Dealing With Potentially Dangerous Library Customers

PCI Webinars
Are All Hostile Library Customers Dangerous?
Key Idea

We need to plan as if anyone might turn out to be dangerous. Not paranoid: prepared!
Outcomes

- Ensure everyone on the staff knows what to do in emergencies.
- Lower the drama of difficult encounters with library customers.
- Develop consistent responses to challenging customer behavior.
- Improve basic security features of your workplace.
- Institute regular safety programs with professionals.
Agenda

- How We Influence The Behaviors Of Others
- Setting Limits On What Is Acceptable
- Prevent Escalation: Don’t Engage Emotionally
- Offer Distractions And Alternatives
- Trust Your Gut: When To Call The Authorities
Assignment 1

- Cheat sheet and phone tree
- Staff meeting – posters and e-mails
  - Leadership presentation
- Law enforcement speakers
- Supervisor meeting
  - Consistent response
Internal Customer Issues

- Applies to employees, volunteers, trustees, directors, managers, contractors, vendors, etc.
- Yearly program on personnel guidelines:
  - Grievances and employees’ rights
  - Management rights
  - Clarifying issues
- Take all physical threats seriously.
- No one is exempt from the rules.
Bully Rules

- Not all bad behaviors are bullying.
- Micromanagement versus bullying
- Pat’s opinion: Anger management classes don’t work.
- Anti-bullying starts with the hiring process.
Introduction – Section 1

How We Influence
The Behavior of Others
First Impressions

- The look of your face
- The tone of your voice
- Your posture and mannerisms
- The first words you say
The Environment

- Outside: No trash and clean windows
- What the staff wears
- How they see and hear you treat others
- The first signs they read at the library
- Clean, uncluttered, and pretty
Hire for Emotional Maturity

- Calm and friendly demeanor
- Flexible and willing to learn
- Treats others with respect: manners
- Understands personal boundaries
- Understands they’re part of a team
- Likes humans, even if they misbehave
- Likes children and teenagers
People who do bad things are opportunistic. They look for people who seem weak, dark corners, and the chance to do wrong.
Typical Mistakes

- The “professional” look: Disapproving?
- Two levels of service:
  - One for people we know and like
  - One for people we *don’t* know or like
- All supervisors not on the same page
- No supervision on weekends and evenings: *false economies*
Assignment 2

If you *watched* the faces of staff members at service desks, what would this *show* you about the people they are serving?
If you *listened* to the voices of staff members at frontline and service desks, what would this *tell* you about the people they are serving?
Section 2

Setting Limits on
What is Acceptable
Manipulative behavior by library customers is a symptom of inconsistent enforcement of the rules. The problem is the library staff, not the library customer.
The Policy Process

- Transparency breeds respect and trust.
- Include library stakeholders in processes.
- Meetings and advisory boards
- Invite professional advice:
  - Law enforcement and social services
- Engage the media.
- Commonsense signs in library
Typical Mistakes

- Too many rules
- Rules dominate conversations.
- Old ladies versus the teenagers
- Only a few people enforce the rules.
- No method to test and evaluate rules
Assignment 4

How many employees would be able to accurately describe the library or institution’s rules regarding unacceptable behavior?
Prevent Escalation: Don’t Engage Emotionally
Avoid Triggers

- Status issues:
  - Who knows more?
  - Credentials
  - Correcting customers
- The *singsong* condescending voice

*Domination under the guise of service*
Stop Arguing

- Provide information.
- It’s about the library, not your ego.
- Find ways to say yes or agree with them.
- Find ways for them to say yes.
- Avoid political discussions.
- Change the subject:
  - Ask their opinion about something.
Assignment 5

Do you know your own triggers? Ask your friends, family, and colleagues.
Section 4

Offer Distractions and Alternatives
Disengagement

- Can you say *no thank you*?
- Learn to interrupt with a *yes* or *okay*.
- The formula:
  - Thank them.
  - Set the limit.
  - Offer an alternative.
- Walk away or hang up: *stay calm*. 
Alternatives

- Can you lower their frustration?
- Generate options and choices.
- Learn the customer’s destination:
  - Will another path serve to get there?
Distractions

- The toy basket
- Writing it down
- Special offer
- A glass of water
- **Caveat: Don’t lie to escape.**
Assignment 6

Discuss with co-workers how to develop the *option* frame of mind.
Section 5

Trust Your Gut: When to Call the Authorities
Education

- Your legal and law enforcement community can help.
- Who has jurisdiction for what issues?
- What you can and can’t do
- Consistent and transparent creation: Rules, communication, and enforcement of rules
Resources

- *The Gift of Fear*: Gavin de Becker
- *Prisoners of Hate*: Aaron Beck
- *Stop Walking On Eggshells*: Mason and Kreger
- *I Hate You--Don’t Leave Me*: Kreisman and Straus
- *Don’t Shoot the Dog*: Karen Pryor
- *Fixing Broken Windows*: Kelling and Coles

- [https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/)  
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