CUSTOMER SERVICE
AND THE ALTERNATE REALITY BASED
QUESTIONS AT THE REFERENCE DESK

Amy Hale Janeke & Peggy Luttrell Martindale
Southwestern Association of Law Libraries 2012 San Antonio Texas
First, a tribute from
Prairie Home
Companion,
December 13, 1997
“Librarians, Dusty, possess a vast store of politeness. These are people who get asked regularly the dumbest questions on God's green earth. These people tolerate every kind of crank and eccentric and mouth-breather there is.”
Customer service is not for everyone

“Can’t be required or even taught. Must come from somewhere inside a person because they want to help others” Pam Tomka, Director of the Washington, ILL District Library

“Great service comes from the heart. You cannot mandate it. You can’t threaten, reward, or coerce people to care. You can only awaken the desire and give them the permission and encouragement to make it come alive in their work.” The Simple Truths of Service p. 71
Customer Service

Good Customer Service Requires Empowered Staff
Empowered Staff

Create...

“escape clauses in rules and policies. This is the Captain Jack Sparrow principle: ‘They’re more like guidelines, really.’”

Gretchen Pruitt & Kit Ward-Crixel, New Braunfels Public Library
from: “Counting Nos to Get to YES”. Public Libraries Online
“The No-So-Secret Keys Great Customer Service.”
www.publiclibrariesonline.org
Empowered Staff: Discretion

Discretion allows for assessing each situation as unique and making judgment calls:

- Waiving costs
- Refunding
- Mailing, emailing, faxing, etc.
- Extending checkout periods
- Lending non-circulating materials
- Enforcing computer time limits
Empowering the Staff
Encourages Confidence and Professionalism

An empowered staff will want to provide good customer service
Libraries: Information is Our Business: Customer Service

- Know Your Collection

- **Courtesy**
  - Greet the Patrons
  - Call by Name, if known
  - Ask if they need help
  - Look them in the eye
  - Listen
  - Walk them to the materials whenever possible
Libraries: Information is Our Business: Customer Service

- Be Solution Oriented
  - Focus on what we can do & not on what we can’t
  - Check back (Have they found what they needed?)
  - Be a 2nd miler: if you don’t have it, try to find it
Customer Service: Library Patrons

- Attorneys
- Judges
- Court Staff / Employees
- Professors
- Students
- The Public
- The Pro Ses
Customer Service:
PATRONS OF DIFFERING OUTLOOKS

- Attorneys
- Judges
- Court Staff / Employees
- Professors
- Students
- The Public
- The Pro Ses
Unshelved: www.unshelved.com

Have you noticed a lot of, um...

Crazies?

That's not the word I would have used.

Loons?

No?

"Patrons of differing outlooks on reality."

No?

Yes. Why so many lately?

It's the cold. Brings them out like rats.

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Waylon Jennings
Littlefield TX 79339

Attn: Texas Tech Law Library
3601 4th Street
Lubbock, TX 79430
“Patrons of Differing Outlooks on Reality”

- The Confused
- The Uncooperative
- The Impatient
- The Angry
- The Mentally Ill
- The Movements / The Groups
The Confused, The Uncooperative, and The Impatient

Wrong building
Wrong floor
Wrong department
Wrong information
Won’t listen
Won’t read

“But... they said ... or they told me you would ...” “They said ....”
## Change in How You Say It

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Say</th>
<th>Instead of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What I can do is</td>
<td>I can’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, and</td>
<td>Yes, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let’s see if we find out</td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here’s a list of organizations that may be able to…</td>
<td>We can’t do that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You may want to look at the info I have</td>
<td>You are wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m in the information business not the advice business what can I help you with</td>
<td>I can’t give advice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Words That Work by Pat Wagner
Pattern Research, Inc. www.pattern.com

Communication Skills for the Front Line
March 24, 2006
The Angry

- Anger is Contagious
  - It’s NOT about you.
  - Don’t take it personal

- Anger is a Secondary Emotion
  - The Annoyed, Frustrated, Grouchy, Mad
  - Trouble parking, bad information, wrong building, late, just looking for a form... “but they told me”

- Anger is in the Body
  - The Body reacts to “fight or flight.” Blood flow leaves the brain and thinking stops

(Rhea Joyce Rubin “Defusing the Angry Paton” Library Mosaics 11 no. 3(2000))
Coping with the Angry Patron

- Stay Calm: don’t take it personal
- Speak in a lower voice
- Do Not Argue
- Be Empathic
- Apologize for the situation
  - “I’m sorry you feel that way”; “I am sorry you were given the wrong information”
- Focus on what can be done
The Angry

Use SET — Support, Empathy, Truth

This is cognitive behavior therapy & is used in dealing with borderline personality patients. Allows you to keep good boundaries & stay in control of the situation.

➢ Support — statement begins with “I” and shows that you care. “I want to help you.” “How can I help you?”
Empathy- NOT PITY, but awareness and validation of the feelings. You are validating their feelings and SEEING them.

- "I see you are angry, and I understand that this is frustrating for you."
- “The system really sucks, huh?”
- “They said what? No way!”
The Angry

Truth- realistic and honest assessment of the situation, not the person’s subjective experience.

 "This is what I can do…,”
 “Here are some of your options…."

But you must use the support and empathy statements first or the truth statements may further anger the customer as they feel as if they are not being heard.

Check out Stop Walking on Eggshells by Randi Kreger.
The Angry

Hopefully, by you staying calm, not allowing the patron to draw you in to anger, showing you are empathetic to the situation the patron will see that you are trying to resolved the issue and will calm down.

BUT ... It doesn’t always work and the patron leaves angry. You do the best you can and move on.
Mentally Ill

- Argues with themselves, computer screens, trash cans, potted plants etc.

- Unusual perceptual experiences
  - Listens when no one speaking
  - Speaks when no one is listening
  - Communicates by notes because someone is listening
Mentally III

- Mentally III people do know that they are upsetting patrons or that they are frightening others around them by arguing with the computer screens or stabbing a carrel with a pencil while exclaiming “... I will not stab him” over and over
Coping with The Mentally Ill

STAY CALM
If the patron picks up on your stress
the situation will only escalate

USE YOUR LISTENING SKILLS; FOCUS ON THE PERSON; MAKE EYE CONTACT

SPEAK IN A DIRECT CLEAR MANNER

Safety: Take another staff member with you

Mark Willis, Dayton Metro Library “Dealing with Special Challenges People with Mental Illness and Other Special Needs”

http://welldressedlibrarian.blogspot.com
Mentally Ill

DEAL WITH THE BEHAVIOR, NOT THE ILLNESS

- Loud talking or disrupting others is not allowed

“Your behavior is making other patrons uncomfortable? Is there anything I can help you with at the library today?”

Remind them that you do not want to them about this with them again or they will be asked to leave.

http://welldressedlibrarian.blogspot.com
Mentally III

- Three strikes and your out rule
  - If the “bad” behavior continues they must leave

It is not bad customer service and “You are not a bad person for making the a library feel like a safe place for others” www.welldressedlibrarian.blogspot.com
Organizations helping the Mentally Ill

- **NAMI**
  - [http://www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

- **National Mental Health Association**
  - [http://www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)

- **Texas Appleseed Project**
  - [http://www.texasappleseed.net](http://www.texasappleseed.net)

Texas Appleseed works for high quality legal representation of persons with mental illness or mental retardation — providing resources for judges and attorneys, handbooks for these defendants and their families, and support for communities to create mental health public defender offices.
The Movements / The Groups

- The Republic of Texas Movement
  - 1990’s: The Republic of Texas is a militia group that claims that the annexation of Texas by the United States was illegal and that Texas remains an independent nation under occupation

- The Freeman Movement
  - The United States is a corporation. Your birth certificate, social security card, driver’s license, your bills all have your name in capital letters and that makes you a slave to the corporation.
Reference Interview Techniques

- Treat the question seriously
  - Analyze question
  - Identify potential resources
  - Use follow-up questions

- Treat the patron respectfully
  - Truth is in the eye of the beholder

- Clarify the question
  - Could you tell me more . . .
  - I’m not sure I understand . . .
Things to Remember

- Treat routinely
- Creative suggestions
  - Step into the alternate universe
  - Treat routinely
- Take them to a resource
Things to Remember

- Never argue with them about their reality
  - Fruitless
  - Makes them angry
- Repeat, repeat, repeat
  - Your limitations, policies
Things to Remember

- Call in a colleague if needed
  - For moral support
  - For diversion
- Define boundaries
  - No inappropriate questions
  - Stay on track
Dealing with Your Feelings

- Acknowledge your feelings
  - Guilt
  - Frustration
  - Angry
- Recognize you can’t help everyone
- Recall successful interactions
- See encounter as chance to grow
- Great stories!!!
Email Us Your Alternate Reality Based Questions at the Reference Desk

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Hilyard, Nann Blaine, ed. “The Not-So-Secret Keys to Great Customer Service.” Public Libraries Online. (Authors include: Nikki Ehlers, Gretchen Pruitt, Pat Tomka, Kit Ward-Crixell),

http://www.publiclibrariesonline.org/content/not-so-secret-keys-great-customer-service


