

SERVICE EXERCISE

There are numerous ways libraries can improve their service to patrons without adding additional elements. Outlined below are some evidence-based suggestions for ways to improve patron experiences.

Customer service

Having a formal customer service statement allows staff to orient themselves and focus their energies in desired places (Bayer & Llewellyn, 2011; Saunders, 2013; Schmidt, 2014). It sets the groundwork for quality customer service by outlining what that looks like within the library. It also creates a rubric by which staff can be congratulated for extraordinary service.

Outline core competencies, provide them to staff as part of the employee manual, and make them easily available (Ippoliti, 2014; Saunders, 2013). As part of the core competencies, describe the observable behavior that should accompany each competency (Bayer & Llewellyn, 2011). This provides staff with a definitive understanding of organizational expectations and culture. Try to keep the core competencies simple, aspirational, and user focused. Don't forget to include all levels of staff while drafting the core competencies and customer service statement. This will help staff feel invested and heard (Ippoliti, 2014; Schmidt, 2014).

Go on a "service safari" to refresh your perspective – leave the library and experience customer service as a customer. Note the various steps necessary to obtain the service, keeping track of what was good, what was outstanding, and what could be improved (Schmidt, 2012).

While a more long-term plan, hire strategically, being sure to include customer service as an element in the job description (Bayer & Llewellyn, 2011; Schmidt, 2014).

Evaluation

Provide periodic performance reviews to all staff members. This allows staff to receive feedback regarding their work, including customer service, and refocus their behavior as feedback dictates (Bayer & Llewellyn, 2011). Managers should be held to a high standard; they need to provide an example for other staff to emulate, being respectful and welcoming towards patrons, even when only library staff are present (Saunders, 2013).

Both during formal performance reviews and informally in the work place, managers should acknowledge and express gratitude for librarians' emotional labor when dealing with challenging situations. When department heads and library directors openly recognize the emotional energy their employees expend while providing quality service in difficult situations, employees find it easier to manage their emotions and continue providing good service (Matteson & Miller, 2014; Shuler & Morgan, 2013). Support should be given regarding challenging circumstances and all levels of staff should be provided with training around emotional management in customer service and burn-out (Shuler & Morgan, 2013).

Provide library patrons various avenues to communicate with the library regarding their customer service experiences; this may include avenues such as surveys (paper or online), focus groups, and online forms. It can also be useful to ask staff about perceived patron satisfaction, to compare levels with reported patron satisfaction; this could provide direction regarding staff training. Continually soliciting feedback is

crucial; it allows library staff to access their current efforts and adjust them as needed on a rolling basis (Saunders, 2013).

Outreach

Be sure to maintain an online presence in today's digital world. Librarians should be interacting with patrons and potential patrons via the internet, whether that's Twitter, Facebook, or Google (Bell, 2012). When posting online, care should be taken to sound human and conversational, as well as soliciting interaction (King, 2015; Sandler, 2014).

Without patrons, libraries are empty. Large amounts of energy should be expended to retain current library patrons as well as attract new ones. Providing outstanding service will produce outstanding patrons; it is less expensive to retain patrons than to replace them (Sandler, 2014).

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