

Moulaison, Heather Lea. (2009, August). Getting a bigger picture: A report of "Leadership Development in Transition". Report submitted to *NMRT Footnotes*, 39(1). Retrieved from [http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/nmrt/news/footnotes/august\\_2009/](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/nmrt/news/footnotes/august_2009/)

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### **Getting a bigger picture: A report of "Leadership Development in Transition"**

Submitted by Heather Lea Moulaison

This program had one main speaker and two respondents. The bulk of the formal part of the program was the very engaging and interactive presentation by Jill Canono, who according to the handout "loves to learn, laugh, and lead ... in that order".

Jill began by reminding us what NMRTers already know: that this is an exciting time in libraries. It's also a time when individuals with a vision can come forth to participate in "shared leadership". Shared leadership involves taking calculated risks, overcoming communication barriers, and seeking new answers by making a point of talking to people who think differently. It is also characterized by engaging with the community and using all available resources freely. Going the safe route isn't always the best way.

One of Jill's anecdotes that seemed to resonate with the audience was the "Bertha story". Jill described a mythical library character (Bertha) who had tried something new 20 years ago. The attempt had been a failure, no one tried the new thing ever again, and Bertha herself was never seen again. Past failures of the mythical Bertha can haunt libraries today. If we are willing to take the calculated risks, however, we can make progress.

Another powerful image used by Jill involved the life cycles of a butterfly. When a caterpillar transitions to a butterfly, its DNA actually changes. The creature that emerges from the cocoon is fundamentally new and different. During the in-between stage, if one accidentally opens the cocoon, the only thing that will be evident inside is a kind of ooze. That goo is actually what is called "imaginal cells"; they become the instrument of change that transforms the ooze into a butterfly (see motivational speaker Skye Thomas's website: <http://www.tomorrowsedge.net/imaginal-cells.html>) The first few new cells are attacked as foreign matter. Only after there are enough new cells to form strong clusters can the next stage of development occur. Libraries are in the in-between, or goo, stage right now as they transition to their new form and change their DNA. Now is the time for shared leadership to be the library version of the imaginal cells, the instruments for change in this period of transition.

Jill's excellent presentation is available online:

[http://presentations.ala.org/images/e/e4/%281428%29\\_ALA\\_2009\\_-\\_june\\_revision.ppt](http://presentations.ala.org/images/e/e4/%281428%29_ALA_2009_-_june_revision.ppt)

Two respondents replied to Jill's remarks. The first respondent was Olivia Madison, Dean of the Library at Iowa State University, who gave advice about committee work as instrument for change. For NMRTers who have yet to be assigned to committees in libraries, it was a particularly interesting approach to the big picture. Olivia suggested that committee work is the best way to effect changes in her library. She suggests that when committees make decisions, that they stand by them to limit wasted time. Olivia finds that the "good" people on committees are often the same, leading me to think that NMRTers who want leadership positions in their libraries will want to get one committee appointment and will want to do a good job on that committee in order to pave the way for future committee work with increasing responsibility.

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The second respondent was NMRT's own Nanette Donohue (NMRT past president, 2007-2008), Technical Services Manager at the Champaign Public Library in Champaign, IL. Nanette began by reminding us quite eloquently that new librarians don't know it all and that at times, the merits of compromise can be overlooked or misunderstood by those new to the profession. NMRTers will want to try to see the big picture in their libraries to appreciate that shared leadership is about being able to give in when necessary. I noticed that Jill shook her head in agreement quite often when Nanette was talking.

Nanette suggested that new librarians ask for responsibility in their institutions. Outside of their institutions, librarians should not be afraid to network; after all, leaders are nice and likeable. Librarians aren't going to elect someone to a position of responsibility if that person isn't approachable. By showing that you are approachable, and by approaching folks in the interest of networking, you can make connections with the (nice) leaders of today, and lay the groundwork for future leadership positions in the library community for yourself in the future.

Nanette also feels that the ability to follow is an important element of leadership. Every librarian's boss also reports to someone. In short, people at all levels both lead and follow. When ownership for a project is distributed, more people can take part and help the project to advance.

After the two respondents had spoken, Jill declined the opportunity to give a final response. This provided additional time for questions, and the audience stayed for about a half hour with a host of interesting questions and comments.

"Leadership Development in Transition: Steering the Ship from Helm and Deck" was sponsored by the ALCTS Leadership Development Committee and co-sponsored by NMRT, LLAMA Human Resources Leadership Skills Committee, and the ACRL Instruction Section. The program was generously supported by Taylor and Francis. Roughly 200 attendees were present at the program, which was held on Saturday, July 11, 2009 at 3:30 in the convention center. Jill's presentation is also on the ALA Annual 2009 Presentation Wiki: [http://presentations.ala.org/index.php?title=Saturday%2C\\_July\\_11#3:30-5:30](http://presentations.ala.org/index.php?title=Saturday%2C_July_11#3:30-5:30)