

Customer Service Skills

Kansas Regional Library Systems

Thursday, June 10, 2021 – 1:30 – 2:30 pm CDT

with Pat Wagner – pat@patternresearch.com

We'll start the webinar at the half-hour.

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# Customer Service Skills

## Kansas Regional Library Systems



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# Kansas Regional Library Systems

**Kansas regional library systems** were established under Kansas Law ([K.S.A. 75-2547](#), [K.S.A. 75-2548](#)) in 1965 as agents of support for local public libraries. The primary goals were, and remain, the improvement of existing library services and programs and the extension of library service to areas where it was previously unavailable.

**Central Kansas Library System (CKLS) - <https://ckls.org>**

**North Central Library System (NCKLS) - <https://lib.nckls.org>**

**Northeast Library System (NEKLS) - <https://www.nekls.org>**

**Northwest Library System (NWKLS) - <https://nwkls.org>**

**South Central Library System (SCKLS) - <https://www.sckls.info>**

**Southeast Library System (SEKLS) - <https://www.sekls.org>**

**Southwest Library System (SWKLS) - <https://swkls.org>**



# After-lunch Course

**After-lunch Course** is a free, four-part, continuing education series, hosted by the *Kansas Regional Library Systems* for Kansas libraries.

Please save the dates for the next two live webinars:

Thursday, September 9: *Library Ethics* with Pat Wagner

Thursday, December 9: *HR Management* with Jamie LaRue

Recordings will be available for all four presentations.

See [systems.mykansalibrary.org](http://systems.mykansalibrary.org) for updates on how you can connect with these online workshops.



# Definition

A library customer is *anyone* with whom you have an interaction or transaction, whether they are a past, present, or potential user, supporter, visitor, or ally of the library...meaning...

*Everyone is a customer!*



# Definition

Customer service standards  
apply to both *internal*  
and *external* customers.



# Note on Library Titles and Roles

**Different libraries use  
different titles for work roles.**

*Pick the ones  
that best suit you.*



# Key Idea

Establish what it means  
to create and consistently  
sustain a *welcoming library*  
for all customers.





# Agenda

- **Intro: The Welcoming Library**
- **Customer service communication skills**
- **Difficult customer behavior and problem interactions**
- **Customer service ethics**
- **The library's physical environment**
- **Standards for programming, services, and collections**
- **Outreach to new residents, different demographics, underserved populations**
- **Next steps**

# Intro: The Welcoming Library





# Exercise #1

How would you describe  
*a welcoming library?*



# Satisfied Customers

- I was treated well.
- I solved my problem.
- I will return with friends and family.
- I will support the library financially.
- I will support the library politically.
- I will tell other people about the library.



# The Welcoming Library

## Four Principles

- Details count.
- **Consistency**
- Customers as partners
- **Take customer service seriously.**



# Details Count: Warm or Cool?

## Your civility during interactions

The look on your face

The tone of your voice

Your posture and gestures

The choice of your words

The speed of the interaction

The thoroughness of your response



# Consistency

## Unintentional different standards

- **One for people we know;**  
*one for those we don't know*
- **One for people we like;**  
*one for those we don't like*
- **One for people who look and talk like us;**  
*one for those who look and talk differently from us*

# Customers as Partners

- **They know themselves.**
- **Ask for input and advice.**
- ***The Canary in the Mine:***



**Pay attention to concerns.**

**Library issues can be signs of issues  
in your community and institutions.**





# Take Customer Service Seriously

- **Success can breed complacency:**  
Great libraries keep improving.
- **Customer service should appear:**  
In job descriptions and evaluations.  
In strategic plans and operations.
- **Everyone has manners, always:**  
**No excuses for discourtesy.**

# Customer Service Communication Skills





## Exercise #2

**As a consumer, you're an expert  
on customer service.**

1. Share great *customer service stories*.
2. What *principles* do the stories share?
3. Since we know them, *why don't we practice them all the time?*



# Customer Services Principles

- Empathy
- Accountable
- Kindness
- Energy
- Curiosity
- Compassion
- Generosity
- Expertise
- Initiative
- Listening
- Conscientious
- Follow-thru
- Civility
- Sensitivity
- Focus
- Smiling
- Awareness
- Fairness
- Integrity
- Polite
- Honest
- Ethical
- Knowledgeable
- Time-sensitive
- Patience
- Anticipates
- Calm
- Good-humored
- Welcoming
- Positive



# What's Hard?

- **Poor history with the customer.**
- **Tired and busy**
- **“Just my personality.”**
- **The customer is unreasonable.**
- **The customer is angry/rude.**
- **The library's customer rules aren't fair.**



# Words That Work

- What to say when you are stuck
- **Reduce emotionality.**
- **Focus on the solution, not the problem.**
- **Stay in the present and the future.**
- **Stay neutral.**
- **Stay constructive.**



# Words That Work

- *Yes, and...*
- **Let me find out.**
- *What I can do is...*
- **Next...**
- **Instead...**
- **Despite...**
- **Satisfy...**

# The Gold Standard

- Move your whole body.
- **Lean in 10 degrees.**
- Look at the person's face.
- **Smile.**
- Nod; acknowledge what they say.
- **Same length of time as others**





# Difficult customer behavior and problem interactions



# Caveat

*Manipulative behavior  
by library customers is a  
symptom of inconsistent  
enforcement of the rules.*



# Setting Limits

*Set limits as an institution,*  
**not as individuals acting**  
**autonomously, regarding**  
**“good” or “bad” behaviors.**

*Prevent Escalation:  
Don't Engage  
Emotionally.*



# Stop Arguing

- **It's about the library, not your opinions.**
- **Provide information for their concerns.**
- **Find a way to say *yes* or agree with them.**
- **Find a way for them to say *yes*.**
- **Avoid political discussions.**
- **Change the subject:**
  - **Ask their opinion about something safe.**

# Disengagement

- **Can you say *no thank you?***  
**Practice interrupting and deflecting.**
- **The formula:**
  - **Thank them.** (*Validation*)
  - **Set the limit.** (*The rules*)
  - **Offer an alternative.** (*Possibilities*)
- **Walk away or hang up: Stay calm.**



# Customer service ethics





# Library Ethics

- ***Fairness:*** People are treated the same, regardless of demographics or status.
- ***Access:*** Everyone has the same access to the same information.
- ***Transparency:*** Decisions are made, policies are created, and actions are taken by the standards of Kansas “open meeting” laws.
- ***Privacy:*** Individual rights are protected.





# Everyday Library Ethics

- **More formal than your back porch**
- **Customer service rules:**
  - **Focus on the customer**
  - **No gossip or venting**
  - **No comments on borrowing**
- **You'll never know who is listening and watching.**

# The library's physical environment





# Your Workplace Audit

- **Visually clean, top to bottom, inside, outside**
- **Smells clean (Public bathrooms audit?)**
- **Legible, rational signs, inside and outside**
- **More than adequate lighting**
- **Safe floors, stairs, steps, sidewalks, grounds**
- **Uncluttered surfaces in public areas**
- **Employees look neat and clean.**



# Standards for programming, services, and collections



# The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Library Principle



*A library is designed  
around people  
instead of books.*



# Convenience Counts

- Easy to...know and understand the rules
- Easy to...apply for a library card or sign up for services
- Easy to...find the library (newcomers)
- Easy to...park and/or close to public transportation
- Easy to...find what I need on my own
- Easy to...find a clerk to help me
- Easy to...custom order (ILL) materials
- Easy to...check out and renew materials
- Easy to...use from home or work, by phone or device.



# Outreach to new residents, different demographics, underserved populations





# Standards

*Do different people have  
different experiences when  
they visit your library,  
based on how they look  
and how they talk?*





# Take Complaints Seriously

**You won't learn how employees  
are treating library customers  
or co-workers based only  
on how they treat you and  
other *"peers"* and *"bosses."***



# Safety for the Stranger

- **Manners are rituals of respect:**  
*Treating people like peers,  
meaning social equals*
- **People who are different still feel welcomed and receive the same level of service as friends and family.**



# Lesson: Look Beyond Your Walls

- *Demographic information:*  
Review existing data for the communities and institutions your library serves.
- *Surveys:* Interviews and focus groups
- *Allied organizations:* What do other agencies, organizations, and businesses know?
- *Leave the building:*  
Meet potential customers on their own turf.

# Next steps





## Exercise #3

- **What are your library and co-workers already doing?**
- **What could you be doing better or differently?**