

Director Kathryn Ames of the Athens Regional Library System has over forty years of experience working with libraries, including special libraries. I was able to sit down with Director Ames last week and was immediately impressed by her graciousness and willingness to share her experiences, insight, and ideas. I did provide Director Ames with a list of interview questions ahead of time and we did discuss each; however, what Ames had to share was not always contained within the original question. Our interview ended up becoming a great conversation about libraries, customer service, technological trends, and leadership styles. At the end of the interview, I wished I had taped it rather than transcribed it as so much of what Ames had shared with me was impossible to write into my notes – I just couldn't write fast enough.

Director Ames believes that vision, the ability to accomplish, and the ability to bring people aboard is the basis of good leadership from a big picture point-of-view. However, it is also important for a good leader to be able to meet the challenge of helping a board build and strategize that vision in a practical way. She believes that one must have the ability to see an issue, break it down into easily managed parts, and then motivate all in order to lead well.

The theory that Director Ames relies most on is from *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* by Peter M. Senge – that reward systems don't really solve morale problems because organizations rely on those in it to have intrinsic motivation and that can only come about through building relationships. To bring this about, Ames relies heavily on mentoring librarians on staff, to regularly conference together, and to aim for

intrinsically pushing job expectations beyond their description. This led directly into Director Ames' leadership style which she described as that of a mentor. (I felt that this was genuine as she spent nearly an hour and a half with me discussing the profession. I felt as if she were working with me as a mentee and very soon had the impression that she would be a great leader to work with.) Ames pointed out that she is close to retirement and has become more involved in reorganization and projects at the state level. So, through her mentoring she hopes to push for change and to help future leaders see the need to meet community needs and to be involved at the local, state, and national level with the profession in order to stay on top of issues and trends.

When asked what she believes to be some of the emerging trends in library leadership, Director Ames shared her experience on the first DTAE committee with Roger Slater. She told the story of how his "ingenuity" was often frustrating to many within the profession and how he was met with many doubters when he first conceptualized the PINES system. Her point was that those within the profession need to be open to those that think outside of the box, have unending energy, and are always looking for new and better ways to do things. Ames believes that it is those professionals that will help keep libraries current and relevant. With this in mind, Ames believes that collaboration between libraries and library systems is the future. She is thrilled that PINES has proved that libraries can collaborate, decide upon, and form a single policy. Ames also believes that in the spirit of collaboration between libraries and library systems that collaboration within a single library and/or system is key to being functional. Participatory management is a vital ingredient to enabling staff and fostering future leaders.

In regards to the question as to whether or not there is a difference between leadership and management, Director Ames was quick to answer that there was a definite difference. Leaders in the library profession have myriad more public relations duties by being the “face” of the library to the public, to the board, and to various agencies. However, leaders are also expected to raise money and take the fall if the business and/or public relations of the library are not meeting the needs of the community. Ames believes that managers are foundational to a strong library as they take care of the “nuts and bolts” of the operation. She did state many times and in many ways that the best managers show leadership qualities in the way that they do their job. She gave an example of one of her staff that created a whole new, streamlined method of keeping record keeping and had the initiative to not only investigate it, but to also present it to her in a way that got her on board.

As far as Director Ames’ belief of how a leader leads, she stressed the need for team leaders and for those leaders to meet on a regular basis – participatory management. As the director, she facilitates the meetings, guides conversations, and then takes their collaboration to the board. Ames stressed that she only asserts herself when something that the team leaders are seriously considering does not fit with the library’s shared vision and mission. Right now Director Ames is pushing her team leaders to implement more up-to-date technical services and more services to children in order to better fulfill their mission. The budget cuts have been the biggest stumbling block to meeting these goals.

Director Ames' advice for a library leader to show competency include "walking the walk" by modeling the behavior that one want others to exhibit, to have remarkable integrity, to earn trust and to never betray that trust, and to always follow through. She stressed that it is important to be genuine twenty-four-seven – to be the same person at work that you are at the grocery store. Ames believes that being a leader cannot be an act and it cannot be a persona that is only worn at work or at important meetings and events, but that the integrity and trust needed to be a good leader is only sustainable if one finds a way to be genuine while leading.

For future leaders, Director Ames believes that one should be involved in the professional organizations available to them at the state and national level. She also encourages librarians to stay in-touch with trends in the business world as they have the resources to do the ground-breaking research in many areas that directly impact libraries and information services. Ames reads *Business Week* faithfully, belongs to the Public Library Association, attends conferences as much as possible in order to network with other library leaders across the country, and works on state level projects.

Director Ames does believe that recruiting new librarians and mentoring new leaders is of utmost importance. She stated that fifty-percent of library directors in Georgia have been replaced in the last one-and-a-half years – mostly due to retirement. Mentoring faculty and staff is important in order to help develop future leaders. If recruitment from outside the library is necessary, then Ames advises to advertise nationally and to be very specific about the skills and experience preferred. Ames also firmly believes that all possible candidates should

be required to present a half hour+ presentation to the faculty and staff with a Q & A follow-up session. She stated that they were able to immediately eliminate two of four candidates for a recently filled post because of the inability of the candidates to interact with the faculty and staff appropriately and effectively during their presentation.

Director Ames wanted to stress to me that above all, a leader must have passion for what they are doing and be able to develop true compassion and respect for their employees and patrons. I came away from the interview with a real sense that Director Ames does walk the walk and that our profession will be losing a great leader if she does retire as she plans.