

Guest Editorial

Leadership: An Imperative We Must Not Ignore

The classic essay by Arthur McAnally and Robert Downs was one of the first articles I accepted as editor of *C&RL*. That essay greatly heightened the profession's consciousness about the pressures under which many library administrators labored. This article was particularly significant to me because I was about to assume the director of libraries position at the University of California-Berkeley. Their advice gave me pause for thought and emphasized for me the importance of leadership.

During the 1970s academic librarians paid a great deal of attention to improving the quality of management in their libraries. The Management Review and Analysis Project (MRAP), developed by the Association of Research Libraries, provided libraries with the ability to examine issues of library structure, communication, and governance. The MRAP techniques could be used to draw a blueprint for the future. MRAP was only one effort to address the problems of disaffected staff, overly paternalistic administrators, and librarians' reluctance to change. In my opinion, librarians are now better managers and staff are better-prepared participants in planning and decision making.

During the 1980s managerial competence issues have been somewhat subordinated to another related concern: organizational leadership. The writings of Warren Bennis and Tom Peters, Rosabeth Kantor, and Peter Drucker all draw attention to concerns about organizational leadership. The phenomenal success of the Japanese in developing products and in penetrating foreign markets coupled with the failure of American institutions to keep pace has only added a sense of urgency to the issue. Lee Iacocca, with his energy, charisma, and bulldog persistence, seemed to almost single-handedly turn around the Chrysler corporation. For many he became a folk hero. They asked themselves, Why can't the seemingly faceless corporate executives be more like Lee?

The library profession has also focused on leadership-related questions; it is searching for its own versions of Lee Iacocca. One can't attend a conference without hearing complaints about the lack of leadership or pleas that something be done, and fast. During my career I have been privileged to work with a number of individuals who merit the accolade "leader," but I must admit that they have been too few. At present, the profession enjoys the commitment of many individuals who have recently moved or are on the brink of moving into leadership positions, but I fear their ranks are still too thin. We need to expand further the pool of potential leaders, and to accomplish this we must make a more tangible commitment to staff development and leadership training—and "tangible" means hard dollar commitments. Staff development is one activity on which we can't afford to skimp.

Most academic librarians realize that our future is quite clouded. Some are quite pessimistic; certain officials I know have likened research libraries to dinosaurs who have long outlived their usefulness. Others of us view the future with great optimism. If we will only seize the opportunity, librarians can serve a central information-providing role in academic environments. But we need strong leaders to pave the way.

As one who has been privileged to have been associated with a group of fine universities, I have come to understand how they operate, how tradition shapes their policies and programs. I believe the pressures under which university officers—presidents and particularly academic vice-presidents—operate have become enormous during the last decade. Librarians experience many of the same pressures. For example, the pace of organizational life has accelerated, and the rapidity of technological change often exceeds the ability of organizations to absorb these technologies in ways that are not at least temporarily destabilizing. To manage these changes and to better position libraries so that they remain major players in the campus information infrastructure, the next generation of librarians will require not only competent managers, but professionals who exhibit a full range of leadership qualities.

RICHARD M. DOUGHERTY

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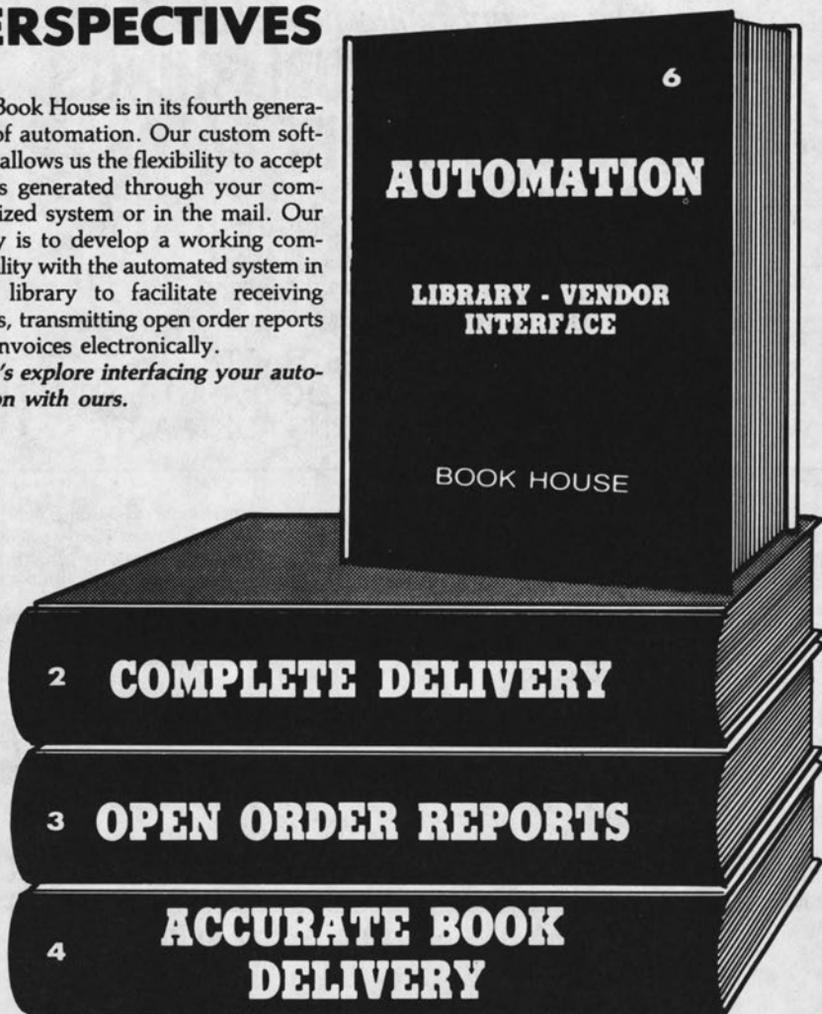
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