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Whose Vision? Whose Values? Librarian-Leaders
in an Era of Persistent Change

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In the waning days of World War II, after years of physical deprivation and psychological terror, Viktor Frankl walked away from the daily prospect of death in a concentration camp. Later, he wrote compellingly of those horrors, laying the foundation for a new school of psychoanalysis and offering to us a framework for assessing our relationship with the world. ---- **SLIDE 2**---- We cannot dictate the broad outlines of our lives, Frankl writes—when and where we are born, or the elements of family, community, nation, and historical circumstance. But we *can* choose the character with which we live our lives, the ethical choices and tone with which we conduct ourselves, and what we see as the purposes and goals for our lives. In the end, Frankl tells us, we are responsible for the content, if not the context, of our lives, and within this we must understand what we can and cannot change.

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Leading change in an era of continual change is about discerning what should and should not be changed. It is about understanding the interplay of self and others, and perceiving the interconnectedness of personal and organizational values. It is about self-awareness and making choices. Key to navigating any change environment successfully is understanding the mechanism for decision making—how participation is balanced with leadership, how *individual* vision is reconciled with *other* visions, how multiple decision-making processes can be reconciled within the same institution. In the end, we realize, marshalling and leading change is about vision and values -- about realizing self through service to others and the fulfillment of collective aspirations.

When Frankl walked away from his concentration camp, the prevailing leadership model in nearly all sectors of American life was that of a strong autocrat. The 1950s and 1960s are full of examples of strong, purposeful leaders managing largely through command-and-control methods. In the 1970s and 1980s, as government bureaucracies expanded exponentially, the number and size of educational institutions mushroomed, and corporations typically became too large to manage as personal fiefdoms, a popular alternative archetype emerged of the chief executive officer (CEO) orchestrating a large, complex bureaucracy.

As we enter more fully into a transformative era in higher education fueled by technology and characterized by the motto of 24/7, we require yet another kind of leader—one more relevant to the emerging realities of discontinuity, ambiguity, and persistent change and transition. Situations conducive to command-and-control leadership models are becoming less common, and the benevolent CEO model is becoming increasingly unwieldy.

Some of the dimensions of the social context for contemporary organizations are mobility, integration, perpetual flux, nonlinearity, and visceral distrust of leaders and institutions. ---- **SLIDE 4**---- Some of the dimensions of the emerging leader for our time are ability to calibrate multiple visions rather than impose one's own vision, commitment to stewardship rather than personal stake, ability to effect clarity and simplicity on the surface of complexity, high tolerance for ambiguity, and commitment to supporting both organizational and personal development. Furthermore, critical to understanding and taking full advantage of our current opportunities is the capacity to think and act beyond prevailing definitions of library and librarianship, to move toward organizational and operational realms that transcend conventional boundaries by bringing library, computing, and other academic support services ever-closer together within more amorphous, evolving, responsive agencies.

All academic librarians are change leaders by virtue of being in an industry that is inherently volatile and continuously changing. Like it or not, *all* of us are at the nexus (some might say the vortex!) of change on multiple planes. Librarians are at the intersections of faculty and student service planes. We are at the crossroads of information, technology, physical space, and electronic communication. We have the traditions of personalized service, respect for individuals and their needs, freedom of access, and privacy. Our heroes include Green, Rothstein, Bunge, and Battin. We must all therefore see ourselves as change leaders because at the very least on a daily basis we participate in advancing the changes themselves among our students, our faculty, and our colleagues. And we are change leaders of yet another sort because through the playing out of these values for the increasingly digital library, whatever that may be or yet become, we make differences in *ourselves* in ways that perpetuate a dynamic cycle of personal and organizational enrichment.

As change leaders, then, each of us must possess a clear sense of self and an understanding of how we relate to our clients and our organizations -- how our personal visions relate to other visions, and how our service and other values play out in these contexts.

Perhaps the hardest internalization of values for change leaders these days may be that change often is far more about leading people through a transition than changing the operations and structures around them. In order to effect lasting systemic change (rather than temporary changes that snap back into place at the first opportunity), it is important to focus as much on the human aspects of transition as on change outcomes.

---- **SLIDE 5**---- (From William Bridges, 1991. *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*. Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Books.)

It isn't the changes that do you in, it's the *transitions*. Change is not the same as transition. *Change* is situational; the new site, the new boss, the new team roles, the new policy. *Transition* is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation. Change is external, transition is internal.

At some level most of us know this intuitively, but through both positive and negative experiences many of us have learned that it has become necessary these days to take this principle to another level of understanding and practice.

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The second-most-difficult lesson for an information services leader in our transitional era may be to internalize the need to shift the change perspective from one's own thinking to that of others—to calibrate one's own vision with that of the organization, the institution, and key individuals beyond, and to see through the eyes of external constituents as well as through the eyes of employees. One must honestly listen to, draw from, and meld the values, ideals, wisdom, and aspirations of both the organization and the larger parent institution. These seem to be simple tasks, really, but performing them consistently requires a degree of deference, discernment, and ideational humility that many of us seem to lack. Never assume you understand the vision of the next level, or that your ideas are more powerful or better conceived than those of others. Be prepared at all times to meld your vision and aspirations into those of others, sometimes morphing your grand notions into lesser elements within a larger canvas.

Now, while it's probably easy to resonate with these notions personally, it's perhaps more difficult to imagine how they can play out in the workplace, so let me give you a couple personal examples of how I have seen them at work and how I have come to appreciate them.

First and foremost was my involvement in bringing online the nation's first information commons. Deploying a heavy concentration of computing within the heart of the library,

enabling on these computers a full range of productivity and network navigation tools -- this was 1994, at a time when access to e-mail was strongly discouraged if not banned outright in most academic libraries -- and providing robust service support for the use of these resources had not previously been undertaken on a large scale. The presence of this massive a concentration of information technology in the library demanded a reformulation of core library values.

Only by working in a highly collaborative fashion with technology-support agencies outside the library were we able to begin experimenting with integrated technology and reference-service support. Only by empowering librarians and others within the library to view our services from the perspective of our students, with a great degree of freedom to shape programs accordingly, were we able to find our way collectively into new service models that integrated library and technology-support services. In this manner, we began to transform the enduring library values of personal service and equity of access into the new values of holistic computing, core services through the network, and making the technology work for everyone—framing principles that arose only after the participating librarians and other service providers placed themselves within the nexus of change, immersing themselves in the perspectives of all the participants.

My experience as a leader at Pacific Lutheran University -- I've been there 2.5 years now -- has afforded me very different kinds of opportunities for both professional and personal growth. Leading organizational change in a smaller university -- I was at USC and a couple University of California campuses before getting wise to the Northwest and to the humane scale of smaller universities -- has in some respects been easier because fewer people are involved and the union of library and computing has been in place under the same administrative umbrella for several years. On the other hand, there is a much greater expectation at PLU for communication and attention to individual and community needs from both inside and outside the organization. My principal challenges have been to begin operational integration, to expand the library's presence within PLU's academic

culture, and to enhance the university's capacity for teaching and learning with technology -- and to do so in ways that connect with community values and aspirations.

After spending several months listening and learning from many voices throughout the university, a newly-formed leadership group and I began an Information Resources planning process with a series of focused discussions, department meetings, public forums, and a leadership group retreat. In this process we paid close attention

---- **SLIDE 7**---- to the classic steps of organization transformation by articulating a sense of urgency for the need to change, maintaining a guiding coalition, and developing a vision to direct the change effort. Parallel to this, we developed the habit of communicating regularly, both in messages and open forums, and of allowing leaders to articulate and to implement these changes in ways they felt most effective.

Several months after launching a planning effort, we produced the customary set of documents for public review and discussion. ---- **SLIDE 8**---- We accomplished this work largely through a broad-based recognition of our purpose (that is, using mission as impelling force), an understanding of common values both institutionally and operationally (values as cohesive force), and a strong sense for the need to articulate a framework for future action and decision making (vision as directing force). The chief benefits of this process have been to create a stronger sense of common purpose and direction throughout the organization, to add substance to the ideal of an integrated leadership group, to describe and accomplish a significant reallocation of human and material resources toward teaching and learning with technology, and to lay the foundation for the next phase of operational and organizational integration.

Now this is all well and good, but it's probably not particularly illuminating for all us "strategic planning" junkies here today. What comes next, though, might be more interesting to some.

Turns out that a new provost arrived just as a separate campus-wide strategic planning process was moving into high gear. The arrival of the provost, coupled with the planning activity, presented the opportunity to connect Information Resources efforts more closely still with other efforts around campus. In vetting Information Resources plans with the new provost, the concept of an information commons became more closely linked with campus-wide planning and melded with the provost's emerging vision of a student academic support center. This combination of a solid planning process within Information Resources and a campus-wide connection that associates it with several related programs has become the basis of an innovative concept for a Mortvedt Commons [following from Robert Mortvedt Library] that will feature integrated library, technology, *and* academic support service elements.

There's a lot more detail here and even some interesting personal dynamics, but in the interest of brevity let me pull out some of the points I'm wanting to get to.

First, I'd like to offer the lesson that an important dimension of leading change in a rapidly changing environment is the capacity to view organizational change and movement toward a vision ---- **SLIDE 9**---- as a train careening down tracks that are being placed only moments before the train speeds onto them—and to alternate frequently between the roles of train engineer and rail-slapper. The lesson here is that you sometimes don't know exactly where the train is going, when your role is that of engineer or layer of rails, or just what kind of terrain lies over the next horizon; however, by sharing a mission and vision with people at all levels you *can* affect (if not closely steer) the overall course.

The challenge for the librarian-leader in an environment of rapid and continual change, then, is truly to give herself or himself up to the vision and to relinquish direct control over the means of accomplishing it once it has been placed into motion. At PLU, in order to form a viable vision that speaks to all constituencies, I have had to surrender the notion of an information commons as the centerpiece in a redesign of the library, along with a

personal emotional attachment to a Camelot I had created around my experiences with the first information commons nearly a decade ago. This has made it more difficult to determine precisely when I should be working as an engineer or as a rail-slapper, but it has brought with it the enormous satisfaction of witnessing the emergence of a still more powerful and galvanizing idea laden with yet more opportunities for achievement and both professional and personal growth by the participants. Essential to this metamorphosis in thinking and acting has been a fuller realization that *change is about people rather than things*; that I must view myself as being at the *nexus -- rather than directing from a pinnacle* -- of change; and that if I act on these two realizations I can find effective balance between my *own* views and those of *others*.

We have been hearing for some time about the coming transformation of higher education. In recent years, many of us within information services have begun to create viable frameworks for the transition from largely print to largely digital scholarly communication and teaching-and-learning environments. But relatively few of us truly understand just how massive the coming shakeout in higher education will be or the true extent and character of the restructuring that likely will occur over the next decade or so. Globalization, return to massive federal deficits, further withdrawal of federal and state funding from higher education, continuing malaise in philanthropic investing, preoccupation with national security, the ongoing struggle over matters of privacy and security, increasing demands for accountability with emphasis on assessment—all conspire to accelerate dramatically our transformation into a system of higher education restructured largely by technology, mission, accountability, and values.

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Values for this new order are by no means clear. It is certain only that the values are changing and that demand is increasing for leaders who can clarify them for institutions, organizations, and even themselves. If the workplace is demanding less command and control and more inspired organizational change, if leadership now requires more interior

affect than exterior control, if organizational effectiveness increasingly requires movement from low-trust/high-control to high-trust/low-control models, then transparent, values-based, egoless leadership is becoming all the more important.

As librarian-leaders, we have the capacity—indeed, the responsibility—to foster creation of the values needed in our organizations. For more than a century, librarians have refined and sustained the values of personal service and equity of access, yet our new service environments demand more. Now we must reinterpret our enduring values and formulate new ones for the next generation of information services. Often the most effective way of doing so is simply to get out of the way and allow the collective wisdom of the persons to whom these services are entrusted to bring them forward. An information commons by definition possesses a hybrid, transforming character that engenders discontinuities and ambiguities. Conventional service silos and multiple service points are no longer viable, professional roles and responsibilities are considerably more ambiguous, and the convergence of information services and technologies erodes organizational boundaries. Finding our way to framing values in an information commons required that librarians have a considerable degree of freedom to search for new responses to new service demands. Service providers had to be empowered to do so, and leadership had to let go of direct control over that process. Individual and organizational values were in synch, and a new vision for academic library service coalesced.

A final point by way of footnote: Fostering change in a true spirit of discovery and receptivity to new directions can lead to unexpected results. Proliferation of the information commons concept throughout much of academe is both a manifestation of and an accelerant for convergence of technologies and the services that support them. That experience early on convinced me of the inevitability of the convergence of library and computing, both operationally and organizationally. The seemingly innocuous exercise of openly exploring new values for a new service arena turned out to be only the

beginning of an odyssey that has since led into the realm of reconceiving how organizations can be shaped to better serve the communities whose interests they serve.

One of the great joys in such a journey can be to witness firsthand the fruits of computing-library integration in the creation of more flexible organizations for the transition from a largely print to a largely digital world, especially the collaboration of librarians and technologists in developing networked resources, understanding user needs in holistic ways, developing new modes of assistance, and jointly instructing faculty and students. Involvement in these and similar enterprises inevitably affects participants through an interplay of organizational values and visioning, lives of writing and speaking, and an evolution of personal values that feed back into one's professional life.

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Let me now conclude by observing that in this era of persistent change and transition, the role of librarian-leader must be experienced as striving toward vision, as a tension among varying interests, as growth through both negative and positive experiences, and as fulfillment of both organizational and personal potential. Effective librarian-leaders have a sense of calling, a vocation from which framing values -- both personal and professional -- are derived. The essence of an academic librarian in an era of continuous change is the feeling that she or he can make a difference and is willing to try.

We repeatedly ask ourselves, "Why and for whom are we doing this?" And as Viktor Frankl urges, we seek to understand what is circumstance that cannot or should not be changed and what is incumbent on us to try to change.

Thank you for allowing me to spend time with you this afternoon. I wish you the very best as you seek in these couple days new paths through what seems to be a chaotic world of information services. I have no doubt you will be successful, both personally and organizationally.