

# FOCUS

## on staff conduct

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The general public is a major stakeholder in libraries. They are the most important role players as they are our clients/customers - without them we will simply be a large storeroom filled with books and information. We should regularly ask ourselves: What is the perception of our patrons regarding our service? Do they view us as helpful and professional?

Yes, libraries are experiencing tough times. With fewer staff members, we can very easily become despondent and if we want to, we can find enough excuses for poor service. However, the question is: should we? Should we use our problems as excuses? And in any case, isn't it true that there is no excuse for rude (read 'unprofessional') behaviour? Let's face it...

the public is not really interested in our domestic problems. They are still as demanding as ever. Whether Miss X pitched for work, or whether we are relying on relief staff, the public requires a professional service, regardless. It's therefore our task, as librarians to work harder and smarter and keep our professional flag flying high.

### Staff meetings

With this in mind, I suggested at the weekly staff meetings held at George Public Library, that everyone should report unprofessional or unacceptable behaviour to me. The following was identified:

- undermining of authority
- not being greeted
- abuse of telephone/personal conversations/cell phone
- chatting with colleagues about personal matters while serving the public

- no eye contact/not acknowledging the person at the other side of counter
- discussion of colleagues/gossip
- loud comments about a person just served
- sighs/loud comments such as 'thank the Lord - only an hour left before I can go home!', or 'will this day never pass?'
- use of 'they' as opposed to 'us'
- sulking/commenting into air (manipulative behaviour)

- passing the buck!
- dress code
- tone of voice (not what staff members say, but how they say it).

We discussed these problems and suggested appropriate behaviour. This exercise led to a heightened awareness of their own behaviour and its effect on others. The fact that we CAN control our own reactions was emphasised.

The library manager then compiled a code of conduct which is currently being reviewed at our weekly meetings. The logical conclusion should be that all staff members accept this written code of conduct. It must be ensured that the ground rules are understood by every member on the team.

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it (the public) requires a professional service, regardless**

### Training sessions in groups

I also conducted training sessions at our library forum and presented a course for library assistants.

Attendants were divided into groups. Each group was given 15 minutes to compile a list of characteristics they feel that librarians/library staff should possess. The groups reported back and their input was written on a board.

Here are some of the characteristics:

- enjoys interaction with other people
- genuine interest in people and books
- friendly
- flexible
- courteous
- enthusiastic
- patient
- helpful
- tactful
- self-motivated
- self-disciplined
- self-confident.

**'Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the things you have to, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not'**

Thomas Huxley

Each characteristic was then discussed and attendants gave examples from their own workplace where these were an issue. It became clear to us that self-analysis should be done regularly.

These types of sessions should be concluded by emphasising the difference between what we KNOW and what we DO.

### General tips

- Keep in mind that library staff need to know what they have to do differently to improve their professional image.
- Knowledge regarding the profession is vital.
- Know yourself. Discover your real strengths and skills.
- Identify the stressors in your workplace and minimise their effect.
- Do not cling to the past. Move forward.
- Your attitude is decisive.
- A professional look creates a positive vibe.
- In order to maintain good relationships with the public, you need to place their needs first.
- Remember that good manners have positive results in all spheres of life.
- Create a challenge. It radiates the required positive energy to see a project through.
- Think of someone you love dearly and treat all people as if they are that person.
- Loyalty is an esteemed virtue.
- Treat all patrons as equals.
- 'Assume a virtue, if you have it not' (Shakespeare).
- Professionalism implies maturity - control your emotions to the advantage of everybody.
- Remember the universal truth - feelings follow behaviour.
- How you say something is sometimes more important than what you are saying.
- Never pass the buck!

All of the above are common sense principles by which your working day is determined. It may even seem unnecessary

to mention them, but I think it is only wise to focus attention on them from time to time.

In the words of Thomas Huxley:

'Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the things you have to, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not.'