Customer Service Series: Part Two

The Ethics of Library Customer Service:

Fair Treatment for Everyone

Arrowhead Library System

With Pat Wagner –patternresearch.com

We'll start at the top of the hour.

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The Ethics of Library Customer Service:
Fair Treatment for Everyone

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Mission and Values

Arrowhead Library System enhances the value of all types of libraries to their communities by cultivating collaboration, technological innovation, and professional development; and enriches the quality of life by providing direct services for those without a public library and access to electronic resources for all people in northeastern Minnesota.

We believe in...

- The worth and appreciation of diverse points of view
- Each individual's right to free and equal access to information and ideas
- The value of individuals, community, and culture
- The importance of innovation in meeting evolving customer needs and expectations

What If...

You walk into your local bank, medical or dental clinic, pharmacy, or municipal office where taxes are paid. You can hear clerks at the counter talking about the personal details of the lives of their customers. You see them offer "special" favors to people in the line in front of you that aren't available to you.

How would you feel?

Ethical Challenges

- **Do privileged people get better class of service?**
  Why aren't perks for everyone, all the time?
- **What about "Use Your Own Judgment"?**
  Do we require customers "earn" good service?
- **Just because it feels good, is it right?**
  Special treatment for family and friends?
- **Ethical standards clash:**
  Being nicer to some people out of respect?

Caveat

Exceptions, meaning special treatment,
are decided by the library as a whole,
via principles, policies, and procedures,
with input from stakeholders–
not just your individual opinion.

Agenda

- What are library ethics?
- Four ethical standards
- Customer service standards
- Your first steps

Agenda

What are library ethics?

Q: What are Library Ethics?

What do you think *ethics* means?

Compare your answer to the list compiled on the next slide.

A: What are Library Ethics?

- ***Study* of morality: right and wrong**
- **More than how you *feel***
- **Requires research and evidence**
- **Requires a transparent process**
- **Our decisions and actions**
- **How we treat everyone, everyday**

What Shapes Our Ethics?

- **How our brains works:** ***Friend or Enemy?***
- **Religious and spiritual traditions**
- **Rule of Law: 2000 years (Plato)**
- **Magna Carta: 1215 A.D.**
  - ***Safety for the stranger: equal treatment***
- **English common law**
- **The United States Bill of Rights**

The Bill of Rights

First Amendment: Individuals have the **legal right to express ideas** without governmental interference and *to read and listen to the ideas of others.*

The Supreme Court has decided that protections stated in the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 9th Amendments imply a *Constitutional right to privacy.*

Rule of Law

- **Ordinary and accessible:**
  - **easy to understand**
  - **transparent process**
- **Applies to everyone equally:**
  - **no special privileges**
  - **no special class or group**

Why Are Ethics Important?

- **Build credibility:**
  - *Earn trust and respect.*
- **Set standards for decisions:**
  - *Increase productivity.*
- **Reduce unhealthy conflict:**
  - *Establish respected rules.*

Agenda

Four Ethical Standards

The Four Standards

- *Transparency* **in governance**
- *Equal treatment* **for everyone.**
- *Privacy* **for information users.**
- *Access to information* **for all.**

Transparency

Transparency

- **Follow state open meeting laws.**
- **Rules are written and posted.**
- **Avoid library/academic jargon.**
  - **Average folk can follow rules.**
- **No “secret” services**

Practical Transparency

- **Are signs self-explanatory?**
- **How are first-timers treated?**
- **Are staff *gatekeepers:* keeping secrets?**
- **Are difficult people lied to?**
- **Are secrets kept from personnel?**
- **Are decisions made transparently?**

Equal Treatment

Equal Treatment

- **No special treatment for buddies**
- **No special treatment for elites**
- **Everyone subject to same rules.**
- **Everyone receives respect: manners and goodwill.**

Practical Equality

- The look on your face
- The tone of your voice
- The amount of time you spend
- Your posture and gestures
- The speed of the transaction
- Your willingness to follow-through

Privacy

Privacy

- **Protection of circ/usage records:**
  - **Respond only to court orders.**
  - **Question subpoenas.**
- **Physical privacy in library**
- **Privacy extends to staff as well.**

Practical Privacy

- Not broadcasting sensitive information
- Procedures for dealing with media
- No comments on customer materials
- Private protocol for "holds" shelves
- State laws regarding privacy posted
- Public terminals: private or public?

Access for All

Access to Information for All

- **Hours for working class people**
- **Services for all residents:**
  - **Illiterate, non-English-speaking**
  - **Information in many formats**
- **Online services for 21st century**
- **Cataloging: help or hindrance?**

Practical Access

- Lighting in stacks, study areas, etc.
- Safety on stairs, bathrooms, outdoors
- ADA followed in word and deed
- "Fine-free" increases circulation.
- Keeping "Paper" alternatives to digital
- Can people sit at service desks?
- Satellite access; easy-to-use services

Agenda

Customer service standards

Practical Standards

Customer service ethics
at a library's front desk
start with ethical standards
for the entire library.

Practical Standards

- Civility clause in job description
- Clearly written expectations
- Ethics included in evaluations
- Staff meetings regarding ethics
- Involvement in state association
- Professional development collection

Practical Standards

- Training on current library ethics
- No special privileges for insiders
- Strict guidelines regarding nepotism
- Strict guidelines regarding cronyism
- Yearly review of state library law
- Legal review with library attorney

Your First Steps

Your First Steps

What are two things you could do in the next week?

Compare your answer to what we have listed on the next slide.

Your First Steps

- **Share this information with others.**
- **Write down your four standards.**
- **Review policies for consistency.**
- **Study the bigger picture.**
- **Learn other professional ethics.**