

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Although the public generally considers public libraries as “safe” places in their community as with all public facilities, this is not necessarily the case. People of all ages, races, religions, and walks of life may enter the public library and this, its greatest strength, can also be its greatest challenge. “What has proved to exacerbate the growing aggression in the library workplaces of the 90s is the wide range of new learning tools available that attract a greater number and diversity of people.”* Children, young mothers, and senior citizens use the public library often but so, sometimes, do the emotionally and mentally disturbed, the sexually deviant, and substance abusers. Good customer service and basic conflict resolution skills will help library staff to solve most of the problems they encounter during their work day but sometimes the issues are more complicated or more dangerous.

Library security is everyone’s job. Everyone should be aware of what is happening around him or her and be prepared to step in when an issue needs addressing, especially if escalation can be avoided or prevented. Even if a library can afford to hire security staff, security officers cannot be everywhere and they should not be expected to handle every little conflict or problem behavior. This manual is designed to help library staffs address problem behavior in their libraries. Problem behavior is any behavior that violates or restricts the rights of others to use the library and/or is specified in the library’s code of conduct or posted rules.

The SAFE HARBOR MANUAL does NOT discuss safe building issues, security equipment, hiring of security staff, or personnel related subjects. It is also not a disaster manual.

Nine librarians from assorted libraries in the Alliance Library System formed the Safe Harbor Taskforce to write policies, procedures, and even scripts in most cases to help front line library staff handle a variety of situations. Additional sample policies from these and other libraries are included in the Appendices. These libraries vary in size from a service population of a few thousand to well over a 100,000. Readers are encouraged to discuss the issues cited and develop their own policies and manuals. Many smaller libraries may never run into some of the problems discussed here, but they should be aware that they have happened in other locations. They may want to change the language or the approach and make the policies uniquely their own. That is fine and what the taskforce expects. Libraries of all sizes are encouraged to think through the problems presented here and be prepared to address them if they should appear

*Canal, Bruce A. “Libraries Attract More Than Readers: Investing in Library Safety”. Indiana Libraries, v. 17 no. 1, 1998. P. 15

in their libraries. These policies and procedures are not guaranteed to produce the results that a library may seek. No two situations are exactly alike and customers' responses to an employee's words or actions will vary as well.

Although the taskforce tried to standardize the format, a different person wrote each policy. They show a variety of approaches and priorities. Some will appeal to you more than others and help you choose your own authorial voice. There are no perfect solutions for these problems, and instead of black and white answers, the policies and appendices sometimes explore the varying shades of gray. **As a taskforce, we encourage librarians to choose what they like from this manual (whole policies and procedures or bits and pieces) and to have their policies or manual reviewed by an attorney.** This manual was written at a certain point in time and the taskforce members had various situations in mind as they wrote the policies. Time, laws, and situations change. Only a library staff, board, and the library attorney can decide if a policy is appropriate for that library. Keep in mind that attorneys vary in their interpretation of the law and may prefer another method of addressing a problem situation.

This manual was written by public librarians for public libraries, but that does not mean that the policies and procedures developed here would not work just as well in an academic, special, or school library. We encourage librarians from other types of libraries to use what we have written and adapt it to their own situations.

For sample introductions to similar manuals for a public library, see Appendix I.

TO BEGIN

EVERY LIBRARY SHOULD:

1. Designate a **Person-in-Charge** for every hour the library is open. It is also important to set up a hierarchy of authority in case of the absence of the director. First in the hierarchy might be the assistant director, then the head of adult services or reference, head of circulation (since a large percent of the problems happen here), head of children's services, and head of technical services. This will vary from library to library. In especially small libraries, even if there is only one person on staff, the person needs to know the limit of their authority and who to call when.
2. Decide who has the authority to eject a customer.
3. Post an emergency phone list at all service desks. This would include at least the emergency and non-emergency numbers for the police, fire department, ambulance or rescue squad, emergency services, and poison control center. It would be helpful to also list the information that a caller should automatically provide when they call—their name, the name of the library, the address of the library, the library's telephone number, what has happened, the exact location within the building where the problem is located, and who is involved in the situation.
4. Have a Code of Conduct or a Conduct Ordinance.
5. Post "Rules of Conduct". These can take several forms.

ISSUES TO COVER IN BEHAVIORAL POLICIES

PLA HANDBOOK FOR WRITERS OF PUBLIC LIBRARY POLICIES

suggests that when writing Rules for Behavior, the following issues should be addressed:²

1. First Amendment rights
2. Respect for the rights of others
3. Equitable use of facilities and services
4. Safety of public and staff
5. Protection of materials, equipment, and facilities
6. Compliance with federal, state, and local laws.
7. Clear statements of standards and consistent enforcement

Another important article to read is "proposed guidelines for the development of policies regarding user behavior and library usage".* The American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee developed these recommendations.

* PLA Policy Manual Committee. PLA HANDBOOK FOR WRITERS OF PUBLIC LIBRARY POLICIES. American Library Association, c1993.

*"proposed guidelines for the development of policies regarding user behavior and library usage". NEWSLETTER ON INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM, September 1992.vol. XLI, no. 5. p. 135-136.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

The first line of defense against bad behavior in a library is a good customer service policy. The Golden Rule is to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Good service involves several very simple rules. People who work with the public should smile, be approachable, and cultivate positive body language and a friendly voice tone. Empathetic, they listen and patiently work through problems and seek alternative solutions that may meet the customer's need. When referring a customer to another department, they call ahead and make sure someone is there to answer the customer's question. They help the customer cut through red tape and make sure they receive the service they came in for. They answer a phone by the second ring, identify themselves and the library, and ask the caller if they may place them on hold. They check back to make sure the customer has been helped. If there are complaints about a service or a policy they pass that information on. Sometimes the best customer service is realizing when a policy is unfair or not working as it should and then changing it. Good public service means translating library jargon and computerese into everyday English.

A library staff promotes a safe environment when they greet or acknowledge customers as they enter the library or department and when they occasionally leave their desks to talk to customers out in the public area of the library. By letting customers know that there is someone ready and willing to help them, a staff person makes the customer feel valued. This also discourages inappropriate behavior because the customer is no longer anonymous.

An example of a good customer service policy follows:

Kewanee Public Library District Customer Service Policy

The Kewanee Public Library District strives for excellent library services, which includes a quality facility and collection. The library staff provides accurate, efficient and friendly service to all patrons at all times. The patron, as taxpayer, is the customer to whom the staff is ultimately responsible.

The Customer Service of the Kewanee Public Library District is the foundation for all staff interactions with the general public. All other library policies should be interpreted in light of the principles outlined below:

- The library offers the same quality of service to all patrons, regardless of age, race, sex, sexual orientation, nationality, educational background, physical limitations, religious affiliation or any other criteria, which may be the source of discrimination.
- Library staff will treat every patron with equal respect and every request with equal importance. Patrons are the reason the library exists.

- Judgment calls are to be made in the patron's favor. If a mistake is made, it should always be to the patron's advantage. Staff members will not be penalized for errors made in good faith pursuit of this policy.
- If a staff member is unable to comply with a request, the patron will be offered an alternative, such as an interlibrary loan, referral to another department, etc.
- Library policies and procedures exist to make library resources available on an equitable basis. Staff members are familiar with library policies and are able to articulate them and to explain them.

Demeanor

The impression made on our patrons profoundly affects the library's image and on-going support. Each staff member, while at work, is a representative of the library, and is therefore expected to conduct oneself in a manner that is consistent with the library's mission and policies.

It is imperative that every staff/patron interaction be a positive one for the patron. A friendly helpful demeanor usually ensures a positive experience, even when the message conveyed is not a pleasant one. Thus, it is essential to remember that the manner in which a person looks, speaks, and acts conveys an attitude, just as the tone of voice and choice of words affect a message.

Ethics

The needs and requests of the library patrons must always be taken seriously and treated with respect. Equal consideration and treatment will be given to users within established guidelines and a non-judgmental environment.

All interactions and transactions between a library patron or group of patrons and the library will be considered confidential and will be discussed only in a professional context. (Such matters include, but are not limited to: registration information, materials selection, loan transaction records, reference questions, patron card status, etc.). Staff should remember that discussion of confidential patron issues should be limited to non-public areas.

Staff Operating Procedures and Instructions

- Be punctual. Service commences at the advertised hour we open and full service is available until the hour we close.
- Wear your nametag at all times.
- Answer the phone in a timely manner, using a greeting, identifying the library and yourself, and offering help.
- Smile!!!
- Greet all patrons. Acknowledge a patron's presence by looking up and making eye contact or greeting them verbally. If you are busy with another patron, acknowledge the patron who is waiting and explain that you will help the new patron as soon as you can.
- Maintain friendly contact with library users without engaging in lengthy conversations. If it is hard to break away, explain that you enjoy talking but you need to get back to work.
- Unless circumstances dictate otherwise, keep your voice low so it doesn't disturb library users.

- Keep conversations with other staff to a minimum. If the library business must be discussed at length, do so away from the public areas.
- Avoid accepting personal phone calls while you are on the desk. Place personal calls when you are on personal time.
- Look up and around periodically. When appropriate, walk around and notice if there are people in the stacks or at the terminals who might need help. Being helpful to patrons takes precedence over deskwork. People aren't an interruption of our business - they are our business.
- Try to avoid merely pointing. Whenever possible, escort the patron to the appropriate area.
- When referring a patron to another staff member, ask the staff member to help the patron (Will you help Mrs. Brown with some Consumer Report information?) instead of leaving the patron to fend for himself.
- Conduct transactions in a helpful, pleasant tone of voice. Keep any impatience, annoyance, or implication of ignorance from your voice. It's always better to presume that the patron is unfamiliar with the library, the Dewey Decimal system, and the on-line catalog.
- Unless there is a specific discipline, do not reprimand or scold patrons.
- Use plain language when speaking to patrons.
- When there is a problem, document it by filling out an Incident Report form.
- When you have a suggestion to make or information to share, document it by filling out a Staff Comment form.
- If there will be a lapse of time before you can obtain information for a patron, tell the patron you will call them. Don't tell the patron to call you.
- Leave parking spaces near the library for patron use.

Adopted by the Library Board
January 8, 2002

HANDLING CONFRONTATION

As well as being knowledgeable of library rules and policies, public service staffs need training in how to handle difficult situations. They should be taught ways to defuse situations before they become confrontations but sometimes even with everyone's best efforts, problems may escalate. DEFUSING THE ANGRY PATRON gives the following tips:

- When faced with a complaint, listen and sympathize before restating the problem and offering alternative solutions
 - If a patron accuses you or someone else, translate the comment into a request for service that you can provide.
 - Never get pulled into a discussion of an accusation, and don't ask questions about it.
- Do not respond reflexively to an accusation or repeat the negative label. *

Beth McNeil and Denise Johnson in PATRON BEHAVIOR IN LIBRARIES make another distinction. * They explain that the library employee needs to determine who has ownership of the problem. For example the library *owns* the problem when someone breaks a rule like talking too loudly or using library equipment beyond the agreed upon time frame. In this case the librarian would approach the customer, give them a copy of the rules, and explain that although they may not be aware of it, they have broken a library rule. The librarian would explain the consequences if the person does not correct their behavior.

The customer *owns* the behavior when he/she is critical of staff or the library, complains about waiting in line, or asks that a book be removed from the shelves. When addressing the customer owned problem, the staff person first needs to look behind the anger to what the real issue is. For example, when a customer complains that things are disorganized maybe they are frustrated in their inability to find a particular piece of information. In this case, the staff person, using active listening skills might respond with, "Is there something I can help you find? I know the online catalog and the library collections may be overwhelming and confusing at times."

Staff members should deal with problem patrons in the same manner that they themselves would like to be approached: with courtesy, tact, calmness, and most of all, common sense. It is important to understand that there is not a simple "recipe" for solutions. The way in which the staff approaches the situation should depend to a large extent on which type of behavior the patron is exhibiting.

* Rubin, Rhea Joyce. DEFUSING THE ANGRY PATRON. Neal Schuman Publishers, Inc. c2000. p. 75

* McNeil Beth and Denise J. Johnson. PATRON BEHAVIOR IN LIBRARIES. American Library Association, c1996.p127 –133.

Because of the uniqueness of each situation, COMMON SENSE should play a large part in any encounter with a problem patron. Most workers' instincts will tell them when to be sympathetic or when to back off if a patron is potentially violent. Whatever the case, handling problem patrons should be a team procedure.

The team approach to problem behavior provides the staff with security and self-confidence, both of which are necessary to deal effectively with problem patrons. However, in order for the team approach to work, all members of the staff must know what their responsibilities are when a problem situation arises.

When faced with a complaint, staff should:

1. Remain calm. Staff should not give the appearance of being combative but not appear fearful either.
2. Listen attentively and elicit all information about the complaint.
3. Be respectful and professional. Use Mr., Mrs., or Ms. instead of first names.
4. Be aware of how they are speaking. Speak slowly and clearly and, if using a loud tone, lower their voice.
5. Empathize with the customer and try to understand exactly how he/she feels. If a customer is assured the staff person understands his/her feelings of anger, then there is no need to express that anger at a higher level. Say, "I am sorry you are frustrated (or that this happened to you or that you feel this way). Let us see what we can do to solve this problem or what alternative we might offer you."
6. Paraphrase using the staff person's own words to summarize the problem.
7. Secure his/her confirmation that the paraphrase was an accurate restatement of what was said.
8. If the customer says the paraphrase was not accurate, try again until the customer is satisfied with the phrasing of the problem.
9. Make a contribution only when the paraphrasing has been accepted by the customer.
10. When the customer wants to speak, ask him/her to accurately paraphrase what the staff person just said and receive agreement before speaking.

Paraphrasing is especially useful during arguments of highly emotional issues when one side tends to prepare a rebuttal while the other side is still speaking. This method insures that both sides really listen because each side must be able to restate the other's position. The resulting communication is usually clearer and the relationships between participants is frequently enhanced.

CONFRONTATIONS*

Confrontations with visitors or others are almost inevitable. This is not always a function of security, but should first be attempted by assigned staff in an area of responsibility. Guidelines for methods that reduce the potential for escalation should be disseminated and rehearsed by all staff members. You begin with a written policy. Published copies should be available to all staff members, and for distribution to visitors when necessary. These are general guidelines for action when a confrontation is inevitable.

Do's	Don'ts
Remain calm	Show fear, anger, panic
Listen Carefully	Use a moralizing or condescending tone
Explain your position in a simple, friendly way	Lose you dignity
Use analogies to support your position	Become sidetracked by extraneous issues
Suggest realistic alternatives	Argue the point
Leave a plausible way out for the subject (saving face), whenever possible	Make physical contact
Give the subject written confirmation of rules and policies	Make the confrontation personal
Call for security or police when necessary	Bluff by threatening to call the police

* Layne, Stevan. The Cultural Property Protection Manual, 2nd ed. Layne Consultants International, c2002 p.71.

EJECTING UNRULY PATRONS*

In order to effectively deal with the removal of a person from a business or institution, it is necessary to establish parameters, or “rules of engagement,” more or less. If you place yourself in the shoes of the subject of removal, you certainly would hope that there is a reason behind the request to leave. As a visitor, you may be unaware of the rule you have inadvertently violated. It makes sense, therefore, to determine, publish, and disseminate a definite list of rules, or code of conduct, violation of which may lead to ejection. While reasonable rules or acceptable conduct may vary with the type of business and operating philosophies, the list of violations below may be suited for application in most businesses;

- Use of or under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Non-compliance with reasonable standards of personal hygiene
- Refusal to follow directions of staff
- Consumption of food or beverages in prohibited areas
- Violation of controlled or restricted area
- Continual violation of barriers
- Failure to control minor children
- Attempted theft or vandalism
- Interruptive behavior
- Spousal abuse
- Child abuse

Once a violation is determined, it is important to document how the determination was made, such as “reported by patron,” or “observed by video surveillance,” or “confronted staff member.” Violation of known or posted rules is an incident, and should be recorded as such on proper incident report form.

First Response. Initial response to the incidence should also be a matter of practical procedure. In many institutions, it is common practice to “call security” for everything. This tends to undermine the real intent of on-site security, and when used excessively, interrupts normal operations and lessens the ability of other staff to deal with everyday problems. When a violation, or potential violation occurs within view of a staff member, it is the responsibility of that staff member to take immediate action, as long as that action does not place the staff in any jeopardy. For example, if a patron is accessing restricted areas, it is a simple matter for the staff member to say, “excuse me, can we help you find something?”

Non-Compliance. If the patron refuses to comply, the incident has been escalated to the next level of response, which may be a staff supervisor, or security officer. Your written policy defines how you want such confrontations to

* Layne, Stevan. THE CULTURAL PROPERTY PROTECTION MANUAL, 2nd ed. Layne Consultants International, C2002. p.73

take place. It is advisable to settle these matters as quietly, and as professionally as possible. Once the incident has reached the level where the institution, by PRE-DEFINED policy dictates they be asked to leave, the next level of response is necessary.

THE POLICE

Developing a good relationship with the local police department is one of the library's most important security measures. Sharing the library's problem behavior manual with the police is probably a good first step to begin discussions on how to handle problem behavior. It will open their eyes to the types of things that can and do happen in the library. They can give the library good advice on many of the issues covered in the manual. For legal advice, the library should talk to an attorney.

Inviting the police in to help train the staff in a subject like drug identification or when to call the police is another step in relationship building. Asking police to do a walk through to identify building security issues benefits both the library and the police. If there is ever a serious problem, they will already be familiar with the building and know where all the exits are located. Help them feel welcome to use the library to write reports by having a desk and coffee available. Seeing a police car in the parking lot or a policeperson in the library will discourage would-be troublemakers and help other users to feel safe. The police will recognize habitual offenders and possibly identify patterns of vandalism or other crimes in relationship to the rest of the community.

TRAINING STAFF

Once a policy and procedural manual is written and approved, a copy should be available at every service desk, and, if possible, given to each employee. Discussion and role-playing will help staff to become more familiar and comfortable with policies and procedures and more capable of applying them in stressful situations. Supervisors should arrange training for new employees as well as refresher training for longer-term employees.

The American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee recommends: "Libraries should develop an ongoing staff training program based upon their user behavior policy. This program should include training to develop empathy and understanding of the social and economic problems of some library users. Training of this nature will increase the likelihood that staff will be able to defuse difficult situations and achieve a satisfactory resolution of actual and potential conflicts."*

In-house training can vary. Other good topics for staff training include:

1. Customer Service. What it is, why it is important, what it means in this library
2. Telephone Etiquette.
3. Active Listening.
4. Defusing Anger and Confrontation.
5. When to Call the Police. Invite someone from the local police department to talk about drugs, gangs, violence, or theft. Have them do a walk through the library and make suggestions on how to make the library a safer place or what to do in various problem situations.
6. Practice Disaster or Emergency Situations. Offer the library as a place for the police department to practice their own training. For example, they might practice a hostage situation where library staff and police play themselves.
7. Understanding Child Abuse. Invite experts from social service agencies in the community to explain what it is and is not and when and how to report child abuse.
8. Understanding Mental Illness. Again invite professionals or other experts from social service agencies to explain what it is and how to handle specific behaviors.
9. Emergency Evacuation of the Library. How to do it and who is responsible for what.
10. Teamwork.
11. Body Language.
12. Communication Skills.
13. How to Make Our Problem Behavior Manual Better. Discuss what works, what doesn't, and how to rework policies and procedures to make them more effective yet customer friendly.

* "proposed guidelines for the development of policies regarding user behavior and library usage".
NEWSLETTER ON INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM. September 1992, vol. XLI, no. 5. p.135-136.

14. Filling Out an Incident Report. Discuss why incident reports are filed (progressive discipline with a known individual, documentation for a police report, evidence in a court case, protection in a liability suit, documentation of need to change a policy). Discuss how to be a witness.
15. Bloodborne Pathogen Issues and procedures.
16. Safety Training. Practice locating and using fire extinguishers, using the elevator call box and procedure, and using Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS).
17. Discussion of what constitutes a criminal act as opposed to just a breach of policy.