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Cardinal rules for those entrusted with leading knowledge citizenship

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Introduction

In 1909, Sam Walter Foss, a librarian at the Somerville Public Library in Massachusetts, wrote a paper entitled '*Some cardinal principals of librarian's work*'. Interestingly, Foss emphasized and encouraged the role of the librarian to be a fundamentally social and people-oriented character as opposed to a shy and retiring 'book lover'. This is relevant because, even in 1909, Foss recognized that a people orientation was the fundamental ingredient of a leader in an intellectual or knowledge type environment.

Modern-day leaders of knowledge citizens know that without a high degree of people focus and orientation, any knowledge management practice or programme will be unsuccessful.

Based on this understanding, we will examine whether Foss's 1909 cardinal principles are as outdated as the language that he used in his original paper.

A leader by any other name

Those of us who are involved in leading knowledge citizens often end up with job titles that only serve to perplex and bewilder our followers, least of all ourselves. We are known by a plethora of titles, for example information broker, research specialist, independent information professional, chief knowledge officer, knowledge officer, knowledge manager, librarian, cybrarian!, director of competitive learning, chief learning officer, VP of learning, director of organizational learning, knowledge management director, knowledge strategies director, director of intangible assets, corporate director of intellectual capital and head of knowledge management development (Liebowitz 2002). These job titles have been appearing in annual reports and career advertisements with increasing frequency.

Identifying the need for a 'knowledge leader' (for the sake of clarity) and choosing that person may be among the most difficult endeavours an organization undertakes. Moreover, these pioneering individuals are given the unenviable task of channelling an organization's knowledge into initiatives that are expected to become a source of competitive advantage (Bontis 2002).

Applying the cardinal rules from 1909 in 2006

Foss (1909) believed that librarians should, among other things, follow these cardinal rules:

Cardinal rule 1

> **'Be all things to all men – and all men are the same thing to him**. He is, as it were, the janitor of an amphitheater where warring creeds, beliefs and tastes contend like gladiators. He champions none and antagonizes none, but simply keeps his amphitheater in good repair and takes a sportsman's delight in seeing the fight go on.'

Interestingly, Brewerton held a similar opinion in 1999 when he asserted that librarians are not
'diminutive civil servants, scuttling about "Sssh-ing" people and stamping things.' Oh no.
'Librarians are all-knowing and all-seeing. They bring order to chaos. They bring wisdom and culture to the masses. They preserve every aspect of human knowledge. Librarians rule.'

Today, knowledge leaders are required to have a psychological makeup that will enable them to perform under serious pressure and responsibility. Most profile experts agree that a knowledge leader must possess the following traits: ambition to succeed, expressiveness; responsiveness , the ability to take immediate, appropriate action; leadership; be articulate ; appreciate others' efforts; social skills; dependability; have a strong work ethic and a vision of future growth.

Knowledge leaders are the designers, implementers and overseers of an organization's knowledge infrastructure, including its libraries, knowledge bases, human resources, computer knowledge networks, research centres and academic relationships.
Liebowitz (2002), believes that the following competencies make a successful knowledge leader: an avid communicator or storyteller, a strategic thinker, comfortable in the use of tools and technology, credible personal behaviour, personal knowledge and cognitive capability, and leadership and management. Specifically, a knowledge leader must have passion, patience, persistence, sensitivity, organizational savvy, intelligence, wisdom, life-long learning capabilities, depth and breadth of knowledge, and be thick-skinned and an integrator.

Cardinal rule 2

> **'He loves all ideas** – even when he despises them and disbelieves them – for he knows that the ferments and chemic reactions of ideas keep the old world from growing moldy and mildewed and effete. Let him attain to absolute intellectual hospitality – if he can' (Foss 1909).

Foss is suggesting that knowledge leaders be open minded and be future centric and there is a belief that the continued viability of the knowledge profession is critically dependent on the recruitment and training of people who can meet future challenges. (Brewerton 1999).

Knowledge leaders are typically focused on work that will provide a sustainable future, for example, knowledge leaders measure outcomes, promote best practices and processes, create a knowledge-sharing culture, champion communities of practice, use incentives and rewards, provide tools and technology, champion education, create and use taxonomy (common language), secure resources and provide leadership and strategy (Liebowitz 2002).

Cardinal rule 3

> 'He is a man who supplies men with intellectual victuals; and he doesn't know his trade if he doesn't know the taste of all kinds of victuals himself. The supple intellect that sympathizes with all tastes; the rubberneck that stretches itself with ease into all the hubbub of affairs about it; the elastic taste that finds some satisfaction and sanction in all the schools of thought; these are what the modern-spirited librarian will at least affect, if he cannot obtain' (Foss 1909).

The knowledge leader generally has a broad base of experience within a business and experience in a wide range of functions (Liebowitz 2002). The knowledge leader provides critical input into the creation of knowledge and uses processes that already exist within an organization. She or he plays a leading role in the design and implementation of a company's knowledge architectures and has deep experience in some aspect of knowledge management, including its creation, dissemination, or application.

The role of a knowledge leader requires a visionary who has the ability to assess what the company has achieved and position it for future growth. At the same time, the knowledge leader has to have the

technical understanding to exploit corporate data because the management of information from a variety of internal and external sources can have a dramatic impact on customer relationships and ultimately on the bottom line. When viewed this way, it is easy to see why a knowledge leader is considered to be the company architect who plans and builds an information-gathering system that extracts knowledge from complex and diverse data across the organization. In this role, the knowledge leader not only foresees the construction of the information-gathering system, identifying how information is used and who will have access to it, but also devises the action plan to apply the knowledge gathered to optimize business practices.

Cardinal rule 4

> 'But let him *become as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove*. Any man, especially the supremely tolerant man we are describing can get acquainted with any other man. Any librarian ought to be able to get acquainted with any alderman, and after he is acquainted he can behave prettily and be agreeable; and it is much more easy to give liberal appropriations to an agreeable librarian than to a disagreeable one, to a visible rather than to an invisible one' (Foss 1909).

Recent reports have stressed the importance of recruiting staff with the appropriate personal qualities, particularly communication and interpersonal skills. While it is relatively easy to teach technical skills, changing personalities is less simple (Brewerton 1999). 'Many still think that a great reader, or a writer of books, will make an excellent librarian. This is pure fallacy' (Brewerton 1999).

Cardinal rule 5

> 'He should *never pester the city fathers with reiterated requests for more funds*, but he should happen about at critical times when the financial budget is under discussion and look anxious. "Do not marry for money, but do where money is." Do not ask the official holders of the public purse for cash, but keep near them in every time of trouble. An adequate appropriation is an indispensable requisite in running a library, and a librarian should make it the paramount object of his life to get it' (Foss 1909).

The chief knowledge officer has to win cooperation and 'buy-in' from all levels of the organization; must identify and utilize a diverse set of skills and expertise; and demonstrate the value of knowledge management to the business. In many organizations, knowledge management has become part of its strategic mission (Liebowitz 2002). As such, knowledge management activities are funded by the organization and measurement of return of investment of knowledge activities are included in annual reporting.

Cardinal rule 6

> 'Why not plainly show men and women that you love them rather than you despise them. *Take as much pains to be pleasant to people as you do to catalog your books correctly* and to keep your account straight. Get acquainted with as many people as you can, and every one you get acquainted with – if it breaks your heart. Count each acquaintance as worth a dollar to you, and then try to become a millionaire. Get everybody that comes to the library so pleased with himself that he will become a missionary and bring in all his neighbors' (Foss 1909).

The public image of a librarian or knowledge leader is partly based on reality, partly self-inflicted and partly self-perpetuating. Our profession is still viewed by many people as book-centred, the ideal refuge for the shrinking violet, for the 'reader'. Brewerton (1999) states: 'We still get some people in interviews saying that they want to work in libraries because they like reading books. When will they say that they are interested in library work because they like people?'

Cardinal rule 7

> 'Don't stay in the library all the time yourself and stagnate in the musty atmosphere of your

dead books. *Be a public and not a private man.* Get out and feel the dynamic thrill that comes from contact with live men. The club, the exchange, the street, the philanthropic and economic organizations that are feeling out for the betterment of mankind are the places where the librarian should be found frequently. He should be the best known man or woman in the city' (Foss 1909).

Today, this view, that knowledge leaders should be people rather than book orientated is stronger than ever. 'The librarian of today, and it will be true still more of the librarians of tomorrow, are not fiery dragons interposed between the people and the books. They are useful public servants, who manage libraries in the interest of the public' (Brewerton 1999).

Knowledge leaders must have strong nurturing qualities and are 'influencers', are good at conceptual thinking, advocacy, project and people management, communications, leadership, team working and have well developed interpersonal skills (Liebowitz 2002).

Cardinal rule 8

> 'A dollar bill that never circulates is not worth as much as a copper cent that keeps moving. Nearly every librarian ought to double the circulation of his books and treble the circulation of himself. In other words, the *librarian ought to meekly and modestly assume the intellectual leadership in his community*. He is certainly the logical man for the intellectual leader. He is the custodian of the intellectual treasures of his town; he is the adviser of its scholars, the teacher of its teachers and the keeper of the keys of the vaults of knowledge' (Foss 1909).

A knowledge leader has the ability to set a good example by displaying a high level of 'knowledge ability' and success (Liebowitz 2002). A knowledge leader can provide the key to managing enterprise knowledge. The goals of a knowledge leader should include providing access to the most current information, refining the information collection system to provide less duplication of effort, reusing the best practices, creating a safeguard system to protect the integrity of the organization and offering input for future innovation and organizational company growth. A knowledge leader must be an advocate or evangelist for knowledge and learning.

Cardinal rule 9

> 'This is the librarian's modern opportunity. Let him become intellectual file-leader of his community. *Let him grow big enough to fill the great place it is his duty to assume*'(Foss 1909).

A knowledge leader acts in four ways: first, as a 'cartographer' in mapping expertise and making connections; second, as a 'geologist' in drilling into specific areas and applying tools; third, as a 'spark plug' in igniting an awareness of the need to change; and last, as an 'architect' in designing the physical and cultural environment.

The typical knowledge leader finds a means to utilize organizational knowledge to help organizational growth, understands the skills and competencies of knowledge teams, creates powerful knowledge cultures that recognize common values, enables the effective flow of information and communicates the meaning of information and knowledge (Liebowitz 2002).

Conclusion

Foss's cardinal rules teach us a lesson about leading in a knowledge-centric world and that is that we must be in constant pursuit of better ways to promote knowledge sharing so that our citizens derive wellness and meaning as well as prosperity in the process. In the knowledge economy with ever increasing dependence upon stakeholder knowledge we now have a new mandate for involvement that goes beyond the charitable contributions or marketing support of the past. We are the inevitable and integral part of the network constellation of real-time innovation performance, leading to the sustainability of our customers, companies and countries (Amidon and Davis).

Knowledge leaders most of all are to be human resources professionals who are able to understand value alignment, incentive mechanisms and social networking behaviour, all of which encourage deliberate knowledge exchange.

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