DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE

Key takeaways from the American Association of Law Libraries’ (AALL) inaugural Executive Leadership Institute.

BY MICHAEL ROBAK

This year, following the 112th AALL Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, AALL held its first-ever Executive Leadership Institute at Georgetown University Law Center. The Institute, held over one and a half days, covered design thinking and creating influence, and included roundtable discussions on issues related to the overall management of the law library. I left feeling personally empowered to make good, strategic decisions, and ready to attend the next Executive Leadership Institute to learn even more. I hope you find the takeaways in this article by Michael Robak useful in your own personal leadership development.

— Michelle Cosby, AALL President
A Brief Review
Let me begin with a conclusion: Every director from academic, government, and private law libraries who could not attend the inaugural AALL Executive Leadership Institute should make the time to attend the next offering; it is one of the best AALL events you will ever attend.

This very short review in no way does justice to what was an inspiring and highly useful event. I am a fan of immersive learning events that provide individualized actionable takeaways. This event was that and more, and it also offered a kind of “cross-pollination” that may be somewhat diluted at the higher-volume Annual Meeting.

Day One: “How Might We … ?”
On the first day, after breakfast networking and an introduction to the Institute, we launched directly into Vanderbilt Law Professor Caitlin “Cat” Moon’s presentation entitled “Using DESIGN to #MakeLawLibrariesBetter.” The keywords for this session were innovation and innovating for the law. Her discussion on Human-Centered Design was framed as the true direction for leadership in the twenty-first century. She examined the five mindsets behind design: Radical Collaboration, Experimentation, Ambiguity, Empathy, and Curiosity. Moon then took us through the elements of the Design Thinking process: Discovery/Empathy, Define/Reframe, Ideate (Brainstorm), Prototype, Test, and Iterate (Feedback).

One of the great delights of her presentation was an introduction to the work being done by a whole host of inspiring individuals in this space. From Giorgia Lupi’s work in visualization, data, and design to Nilofer Merchant’s Harvard Business Review piece entitled “To Change Someone’s Mind, Stop Talking and Listen.” But this was much more than a presentation. Moon provided a hands-on opportunity to use and learn the human-centered design sprint methodology, which encourages reframing the challenge as “How might we …?”

Institute participants moved around to create balanced teams and were given three challenges from which to choose one to work on: 1) How might we lead the charge for innovation across the legal spectrum? 2) How might we play a central role in building collaborative legal knowledge supply chains? 3) How might we position the law library as the refinery and distributor of advisory knowledge?

Moon walked through the design sprint format, which consisted of 10 phases lasting a total of 76 minutes. After teams selected their challenge, the process moved from the first phase, with each team member “writing down as many specific (narrow) challenges/problems related to the primary challenge,” to the final phase, with the team working together to create a storyboard for the solution. The event ended with each team presenting their solution storyboard.

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This group had a very nice mix of library directors, and the discussion began with some of the innovation private law firms are developing. It was heartening to hear that law librarians at big firms are recognized as partners in this process. This innovation comes in the form of both internal (helping the firm with business and competitive intelligence, and other business of law concerns) and external (finding ways to provide stronger offerings to clients) activities. John Harbison led a particularly strong discussion on where private law firms are headed, which can be deftly summed up in two words: data analytics. He posited that Big Data is like the Grand Canyon and lawyers...
and law firms need someone to guide them through it. Using tools such as Tableau, private law librarians are in a perfect position to provide strong collaboration, particularly with newer attorneys. It also became clear (at least to me) that this has a flip side for academic law librarians in that we can help shape curriculum to give newer attorneys the skill sets for innovating law practice. This was a terrific conversation on moving librarians to become legal engineers and knowledge architects. The last session of the day focused on succession planning and what new skill sets (tech skills, video editing skills) law librarians need to bring to the table to better support attorney practice. The first day ended with lots of energy and enthusiasm from the terrific conversations.

Day Two
The next day started with Cornell Professor of Practice Management, Risa Mish, presenting “Art of the Sale: How to Gain Genuine Leadership Influence.” This session was nothing short of terrific. Mish’s talk was energetic, enthusiastic, and incredibly motivational.

She began by describing Influence as the confluence of three components: Ethos (Credibility); Logos (Logic), and Pathos (Emotional Connection).

To have influence you need to be credible. So, how do you develop credibility (Ethos), which helps build confidence? This comes from knowing your Core Values. When you have clarity in your core values it creates changes within you. Mish then ran a Core Values exercise so that each member could discern what core values they maintain. You need to be able to convey your personal value proposition in such a way that it is conveyed through you. People respond to people who have clarity in their personal value proposition. Because at the heart of influence is getting another person’s time (attention)—if you can’t get their time they don’t understand your value proposition. Mish walked through the nonverbal cues that can reduce (or enhance) our value proposition message and affect the ability to influence.

The second part of Influence is Logic (Logos), particularly the logic of your pitch. The structure of the pitch you are making is everything. One method for a pitch is to reframe the issue so that the problem is seen as a gap. In other words, getting people to move forward on your proposal involves discussing the current and desired states and showing how we are solving a problem by closing that gap.

The third part of Influence is Emotional Connection (Pathos). Mish talked about strategies for developing the connection and creating rapport, including mirroring, which is an essential task for putting a person at ease. The other key to building rapport is to engage with the person in a way that allows you to figure out what you have in common. This begins as early as the first meeting in which, for example, upon introduction you need to make eye contact long enough to know the person’s eye color. The most important point is to LISTEN. As Mish demonstrated through listening exercises, we need to listen to understand—what are they thinking, how are they feeling? The most fundamental need of every human is to be heard, and, as we each have our own core values, learning what others value is key to understanding others.

There was enough time left to review points from the session on Critical Thinking that was meant for the first day. I think it’s fair to say that Mish left us all wanting more.

Final Thoughts
At the conclusion of the Institute, the group took time to reflect on what they learned and raised a number of issues about how to go forward. A series of questions were asked, such as: How does this cohort keep the conversation moving forward? What are the purpose and goals behind the Executive Leadership Institute? Should such an Institute only exist at the director level? I can tell you the Institute provided great conversations, generated real enthusiasm, and provided every participant with a personalized action plan for developing influence.

My final note is to sing the praises of Celeste Smith and the other folks at AALL for pulling this together, and of Femi Cadmus for her leadership in getting the Institute underway.

EXTRA

READ
AALL Spectrum’s November/December 2016 Ask a Director column “Successful Leadership,” at bit.ly/ND16Director.