

Public Services Board Report April 2015

In his book, *Crafting the Customer Experience for People not Like You*, Kelly McDonald describes great customer service as service that is delivered to customers “in a way that *they* want. . . in a manner that’s important to *them*.” Certainly, libraries can get tied up in their specific library terminology and create a number of hoops through which patrons must jump in order to gain access to service. McDonald reminds the reader that it is not about what we think the customer should want or expect. Every library system has policies and procedures, and in the past six months, this library system’s staff has been reviewing some of our own policies and procedures that may have contributed to less than stellar customer experience. By looking at some of our limitations and required paperwork from the customer’s point of view, we have made discoveries that have improved both customer service and staff morale.

Policy Changes

One important revision was our change in the amount of fees a person could have on their account without being blocked from using the computer, downloadable services, and the Internet computer. Our previous policy was that any fee on a patron’s account would block their privileges. Someone who owed .25 would find themselves unable to renew their items online. A patron who owed \$5.00, and had their debit card, but no cash handy, was unable to use an Internet computer. We have changed our policy so that our new limit is \$10.00. At \$10.00 a person is blocked, but in an effort to be flexible and responsive to what our patrons are able to offer, if a person can make a payment on the amount, we are happy to override the block so that a person can at least check out materials.

We have also extended the number of renewals we offer, from three to five. At any time that someone else requests the item, the number of renewals goes to zero so that the next patron may have the item. We no longer require that after three renewals, a person return the item for 24 hours before they can check the item out again.

Something else we looked at was paperwork. There were some forms, mostly related to use of the Internet computers, that we asked patrons to complete. We did not retain the forms; they were shredded. Instead of asking patrons to read our policy, and fill out a form stating they had read the policy, we now let our digital policy on each Internet computer satisfy that requirement. Our computer use policy is one of the first screens that pops up on the public Internet computer, and patrons may accept the policy or not (in which case the computer does not log on). Nor do we ask visitors to the Collin County area to fill out a paper registration for a guest pass to the computers. The database we kept of guest pass users has gone the way of the dinosaurs, and visitors are no longer limited to one 14-day pass per year.

We have made access to the computer lab easier by not requiring everyone to have their library card in hand in order to sign onto the computers. This simplification of procedures has made access to the Internet computers faster and smoother for library customers, and has freed library staff to assist the public with computer questions.

The Human Touch

Staff is encouraged now to come out from behind the desks to assist patrons who need assistance in the stacks, help with the online library card registration, or an introduction to our Express Checkout Machines. We always want a staff member present in the lobby area, but

what matters is that the public are welcomed, not the precise location of the staff person behind a desk.

We have given ourselves permission to be more humanitarian! Customers frequently arrive at the library before we open, many of them on foot or by bicycle. On cold mornings, we have asked them if they would like to wait in the vestibule of Hall or the lobby of JJGL. There is still a set of locked doors between those waiting and the interior of the library itself, but we can get those people out of the bad weather.

Recent visitors have seen offerings from other City departments at our libraries. We have partnered with the Emergency Management Division of Public Safety, handing out their Quick Reference Preparedness Guides and DVDs in March. This was followed by buckets of packets that can be used to test toilets for leaks, part of the EPA's "Fix-a-Leak" Campaign, championed locally by the City's Environmental Education department. Other city departments are our customers, too, and they have a lot to offer our many visitors.

Our library customers do not need to know the technology that makes our integrated library system work or the discussions and changes that happen behind the scenes in order to make their visits more pleasant. Our goal is that our customers are happy not only with the book, DVD, or online ebook that they checked out, but that their whole experience at the library was easy and positive. This recommitment to excellent customer service has energized the Public Services department and other library staff.

Communication Matters

Our Public Services department, and the whole Library system, has seen a great deal of change in recent months. We have been working in cat (or dog) years to revise our procedures, to become familiar with new technology in the computer lab, and to learn about the City's budgeting process and various statistical reports. In order to keep everyone aware of the timeline of changes, there have been multiple staff meetings at both buildings in addition to departmental (Public Services) meetings. We have posted a large white board in the work area of each building on which the latest changes are noted for all to see. In addition, I compile and email out the Banana Split (formerly known as the Library Scoop) on a weekly basis. This archived document serves to alert staff to changes, gives them a laugh, and lets them know what is ahead!

At some point, we will pause to update our internal policy documents and our Standard Operating Procedures so that they accurately reflect our changes. For now, however, we are enjoying this "Year of the Patron" and continuing to encourage new ideas that will enhance the experience of the patron and the library staff.

Lisa Bailey
Public Services Coordinator
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