

From Situational Leadership ® [0] to SuperLeadership:

One OMS Participant's Story

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Participants in ARL/OMS Institutes often communicate with OMS staff after their return to work. Frequently, these communications are sparked by a participant's insights regarding his or her own leadership values and practices. Roland Barksdale-Hall, a participant in a Library Management Skills Institute I in June 1995, is Head Librarian at the Shenango Campus of Pennsylvania State University. With encouragement from both Penn State and OMS, he agreed to write this article about his thoughts on leadership since his Institute participation. We hope this will prompt other participants to share with us developments in their thinking.

-- [Kathryn J. Deiss](#), ARL/OMS Program Officer for Training

At the close of an exhilarating OMS *Library Management Skills Institute I* in Denver, I wondered, "Where do I go from here?"

"Back home, of course," came the immediate response. Unfinished work assignments and family commitments were waiting for me. It sounded simple enough. The thought prompted a mad dash for the airport.

On the airplane I reflected on what had brought me to Denver. Although I was a hard sell for leadership training, the OMS *Institute* swung open the doors of self-discovery. I had wondered what tangible difference a week-long management skills institute possibly could make because, in my book, technical competence held a higher value than leadership training. In today's high pressure business world, where change is the only constant, adult learners reserve little time for nonessentials; yet I committed to go and promised myself to keep an open mind.

At the time of enrollment I had more than 17 years of progressively responsible leadership experience. Despite various professional pursuits, I had never received a management skills assessment. Since childhood I have approached tests with apprehension. The instruments for the *Library Management Skills Institute I* were less tortuous than tests taken during childhood, however. In addition, the management simulations provided a stimulating, nonthreatening environment for self-evaluation. Moreover, the results shed valuable light upon my character, tendencies, and preferences. I returned home with renewed confidence.

The first week back at Pennsylvania State University, I discussed the experience with my supervisor. The report was routine, yet there was a change in my perspective. I could not put my finger on it, but I felt better when I looked in the mirror.

To know thyself is the beginning of true understanding.^[1] Before the *Institute*, I was a situational leader. According to Paul Hersey, a situational leader adapts "leadership behaviors to features of the situation and followers."^[2] My situations, which sometimes appeared bigger than life, were regulated through a selection of various decision-making styles in order to maximize the achievement of various constituents. A drawback was that my personal progress was tied to the constituents' perceived

outcomes. If constituents' responses were in keeping with expected outcomes, I was an effective manager. But an unexpected outcome presented a challenge to my self-worth. At such times I fastidiously sought advice from mentors. On several occasions group problem solving showed the situations to be more complex than I even imagined.

After the *Institute* I aspired to become a superleader. Charles C. Manz defines a superleader as an administrator who focuses largely on developing the self-leadership abilities of constituents.[3] During a getaway this past August, I pondered what other applications there were, if any, for the knowledge gained from the OMS *Institute*. I concluded that, given the complexity of today's organizational structures, the belief that the heroic manager resolves all problems was anachronistic.[4] This thought provided the impetus to explore other leadership paradigms.

Superleadership provides a potential springboard for the promotion of steadiness within organizations. The multidimensional nature of change touches the lives of all constituents. Consequently, "self-leadership is relevant to executives, managers, and all employees--that is to everyone who works." [5] The search for solutions requires an analysis of systems and procedures by constituents at all levels.

My thoughts turned to former supervisors. Among the exemplary leaders that came to mind was one outstanding library administrator, Gloria J. Reaves, at the Capitol Institute of Technology. She consistently assigned me challenging assignments in keeping with my skills and service. Gloria, like a coach, cheered for the home team. This superleader also provided ample praise along with constructive criticism and good solid advice. When my first essay was published, my mentor showered me with encouragement: "Now that you're over the first hurdle, other publications are sure to follow," she said in her quiet matter-of-fact way. Her confidence inspired me to write additional essays. Through her mentorship I achieved in other professional areas. At Penn State I aspired to emulate her wonderful example.[6]

The quest for self-fulfillment has led to a new emerging self. For a few months there were moments of uncertainty as I shed the vestiges of thinking that I had to be the heroic leader. I then realized that additional experiences were required for my development into a well-rounded superleader such as Gloria Reaves. Out of reflections in my journal also came the knowledge that there was a developmental gap. I became determined to close that gap through further learning experiences.

To be candid, a need existed inside me to grow beyond my leadership skill level. Few extensive leadership learning opportunities exist in my institution, as is common for academic libraries throughout the nation.[7] Because of these observations, I inquired about additional education.

As a result of the summer OMS *Management Skills Institute I*, I enrolled this fall in the first class of the new master's degree program in Leadership and Liberal Studies at Duquesne University. The Saturday program offers an eclectic curriculum that is designed for inquisitive administrators.[8] What I once understood intuitively, I am now understanding differently through acquiring the appropriate underlying theoretical constructs. Best of all, I am growing again. As with most processes, my transformation is ongoing, yet my new sense of direction is gratifying. Thanks to the insights that I gained through attending the OMS *Institute*, I am on a leadership track which will help me contribute more effectively to my team and organization.

⁰The term "Situational Leadership" is a registered trademark and the property of the Center for Leadership Studies.

¹An inscription at the Delphic Oracle. John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980, p. 62.

²Hersey, Paul, and Kenneth H. Blanchard. "Situational Leadership ® ." Chapter 32 in *The Leader's Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages*, edited by J. Thomas Wren. New York: Free Press, 1995, p. 210.

³Manz, Charles C. "SuperLeadership: Beyond the Myth of Heroic Leadership." Chapter 33 in *The Leader's Companion*, p. 216.

⁴Bass, Bernard M. "Concepts of Leadership: The Beginning." Chapter 9 in *The Leader's Companion*, p. 50.

⁵Manz, Charles C. 1995. op.cit., p. 217.

⁶Roland C. Barksdale-Hall, "Nurturing Leadership Is Tops in Goals of Higher Education," *The Herald*, April 10, 1994, A-9.

⁷Baker, Shirley K., "Leading from Below; or Risking Getting Fired," *Library Administration and Management*, vol. 9, no. 4, 1995, pp. 238-40.

⁸Courses include Information Technologies for Modern Organizations, Conflict Resolution, Decision Making and Problem Solving for Leaders, Human and Financial Resources, Interpersonal Communication, The Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions of Leadership, and Valuing a Diverse Workforce: the Leader's Role.

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