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Considering the myriad challenges faced in their new positions, Alexander, Pike, and Whittington offer some advice to those following in their footsteps. Alexander recommends cultivating resources from other institutions for ongoing advice and mentoring. Whittington encourages new leaders to collaborate and establish a vision supported by the entire organization. He says, "be clear about your goals and what is expected." Pike advises new leaders not to pretend to have all the answers and he says, "It's most important to be a good, active listener." Pike too advocates involvement in personal growth and leadership associations. (see article on pg 3, *Changing Times, Evolving Leaders*)

These three examples demonstrate the diverse experiences and proficiencies expected of museum directors today. Directors are not only expected to be stewards of scholarly institutions with extensive academic knowledge, but also to serve as de facto financial officers, development directors, media relations experts, and community representatives. It is therefore easy to understand the headlines within the museum field that declare a high degree of burnout and fatigue in the leadership ranks. There are currently many openings for directors in cultural institutions, begging the question: Who will be the "super-leaders" of the museums of tomorrow? If current trends continue, future directors will be expected to further diversify their skills while promoting museums as relevant cultural institutions to current and prospective audiences. With our interviewees as examples, we can see that this work is best accomplished through a complex combination of experience, intuition, and enthusiasm.

Museum Management Consultants, Inc. (MMC) is nationally known for its expertise in all aspects of planning, evaluation, audience building, program development, and executive search. Founded in 1987 and based in San Francisco, California, MMC provides consulting services to art, history, and science museums, zoos, and other nonprofit cultural institutions throughout the United States and abroad.

The mission of MMC is to help our clients thrive in a competitive and changing environment.

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While MMC provides an insightful "outsider's perspective" to any project, we also bring years of collective experience in understanding the complex dynamics of museums and other cultural institutions and funding agencies. MMC staff members have experience not only as consultants, but also in museums as trustees, directors, curators, and educators. This comprehensive understanding of museums "from the inside out" allows MMC to provide clients with a seasoned and knowledgeable perspective.

We believe every organization is unique in its culture, circumstance, and constituencies, and thus our process is uniquely tailored to meet each client's needs and objectives. Each client gets the benefit of our experience with over 200 institutions of varying sizes and types.

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Museum Directors Must Do It All

The responsibilities of a modern museum director continue to shift, with ever-increasing demands on time, resources, and skills. Museums today are complex organizations and Boards of Trustees expect directors to lead them like well-run businesses. As such, leaders are challenged to continually increase attendance numbers, attract blockbuster exhibits, and remain accountable to funders, members, governing boards, and the public at large.

MMC has worked with hundreds of executive directors over the last 19 years, and we know the growing demand for skilled, multi-faceted museum leaders. For this issue of *Viewpoints*, we spoke with three directors who are relatively new in their current positions to find out how they prepared for their roles, what challenges they faced, and what it takes to guide museums in this cultural environment.

MMC interviewed directors with varying degrees of executive experience, who represent museums of different sizes, and who approach their jobs in different ways. Each of these directors brings a unique background and vision to their role, illustrating the fact that no one model of successful leadership exists. Terry Pink Alexander has been the Executive Director of the Judah L. Magnes Museum, a Jewish art and cultural institution in Berkeley, California, for just over a year. With a master's degree in art history and experience running a museum and gallery, Alexander has supplemented her knowledge with extensive work in fundraising and arts journalism. Steve Pike has

directed the Pink Palace Family of Museums, a collection of historic, educational, and scientific attractions in Memphis, Tennessee since 2003. Pike has a master's degree in literature and work experience in marketing and publishing. Pike "moved sideways into the museum world" and as a self-professed "generalist," Pike's background allowed him to promote a variety of programs at different organizations. E. Michael Whittington, Executive Director of the Monterey Museum of Art in Monterey, California for the past year, has a traditional museum background. He holds a master's degree in art history and served most recently as Curator of Pre-

Columbian and African Art at the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Alexander, Pike, and Whittington confront key museum issues in different ways because of the variety of experience in their backgrounds. When asked about the challenges they faced at the start of their tenure, all three spoke of the need for better communication, a focused vision, and enhanced community engagement. Pike entered an organization that had been managed from the top down and immediately identified the "need for more communication, especially lateral communication." Staff felt isolated and were not working together on the strategic direction of the museum. In addition, Pike had to redefine communication and job responsibilities with his Board. Changing the way things had been done in the past became Pike's top priority. In their new roles, Whittington and Alexander both faced significant organizational rebuilding. Whittington iden-

"A leader needs to look at all arms of an institution and how they interrelate; each piece of a museum is dependent upon the smooth operation of the other pieces."



E. Michael Whittington (on the right), Executive Director, Monterey Museum of Art, with tour group

tified infrastructure, fundraising, staffing, and facilities issues in need of attention. He found a museum beginning to reinvent itself through dynamic Board leadership, but in need of an executive to lead them through this process. Similar to Pike's experience in Memphis, Whittington saw a museum that had "existed quietly for a decade, was beloved by many, but was not a destination." He views the challenge of increasing the museum's profile in the community as a long-term issue that requires careful strategy and substantial funding. Similarly, Alexander's top priority was to lead the Magnes through a new phase in its history, providing direction and building consensus around the museum's future after a brief period of closure. In her efforts to redirect the renewal of the Magnes, Alexander focused on planning, including a strategic plan and a capital campaign. Alexander relies heavily on her development and financial skills to take Magnes to "its next iteration."

Addressing these challenges required many of the traits necessary in any museum director: honesty, perspective, vision, planning, financial acumen, humility, and gut instinct. Pike began by writing a letter to himself detailing his observations and what he could do to help the Pink Palace, "based on the idea that there is a value to intuition, and there is a value in putting intuition into words." He then initiated a master planning process to align the museum's stakeholders and to position the Pink Palace over the next several years. Whittington entered the job with a detailed road map he submitted during his interview for the position. He began by prioritizing key issues and focusing everyone in the museum on one vision. At the same time, Whittington points out that as a leader he had to recognize his limitations. "You can't do everything, and people will respect you more if you can recognize and admit that you don't have expertise in every area." Pike echoed the need for honesty, saying that transparency and clarity about expectations are necessary in any organization. According to Pike, "If I succeeded it was by consistently asking for honest opinions and taking ad-

vice if I agreed with it." Alexander stresses the importance of looking at the big picture, focusing on the greater good of the entire museum. She said, "A leader needs to look at all arms of an institution and how they interrelate; each piece of a museum is dependent upon the smooth operation of the other pieces." Alexander took advantage of the six-month "honeymoon phase" to gain an understanding of the Magnes, because after that time she says, "you must have engendered trust in order to succeed."

In their new roles, each director paid special attention to his or her relationship with the Board. Alexander interviewed every member individually to understand the history, strengths, and weaknesses of the Magnes, and how each person could be most effective. From these interviews, she was able to suggest a committee structure, identify funding opportunities, and determine personal commitment. She continues to use the information she gathered as she formulates an effective team. Pike also met with every Board member within his first few months, developing one-on-one relationships with each trustee. This process was as much a benefit to Pike as it was to the Board, and during the process Pike "learned to admit the value of having a 'feel' for relationships. I learned that I do better if I establish a comfort level with an individual." Whittington's relationship with his Board is unique to smaller organizations, in which the Board takes on certain responsibilities that typically fall to staff in larger institutions. For Whittington, recognizing that trustees and staff may fill different, non-traditional roles was important to his relationship with the Board and in directing effective museum operations.

In addition to building trust and consensus among Board and staff, all three interviewees say that financial management skills are essential to a director's success, even though none of them received formal training in this area. For example, Whittington gained financial skills while directing major projects at the Mint, some with project budgets equal to the Monterey Museum's



Steve Pike (in the middle), Executive Director, Pink Palace Family of Museums, with members of the Friends of the Pink Palace



Terry Pink Alexander (on the left), Executive Director, Judah L. Magnes Museum, with Magnes trustee

operating budget. According to Whittington, he "does not possess the skills as a generator of financial data. I can use the information, but do not generate it, as an accountant or CFO would." He says that a museum director must understand and use the financials, as well as represent the museum's vision, and work with financial staff members to generate and monitor the appropriate information. Whittington adds that if he could start his career again he would pursue a combined arts and business degree, although he says there is no substitute for substantive art knowledge in an art museum. Alexander is self-taught in the financial realm as well, learning on the job in various environments. While interviewing for the Magnes directorship, Alexander realized that the Search Committee was focused on finding someone with financial expertise. "I

made it clear that while I have an art history background, my most important concern was running the business. Nonprofits are businesses. If Magnes is to be successful, it has to run effectively like a business." Alexander feels that her varied work experience has provided her with a wide range of skills that positioned her to be an effective museum director. At the same time, she notes the trend toward increased fiscal responsibility and recommends future leaders consider getting an MBA to augment a degree in art history. Pike said that although he has a basic understanding of museum budgets from years of hands-on experience, he tends to delegate that role to capable financial managers. More important than having the skills, Pike feels it is necessary to surround oneself, on the Board and staff, with people who have financial expertise.

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Changing Times, Evolving Leaders

Museum leaders today acknowledge they must continually engage in professional development to respond to the changes taking place in the museum field. For example, there is a strong need for museum directors to be effective fundraisers, to supplement content knowledge with strong fiscal management, and to develop new audiences. A number of resources available to museum directors provide ongoing education on these, and other, subjects. Through associations, leadership training seminars, and mentor relationships with other museum professionals, there are a variety of resources for museum directors' professional development.

RESOURCES FOR MUSEUM LEADERS:

- Getty Leadership Institute: The Museum Leadership Institute, The Compleat Leader; www.getty.edu/leadership/leader.html
- Harvard University Art Museums Professional Training: Director's Program;

www.artmuseums.harvard.edu/professional/directorsprogram.html

- The Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies; <http://museumstudies.si.edu/courses.html>
- American Association of Museums: Best Practices in Museum Management; www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/learn/seminars.cfm?mode=showall
- American Association for State and Local History: Seminar for Historical Administration; www.aaslh.org/histadmin.htm
- The Learning Institute for Nonprofit Management: Mission Based Management, Social Entrepreneurship; www.nonprofitcourses.org/li/ex5.php

MMC FINDS GREAT LEADERS

A well-planned search strategy is vital to finding a new museum director or department head with the skills necessary to achieve the goals of an organization. Our experience with museums and other cultural institutions in strategic planning, audience building, program evaluation, and organizational development gives MMC a broader understanding of what it takes to be an effective leader in a museum setting. We believe that it is critical for stakeholders to reflect upon the museum's future direction before the search begins. Only after an institutional assessment has been made can the qualifications of a new leader be clearly delineated. MMC's thorough knowledge of museum operations combined with our well-developed national database of nonprofit leaders allows us to access top candidates and provide guidance to make an informed choice.