



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

Amy Hale Janeke & Peggy Luttrell Martindale
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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

- 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

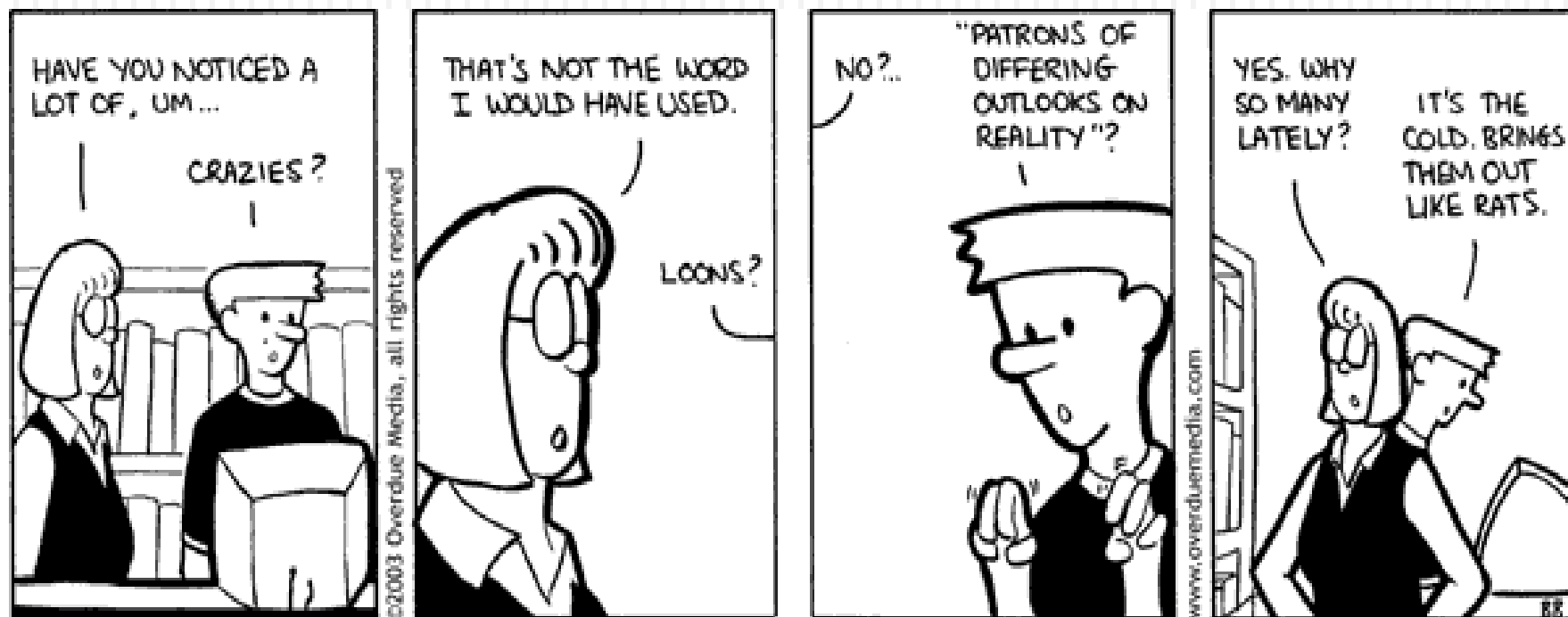


- Attorneys
- Judges
- Court Staff / Employees
- Professors
- Students
- The Public
- The Pro Ses

Customer Service : PATRONS OF DIFFERING OUTLOOKS



- Attorneys
- Judges
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- The Pro Ses



[redacted]
[redacted] waylon Jennings
Littlefield TX, 79339



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“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

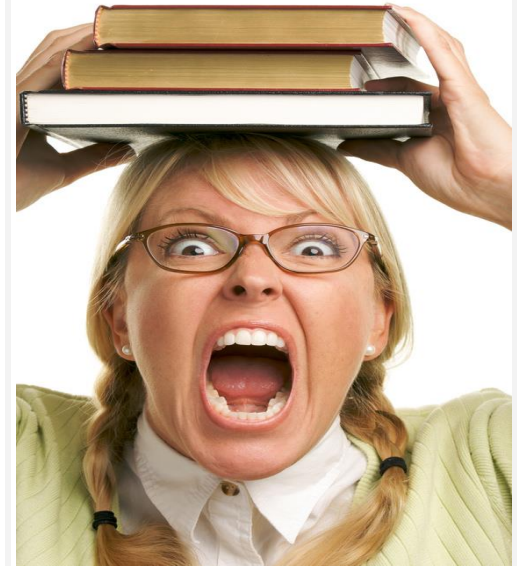
Wrong department

Wrong information

Won't listen

Won't read

“But.. they said ... or they told me
you would ...” “They said”



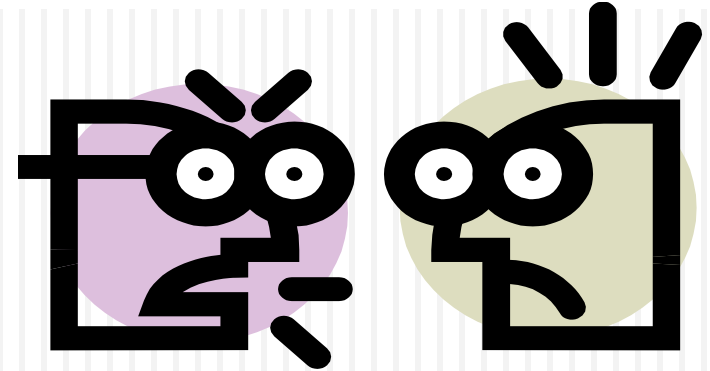
Change in How You Say It

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

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?”

The Angry



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 III

- Argues with themselves, computer screens, trash cans, potted plants etc.
- Unusual perceptual experiences
 - ▣ Listens when no one speaking
 - ▣ Speaks when no one is listens
 - ▣ 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 N
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 III

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 III

- NAMI
 - ▣ <http://www.nami.org>
- National Mental Health Association
 - ▣ <http://www.nmha.org>
- ▣ Texas Appleseed Project
 - <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



Amy Hale-Janeke

Amy_Hale-Janeke@ca5.uscourts.gov

Peggy Luttrell Martindale

pmartindale@tarrantcounty.com

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