

# The Archivist's Challenge: To Lead—or Not To Lead

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IN the many years during which it has been my privilege to serve the Society of American Archivists in a variety of ways, I have sensed throughout a continuing hunger on the part of members and of colleagues within the profession and in those with allied interests to develop for the archival profession more specific standards, more specific guideposts, against which we can measure at any given time where we are going and what things we must do to make the profession something to which we can all dedicate ourselves with pride and conviction.

During the past 15 or 20 years a very great deal has been accomplished, and many benefits to the entire community of archivists have been firmed up on the solid ground of our experience and the leadership of a large company of dedicated individuals—both practical and academic—to the point where we can define our proper place in the archival or record scene. It is now time to chart a course that will lead us to a fuller realization of the great and timely opportunity ahead.

It occurs to me that we could draw an analogy from the botanists, who distinguish between two types of plants. There are the annuals, which spring up from their seeds as the weather becomes warm; they grow fast to maturity, blossom, cast away their seeds, and die. They gamble for their perpetuation on the chance that a few of their seeds will fall on fertile ground and will produce again a plant in the image of themselves, a plant of like size and like qualities.

Another type of plant is the perennial, as, for instance, an oak tree. It, too, begins with the seed of a progenitor. It has a chance to take root and grow—not continuously, but always in tune with the vagaries of nature. In winter it is dormant; in summer it is active and adds another ring to its girth and twigs to its branches. It grows slowly during the drought years, rampantly during the

Presidential address, given on Friday, Oct. 7, 1966, at the annual dinner terminating the Society's 30th annual meeting, held in Atlanta, Ga., Oct. 5-7. Mrs. Renze is the State Archivist of Colorado. She was the Society's secretary from 1956 to 1963 and was elected Fellow in 1958.

more favorable ones. It insures its long-range future by each year putting its roots deeper and more widely spread into the earth from which it draws its vitality. It spreads its foliage to give wider areas of shade; it produces each year more acorns, which in turn give birth to forests of oaks covering a hillside. For all practical purposes, the oak lives on and on in a perennial way, changing in size and shape but always remaining true to its heritage—an oak—with the certain and constant qualities that distinguish it from all other trees, all other plants.

And so, too, I think that expressed professional objectives and standards should be the perennial of our Society. If we are healthy, if we are well nourished, if we put our roots firmly in our objective environment, we too will grow; we will produce our annual crop of offspring able to perpetuate the best of the past, anxious to create a better present and future.

Sometimes it seems we have fallen into or seem anxious to remain in the "annual plant" category. We seem to be satisfied to start each year from scratch; satisfied to complete our mission in a single year. I strongly believe, however, that we do have some elements more akin to the "perennial"—even sometimes like the oak, which during dry years, when its visible growth above ground is slight, is really sending its roots deeper into the soil, making itself stronger for the future and making itself less vulnerable to the winds and to the ravages of passing attacks on its surfaces.

Too many problems, as we conclude each year, are apparently consigned to the questionable state of limbo, where I suspect many remain—unless someone or some few have the intestinal fortitude to do something about them.

We must sooner or later establish for ourselves certain and proper standards against which we can measure the work of the individuals who engage in archival practice in the broad sense of a profession. We must recognize that with changing times these standards must change. It is necessary, however, to have the fortitude to resist the pressures to cut adrift from the moorings that are the fundamental and stable objectives of the Society and the profession at large. Why, then, the great fear of tangibly giving expression to such objectives?

Do you think it worthwhile continuing the effort to do something? Or, is it best to make fine speeches and gestures annually, with the hope that exposure and the mere passage of time will produce the qualitative achievement we all must surely desire to a greater or lesser degree?

Since establishment of the National Archives, so closely coupled

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with the formation of our Society, the Federal Government has traditionally been the major challenge to the balance of our membership. It has been the pace setter for most of us. The development of many of our programs, the active participation of members from the Federal complex, the support so generously given to special projects, the editorial staffing of the Society's journal, the provision of workshops, and the distribution of publications are examples of the forward role the Federal Government has taken in this area.

Some States and a number of educational and other institutions, too, have made major contributions to the profession and its advancement; but many more have given but passively, and all too many have contributed not at all—even in a limited locale.

When I speak of giving, I do not necessarily limit it to time, space, or money. The most valuable commodity lies in leadership—of individuals and of groups—the primary subject I choose to examine with you tonight.

I strongly believe that the Society members as a whole must continue their role as the leaders of a wholesome trend in our country—a trend by individuals, institutions, government, and corporations toward greater contributions to the public interest. It has been characteristic of our Society to do more than perform public services ourselves. We have, I think, sought to inspire others—generally with notable success. The importance of this spirit cannot be overstated. To the extent that it prevails, the more strongly our Society will be equipped and fortified to meet the problems that confront us.

Our civilization, our country, our communities, are locked in vast contests of ideologies, in technological change, in which our very survival is at stake. In this struggle there is enforced upon us an uninvited but obligated responsibility for leadership in our field of endeavor.

If we are to meet this obligation, it is essential that we build our strength in every facet of our profession, and I think it is clear that the core of the profession is our Society. To be capable of *leadership*, we must have a *strong, active, and dedicated* membership.

All of us can agree, I think, that we can have such strong membership *only* as it is made up of able people who are actively involved. And I think not only of the top few or of those who hold major elective offices or committee chairmanships!

The responsibilities of our profession have grown immensely in span and complexity. Decisions made and actions taken every day

in a variety of situations, at all levels, contribute to the success or failure of our efforts as archivists. This applies equally to top professional men and women, those in career service, those who hold appointive positions, and those who merely serve.

To recognize the need for leadership is, of course, important; but awareness is not enough. The real test lies in what we are willing to do about it, lest we too long neglect the serious problems ahead. Unless those of us who can are willing to do something constructive to insure leadership quality, it will be difficult to inspire our finest young people to consider the archival profession as an attractive and stimulating career. Their role for the future is important, and we must look to them for our long-range continuity and for our qualified members.

If the more talented of these young people are to be encouraged to stay in the profession, we must see that they get the necessary education and training, the respect and incentives to which they are entitled but which many of us strive a lifetime to achieve.

If we are to stimulate people who are educated and experienced in the basics essential to our profession, then we must provide fair inducements; we must recognize their contributions and give them proper status in the profession's esteem. Moreover, they must be reasonably and adequately compensated. No one ever became an archivist to grow wealthy. The profession's compensations have been and are often still based on the intangibles of a desire to serve in an intellectual discipline somewhat removed from the ivory tower. Like teaching and the ministry, it is a dedicated service. It can and does offer satisfactions in personal accomplishment and fulfilment for which, for most of us, there is no substitute.

There is much that each of us can do, as individuals and as professionals, to improve our approaches to betterment of the archival profession. But in order to be really effective, we must rely on the leadership of an organization such as the Society of American Archivists to make the planned long-term effort. The urgency for action is emphasized by the march of events in a changing world and the comparable increase in responsibility that each of us faces in his daily work. Certainly, there is no other organization that is better suited, by experience or accomplishment, to carry out such a program with success. It is difficult for me to conceive of any higher priority ahead than a Society strong in its every functioning unit—from the president down to the neophyte member.

Now, to the question: TO LEAD—OR NOT TO LEAD?

Many of us like to think of ourselves as leaders. But how many of us are filling our roles adequately? How many of us understand

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what assumption of even a minor degree of leadership entails? All too often, leadership is regarded simply in terms of "personality" or "public relations." The attractiveness of being "on top of the heap" tends to obscure the facts that leadership, if it serves its rightful purpose, means responsibility and that, physically and mentally, it is the most demanding of enterprises.

What, actually, do *I* mean by leadership? One of my favorite authors on the art of leadership defines leadership as "the activity of influencing people to cooperate toward some goal which they come to find desirable." He goes on to say that it is "not a matter of hypnosis, blandishment, or 'salesmanship.'" It is a matter of leading out from within individuals those impulses, motives and efforts which they discover to represent themselves most truly . . . leadership is known by the personalities it enriches, not by those it dominates or captivates."

Such definition makes it plain that leadership implies a tremendous responsibility to those led and that it certainly does not mean manipulating people to get them to do what we want or need them to do. The relationship between leader and led is a mutually dependent one, in which each helps the other to achieve certain ends. As leaders, we expect from our role: prestige, a sense of achievement, and emotional satisfaction. Those we lead look to us for direction of their energies, work satisfaction, and personal growth.

It is unquestionably true that some leaders are "born," but there are many more who are "made," largely through conscious effort or the necessity of rising to meet particular circumstances. If you will permit me the observation, there are a number of qualities that, if we aspire to be leaders, we should try hard to develop. At least three characteristics, however, we should already possess before we even attempt to lead: these are intelligence, a genuine liking and concern for people, and willingness to assume responsibility and authority. Without these three essentials, we would be better advised not to try to lead others, lest we, and they, suffer much unhappiness.

By intelligence, I do not necessarily mean a high I.Q. or intellectualism. I do mean, to quote again my favorite leadership author, "the ability to appraise situations readily, to see their significance in the total setting of present and past experience, and to get the cue as to the likely line of wise action." A leader must be creative and resourceful and must exercise good judgment, all of which require a certain level of native intelligence. Though some leaders have undoubtedly been able to compensate for some lack of this essential—through sheer determination or charm of personality,

for example—in most instances intelligence is a prime requisite for leadership.

The second ingredient, a liking and concern for people, may seem an easy qualification to meet but on further analysis may prove more difficult than any other. Dostoevski has one of his characters confess to his priest, "The more I love humanity in general, the less I love him in particular." It is in the "particular" that the usual leader must love man: great leaders, rulers of nations, can perhaps afford to love man only *en masse*; but we leaders, administrators of lesser status, must feel affection for the individuals with whom we come into daily, personal contact—and this isn't always easy.

The third essential—a willingness to assume responsibility and authority—is probably the easiest to evaluate in terms of ourselves. Few of us reach adulthood without being aware of whether or not we are comfortable in positions of responsibility and leadership. There are at least two types of individuals who are not fitted for leadership: those who prefer "to let George do it" and those who, on the contrary, would rather do something themselves than ask or train someone else to do it. The first type is bound to arouse resentment because he doesn't carry his share of the load; the second wears himself out doing more than his share and winds up frustrated as well as exhausted. Neither exhibits the most desirable qualities of a good leader.

In order to judge whether or not we have these prerequisites or the other qualities we are about to consider, we must have insight or knowledge of self. Insight is an important part of what psychologist Gordon Allport terms "self-objectification," a sort of detachment that enables the mature person to stand off and look at himself objectively. If each of us can say, "I know what I can do, what I cannot do, and consequently what I ought to do," we will have exhibited such self-understanding as calls for effort and honesty. One has to work hard at self-examination and be willing to admit gaps in his knowledge of himself and to recognize faults that stand out too clearly to be defined.

A close correlate of insight is a sense of humor. By this I do not mean a sense of the comic but rather the ability to laugh at our efforts gone awry and at ourselves, without any sacrifice in basic respect for purpose. This is a hallmark of the mature individual. It requires seeing oneself in perspective, but without maintaining a sense of balance and proportion. Deliver me from the individual without a sense of humor!

Both insight and a sense of humor can be cultivated, though certainly they come more easily to some people than others. Both being aware of the desirability of attaining these two qualities and genuinely trying to develop them require a gradual sort of development, one that progresses from small successes to larger ones until the two qualities become a part of our personality and play a major role in our philosophy of life and our association with others.

Understanding ourselves as professionals is fundamental to understanding others, which is another requirement of leadership. Our leaders should be experts in human nature, either intuitively or by conscious effort. Understanding of others will manifest itself above all in flexibility. Perhaps the most difficult person to work with—after the one who is downright unpleasant and mean—is the one who is rigid, the one who “suffers from the delusion of certainty” and, as Louis Pasteur said, “transforms a question of fact into a question of faith.” There are those who cannot admit that there might be a better way of doing things; who are so much on the defensive that they cannot be openminded to another person’s point of view; and who become so emotionally involved that they commit themselves to rationally indefensible positions. We have all encountered individuals of this type and know what havoc and unhappiness result when they are in positions of leadership or authority over others. The good leader, by contrast, is flexible, adapting to changing conditions, listening to the suggestions of others, and trying always to view a situation unemotionally.

If we understand ourselves, we realize that other people, even as we, are probably playing roles, seeing themselves quite differently from the way we see them and viewing the same facts in quite a different light.

At this point, it might be well to note another important factor in our relationship with those we lead, either as members of a profession or as individual archivists. As leaders, we should not expect perfection of ourselves or of others. Although it is well to set our sights high and to aim for excellent performance of duties, large and small, it is also well to know *when* a person is doing his best and to be content with that. The position of leadership is no place for a perfectionist; striving for perfection can only lead to frustration and unhappiness on the part of both the leader and the led. Archivists are especially prone to being perfectionists of a kind.

Of course, the perfectionist is one who has lost his sense of proportion, who has allowed his job to take over his life. It is essential



for a leader to be as well-rounded a person as possible. This means that our leaders should not allow themselves to become married to the job or to think only in the terms and boundaries of our profession. We must have outside interests in order to maintain a proper perspective. The good leader is one who is alert and alive, vitally interested in a great number of subjects, and forever learning. Leadership requires more energy and stamina than ordinary tasks, and for this additional reason the wise leader gives attention to recreation and diversion, knowing that only through variety can he combat fatigue and boredom. Wide interests make for a more interesting individual and profession, and the leader needs to be an interesting person if he is to command the respect and affection of the led.

This brings us to another desirable attribute of the leader: *enthusiasm*. Genuine enthusiasm makes a person almost unbeatable, no matter what the field in which he is trying to lead. If we aren't enthusiastic about our profession and about what we as individuals are doing, we cannot expect to arouse much enthusiasm in others. It's difficult, of course, to maintain a high level of enthusiasm at all times. But when we sense that we and our coworkers are "going stale," then is the time to search for new and better ways of doing things. We must try to look at even the most ordinary tasks creatively and see in them some new challenge. This helps to keep interest alive and to relieve the tedium of everyday routine. There have always been ways to build better mousetraps!

Closely allied to enthusiasm—in fact, an essential part of it—is *a sense of purpose and direction*. Our leaders must know where they are leading; they must have definite objectives and make our members aware of them. If we are right in our purpose, those we hope to lead will feel that what they are doing has value.

Two other characteristics essential to the leader who would inspire his followers are *integrity* and *faith*. Those we lead must know that they can trust us. A correlate of this is that they must feel that we trust them, that we have faith in them. As leaders, we must inspire confidence, and to inspire confidence we must, of course, *be* confident. The best guarantee of confidence is some deep conviction about life and what we stand for, some philosophy that gives life and work meaning. In the final analysis, our professional philosophy determines what we, as a Society, are. What we *are* determines our capacity for leadership more than what we *do*.

One of the marks of a self-confident individual is the ability to make decisions. Leadership is at a premium because so many people



are loath to make irrevocable decisions, are lukewarm in their enthusiasms, have little faith in themselves or others, and are not willing to bear the burden of responsibility. They are undecided about their direction. It sometimes takes great courage and practice to make decisions wisely and swiftly. Alternatives must be carefully weighed, possible effects evaluated, and then a choice made, with firmness. Of course, we must realize that we can't always be right; and part of wise decision-making is knowing when we have made a mistake and that we must therefore change the original decision. Decisiveness can become a habit—one that commands much respect in a leader.

It is impossible to make decisions without the necessary background knowledge to do so. This points to another important characteristic of the leader: *technical mastery of the field in which he is to lead*. It almost goes without saying that, as leaders in the archival profession, we have to be more skilled, by reason of education, training, or experience, in what we are to lead or supervise than are those we direct. It is well to "stay ahead of the game" in this respect. We must always be learners, seeking to broaden our knowledge and experience by continuing our education, by professional participation in seminars and workshops, by writing, by attending meetings, and in every other way possible.

In addition to being perpetual learners, we must also be teachers. The important thing for us to remember when we are teaching adult men and women is that the learning process must be an active one, for adults must be interested in what they are to learn and intellectually and emotionally involved in the experience. We must persuade rather than coerce them to a change of outlook. As the old rhyme says, "A man convinced against his will / Is of the same opinion still." Another principle in our teaching is to start the learning at the point of the learner's present outlook and equipment, so that the new objectives and information can be related to what he already knows and feels. We have to try to find out what that point is, and begin from there.

In all of the qualities of leadership that I have mentioned, I have tried to show *implicit concern for those we lead*. This is the crux of leadership: interest in, and understanding of, other people. We are good leaders to the extent that we concentrate on trying to help bring out the best in other people for the good of the cause we seek to further. Our success as leaders will be dependent on our success in helping those we lead to realize their potential as individual professionals. Our self-development is dependent on helping others to develop themselves. This requires an acute sense

of dedication, coupled with a sense of proportion, an abiding interest in our members, a desire to aid them in solving their problems, and an unflagging enthusiasm for what we are trying to do.

A test by which we can measure ourselves as leaders can be adopted from some of the following questions, which their author, Ross Mooney, director of educational research at Ohio State University, has termed "Indices for Creative Behavior":

1. Do we dare to be different in things that make a difference to us?
2. Do we sense life as a beginning?
3. Do we take life as an adventure?
4. Do we feel wide awake in every pore of our being?
5. Do we experience a sense of belonging to something larger than ourselves?
6. Are we willing to face ourselves?
7. Do we feel that there are powers to tap within ourselves which we have not yet tapped?
8. Do we feel that we belong to all mankind as much as we belong to our own particular time and place?
9. Are we more impressed with WHAT WE DON'T KNOW than with WHAT WE KNOW?
10. Are we concerned with discovering the work which is most natural for us to do, most inclusive and challenging to all our capacities?
11. Do we like to be of help to others in the discovery of themselves?
12. Do we search for the way things look from another person's point of view?
13. Are we aware that our own psychological independence and freedom are dependent upon others' having a similar psychological independence and freedom?

Creativity is an important ingredient in high-quality leadership. Improving the functioning of an organization is largely dependent on solving old problems in new ways. Therefore, creativity should be fostered in the individual, and the leader should undertake to develop his own creativity to the maximum.

I have emphasized that the leader must have a devotion to duty and to his constituency far beyond that ordinarily conceived—that real leadership is a position of high trust and responsibility to which a good leader will respond with every ounce of vitality and energy he possesses. I have asserted that real leadership involves the highest order of ability in meeting stress situations, in deciding on and carrying out appropriate action where choices are not clear-cut. Our members are becoming more knowledgeable and sophisticated all the time. So, too, should our leadership become more thoughtful, more sophisticated.

Only some of the qualities of leadership have been mentioned.

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There are many others, such as, briefly: *intellectual ability, human relations skills, personal impact, decision-making, and energy*. The real leader understands that the prerequisite to achievement as a leader is an unswerving devotion and willingness to make the personal sacrifices required. He further understands that *consistency and persistence* are vital in striving for the goals of his organization. A leader must have *purpose*. He must recognize that his is a job of *trust and confidence* and that real leadership does not necessarily follow the winning of a contest. He needs to value *character* above mere reputation. He needs to listen to what is said and to be aware of how his leadership is being received; and not only must he be sensitive to responses generated as a reaction to his leadership, but he must have a perception of even minimal social cues. Needless to say, he needs to have a boundless *willingness to work*—a high energy level. It has been said, "Not all hard workers succeed, but all men who succeed are hard workers." This I firmly believe. Leaders must understand relationships and interactions—social, political, economic, emotional, and other.

In summary, may I itemize the essential points of leadership qualification for individuals that I consider essential to the archival profession.

1. *Self-objectivity*: This entails the question of how realistically each of us sees his own assets and liabilities and how much insight we have into our own motives.
2. *Flexibility*: The archivist, under appropriate circumstances, must be able to modify his behavior to reach a desired goal.
3. *Dare to be different*: Most of us possess, consciously or unconsciously, to some extent, two needs: the need for approval by superiors and the need for approval by peers or colleagues. When these needs are possessed in an unusually great degree, however, they may at times prevent proceeding with necessary, but currently unpopular, programs or projects.
4. *Personal and professional standards*: The archivist must have what may be called inner work standards—standards having to do with the extent to which he will, from within, wish to do a superior job, even though one of slightly lower quality may be acceptable to other people. A man's expectations about his work situation and his job, however, must conform to objective standards of reality.
5. *Learn to live with uncertainty*: It is especially true in our field that the archivist must live with day-to-day uncertainties, but his work performance must stand up under unstructured conditions.
6. *Rewards and recognition*: The reward of leadership in our field is gratification, but it may be a delayed gratification, and in order to reach later rewards we must be able to work over long periods of time without reward or current recognition.

7. *Learn to withstand stress*: There is always need for the ability to withstand stress situations. All leadership in the work of the archivist, by its very nature, involves repeated stresses, emotional and otherwise, and the soundness of our reactions to stress or unusual pressures is vital.

8. *Performance standards*: History judges us by our performance on the job as leaders in our chosen field. In employing potential leaders for the profession from various educational institutions, we should not be overly impressed with the fact that an individual was president of his fraternity, club, student government, or other group. It is much more important to know what kind of a job he did on these assignments.

9. *Be reasonably modest*: The trick, of course, is in using all these abilities in such a way as to get those whom you would profess to lead to respond with their maximum effort. You cannot overwhelm others with your own capabilities if you are to be successful.

10. *Avoid "cronyism"*: In choosing assistants and associates it is particularly vital to avoid the "to the victor belong the spoils" attitude. If a leader is indebted to someone for helping him arrive at his position of leadership, he should show his appreciation in as generous and gracious a way as possible but not by assigning that person to a position that he is not qualified to fill. Cronyism has no place in the organization of the real leader.

11. *Responsibilities and obligations*: The responsibilities of leadership must be viewed not only in relation to the particular institution with which one is associated but also to the Society of which we are members and to ourselves as individuals. Leadership carries responsibilities and obligations. It is easy to be ambitious for leader roles. It is comparatively easy to obtain positions of leadership, at least in the first instance. It is difficult, though, to bear the burdens and to fulfill the obligations that *real* leadership entails. Too many wish to participate in the benefits of professional leadership; too few are willing to be active.

12. *Recognition of ability and talent of members*: It has been said that "leadership, at its highest peak, consists of getting people to work for you when they are under no obligation to do so." The era of the authoritarian leader, if ever in vogue, has long since passed. The skillful leader seeks and uses the special talents that every member possesses. He knows how each member feels and takes this into account in his leadership.

In conclusion, I suggest that this is a time to reaffirm, with all the dedication of which we are capable, that we will work together in the demanding tasks ahead for our profession and that we will rise above petty animosities, prejudices, and indifference and get on with the task of bringing to maturation a profession where "Whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile—go with him twain." In that second mile lies the span of voluntary effort where individuals strive for excellence, give of themselves above and beyond the call of duty, and, in so doing, give dignity, distinction, loyalty, and enduring significance to the profession we represent.