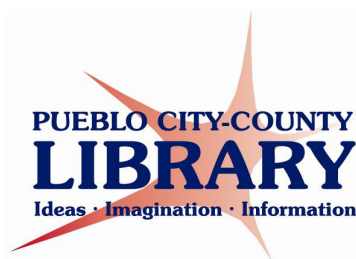


## *Why is being a great communicator in a library increasingly important?*

### **Trends in libraries:**

- **More customers are using GOOGLE to find answers to the typical questions we have been asked for years, especially over the phone:**
  - **What's the population of Chicago?**
  - **Who was the 15<sup>th</sup> president of the United States?**
    - **So the telephone calls are fewer, but when they occur they may be regarding more difficult / lengthy questions**
  
- **Roving Reference and customer service**
  - **The trend in Seattle and other leading libraries is to get out from behind the desk and to rove, and to be proactive with customers --- libraries are rethinking the service model from the customer's perspective:**
    - **Richmond Public Library in Vancouver: "We point with our feet, not with our fingers"**
    - **"Saying Yes" and Floating in Denver**
    - **"Getting out from behind the desk" in Westport, CT**
    - **Surveys: 50% of customers are "hidden" – these are the customers who will never approach the desk**
  - **Need to rethink the desk—moving away from the concept of a traditional sit-down service desk and developing the concept of a light, mobile, stand-up service point where the focus is 100% on the customer.**
  
- **The Millennials are here!**
  - **Born after 1981**
  - **Instant messaging, cell phones, mp3players and multitasking**
  - **Visually orientated, easily bored, used to having the best of everything**
  
- **Library as contemplative and social places (Library as Place)**
  - **teaching, learning, research, community, fun**



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## Customer Service (Libraries as service organizations)

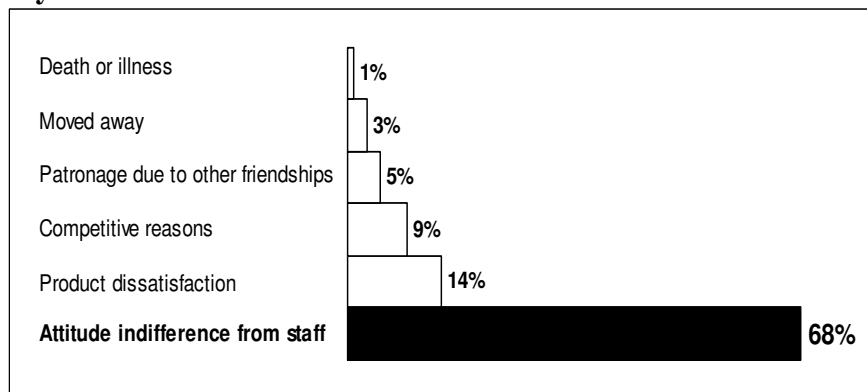
\*info from *Customer Service Excellence: A Concise Guide for Librarians* by Darlene E. Weingand

### Language is a reflection of thought:

- **Patron** – associated with act of giving support and protection as occurred in the renaissance between royalty and artists—impression is of unequal status--- the more powerful protecting the less powerful
- **User** – term is quite unspecific/ widely associated with the drug culture
- **Customer** – implies payment for a product or service—and is a better reflection of what actually transpires between the library and the people in the community---with this term the mythology of a “free” library is addressed.

The perception and use of the term library *customer* is the 1<sup>st</sup> step to transform the service tradition from a vague philosophy into a vital operational mandate.

### Why library customers leave:



*From the Ontario Library Association/ Motiv-Action Achievement Systems*

*Customers assess service based on how they feel they are treated and valued as people, over and above other indicators that may seem more important to the service provider.*

\* Played 16 minutes of the fabulous Arch Lustberg's **Communicator** Collection: **Face It! Using Your Face to Sell Your Message**, 2004, Library Video Network, 320 York Road, Towson, MD 21204, 1-800-441-TAPE, [www.Ivn.org](http://www.Ivn.org)

## **A customer's perception of being treated with care and respect can minimize other service difficulties.**

Fundamental issues for staff working with the public:

- Customer Service:
  - responsiveness to customer requests whether or not the customer is visibly present
  - ability to put customers at ease in stressful situations
  - patience
  - ability to solve problems both independently and as part of a team
- Oral communication:
  - good listening skills
  - ability to clearly communicate concerns / information so that understanding is reached
- Pressure and adaptability:
  - ability to handle multiple requests
  - multitasking
  - toleration of stress and frustration
  - adaptability to changing work conditions
  - ability to deal with crisis
- Interpersonal sensitivity:
  - responsiveness to customer concerns
  - ability to calm down upset customers
  - respect for coworkers' responsibilities and priorities
  - assertiveness not aggressiveness

Libraries are staff intensive operations—as much as 70% of the budget is consumed by staff cost.

Staff – customer interaction has the greatest effect on customer satisfaction.

*COMMUNICATION is like a powerful medicine: a proper dose of correct ingredients can restore health; an improper dose or wrong ingredients can produce ill effects.*

**PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS:**

- Acknowledge your customer's problem
- Carefully probe for information to clarify the scope of the problem
- Make sure that the customer is aware that you understand the problem
- Mutually look with your customer for alternative solutions
- Mutually agree on a plan to solve the problem
- Follow up with your customer to make sure the problem is resolved

***COMMUNICATION: THE LANGUAGE OF  
CUSTOMER SERVICE***

## TEN "MAGIC" PHRASES from Darlene E. Weingand's book

### **1. "Of course we can try to get it for you."**

A sentence that should *never* be heard in a library without this corresponding phrase is "No, we don't have it." In other words, no customer should ever be turned away without the assurance that every effort will be made to satisfy his or her request.

### **2. "How may I help you?"**

This open-ended question is far superior to the commonly used, "May I help you?" The simple addition of "how" encourages dialogue and further discussion.

### **3. "Of course we'll waive the fines...and I hope you are feeling better."**

, Every library should have a policy on fines and fees, even if none are to be assessed. Even when a well-written policy is in place, too many staff members interpret it literally and rigidly. Part of the language of the policy – supported by appropriate training and administrative support – should authorize staff to extend every courtesy to customers with special needs. Policies are intended to be guidelines not commandments that can never be broken.

### **4. "I'll be happy to make that call to \_\_\_\_\_ for you."**

This is simple advocacy. Advocacy in the library environment does not mean practicing law. Rather, it is going the extra mile to make sure that the customer is connected with the appropriate referral – and then checking back with both the referral site and the customer to make sure that the information need was satisfied.

### **5. "Did you locate what you wanted? How well does the material meet your needs? Is there something else that I can find for you?"**

This is a combination of closed and open-ended questions that probes into whether the customer has sufficient and appropriate materials. Too many items can be just as much of a problem as too few. Also consider the relationship between reading, listening, and viewing level and customer's age and ability. These phrases are also appropriate when the customer is browsing and engaged in self-service.

**6. "Is this what you are looking for, or shall I investigate further?"**

These phrases further expand the type of interchange in the previous question and can be used quite effectively together in some cases. The compound question assumes that a staff member has been assisting the customer.

**7. "There are several possible ways to address your question. ...Can you give me a little more background?"**

This question continues to probe in greater depth to target appropriate material or information. It can be used together with the previous questions or stand alone as an opening question.

**8. "I'm with a customer at the moment ... May I call you back in just a few minutes?"**

"First come, first served" is more than simply logical; it is also courteous and considerate—to the in-library customer and to the customer on the telephone. However, an additional step should be taken. As soon as the first customer is served, the telephone customer should be called. These sentences underscore the importance of each customer – but the follow-up service must also take place.

**9. "Yes, that item is in, and I'll be happy to hold it for you for forty-eight hours."**

This simple statement demonstrates that several actions are taking place: (1) the staff member has looked for an item and been successful, (2) the customer cannot come to the library immediately and has asked that the item be held, (3) you have made an effort to be responsive to the convenience needs of the customer by holding the item for two days, and (4) you have clearly stated the length of the hold so that the customer understands the time parameters.

**10. "Thank you for using the 'XYZ' library."**

A simple phrase, yet one that is too infrequently expressed. We want our customers to come back and use the library often. This phrase acknowledges that the customer has choices and demonstrates gratitude for the patronage. (Is there any airline that does not thank customers as the airplane lands? If it works in the air, it can work on the ground!)

## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

### **1. *Be aware that your customer needs your attention.***

A simple "Good Afternoon. How can I assist you?" acknowledges the customer's presence. Practice using the language of customer service.

### **2. *Listen to understand.***

Pay attention to what the customer is saying, rather than formulating your own response. Assume that you know nothing about what the customer may want; suppress any assumptions that you may have concerning the customer.

### **3. *Ask Questions to gain information.***

Ask clarifying and open-ended questions. Try to phrase your questions with potential benefits to the customer in mind.

### **4. *Acknowledge when things go wrong.***

Things do not go right all of the time. When the inevitable happens, be honest and forthright with the customer. Expand upon a simple apology and assure the customer that you will make every effort to correct the situation then follow through.

### **5. *Appreciate the customer.***

Always remember that it is the customer who keeps the library in business. Let each customer know how much his or her patronage is valued, and thank the customer for using the library.

### **6. *Serve all customers as they wish to be served.***

Every customer has individual needs and a unique cultural and experiential background. Remind yourself that each customer brings a unique set of needs and expectations to the transaction, and *never* assume that one customer is just like another.