Responding to Patron Frustrations in a Resource Sharing Environment

Presented by Susie Duncan
University of Illinois Library at Urbana-Champaign, December 2014
Please share one of your patron nightmare scenarios.

For example, patrons who had unrealistic expectations, who were already riled up before they even got to you, schools with policies in conflict with your own or with CARLI’s etc.
You are not alone ...
Almost everyone hates conflict
It’s not personal.

It’s not you, it’s the big U – the University! Or maybe even the #$@?$#! Universe!
Experience
What annoys ‘customer-you’?
Why do they act like that?
Empathetic Distancing

This image is posted under a Creative Commons - Attribution Licence, in accordance with the Open Government Licence. 'Simon Davis/DFID'.
Boundaries in a consortium . . .
CARLI

http://www.carli.illinois.edu/products-services/i-share/circ

Circulation & Universal Borrowing/Interlibrary Loan

- Policies
- Best Practices & Workflow Recommendations
- Configuration & Technical Information
- Past Events and Webinars
Who are we?

Let’s go to the polls.
Each transaction is another opportunity to . . .
Let’s divide the angry into two categories . . .

1. Steamrollers.
   “I know what I want and you’re going to give it to me.”

2. The Harassed
   “It’s all falling apart!”
Meet Steamrollers with simplicity. Keep it stark.
Help the harassed find the next foothold.
Acknowledgement

“I’d like to thank the Academy . . .”

Not that kind...
I’m sorry you had difficulties with the return of this item. That must have been very frustrating.

I can see where *(this policy)* might have caught you by surprise. You’ve certainly been very busy.

It’s easy to forget *(to renew)*.

I know, it can be hard *(to keep track of what you have checked out)*.

I’m sorry you felt we were *(rude)*, that wasn’t our intention.

*so they can move on.*
Concierge them

- Could I have my supervisor contact you?
- Would you be willing to give me your email address?
- If you wouldn’t mind…
- If I could . . .
- Let me send you full bibliographic information so you can order a replacement.
Manipulation

Patron:

1. They did it for me before.
2. It’s urgent.
3. I’m pitiful/desperate/broke.

You:

1. We did it before.
2. There’s no time.
3. They’re so helpless, I’m their only hope.
Making Exceptions

**Judgment calls** = your judgment + your Library’s policies and guidelines.

1. **Make it clear** that it’s YOUR call, not the patron’s, and other staff at your institution may not choose to make the same call:

   “I will make an exception this time. If this happens again, however, we will not make another exception.”

2. **Depersonalize it** – do it because it is an exceptional **situation**, not because the patron was exceptionally incapable, unprepared, etc. IOW, do it for this patron because you would do the same thing for anyone in this situation.

3. **Sustainability** – Don’t set up a pattern you can’t sustain.
Email

1. Your name and contact information.
2. The patron.
4. **Explain it as you would to your boss**, be clear about:
   a. Which school the book belongs to.
   b. Which school the patron belongs to.
   c. What the problem is.
5. **Who agreed to do what and when** they agreed to do it.

*Emails are easy to forward!* Write as though the person you’re writing about will be reading it.
Steamrollers on the Phone

You have options.

1. You may put them on hold (or at least cover the receiver and gather your thoughts).
2. Take notes (it may help you focus on the problem instead of the person).
3. Ask questions, if you can.
4. Tell them you need to review the situation and confer with your staff/supervisor.
5. Ask when it will be convenient for you to call them back. Better yet, offer to email the response.
6. Remember:
   a. Patrons can ask for anything, it doesn’t follow that you will be willing or able to give it to them.
   b. Share the joy! The patron is always welcome to call your supervisor/head of the library/senator/etc.
Expectations

1. We can’t control other institutions or people.
2. Life is not always fair.
3. It’s easier to set up an expectation than to change it.
   
   **NOTE:** When you make an exception you’re creating future expectations.

4. Get to know your colleagues!
   1. Go to forums
   2. Get on the mailing lists.
Take care of yourselves

- www.calm.com
- www.donethingfor2minutes.com
- www.happify.com
- getgratitude.co/
- http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/
How to Switch Off an Angry Person
By Nadia Persun, PhD, Psych Central

Be Empathetic Not Sympathetic
March 18, 2013 by Steve Davis
http://facilitatoru.com/blog/facilitation/be-empathetic-not-sympathetic/

Empathetic Listening

Six Habits of Highly Empathic People
By Roman Krznaric | November 27, 2012 The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley
http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six_habits_of_highly_empathic_people1
TED Talks | Best of the Web
Jeremy Rifkin: The empathic civilization
Filmed Aug 2010 • Posted Aug 2010 • RSA Animate
http://www.ted.com/talks/jeremy_rifkin_on_the_empathic_civilization.html

• Therapists Spill: How I Set & Sustain Boundaries.
  http://psychcentral.com/lib/therapists-spill-how-i-set-sustain-boundaries/00017954

• What Are Personal Boundaries? How Do I Get Some?
  By Darlene Lancer, JD, MFT
  http://psychcentral.com/lib/what-are-personal-boundaries-how-do-i-get-some/00016100

• 8 Principles for Effectively Maintaining Professional Boundaries as a Service Provider
  http://human-solutions.net/8-principles-for-effectively-maintaining-professional-boundaries-as-a-service-provider/

• Too Much Customer Service?
  http://www.socialmarketing.org/newsletter/features/too_much.htm
• **Setting Healthy Workplace Boundaries**
UCSF Human Resources, FSAP. Retrieved on May 7, 2014
http://ucsfhr.ucsf.edu/index.php/assist/article/setting-healthy-workplace-boundaries/

• **Boundaries & Expecations**
By Susie Duncan. *Pinterest.*
http://www.pinterest.com/sbduncan2/boundaries-vs-expecations/

Note: Images not credited are from Microsoft Clipart or in public domain.