

OLA Quarterly

SERVICE



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Service



Introduction

My second class in library school was all about service. I was very excited and happy because here was a subject that I actually knew something about. I had been raised in the restaurant business—my dad had a small cafe and I had worked for him for what seemed my entire childhood. (I used to think they wrote the child labor laws specifically for him.) My dad was a stickler for good service; I learned to wear a smile, understand that the customer was *always* right (no really, ALWAYS), and the coffee cup needed to stay full. However, in library school we were discussing learning styles and multiple intelligences. Not so timidly, I raised my hand and asked, “Where is the literature from the hospitality and retail industries? I mean, after all, don’t they know a thing or two about service?” You could have heard a pin drop after the professor gasped and firmly replied, “We are *professionals*; we serve from a more enlightened perspective.” Chastened and mortified to have revealed what an ignoramus I was, I vowed to keep my head down (succeeded) and my mouth shut (epic fail). Humbled, I eventually came to understand that service in libraries is indeed a nuanced phenomenon, and, as with Gardner’s multiple intelligences, there are also multiple ways to deliver, measure, and assess good (and bad) service.

In libraries we are always delving into what constitutes good service and how we should deliver it and why. Those considerations are the pervasive undercurrents to our specific missions and what ultimately tie us to our unique communities. It’s why my professor was right: we librarians do serve from enlightened and sophisticated conceptual understandings of what serves our patron’s needs. Having said that, the public’s understanding of service is informed by its retail and hospitality experience, and there are many paradigms that map well to our work.

At my dad’s restaurant, good service was atmospheric. The place was clean and bright and filled with the aroma of good food; you could *feel* the care that was put into making your meal delicious, promptly served, and piping hot. Of course we wanted the return business that friendly, efficient service would bring—and I wanted good tips—but it had the side effect of making the work more engaging and even fun. It also made the place a comfortable hangout for the locals. The mayor, the building inspector, the fire chief, and the premier long-board surfer of the world all made the back table at my dad’s place their de facto offices.

Libraries are all about the ambiance, too. Like cleanliness, metadata is invisible. When it’s done right we don’t notice it, and when it’s poor, it can literally kill the experience. In this issue, Friday Valentine (OHSU) explains how cataloging is foundational to excellent library service. Another atmospheric marker is what we have on hand: Karen Medjrich (Hillsboro Public Library) reports on the innovative use of patron-driven acquisition tools to build a collection that’s inviting to her community and served ‘piping hot.’ Robert Heilman, a non-librarian essayist from Douglas County and outspoken public library supporter, reminds us that a proletarian service attitude creates an atmosphere of acceptance, a welcoming space for all and a de facto gathering place for the community.

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And yet service is a personal act that we all come to with different motivations and perspectives. Many of us have learned a service ethic from experience or by example. Janet Webster (OSU) shares her personal inspirations around public service and asks some basic questions for all of us to ponder in order to keep that fire in the belly alive. Steve Silver (Northwest Christian University) writes thoughtfully about the blending and balancing of his personal beliefs and the management of his library as a cog in a larger academic community.

Service learning seeks to engage and challenge students of all ages through meaningful service experiences in order to understand community problems and issues. Jennifer Nutefall (OSU) describes how librarians can and should contribute to this philosophically aligned educational trend.

Sometimes giving service can ask a lot from us personally. Robin Milford and Tania Wisotzke (University of Western States) analyze the perils *and* the secret strengths of introverts that work with the public. Christy Davis (Klamath Falls Public Library) cheerfully observes that life as a small town librarian is an all-day/every-day service gauntlet.

This issue of the Oregon Library Association Quarterly is dedicated to exploring the multiple meanings of service, the way we accomplish service through our programs and policies, and the deeply held beliefs and feelings that drive us to serve. And, even though my professor taught me so much about delivering service in libraries, I just have to say that Dad was right too; sometimes a smile and a full cup of coffee says it all.

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What the Service Element of Technical Services Means to Me

by Friday Valentine

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“In the future, everyone’s going to say,

Come down to the library, we’ll have a wild time, shall we?”

—Eddie Izzard

I’ve always been an organizer. From my early days of re-arranging my mother’s books, to my current position as metadata maven at a local health sciences university, I put things in different arrangements to make sense of them. I enjoy providing access between the information source and the people who need that resource, and this is what motivates me to continue to advocate for the necessity of Technical Services.

When I first started cataloging I saw it as a basic data entry clerical task. Information A goes in Field B. I was learning the recipe, but I didn’t see the whole banquet. About this same time, I started library school, and as I learned about service design and user needs, search behavior, and integrated library systems, I grew to understand that in any setting it is important to have a system of organizing information. I’ve always known this intuitively, but now I was learning the theory along with the practice. For some reason the image of all the books in the tower library of the monastery in *The Name of the Rose* wouldn’t leave my imagination. Isn’t providing access to information the service we Technical Services librarians provide? How could the monks not provide access to all those books?!

It’s not hyperbole to say that service is what librarianship is all about. Look at how we label ourselves: Access Services, Public Services, and Technical Services. Study the definitions of “service” and one sees variations of meaning from the delivery of goods to consultation to animal husbandry. I prefer the first definition of “service” at Dictionary.com, “an act of helpful activity.”

What about the service of Technical Services specifically? What “acts of helpful activity” do we exhibit and aspire to? This definition is simple and direct and inclusive of the holistic component of community that I find in my everyday work. Service is an attitude and an approach to the world that says, “I’m part of a larger community and what I do affects that community.”

In the last decade there’s been a lot of talk in the library literature about becoming “user-oriented” in our services, as if we’ve never considered the needs of our users before. We’ve *always* been focused on our users; that’s not new. I concede that we used to have the expectation that they would come to us because we had The Stuff. Now that geography is unimportant in the digital age, we’re rightfully readjusting to meet the Ultimate Service Goal of providing information Anytime, Anywhere, Any format.

Technical Services departments have traditionally included the units of Collection Development, Acquisitions, and Cataloging. As we negotiate the changes that technology brings, many Technical Services departments are expanding. My department, for example, currently includes these units: Collection Development, Acquisitions, Cataloging, Electronic Resources, Digital Resources, Data Curation, Scholarly Communications, and Systems. I know from looking at the web pages of other academic libraries around the country that this expansion of services is happening all over. I expect that in another five years our department will look completely different. What I don’t expect to change in Technical Services will be our service orientation to our communities. Our individual job titles may change, our department names may change, the services we offer *will* change, but our service-oriented approach to bridging the gap between information and users will remain the same.



When I teach new catalogers, and now metadata specialists, I give what I jokingly refer to as my “Cataloging Changes the World” speech. I don’t think people understand how much I really believe in this idea. I want my students to understand that metadata isn’t just “Information A goes in Field B,” as I learned it so many years ago. I want my students to understand the underlying truth of how the act and art of metadata description can fundamentally change a person’s life.

Consider how different your life would be if you didn’t read that book or see that movie or hear that music that changed your worldview. Consider what it was like finding that all-important information that changed your world. Metadata, combined with the data itself, is what drives databases and information retrieval. If the data in the database is incorrect—e.g., containing spelling or transposition errors—or misapplied, then one is blocked from finding the information one needs.

Take the humble 245 2nd indicator. For the non-catalogers in the audience, that’s the Title field in the MaRC record that tells the computer to skip over initial articles and other leading characters at the beginning of a title. When this data is incorrect the item might as well not exist, unless one can figure out a different search that works. It’s a very small piece of data. Its value can be a number between 0 and 9, but it makes all the difference in the world to the user trying to find that item.

When I first read David Weinberger’s book *Everything is Miscellaneous*, it angered me so much I had to put it down. I interpreted his thesis as, “Any system of organization is unnecessary.” It didn’t help that I seemed to be hearing that from other sectors in library land. “Everything you’ve been doing up to this point in Technical Services is wrong. What were you people thinking? Nothing you do makes any sense for the Digital Age.” Hang on a blessed minute! Technical Services is the access bridge from the item to the patron. Please don’t tell me that my service of making stuff available and searchable is wrong!

I realize now that Weinberger was trying to say that classification focused *only* on physical inventory is outdated in the Digital Age and I agree with him on that point. I’ll take his thesis a step further and say what we need now in the era of electronic information glut is *more* description, not less. Just as we’re getting to the good stuff in our electronic capability to organize and view in different modes, let’s not revert to a status of non-quality by throwing everything on the virtual floor in one big unsearchable pile.

We’re getting to the point where search systems will take our cataloging and classification data and allow us to discover what we need from different conceptual angles—for example, linked maps of subject areas. This semantic searching—cousin to the larger vision of the Semantic Web—will enable librarians and researchers to realize the benefits of the metadata we have worked so hard to input. In addition to providing access, the next product of this service will be increased interdisciplinarity.

As a user, finding an item when you need it means the world. It doesn’t matter if your need is large or small. It could be a best-selling novel or the newest in cardiac surgical techniques. It could be information on how to complete a will or details of the woodworking tools from the latest archeological find in Sweden. In Technical Services, our service is our presence in the community. In Technical Services, we do all we can to lower the barrier in getting users their information. Poor service is costly, to our users and our reputations. Good service is priceless. 🌿



The Library Collection as Service

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Excellent customer service is at the forefront of what is vital in the public library. Our customer service, the way the staff presents itself to and interacts with the public, is visible to every person who walks through our door. We are friendly and courteous, and give the customer the information or entertainment he or she is seeking. In this same way the overall collection at each public library is a very visible service we offer to our patrons. Our collection represents what is best about our library because it has been consciously designed to try to meet the needs of every person, regardless of age, who walks through our door. And not only is our collection a visible service, it is the largest service we offer.

Nordstrom's department store has long been regarded as an industry leader in customer service. That service is emulated and copied by businesses throughout the United States. As Nordstrom was expanding its stores in the 1960s, it became the largest independently owned shoe store in the United States, stocking 150,000 pairs of shoes at a time. Its goal was not just to sell shoes to established customers, but also "to sell shoes to everyone in Seattle" (Spector, 1995). In the public library we can take that same philosophy of customer service and apply it to the way we select the items for our collection.

Just as Nordstrom set out to sell a pair of shoes to every person in Seattle, the library's collection should aim to meet the needs of every person in the community. We order books and other materials in a variety of formats that will reach everyone when they come in the door. Most importantly, we try to have something there for the person who has never visited a library before. By having a broad collection, we anticipate the needs of patrons before they do. But this can be dangerous when we begin to have collections that don't reflect what our customers want. When we buy our collections based on a "just in case" rather than a "just in time" philosophy, we run the risk of housing a collection of items that may not be used as much as we would like. It is important to evaluate our collections on a continual basis to weed out items that don't circulate. Careful analysis can also tell us exactly what our patrons are checking out. We can use this information to assess areas of the collection that need to either grow or be reduced. With a philosophy of continual evaluation and weeding, and being willing to change our buying patterns based on usage, we will provide collections and formats that are relevant, useful, and used.

In addition to collecting the items that we know patrons want and use, we also provide great customer service by decreasing the response time to acquire these items. Like many other libraries, Hillsboro Public Library established a collection development method that quickly and directly responds to our customers' requests. In addition to inviting patrons to submit requests for purchase through an in-library print form, e-mail, or a form on our library website, we also turn certain Interlibrary Loan (ILL) requests into an automatic purchase request. This applies to requests for items not owned by the members of our library cooperative and its shared ILS. We believe that if one person is asking for a title, chances are good that there are other patrons who would also be interested in that same item. By considering each ILL request for purchase we are able to add unique items to our collection that increase the breadth of the collection while directly affecting the patron who made the original request. The Library Assistants in our Interlibrary Loan office forward the ILL requests to the appropriate selector who then determines whether the item will be bought, contingent on its meeting our selection criteria. If the item is to be purchased, it is put into a virtual cart and a hold placed for the patron who made the request. If the selector does not




purchase the item, it is placed back in the ILL process. This process ensures that patrons are receiving the items they wanted in whatever manner is most appropriate.

After about a year of following this procedure, we undertook a study to determine the effectiveness of this service. We wanted to be sure that we were providing improved service to our customers by getting requested items to them quickly. We found that on average it took 12 days to receive a book through the ILL process and 93% of ILLs were received within 21 days. In contrast, purchasing the items took an average of 56+ days to deliver to the customer. We also discovered that ILL costs were less than purchasing and processing costs, although purchasing an item provides us with holdings that will have continued use. After investigating further, we determined that our practice of ordering monthly was reducing our ability to provide patrons with these requested items in a timely manner. In response, we implemented a new procedure at the beginning of FY 2011–12 called the “Request to Buy” program. Modeled after a similar program presented at the 2010 Northwest Interlibrary Loan and Resource Sharing Conference (Sylvester, Anderson, Kochan, Duncan, Fagerheim, 2010), our new procedure gives ILL staff the budget and authority to place orders for items requested through the ILL process without receiving selector approval. Under this new program, orders are sent to Acquisitions staff on a weekly basis, cutting down the time an item is in a selector’s virtual cart. The ILL staff makes independent purchasing decisions following these guidelines:

- Published within the last two years
- Published in the USA
- Cost of the item is \$25 or less
- Not in a foreign language
- For films, the item was not released straight to DVD, unrated, or NC17
- For series, WCCLS libraries own copies of the previous editions in the series

For items that do not fall into these parameters, selectors are contacted for approval, and, if approved, the item is included in the weekly order. Evaluation of the “Request to Buy” program one month after implementation shows that we have reduced our response time for buying requested items to an average of 12 days, making this on par with the ILL process. If this rate continues we will have successfully met our goal of faster response to our patrons.

Library collections, in all formats, will continue to be the largest visible service we offer. Patrons who come into the library or who search our catalogs online need to know that they will find items they want and need. By carefully selecting materials based on our continual evaluation of the collection, and by purchasing items our patrons have requested, we will continue to be relevant to our entire community. And being relevant is the best way we can provide service into the future. 

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At Your Service

by **Robert Leo Heilman**
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Author of *Overstory: Zero: Real Life in Timber Country*

I was delighted to hear that Carol Hildebrand had been named “Educator of the Year” at the annual Citizen of the Year banquet. I’ve known her for nearly thirty years now in our small-town way, and the good news first struck me as both a well-deserved honor and an unexpected one.

Carol is a librarian who presides over the Canyonville Public Library, and though she is not a teacher or professor I saw immediately the justice of the award. She spends her working days helping people, in a dozen ways, to get the knowledge that drew them to her small section of city hall. It is heartening to watch her patient and skillful work in greeting the patrons—taking the time to listen to their worries and hopes, their joys and sorrows – and always providing gentle suggestions for sources of further information or amusement.

It was only later that I remembered the cuts. At the moment when Carol was being honored, her library was facing a severe budget cut. A few months later the Canyonville Public Library lost six of its twenty-two open-door hours—a major loss not just in library service but also to the well-being of the town.

Getting people to understand the great social value of our free public libraries has become increasingly difficult over the past twenty years. I have heard it argued that maintaining a library at public expense is a waste of tax revenue in this age of easy internet access. This line of reasoning always seems to come from people who are perfectly able to pay the small necessary annual tax, and who haven’t actually set foot in a public library for several years. If a public library were a mere tool, like a screwdriver, a dictionary or the internet, such talk would be reasonable. Fortunately, our free public libraries are much more than that.

Both the internet and the library are sources of information. The difference is that the virtual help offered by the worldwide web is impersonal, while libraries have librarians. When you walk in the door of your local public library, there is someone there who is ready to help you. Librarians aren’t there to run a scam on you, nor to try to turn a profit, nor to deceive you—all common enough occurrences in this, the so-called “information age.” A librarian is more than just a specialist but rather a sort of friend to one and all, someone with nothing more than your own good at heart.

We live in an age of epidemic loneliness. Along with our gadgets and our wealth have come increasing isolation and alienation. Our virtual magic carpets have whisked us off to illusory worlds with much to delight the eye and the intellect but nothing to please our hearts. I have often, over the years, thought of our free public libraries as temples of knowledge. It is only lately that I have come to understand that they are temples of compassion as well.

The creation of free public libraries is, in itself, a compassionate act. Properly understood, compassion is a matter of acknowledging that others are equal to us; and therefore they are deserving of the same respect and kindly assistance that we would accord ourselves. Compassion is an essentially egalitarian approach to living and our free public libraries first came about as a way to extend that personal compassion to entire communities. A public library is one of the few places that I know of where I am always treated with real respect, as an equal rather than as a mere consumer or client, patient or employee.


I am, I admit, quite fond of librarians. Alone among the professional classes, they have consistently earned my admiration throughout my life. I have lived long enough at the bottom of the societal heap to have seen oppression in both its gross and petty forms and to have



learned from it a deep-seated distrust of the credentialed products of what passes for “higher education” in our society. It has often struck me that “the evil that men do” in these modern days is mostly done by those who hold advanced college degrees. Yet, when I contemplate the horrible mediocrity of our mass culture and the terrible pain brought to so many through their inescapable poverty and through the cold-blooded ill treatment that is their daily share, it comes to me that librarians, at least, are consistently creative and helpful people.

We seldom fully know the full worth of the good we do. A kind word or an off-hand suggestion at the right time can often save a life or launch a useful career. The people we meet in our daily lives remain largely mysterious to us. A stranger met once may never be met again and yet the memory of that meeting may affect his or her life or our own for decades afterward, perhaps enriching a life or two or thousands of other lives. The front desk of a public library is not just a place where such things can happen. It is a place whose purpose is to make sure that it will happen—repeatedly and “for the common good.”

The premise underlying free public libraries is neither liberal nor conservative. It is, however, an American premise: that all of us need to have an equal opportunity to educate ourselves. I like to think of libraries as both the university of the poor and the place where the truly educated go to continue to learn. It is obvious that an education through a process which aims at obtaining accreditation is a very inferior sort of education, one that at best prepares us to learn on our own. And where but in a public library can a thorough lifelong education take place free of charge and assisted by a kindly neighbor?

It is distressing that we live in a radically libertarian age of rampant tightwadism, and sad that our free public libraries should be closed because of “bottom line” small-mindedness. Must all the public good that can’t be expressed by strings of digits and displayed on a spreadsheet lose public funding? Have we, as a society, concluded at last that we must abandon generosity and compassion in order to prosper? Not so very long ago these were said to be the essential ingredients in the humane glue that holds us together as a nation and as a people. 



A Sense of Service

by Janet Webster

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OLA's Vision 2020 assumes that libraries "will maintain a sense of service and a commitment to provide many services to many people in many ways." That multiplicity of 'manys' and the call for 'a sense of service' reminds me that service is personal; we interpret and demonstrate it in our own ways. I developed my sense of service building on the examples of two people who influenced me at an early age.

Maldon Horton was my remarkable first grade teacher, remarkable not just for her personality and love of life, but for the confidence and sense of belonging she instilled in her charges. In hindsight, she taught me about service in ways I didn't recognize at the time. Teaching is perhaps the ultimate service if done by someone who is passionate and capable. Miss Horton planted the seed in my seven-year-old spirit that working with and for others was fun and challenging. After I finished first grade, she decided that I would be the first woman president of the United States. She was wrong on my future, but she was right to push me to think beyond my backyard and the schoolyard. She taught me that service is everywhere, if you look.

George Neuner, my grandfather, also taught me about service. He, too, was remarkable but, in very different ways from the vivacious Miss Horton. As an immigrant German adolescent, he excelled in his adopted country, becoming a lawyer without the normal educational background and eventually being elected as attorney general in Oregon. He impressed upon all of his grandchildren that working for the Post Office should be part of our patriotic duty. None of us followed his advice, but his great commitment to serving the community and the country was indelibly etched on my consciousness.

Given these two influences, my sense of service reflects both the joy of being part of something you are passionate about and the duty of contributing to the greater good of your community. I suggest that each of us in the library community has a sense of service. I further suggest that it manifests itself in many ways. However, sometimes it is challenging to maintain the joy of service or see the payback for your commitment. We can get bogged down in the daily task of running libraries: stocking the copier again, writing yet another report, giving directions to the restrooms, managing shrinking budgets, correcting a catalog record for the tenth time, cleaning up a spill on the new carpet.

So for those of you who have lost your sense of service or feel it needs refurbishing, I have some questions to consider that might help you revise, energize or just reconsider your approach to service.

- **Whom do you serve?**
- **How do you serve?**
- **Why do you serve?**

These are pretty basic questions. Here are my answers.

Whom do I serve?

My immediate answer is the people who work and study at OSU's Hatfield Marine Science Center. But, OSU is a land grant university, part of its appeal to me as a dyed-in-the-wool public librarian. So, I serve the people of Oregon. With more thought, I realize that I also serve my colleagues who are widely distributed throughout the world.




How do I serve?

For the locals, I open the doors every weekday, providing a quiet place to work, access to a wide array of science information, and some help with difficult citations or problems. Usually, I do this with a smile unless it's late afternoon and the question is weird. Then I may snarl a bit, but I try to be nice. The desperate grade school student calls, e-mails or chats about the life and death of the octopus, and the fisheries manager in Salem may chat about how to find sardine statistics. I apply my specialized expertise, gleaned from years of working around fisheries and marine information. I'm not a scientist, but I remain convinced that a good librarian can learn to navigate the landscape of almost any field.

Service to my colleagues is collaborative. That's what makes it interesting, sometimes trying, but consistently illuminating. I learn much about myself as well as those with whom I work. This goes for both daily local collaborations and the occasional virtual ones. My collaborations are planned as well as unexpected. So, the way I serve my colleagues varies because of who they are, where they are, and what we need to accomplish. Beyond my subject expertise, I have some aptitude with synthesizing what others are saying, and capturing what is important to our work. This means I get to serve on OLA's Legislative Committee and learn how strategize to improve libraries in Oregon. Professional or collegial service has taken me physically to Rome, Argentina, and Malawi as well as Baker City and Tillamook. Virtually, you can go even further afield.

Why do I serve?

It gets back to being part of something I enjoy as well as contributing to something beyond myself. I started volunteering in a library because I liked to read. Then I discovered that libraries did not have much of a voice at the funding and policy table, so I got my credentials. I found I liked the work we do in libraries and figured out how to combine my commitment to library work with my desire to contribute broadly. In 1989, I accepted an invitation by the chair of the OLA Legislative Committee to tag along to a meeting. I was new, but impressed that I could just show up and be part of something bigger that might make a difference. Just showing up, raising your hand to ask a question, saying yes when asked to do something for a colleague: that's how it starts. It continues because serving gives you something back much of the time (not always). There are the tangible successes: legislation that passes or a project that make access better for someone. There are the intangibles: talking with a colleague in India using Skype after corresponding for months, having a report cited by a librarian I'll never know.

Developing your sense of service is an ongoing process. I suggest that it entails taking stock of why you do it as well as how. There are many different scales of service as reflected in the Vision 2020. Those scales, as well as the variety of means to serve, keep my sense of service evolving. In 1899, Melvil Dewey described the ideal librarian as having a clear head, a strong hand, and a great heart. To meet the challenges of our libraries and communities today, we use our clear heads to look above the fray and envision the future, our strong hands to shape resources and services in good times and times of stagnant budgets and increasing demands, and our great hearts to empathize with our many users and meet their divergent demands. Using our heads, hands and hearts is how we serve and become part of our world. 



Seeking a Balance Between Pragmatism and Probity

by **Steve Silver**

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One prevailing theme in much of the library science literature these days, and rightly so, is concern about the future of the library. Shrinking institutional and governmental budgets, and a misperception by some that libraries are obsolete in the Internet age, lead many to worry that libraries are being marginalized. This is as true in academia, where I work, as in any other library sector. Browse any library journal, peruse the session topics at library association conferences, scour the lists of professional development webinars, and you will find articles, workshops, and other “how-tos” to help those of us in library leadership “make the case” for the library to our respective government or institutional leaderships. We are told we must demonstrate our worth and argue for our value or risk losing out on the resources our libraries need in order to offer quality services and resources to our clientele. Shrinking resources mean we must learn how to compete with other units for funding, resources, and legitimacy.

Such approaches do have their place and usefulness in our present environment. But the theme of this quarter’s OLAQ—service—reminds me that thinking competitively is not the only way to validate our worth to those who make funding and resource decisions for us. I am reminded that service to others can win over more hearts and minds than finely crafted arguments, statistics, and charts. More importantly, I am reminded that service is at the very heart of what we do. Arguing, proving, and jockeying for influence may be important, but they are not core. Service is core.

As librarians we tend to do service well. We are partially drawn to this field as a way to serve others. Individually—especially in difficult funding times—we understand and practice good service as central to our mission. However, as a library leader in the midst of advocating for my library’s needs, I sometimes struggle to remember that, in addition to students and individuals, the library itself also serves the larger institution of which it is a part. An academic library serves the needs and mission of the college or university to which it is attached. A school library serves the needs and mission of the school and district of which it is a part. Even a public library has an opportunity to be a service to the other departments within its governing hierarchy. Yes, ultimately we serve our clients. But, particularly for an academic library, the library itself as an institution, as an entity, serves the needs of the college or university. The academic library is not an entity unto itself; it exists as part of a larger organization and it exists to support the goals and objectives of that larger organization.

As a person of faith working for an institution that places faith at the heart of what it does, I am particularly reminded of this calling to service, both individually and as an organizational entity. It is easy to see the connection on the individual level. My faith calls me to serve others, to place the needs of others above my own. Of course this translates well into serving my library’s clients to the best of my ability. That calls me to give the best service I can whether at the circulation desk, in a reference transaction, or as a library leader planning for services and resources to serve the needs of our users.

As a person of faith, I also believe my faith calls me to lead my library, as an organizational entity, in an attitude of service to the larger organization, not an attitude of competition for resources or attention. It is not always an easy path. It is a real test of faith to maintain a humble, serving attitude within the larger organization and trust that the needs of the students and of the library will work out in the end. Some may see such an approach as folly. Humbleness and service-oriented attitudes can imply weakness. It certainly can feel counter-



intuitive. I believe it is also, in the long run, more effective. We can prove our value—individually as professionals and corporately as a library—by providing high quality service. We prove our value, in essence, by doing our jobs to the best of our ability. Deans, administrators, and decision makers may well remember the special effort made to provide an un-asked-for resource, or to make those student workers available to help with another department’s office move, or simply to treat them as persons not positions when we ask about vacations, or families, or favorite hobbies. Such service can reap rewards down the road.

It is easy, of course, to fall into the trap of serving because it will provide benefit for the library. If I support a department’s need for a faculty position in the budget meeting, then that dean may be more likely to vote for the library’s budget needs in the next meeting. If I go above and beyond in providing instruction to a class, that instructor may be more likely to understand the value of—and support the library’s need for—resources to increase instruction. If I “play nice” with my dean—ask about his family, laugh at his jokes, volunteer to serve on that odious committee—then maybe he’ll be more sympathetic when I argue for a larger share of the funding pie for the library. Such indeed can be the outcome of genuine service to individuals in positions of influence. But if that is the only motivation, is it really “service”? My faith calls me to those very same acts of service, but with no expectation of reward or payback. My faith calls me to those very same acts of service to persons not in a position of influence: to serve the admissions counselor, the grounds keeper, the student development officer, and the public patron with no connection to our school. What can I do, both as a librarian and as a person, to make their lives better, with no thought of how it might benefit me or the library down the road?


There is an equal danger to treat the call to service as an invitation to be a doormat, to avoid conflict, and to abdicate responsibility. Resources are limited, and I truly, firmly, and ardently believe that the library deserves a significant share of those resources. This is not simply to increase my own little library empire, but because I believe that having good library resources is best for students. My best service to students may be arguing strong and hard for those needed library resources, or bringing the best charts and graphs I can to demonstrate the positive impact of good information literacy training. Other departments are doing the same, and I do a disservice to our students and our library if I do not make the case that needs to be made. At times, arguing, proving, and jockeying for influence may be the best service I can provide, both to our students and to the larger institution.

Reality, of course, is most often a mix. I do care about my dean as a person. I ask about his vacation, their recent move, their daughter’s growing up, as one person to another. I provide what support I can to help take the tremendous load off of him because I see a human being struggling to keep up with it all, and I can relate. I also do those things because he is my dean and I want him to have positive thoughts when he considers my requests for library resources and funding. I look at institutional issues that arise and try to support what seems best for the school overall, not just what benefits the library directly. It is not an either/or, good/bad dichotomy. It is a matter of balance and motivation. If my primary motivation is simply serving another person in need, then positive results can ensue. If I serve only in order to get those positive results, my service has become disingenuous. As a library leader I am interested in doing whatever I can to generate a positive climate for decisions that will best support the library and student informational needs. But this should come



secondary to a desire to simply be of service in whatever way I, or the library I lead, can. That may mean giving support to a new faculty position when library staffing has been cut, if that faculty position truly meets the needs of the university better. It may mean supporting increased funding for admissions or student development when library funding has been cut, if those increases truly benefit the larger institution more effectively. Positive results may come back to the library in the long term, but in the meantime I simply try to serve and let the consequences be what they will be.

It is not easy. It is a difficult balance to find at times, serving my faith while advocating for my library's needs. I often find myself "unbalanced" on one side or the other. It is a lifelong process.

I would love to hear others' thoughts on these subjects. How—and, more importantly, why—do you serve those in the larger institution outside your library? How does your library as an entity serve the parent organization of which it is a part, even perhaps at the expense of immediate library needs? Where and why do you disagree with my assessment? How does your faith or life-perspective—whatever it may be—impact how you serve others within your professional role? I would love to hear from you. We can engage in dialogue and challenge and improve each other's thinking as we journey this path together. 



Why Service Learning is Important to Librarians

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“If colleges and universities become properly engaged with our communities, we can become the source of social capital for a new era.”

—Judith Ramaley, PSU President, 1990–1997

Service learning is an important and growing trend in higher education, and librarians need to become involved at their institutions. The attention service learning is getting in higher education is evidenced by the creation in 2006 of the Carnegie Classification on Community Engagement and the inclusion of service learning in the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ (AAC&U) high impact educational practices (Kuh, 2008).

What does service learning look like? An example from Oregon State University is the Writing Liaison (OWL) project. OWL integrates service learning and community outreach opportunities by pairing OSU undergraduates in Writing (WR) 121 courses with student writers at local middle and high schools. Under the guidance of their university instructors, the OSU students work with the middle and high school students to develop and revise a personal essay about an aspect of their educational experiences. The OSU students, having been trained in peer editing techniques, offer generative feedback to their mentee students. Afterward, the OSU students write a brief reflective paper about their experiences working with the students, themes, and texts. OSU’s Assistant Professor and Director of Writing, Susan Meyers, states that:

The OSU instructors reported that their students enjoyed this project as something that was more than “just another assignment” and that it gave them insight both into how much they have developed as writers, and how much more work they have ahead of them. They found it challenging to achieve both a positive, motivating tone in their letters to the high school writers while, at the same time, giving them specific, constructive feedback. In particular, participating OSU instructors mentioned that during the OWL project, their students were more articulate about WR 121 course concepts and more self-aware of the process that teachers go through when they are evaluating papers. Many instructors said they felt like their students are now paying more attention to the comments written on their own papers because they better understand the intention and process behind them.

So what is service learning? Essentially it is an “experiential learning pedagogy that balances the needs of student and community members involved, links the service and learning through reflective processes, and if skillfully managed leads to positive student personal, social or citizenship, career, and intellectual development” (Eyler, 2002). In other words, service learning uses what students learn in the classroom to solve real-life problems. Kuh writes of service learning:

In these programs, field-based “experiential learning” with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in



real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life (Kuh, 2008).

There are three key elements of service learning. The first is reciprocity. This emphasizes the importance of service learning as a mutually beneficial partnership between the institution and the community organization. The second element is reflection. Structured reflection activities allow students to connect their service experience to particular learning outcomes. Reflection activities should occur regularly to allow students to explore, clarify, and alter values, and provide an opportunity for faculty feedback. Sample reflection activities include personal journals, directed writings, agency presentations, case studies, portfolios, and experiential research papers. The third key element of service learning is civic education. Among the goals of many institutions is to create civic-minded graduates. Service learning contributes to this goal by creating and strengthening the serving-to-learn and learning-to-serve ethic. The key is that service learning is more than volunteerism. With service learning, the community becomes an extension of the classroom and the service is a vehicle for students to reach their academic goals.

Librarians need to focus on the opportunities that service learning offers for engaging and connecting with students, faculty and the larger community. Here are five reasons why service learning is important to librarians and why librarians should get involved on their campuses. Service learning can:

1. Support and actualize the university's mission and strategic plan
2. Strengthen connections between librarians and the curriculum
3. Increase opportunities for faculty/librarian partnerships
4. Create ties with students
5. Foster connections between the library and the community


Each university's mission is unique, yet most, if not all, institutions strive to graduate students that are civically engaged and socially responsible. One way for universities to meet this goal is through service learning. Librarians can play a key role in creating civically engaged students by providing resources and instruction that allow students to explore local, national, and international issues such as food insecurity, education, homelessness, environmental sustainability and immigration.

Many campuses offer a central office to assist faculty and students in connecting to the community. These centers can also provide pedagogical support to faculty to strengthen the connection between the service experience and the course and assignments. By collaborating with faculty and service learning centers, librarians can strengthen their ties to the curriculum and their partnerships with faculty. As librarians work closely with faculty on course objectives that link assignments to the service experience, they learn more about why the faculty member chose to incorporate service learning and work with particular organizations. This knowledge can deepen the partnership as they develop a mutual understanding about the course that can be conveyed to students. New opportunities can also arise from these partnerships. Librarians could offer workshops on linking research and service, connect with faculty in other disciplines, and create higher visibility for information literacy on campus.



Service learning offers the opportunity for librarians to create and strengthen ties with students. But how does service learning benefit students? Articles in the service learning literature articulate that students in “service learning classes report higher gains in academic skills, life skills, and civic development than students who do not participate in service learning” (Campbell, 2010).

Librarians can assist students in recognizing and strengthening the connection between their service experience and their course assignment. One study which investigated if a student’s research process was affected by his or her service experience showed that service learning students were more motivated, used a wider variety of sources including numerical data and primary sources, were more knowledgeable in approaching and limiting topics, and recognized the potential for bias (Nutefall, 2009).

Along with the ties librarians can build with faculty and students, service learning can also foster engagement between librarians and the community. Librarians working with faculty and students in service learning courses become more knowledgeable about the local community and community organizations. While many librarians already volunteer in their community, service-learning courses offer an opportunity to foster additional connections in the community and help librarians realize how they can assist local organizations and businesses to help strengthen the community and economy. By becoming involved with service learning, librarians will strengthen ties with the institution, curriculum, faculty, students, and the local community. 

What can librarians do to connect with service learning initiatives?

- The first step is to learn more about service learning in higher education. Examples include the Association of American College & Universities LEAP initiative (2010), Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2011), Campus Compact (2010), and the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse.
- The second step is reading through the library literature related to service learning. While there is still a paucity of research, a literature search reveals only ten articles in the library literature that highlight service learning in higher education with an additional six focusing specifically on its application to LIS education (see Further Reading for full citations).
- Finally, it is imperative for librarians to become involved in the service learning movement on their campuses and nationally. Opportunities for involvement include:
 - Serving on a campus-wide committee on service learning
 - Joint faculty/librarian research projects related to the impact of service learning on research
 - Conversations with faculty about incorporating service learning and its benefits
 - Contributing to the profession on the links between librarians and service learning through articles in the professional literature and presentations at national conferences.



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Introverts and Customer Service in the Library:

An Unexpected Fit

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Why this topic matters to us:

Robin and I both work in front-line customer service positions at a small academic library where customer service is central to the mission. We both feel that providing excellent customer service is at once the most rewarding and the most challenging part of our jobs. We are also both deep introverts. We have had many discussions—sometimes venting sessions—about what it is like to be an introvert working in a job that is so, well, extroverted. We are betting we are not alone in these thoughts and would like to share with the library community what we have learned, intuited, and experienced regarding how introversion and customer service intersect, as well as tried-and-true coping methods to help introverts thrive in library customer service. —Tania

Introduction

Introverts in our extroverted society can feel outnumbered, and rightly so. Experts estimate that 65–75 percent of the general population is extroverted (Laney, 2002; Scherdin, 1994). In the library profession, however, introverts seem to have a place they can feel at home. In Scherdin's landmark study of librarian personality types (1994), 63 percent of librarians tested as introverted, based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®. However much the composition of library personnel may have changed since this study was conducted, introversion surely remains a common trait among our library colleagues. Yet, despite its prevalence among library professionals, introversion's effect on the work we do appears to have been little studied.

The question arises, then: how might the introverted tendency among library professionals mesh with the service-oriented nature of library work? Customer service work in libraries, especially the front-line variety practiced by access services and reference staff, can involve nearly constant interaction with patrons. This degree of face-time with others necessitates an outward orientation, normally considered the comfort zone of extroverts and the worst nightmare of introverts. As it turns out, this is not giving introverts enough credit when it comes to service. Many of the qualities shared by introverted personalities actually make them ideally suited to provide exceptional customer service, particularly in libraries.

Customer Service Strengths of Introverts

While it is true that an introvert's natural focus is inward, the consequences of this in a customer service situation may be unexpected. An inward orientation often means that introverts are very self-aware, and as Laney (2002) explained in her book, *The Introvert Advantage*,* this sensitive insight into self can carry over to insight into others:

Rather than being self-centered, introverts are often really the opposite. Our ability to focus on our internal world and reflect on what we are feeling and experiencing allows us to understand the external world and other human beings better. What appears to be self-centeredness is actually the very talent that provides the capacity to understand what it's like to put ourselves in someone else's shoes (p. 45).



In the library this ability to put oneself in the shoes of another can translate into a patron-centered approach that is flexible, depending on the needs of the individual. The naturally reflective stance of introverts may predispose introverted library professionals to the patron-centric attitude that is the basis of excellent customer service in the library.

Being partial to internal processing and reflection also means that introverts put a premium on listening. In contrast to the “talking it through” method of understanding employed by extroverts, introverts tend to listen first, silently process what they hear, and only then speak (Laney, 2002). Furthermore, whereas extroverts tend to aim for breadth in their experiences and understanding, introverts prefer depth (Laney, 2002; Scherdin, 1994). Because of this preference, it follows that in conversation, when introverts choose to speak, it may likely be first to ask questions with an ear toward deeper understanding. This way of conversing is reminiscent of the reference interview, where listening and reflecting and asking clarifying questions are keys to a successful patron interaction.

In one-to-one interactions with patrons, introverted library professionals are poised to excel. Despite their undeserved reputation for being anti-social, Laney (2002) noted that introverts are often socially adept, albeit in a very different style than extroverts. Introverts, while not inclined toward small talk, value making meaningful connections and feel most comfortable in conversation with one other person or a small group (Laney, 2002; Scherdin, 2002). Laney (2002) pointed out that far from being indifferent to those around them, introverts are often fascinated by people and like letting others take center-stage. In patron interactions, introverted library professionals may be naturals at letting the patron do the talking, putting the focus where it belongs to set the stage for excellent customer service.

In many ways, including their reflective stance, listening skills, and strength in one-to-one interactions, introverts have the potential to give their extroverted colleagues—whose people skills are certainly enviable—a run for their money in the customer service department. Of course, customer service for introverts is not without its challenges. Fortunately, customer service is as much a set of skills to be learned as a natural aptitude, and introverted library professionals can employ a number of strategies to cope with a work environment heavy on people-time.

Challenges Introverts Face in Customer Service

Customer service in a library means interacting with patrons all day long, whether you are answering simple directional questions, troubleshooting computer problems, or assisting patrons. Your skills and knowledge are constantly in demand, which can be mentally draining for introverts. As Laney (2002) explained,

Just being around people can be over-stimulating to introverts. Their energy is drained in crowds, class, or any noisy or invasive environment. They may like people very much, but after talking to anyone, they usually feel the need to move away, take a break, and get some air (p. 23).



Any introvert who has worked a busy reference desk at a public library or a crowded circulation desk at an academic library can probably relate to experiencing these feelings of overstimulation.

I (Robin) can attest to this overstimulated sensation first hand. I am introverted by nature, so it is ironic that my official job title is Access Services Assistant. I often find myself thinking over the double meaning of the “access” part of my job. In a literal sense, my title indicates that I should strive to facilitate access for patrons. As a metaphor, my title means that I must be accessible. This often means going above and beyond sitting behind the circulation desk. As the circulation manager, I am the person that patrons interact with most frequently, so it is my job to make them feel welcome and comfortable by smiling and being friendly. By the end of the day, constantly interacting with other people can make me feel worn out and irritable. I experience the typical brain drain of introverts exposed to too much stimulus.

Beyond feeling exhausted, I have also found that the different ways introverts and extroverts communicate can sometimes result in misunderstanding. Laney (2002) noted, “Because introverts tend to speak slowly, with long pauses, they can appear hesitant and uncertain of their opinion. Actually, they give deep thought to their ideas” (p. 197). Good customer service means meeting the diverse needs of your patrons quickly and efficiently, while at the same time maintaining a pleasant demeanor. Often in a customer service situation, there is little room for hesitation or pensive reflection. Patrons want answers to their questions, and they want them now. Customer service also means being frequently interrupted, something introverts have difficulty recovering from because it is hard for them “to pull themselves up and out of their deep well of concentration” (Laney, 2002, p. 24).

Upcoming OLA Board Meetings

Date	Location	Coordinator
9/30/11	Hood River	Buzzy Nielson/ Robert Hulshof-Schmidt
12/2/11	OSU	Anne-Marie Deitering
2/3/12	Washington County	Eva Calcagno
4/25/12	Bend (conference)	Todd Dunkelberg
6/8/12	Bandon	Sean Park
7/30/12	Silver Falls (retreat)	Abigail Elder/VP
8/24/12	Tualatin	Abigail Elder





How to Cope

In order to do their jobs effectively, introverts need to develop coping strategies for dealing with the challenges of working in customer service. First and foremost, it is important as an introvert that you find time to refuel your energy reserve. As mentioned previously, if you are in a customer service position at your library, you are most likely interacting with other people all day. As such, when you get home from work, finding time to yourself is especially important. It is no revelation that finding a good work-life balance can be extremely difficult. Finding the time to treat yourself to a lavender-infused bubble bath after work is easier said than done! The reality is that most people have busy lives with social obligations and responsibilities that involve other people (children, spouses, friends, etc.). Often taking time to ourselves is a luxury most of us cannot afford. Simply taking the following small steps at work can go a long way toward nourishing your inner introvert.

Take a breather, literally.

Focusing on your breathing is a surprisingly simple and effective method of calming yourself down when you are feeling anxious or overwhelmed, and it is something you can do without retreating to the break room. A quick and simple breathing exercise you can do at your desk is focusing on breathing in and out deeply while counting backwards from ten. If you have a little extra time, practice abdominal breathing, the process of breathing air into the lungs using the diaphragm. Abdominal breathing is the most effective way to breathe because it delivers more oxygen to the body.

Take five.

Or ten, or fifteen, or whatever your scheduled break allows. Laws about designated breaks and lunches exist for a reason, so do not skip them. Breaks are particularly important for introverts so they have time to recharge their batteries. If it is nice out, go outside and soak up some Vitamin D. If it is raining, try to find a quiet spot where you can be alone and reflect. Do not feel pressured by a supervisor or other employees to work through your breaks or cut your lunch short; let them know that you work better when you have time to stretch and recharge.

Take a (mental) hike.

Prepare for work the same way you would if you were going for a challenging hike in the Gorge. Bring a water bottle to stay well hydrated and plenty of healthy snacks (fresh fruits and veggies, nuts, organic turkey jerky) to keep your energy up throughout the day. Make sure you wear appropriate and versatile attire, such as comfortable shoes. Bring a warm cardigan in case it gets cold. Being physically prepared for the emotional workout of overstimulation can make a huge difference.

Take an empathy check.

Put yourself in the shoes of your patron. It may sound like a simple solution, but it is often easy to forget. Imagine that you have just finished a long day of work and still have to complete a long list of errands. You stop into the bank and the teller seems distracted, tired, and annoyed by your presence. How do you feel? You might just chalk it up to her having a bad day, but you probably also feel a little frustrated. Try to remember a scenario like this whenever you feel drained from a long day of interacting with patrons. Also try to remember that for every difficult patron, there are hundreds of wonderful and appreciative patrons who value your hard work and make your job enjoyable and fulfilling. Try to be cognizant of your nonverbal communication, as it can often overpower your verbal communication. A simple smile can go a long way in your interaction with a patron.

Take charge.

Introverts need to own their introversion by acknowledging their respective strengths and weaknesses. The director at our library is a classic extrovert, someone that loves socializing and gets energized from fast-paced, high-energy environments. She is a genius at off-the-cuff banter and comes up with innovative ideas in a spontaneous manner. When I (Robin) started working for her, I thought, "I'll never be able to keep up!" When she would ask me questions or want my opinions on issues like changing library policies, I would often freeze. I eventually came to accept that however differently we may relate to people, by asserting my need for time and space, we have fostered a more productive and comfortable working relationship. For example, now when she asks me a question I am unsure of, I will say, "I don't have an answer for you on that right now. Let me think about it and I'll get back to you with some possible solutions." She is understanding of this approach and appreciates that I work more effectively when I have time to take in information and then reflect on it. I have found that this is also an effective approach when dealing with demanding patrons. Promise to get back to them via phone or e-mail if you do not have an answer to their questions right away and then keep them informed of your progress. In short, I have come to recognize that while I may not be the best at spur of the moment decision-making, I excel in other areas like research and organization. Being a self-aware introvert has given me more confidence, which in turn makes me feel more enthusiastic about and proud of my customer service position. I have always loved helping patrons. Now I no longer feel like I need a nap to recover from doing so!



Parting Thoughts

Rather than being the exclusive domain of outgoing people-persons, customer service actually requires a combination of outward- and inward-focused processes and skills. Library professionals, like our patrons, are a mix of introverted and extroverted personalities, each type possessing unique strengths and facing unique challenges when working with people. The introverts among us (a sizable bunch) are well suited to excel at customer service, especially if we learn the art of self-care to recharge our energy reserves. We introverted library professionals can at once be inspired by our extroverted colleagues and take pride in our own distinctive contributions to customer service in libraries.

*Thank you to Jane Scott for recommending the excellent book by Marti Olsen Laney, *The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World*. 🌿

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Library Service in a Rural County: Why I Never Really Consider Myself Off-Duty

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Supervising Librarian,
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The other day as I was on my two-block walk to work, I was hailed by a patron who also lives near the library. I'll call her Sue. "Hey, Christy!" She shouted from up the hill, "I have a reference question for you." I stopped and waited for her to catch up. Sue wanted to know if I vegetable gardened and more specifically if I could tell her when onions might be ready to pull. I confided that this was a question I had, too, this being the first year I have ever planted onions. She told me all the different advice she'd been given. I said I would look in *Rodale's Organic Gardening* as well as some other print and online sources and try to have an answer or answers for her (and myself) by the time we opened.

Sue kept talking to me as I unlocked the door to let myself in the library and she put her returned materials in the outdoor book-drop. I had not traversed more than 10 yards into the building when I heard banging on the door. Sue had accidentally put all her outgoing mail and her newspaper in the book-drop. I reassured her she was not the first person to ever do this. I went and got the keys, retrieved her personal items, and, after checking in and checking my e-mail, started researching onion harvesting.

From my perspective, which I have cultivated by monitoring the responses of our patrons for over fifteen years, service that is considered *excellent*—in our medium-sized library, located in our rural county of 65,000—is service that is very personal. For much—but of course not all—of our service population, anonymity is not the relationship that is desired. At all points of public service in our libraries, knowing someone's name can be just a start; knowing their children's names, the breeds of their pets, what neighborhoods they live in, a few of their hobbies and, of course, their reading, listening or even viewing preferences, is the familiarity level preferred by many of the patrons we encounter daily in our county service district.

I am accustomed to being stopped in the grocery store or on the street and asked a reference question. I am often queried about a service or asked if we have a certain title in our holdings. I pull out my smart phone and, while talking to them, show them that I'm e-mailing their question to my work account and that I'll get back to them as soon as I am able to do so. If my internal memory of our catalog doesn't serve me, I'll also pull up our actual catalog on my phone and check for them, right there on the spot, as to whether we have the title. If the library is open when this occurs I just call in their request to the person on the reference desk. The occasional look of amazement and the inevitable thank you make these interruptions of my personal time quite worth it.

When I go about my personal business in town, whether I'm at a restaurant, the mechanic, the bank, or the tailor, I almost always tell people where I work. I usually get some sort of response – from how much they love and use the library to some confession about how they have an overdue fine or haven't been through the doors in ten years. Sadly too, I am now often questioned by admitted non-users as to whether books and libraries are dead. Regardless of the comment or question, I am determined to find a way to answer it that puts my workplace in a positive light and expands their notions of what a modern library is and what it has to offer them.

Seemingly regardless of how many feature stories our local paper runs about the library's offerings of downloadable audio-books and our huge selection of popular music and films, most non-users have serendipitous reactions when I tell them that we offer these materials and so much more. If they seem genuinely impressed I go on to tell them about our



book clubs, movie nights, lectures and writing workshops, and youth programs, as well as our free holiday craft nights. By this point I feel I have sealed the deal. I honestly have some faith that they are now going to do some combination of three things: use the library, say good things about the library, or at the very least, think happy thoughts about the library.

Do I always enjoy this blurred boundary, this lack of delineation between my work and personal life? No, I don't. There are times when, unlike the seeming majority of our patrons, what I would most value is some anonymity. I've entertained the idea of a wig and sunglasses in public, but never too seriously. However, sometimes I will skip the Saturday farmer's market in the summer because I am simply feeling too overexposed to the public. If a person approaches me to tell me that they were treated less than optimally at my library, it's sometimes all I can do to not say, "I am off-duty right now. Sorry." But I never do. I don't feel servile because of this. Instead, I choose to feel empowered that they believe in me enough to think I can fix it.

When I try to solve a patron's problems, whether I am on duty or off, I feel elegant and energized when I pull it off, even if I am sometimes hiding a somewhat clenched jaw behind my smile. I remind myself often that I am unequal parts researcher, diplomat, cheerleader, teacher, free speech advocate, social worker, technical whiz-bang, and, ultimately, a Jungian librarian archetype upon which a patron will project whatever it is they need me to be. Lest I've misled you, I am no saint by any stretch, and I admit I sometimes find myself muttering, "I'd like to thank the Academy..." as I'm walking away from an difficult interaction that I've had to address using my very best acting skills.

In helping the rural library user, finding the balance between delivering what they're really seeking and staying within the boundaries of professionalism is an art. Many of us discover that sometimes the best way to approach the rules of art is to bend them. There are times when a library user asks for something that the rules say we should not be giving them or doing for them. Yet who among those of us who serve the public has not occasionally sat down and done something such as fill out a free e-mail account application for someone? Why do this? Because we know that to wait for patrons to type it on their own would take up their allotted internet time for the day and frustrate them—and us—further. I knew a librarian who once made a loan to an elderly woman to pay for heating oil one winter because she knew the bureaucracy was failing this patron as surely as she knew she would be repaid. I am not suggesting you go this far. However, service delivery that can make your library the place for which a user is grateful and even happy to pay taxes, is sometimes service that might be a bit outside of the box.

One of my favorite services to provide is direct but casual education regarding intellectual freedom. While professionalism in the library is a flexible art, adherence to the principles of privacy, confidentiality, and the freedom to read and seek information are not to be compromised. When a patron is disappointed that we don't keep a record of all the books they have checked out in the past, I like to explain to them how this is really in service to their privacy. I give them ideas about how to keep their own lists if they are still disgruntled, but usually they are relieved to know that even though they can't know what they read last year, neither can a government agent.



Perhaps the greatest challenge in the delivery of excellent library service is simply how hard it can be to get out the message that the library has some service or services that everyone would be thrilled to partake in – if only they knew we were offering them! Really, it's only those who tell me they think libraries are dinosaur institutions or a waste of taxpayer money that bring me down. The challenge of encountering these attitudes is to convince those who hold them that they need to relinquish and transform them, and become *really grateful* for the existence of THEIR LIBRARY. I've made it my personal service mission to attempt to do something similar to the sentiment reflected in the old adage about diplomacy; the one where it is defined as the art of telling someone to go to hell in such a way that they look forward to the trip. So usually now, after I cheerfully illuminate to these doubters and naysayers just how much we have to offer them and just how wrong they were for thinking otherwise, many of them do seem quite enthusiastically ready for a trip to the library, or at least back to their gardens to harvest some onions. 🌿



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Vol./No.	Theme	Deadline	Pub. Date	Guest Editor
Vol 17 • No 4 Winter 2011	<i>Connecting to Collections</i>	November 1, 2011	December 15, 2011	Robyn Ward Lewis & Clark College
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