

LEADER PROFILE

CALLING FOR AN ENCORE

Throughout her career, former AALL President Sarah (Sally) Holterhoff has been an advocate for the federal depository library program, for digital authentication of legal materials, and for access to government information. Now, in her retirement, she has a new cause: building a network of seasoned American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) colleagues and exploring opportunities for them to stay engaged with each other and the Association.

A stroke of luck brought Sally Holterhoff into a career in law librarianship. After receiving her MALS from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Holterhoff worked in public and school libraries. Then, in 1981, she and her husband moved to Valparaiso, Indiana, with their two small children. “After checking around, I learned that Matt Downs, director of Valparaiso University Law Library, wanted to hire a part-time government documents librarian,” recalls Holterhoff. Though she lacked relevant experience in government information or law, she was hired for the position that began her 35-year career as a law librarian. “That fortunate break turned my career in a new direction, one that was better than I could possibly have imagined. I learned quickly on the job, and through the years my responsibilities changed and expanded,” said Holterhoff.

Her position evolved into government information/reference librarian and associate professor of law librarianship. “When the Valpo law librarians gained faculty



status, I took on teaching responsibilities. I discovered that I really enjoyed teaching legal research and answering tough research questions about government information for faculty.”

Holterhoff spent her entire career at Valpo Law Library, until her retirement in 2016. She is now associate professor emerita of law librarianship at Valparaiso.

Since joining AALL in 1982, Holterhoff has been extremely active within the Association. She served as AALL President from 2006–2007 and was an Executive Board member from 2000–2003 and 2005–2008. She has chaired standing committees (Government Relations

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Committee, Public Relations Committee, and the Council of Chapter Presidents) as well as numerous special committees, advisory groups, and task forces. She served as chair of the Government Documents Special Interest Section, and has been a longtime member of the Chicago Association of Law Libraries (where she served as president from 1995–1996) and the Ohio Regional Association of Law Libraries. In 2016, she and several other AALL colleagues organized the Encore Caucus. Here, she discusses the benefits of belonging to a professional association, and why it’s important that retired and later-career members stay engaged, not only with the Association, but with the profession as well.

What’s the value of being an AALL member?

First of all, I’m convinced that being actively involved in a professional association can greatly

enrich a person’s career. It’s a way to meet colleagues, find mentors, and build professional and personal friendships. AALL provides members with opportunities to hone their skills by volunteering, to find programming to continue learning in their field, and to network and exchange information and find answers.

What role has AALL played in your career?

Membership in AALL has been especially valuable to me personally. I attended my first AALL Annual Meeting in Detroit in 1982. I was so impressed with the people I met there and what I saw happening, I could hardly wait to get involved. AALL quickly became my professional “home” and has remained so, even now in my retirement.

Although I spent my entire career working in one law library, through AALL I was able to form strong connections with colleagues and mentors around the country and in a variety of library types. My involvement with the Association for all these years has broadened my horizons and has provided me with numerous opportunities to learn about leadership, advocacy, and public speaking. Serving as AALL President was a great honor and certainly a highlight of my career. My colleagues in AALL continue to challenge, advise, and inspire me.

What lessons have you learned from the leadership roles you’ve held in AALL?

Leaders have to be problem solvers, and it can be tempting to make a quick decision to resolve a situation. But before making a major decision, it’s often better to be patient and take a day or night to reflect. That’s not possible in every decision-making situation, but when it is, I’ve found that the result is often better.

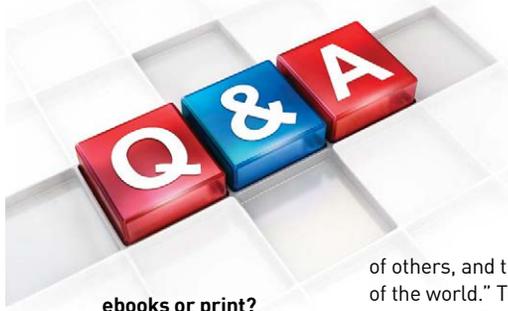
Criticism is something leaders must learn to handle. No one enjoys being criticized, but it’s nearly impossible to avoid some negative feedback if you’re doing your job as a leader. You should listen and try to understand the viewpoint of others, but ultimately you have to accept that very often you can’t please everyone. You have to focus on the goals of the organization and proceed, not taking differing opinions personally.

Other AALL leaders can serve as valuable role models. Early in my career, some of the best training for future leadership that I found was as a volunteer at the special interest section or chapter level. There I had the good fortune

SARAH (SALLY) HOLTERHOFF

- ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR EMERITA OF LAW LIBRARIANSHIP
- VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL LIBRARY
- VALPARAISO, IN

QUICK HITS WITH SALLY HOLTERHOFF



ebooks or print?

I'm still very partial to print and usually have several books underway at any given time. I listen to audiobooks while driving.

Favorite quote? "Show kindness whenever possible. Show it to the people in front of you, the people coming up behind you, and the people with whom you are running neck and neck. It will vastly improve the quality of your own life, the lives

of others, and the state of the world." This advice is from Ann Patchett, a favorite author of mine.

Book you've enjoyed reading recently?

Fiction: *Commonwealth* by Ann Patchett.

Nonfiction: *This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism* by Ashton Applewhite. This author believes that society needs to overcome the prejudice of ageism. She makes a case for age being a criterion for diversity, which should

be applied in all aspects of life, including the workplace.

Guilty pleasure? My fascination with British royalty!

Favorite travel destination? Bonita Springs, Florida, where my husband and I have a vacation condo and are now spending several very pleasant months each fall and winter. Recent favorites also include Cape Town, Athens, Prague, and Budapest.

Favorite TV show to binge-watch? I enjoy catching up on all the seasons of top drama series of the past: *The Sopranos*, *West Wing*, *Six Feet Under*, *Breaking Bad*, *The Good Wife*, and (most recently) *Mad Men*.

to observe some excellent leaders in action and a chance to take note of what they did well. Later on, when I was in leadership positions of my own, I was guided to some extent by these observations and memories. This worked for me at the committee and Executive Board level as well, all the way up the AALL leadership line.

What do you see as essential traits for leadership?

There are different leadership traits and styles that can be appropriate and effective for a given situation or organization. While I'm not an expert on traits of effective leaders, I can offer my personal reflections on leadership, things that have worked for me in the positions I've held or that I've observed in others. They can be summed up with four words that begin with the letter H:

History: Be aware of and consider what has come before in an organization before planning the next steps. Be familiar with the norms of the past. The status quo may be deeply seated. Even if it's time to change past practices, do that as respectfully as possible.

Homework: There is no substitute for being fully versed about an issue, for researching to determine how other individuals or organizations have tackled something similar, and for being aware of potential road blocks and pitfalls. As a leader, be well prepared for meetings you run, conference calls you convene, and presentations you make. Behind-the-scenes work is necessary if you're going to have credibility and be effective. These tasks prepare you to be responsive and flexible if things don't work out quite as expected.

Humility: To be an authentic leader, it's important to be humble and know that you alone don't have all the answers. Being in the top job is an honor and a responsibility. It's not about you personally, but about those who have put their trust in you. You and your current efforts make up a new link in the chain of leaders of the organization, connecting what happened before you arrived on the scene with things that will happen down the road.

Horizon: See the big picture and embrace new ideas and ways of thinking. Take full advantage of your chance to make a difference. Have a vision and be an advocate for something you believe will improve the organization and make a difference beyond your time at its helm. Be invested in your vision and be willing to take some risks to accomplish it.

You've been involved in AALL advocacy for many years. How do you see advocacy skills as related to leadership?

With members of our profession taking on new roles in their work environments, advocacy skills are increasingly important. It's essential for all of us to be able to speak and write effectively about important legal information issues. Through advocacy work in the Association, we can gain experience in talking to persons in positions of authority, in explaining both sides of an issue succinctly, and in making the case for a particular action or goal. That skill set is transferable, enabling individuals to take on leadership roles in various workplaces. In law schools, librarians may be supporting the implementation of legal research competency standards. In law firms, they may be making a case for using Lean Six Sigma concepts and strategies for project management. Government librarians may be speaking up on access to justice issues. Across the board, our standing as leaders in the legal information profession is enhanced if we have good advocacy skills.

In 2016, you and several other colleagues organized the AALL Encore Caucus. What was your motivation for founding this new group? What are its goals?

In 2016, as I approached my own retirement, it seemed to me that there must be some additional way for me and others in my situation to continue to be involved and contribute to AALL, beyond the roles we had already played. I wanted to stay connected with colleagues of all ages and career stages, which is something I've always enjoyed and found to be valuable.

AALL has a large number of later-career members—seasoned professionals who possess a wealth of experience, tacit knowledge, and perspective. If, as these individuals approach and reach retirement, they drift away from their connection to AALL, that will be quite a loss—both for the Association and for them.

The Encore Caucus is a group of longtime, experienced AALL members. It was formed to bridge the gap between colleagues who are in the last decade or so of their active careers—those who are approaching the finish line—and those who have already transitioned to post-employment life (and want to continue their connections with colleagues in AALL). At this point, ours is one of the largest AALL caucuses, with 130 members, many of whom are still working full time.

For our first two AALL Annual Meetings as a caucus, we have tried to offer some special experiences for our members (while also welcoming guests and future recruits). A feature of our annual business meeting has been a short presentation by a local speaker on a topic of interest to our members. We've also offered a social/cultural event or "field trip."

I think there are some great possibilities ahead in AALL for the Encore Caucus—I'm eager to see what comes next!

For individuals who are approaching or have reached the retirement milestone, what benefit do you see for them in continuing their AALL membership and their involvement in activities with the Association?

For those of us who, throughout our careers, have felt a sense of community within AALL, reaching retirement is no reason/excuse to leave the stage, so to speak. It is in the interest of all for "seasoned" colleagues to continue their AALL involvement—to stay in touch with friends and put to use their experience and tacit knowledge in meaningful ways. It's a waste of talent to lose that. The Encore Caucus is just

one attempt to give longtime AALL members a purpose and a place to stay involved and to continue to make contributions, without detracting in any way from the need for younger colleagues to take the lead in running the organization. AALL offers opportunities for people of all ages to be engaged, to be part of a social network, and to feel a sense of community. Plus, on a practical level, there are discounted dues and registration rates for retired members!

Also, AALL has taken strong stands on diversity issues and it is important for all of us to be aware that age is one criterion for diversity. It has been pointed out that ageism is the last socially acceptable prejudice and it is found throughout society—in the workplace, in advertising, and yes, even in professional organizations. It's time to change that, and we hope to encourage AALL to take a stand against ageism. That is less likely to happen if those of us in the "older" category just disappear from the AALL picture by dropping out of the Association.

What is the best career advice you received during your 35 years as a law librarian?

Don't be afraid to take on a new role or challenge, even if it scares you a little or takes you well out of your comfort zone. Trying the new thing and struggling through some doubt and uncertainty about it can be uncomfortable. But it is almost always worth it in the end and can be a great way to increase your skills. Success at something new helps you grow professionally and reach the next stage of your career.

What advice would you give to a colleague in the earlier stages of his or her career?

- Be aware that members of the law library and legal information profession form a close-knit group, a network of colleagues and friends with many interconnections. The reputation (good or not-so-good) that you build for yourself will follow you throughout your career, in ways you might not expect.
- Show respect to and value the perspective of everyone in your work environment, not just the "important people." You can learn a great deal about how things really work from members of the support staff.
- Have fun. Be the person who can enjoy the scenery on a detour. Changes, even disappointments, as hard as they seem at the time, may bring you to an unexpected but much better destination than the one you intended to reach. ■