunking common leadership myths. Many people—I was one of them—assume that specific characteristics make someone a leader and that leadership is synonymous with management. This is not true.

Anyone, whether or not in a managerial position, can be a leader. Our speakers, Gail Johnson and Pam Parr, described leaders as “people with influence who think creatively and are passionate about what they do.”

Since the Academy, I am more comfortable with thinking of myself as a leader and proactively identifying situations in which I can demonstrate leadership in ways both big and small, even though I am not in a managerial position.

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## I CAN motivate student workers!

Another leadership conversation focused on motivating others, which can be difficult. I have been practicing this skill with our student employees, who I supervise.

For example, I deliberately practice showing appreciation to them in different ways, whether by saying “thank you,” taking them out for lunch, sending a handwritten note about their good work, or giving them small tokens of

appreciation for birthdays and other special occasions.

I have also tried to get to know our student employees on a more personal level. When we first hire a student, I ask about the student's interests and whether he or she has any special skills—proficiency in a foreign language, experience with empirical work, etc.—so I can tailor tasks and assign meaningful, relevant work that the student will enjoy. I give students leeway to make suggestions and use their own skills and judgment in their work, but I also let them know that I will hold them accountable.



## I WILL communicate effectively!

For me, the most important takeaway from the Leadership Academy was our discussion on communication styles.

Before the workshop, we were told to ask three or four people to complete a questionnaire regarding our communication style. It included questions about our body language,

speaking voice, how we express opinions, whether we use small talk, etc. It was eye-opening to read the responses and to learn how different people perceive me. During the workshop we reviewed our results and discussed how we could improve our communication with others, especially people with different personality types.

I know I sometimes appear too intense or task-focused to others, and this discussion helped me reflect on my interactions. I am much more conscious of ways that I can modify my behavior to get my point across while maintaining good relationships.

## Well Worth it!

While the change in my manner may not be as obvious to others, the Academy has had a lasting impact on me. I am more mindful of the communication choices I make and of how simple changes can improve my relationships with others and my ability to influence them.

The assignments I have worked on with my mentor have forced me to think critically about my strengths and weaknesses, the skills I want to build, and the character traits I want to develop based on leaders I personally admire. I have a new awareness and a renewed sense of purpose and possibility! ■

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## The Dirty Work of a Leader

By **Patrick Butler**, *Electronic Resources and Reference Librarian, University of Connecticut School of Law Library, Hartford*



Imagine you have a group of, let's say, five people. Maybe they are your staff and you are their manager, or maybe they are members of a committee and you're the chair. Either way, you are the leader of the group. Then Member A comes to you to complain that he feels that he is pulling all the weight and that other members haven't done anything.

We have all seen what happens when a leader does not hold individuals accountable. The work still needs to be done, so the leader "rewards" his or her best workers by giving them more work. This devalues the star performer. It ruins motivation for the entire group. Then you see less and less until the great people go somewhere else and the group or organization is left with the non-performers.

Holding individuals accountable is

No one wants to have the difficult conversations with their staff because, well, they're difficult. But not having those conversations and failing to address the issues that arise causes many more problems, often leading to an unhappy staff full of resentment.

We often make the assumption that the non-performers know that they are not performing up to task, but that is generally not true. When having those difficult conversations, the leader should begin with, "Do you know . . ." or "Are you aware . . ." This approach gives the individual the benefit of the doubt without putting him on the defensive. This would also be a good opportunity for the leader to reiterate expectations or, if necessary, to alter them.

Much of the training I had in the past focused on the leader's communication style, how to influence others, coaching, and problem solving. The trainers at the Leadership Academy were the first ones to directly discuss the dirty work of being a leader and to give valuable advice on how to have those difficult conversations. So far, this information has had the most profound influence on my growth and effectiveness as a leader. Holding individuals accountable is not always easy, but if addressed appropriately, the result can be positive for everyone. Or, to return to my analogy, treated wounds will heal. ■

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That's it. Even if Member A is completely wrong about the accomplishments of others, all that matters is Member A's perception. Now you have a conflict and tension among the group. There is a sore that, if left untreated, may cause an infection. As the leader, it is your responsibility to clean the wound. I know this isn't the most beautiful analogy, but this is the dirty work of being a leader.

Too often, these issues are not addressed or even raised. When the issues are not raised, you, as a leader, have additional problems. Unhappy members of the group may just complain to their colleagues, which only spreads the infection.

one of the most positive motivators a leader can do for a group. It begins with setting clear expectations, but that is not enough. Once the expectations are set, it is necessary to address the tensions that arise. This often means having difficult conversations.

I have been through a lot of management training over the course of my career. Some of the training was done in-house and lasted an hour while other training brought in consultants and lasted three days. It wasn't until I attended the Leadership Academy this past spring that one of those trainers talked about accountability, the dirty work of a leader, and how to effectively have those difficult conversations.

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## Know Thyself, Know Others

By **Susan David DeMaine**, *Research and Instructional Services Librarian, Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law, Ruth Lilly Law Library, Indianapolis*



Much of what I gained from the 2014 AALL Leadership Academy revolves around 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 and act according to our own values, but this does not necessarily jive with the communication attributes and values of others. Regardless of rank or

responsibility, we can all improve our leadership capabilities by building on what we learn when we observe how others (as opposed to ourselves) feel and communicate.

### Understanding Others' Communication Styles

At the Leadership Academy we discussed the finding that, in any communication, we derive 55 percent of the meaning we glean from what we see, 38 percent from what we hear, and only 7 percent from actual words. How we carry ourselves,

how our facial expressions shift, and how our tone of voice and volume modulate have a far greater effect on the meaning we convey than our words do.

We undertook exercises to gain insight into our own communication style, and I learned that I am an "Expressive"—more assertive with my ideas on the assertiveness scale and more responsive to others on the responsiveness scale. This is all well and good but did not come as any real surprise to me. The insights that have proven more valuable over the long term



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happened when I started thinking about where my colleagues would fall in the communication-styles matrix and how I could use that knowledge to build stronger and more productive relationships. For example, the realization that my supervisor is a “Driver” (more assertive and less responsive) might prompt me to focus on results and outcomes rather than consensus-building and process. The realization that my peer is an “Amiable” (less assertive and more responsive) might prompt me to run some interference between peer and supervisor to help bridge communication gaps and build better productivity in the end.

I have used the insights I gained from the communication-styles matrix on numerous occasions.

### Networking

I attended the AALL Annual Meeting for the third time this past summer, and it was the first time that I felt truly comfortable, like I belonged. Reflecting on this, I realized that I knew at least one person just about everywhere I went, and many of them were people I had met or gotten to know better at the Leadership Academy. Unlike a reception or a cocktail party, the Leadership Academy created an environment that fostered true networking. We had

enough time, structure, and guidance to discuss real questions, to listen and observe other people, and to work together to solve problems—the kinds of experiences that create lasting connections. I have since had further conversations with other members of the Leadership Academy, sought advice, and worked on joint undertakings.

I also gained a mentor who is committed to the mentoring process, experienced in law librarian leadership, and dedicated to having an ongoing discussion with me. Our phone calls have covered questions of leadership in the profession, on our campuses, in our law schools, and in our libraries. The best part is that these conversations result in answers or ideas that are specific to my situation. In short, I have the confidential ear of a longtime leader in law librarianship who has the wisdom of an arm’s-length view. ■

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## Lasting Leadership Lessons

By **Beau Steenken**, *Instructional Services Librarian and Assistant Professor of Legal Research, University of Kentucky College of Law, Lexington*



When I first discovered that AALL’s Leadership Academy involved monthly assignments—a discovery that occurred long after

I had accepted the offer to participate—my initial (unexpressed) reaction was something along the lines of, “I notice you didn’t advertise the year-long ongoing homework in your call for applications.” Despite my initial skepticism, however, the assignments have proven to be a valuable aspect of the Leadership Academy experience.

In retrospect, though I enjoyed the theories presented at the Leadership Academy, they most likely would have remained abstract for me had it not been for the ongoing assignments. (I sometimes tend to be drawn to ideas to the detriment of practical application.) The assignments, which feature either reading or real-world observations combined with discussions with an assigned mentor, have actually done a wonderful job of connecting the theories introduced at the Academy to practical applications. Observing leadership has been particularly valuable, as has been receiving insight from a more experienced law librarian. The fact that the assignments draw the lessons out over an extended period of time also helps, as two days of on-site training did feel a bit like cramming for an exam.

Overall, the assignments have helped ensure that the leadership lessons remain lasting.

Of the ideas presented at the Leadership Academy, I identified those dealing with motivation as being highly relevant at this point in my career. Thus, during the assignments, I often focused on how I saw law librarians in positions of leadership motivate their colleagues for various projects by obtaining “buy-in.” I have already been able to adopt some of the techniques I observed to great success, both professionally and personally.

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UK Law is currently shifting to an outcomes-based model of assessment. Part of the process of instituting such assessment involves creating rubrics to measure the capabilities of students in the desired outcomes. Because LRW at UK Law operates under the “program” model, the assessment of outcomes for Legal Research as a course needed to be standardized. Coordination of Legal Research falls to me. In the past, I would have offered to write the required rubric and wait for feedback. However, my

wonderful, enthusiastic colleagues all bring their own ideas to the table. Quite rightly, they all value their academic freedom. As such, I suspect they may have reacted negatively to a mandated rubric. Having learned from my leadership assignments, however, I decided to involve my colleagues in the rubric creation from the onset, which gave everyone a stake in the project and has led to great enthusiasm for the finished rubric.

I have also applied the leadership lessons in my personal life. At around 18 months of age, my son underwent a sleep regression, meaning that he would wake up in the middle of the night and not go back to sleep on his own. Thus, from that point onward, he became a semi-permanent resident in his parents’ bed. He turned two last May. I decided to see if offering stakes in a project would also work on a two-year old.

I told him that he was getting a grown-up bed and that he could pick out his own blankets and pillows for his new bed. He told me that he wanted green blankets. Three stores later (green apparently was not “in” this year) he had a green comforter, some matching dinosaur pillows, and a great enthusiasm for his new bed. He has been sleeping in his own bed all night for several months now.

Thus, I feel that I have already reaped benefits from the lessons I learned through AALL’s Leadership Academy! ■