

Compassionate Accountability: Dealing with Problem Behaviors in the Library

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Suggestions: *Try out these scenarios with your staff or co-workers. Have one person play the librarian, one the customer, and one or more can observe and give feedback and suggestions.*

Scenario 1: Fine Dispute – Librarian Role

Background: You are the senior staff member on duty in the branch. A clerk comes to tell you a patron is really upset about a fine and wants to talk to the “person in charge”. The patron wants to get a card for her son but has been told she can’t because she has a fine of \$82.97 on her card from February 2016. There were several lost children’s books, and she was sent to collections. She told the clerk her address and contact information are all correct, so you know she should have received notifications both from the library and from the collection agency. You notice one of the “lost” items she is being billed for is a Disney Toy Story book.

What to do before talking to the customer:

- What is the main issue you are dealing with?
- What do you want to see happen?
- Get yourself in a positive place before talking to the customer.
- What facts will you be addressing with her?

What to do while talking to the customer:

- Start by greeting the patron and introduce yourself.
- Ask about the issue and listen actively.
- Ask questions to clarify if needed.
- Share the facts.
- Explain the policy/rule.
- Explain what you can do for them.
- Keep it safe for yourself and the customer

What to do after talking to the customer:

- Breathe! This is challenging!
- Follow through
- Document and communicate as needed
- Reflect on what could have gone better/different

Scenario 1: Fine Dispute – Customer Role

Background: Your ten year old son is excited to get a library card so he can use the computers. You remember getting a card for yourself a few years ago, and think you may have had a few fines, but hey! It's been a few years ago, and you can just get a card for him, right? It's not like you will be checking out things for yourself. Now they are telling you not only that you can't get a card for your son, but that you have \$82.97 in fees for books you don't think you have.

What to do: You are embarrassed but don't want to look bad in front of your kid. Be insistent. Tell the librarian you didn't check out those books, and you couldn't have because you were at Disneyworld in February 2016. If they don't handle it well, get angry. Your kid should be able to get a library card! Your kid didn't do anything wrong! If they do, respond that you just wanted your kid to be able to use the computers after school.

Scenario 2: Repeated Smoking Violation – Librarian Role

It is a busy afternoon in the library. You have just wrapped up a program and have limited time to grab lunch before you go on desk. As you walk past the front door of the Library, you notice a patron who is smoking just outside the entrance on library property. You told her earlier this week that she can't smoke there. She sees you near the door, and she turns her back to you. You know you need to address the behavior and are frustrated that this will delay you from your overdue lunch break. You decide to go outside and address the smoking patron for the second time that week.

What to do before talking to the customer:

- What is the main issue you are dealing with?
- What do you want to see happen?
- Get yourself in a positive place before talking to the customer.
- What facts will you be addressing with her?

What to do while talking to the customer:

- Start by greeting the patron and introduce yourself.
- Share the facts.
- Explain the policy/rule.
- Ask for customer's input. Listen actively.
- Explain what you *can* do for the customer and/or consequences.
- Keep it safe for yourself and the customer

What to do after talking to the customer:

- Breathe! This is challenging!
- Follow through
- Document and communicate as needed
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Scenario 2: Repeated Smoking Violation-Customer Role

You recently lost your job. Your friend told you to go to the library and that you can apply for jobs online and there is a website to create a resume really easily. You are not comfortable with computers. This is your third trip to the library this week, and you are having trouble remembering how to access the information you need to job search. You go outside to have a cigarette to help deal with your stress. As you smoke just outside the doors to the library, you see the person who yelled at you earlier this week about smoking outside. You turn away hoping she didn't see you.

If the librarian doesn't handle it well, become angry. This is a free county and she can't tell you what you can and can't do outside! If they do handle it well, tell them how stressed you are how badly you need this cigarette break.

Situation 3: Inappropriately Dressed Patron- Librarian Role

You just started your weekend shift on a warm summer day. You notice a patron walking past the public service desk wearing a buttoned-up style shirt, however all of the buttons are unbuttoned, and his chest is exposed. You consult the behavior policy and confirm that this is in violation of your policy. You are the senior person on duty and will need to address the situation with the patron. You approach the bare-chested patron, greet them and introduce yourself.

What to do before talking to the customer:

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- Get yourself in a positive place before talking to the customer.
- What facts will you be addressing with the customer?

What to do while talking to the customer:

- Start by greeting the patron and introduce yourself.
- Share the facts.
- Explain the policy/rule.
- Ask for customer's input. Listen actively.
- Explain what you *can* do for the customer and/or consequences.
- Keep it safe for yourself and the customer

What to do after talking to the customer:

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Scenario 3: Inappropriately Dressed Patron-Customer Role

The weather has been unseasonably warm this summer. You left the house in a button-up shirt because it had short sleeves and is made of lightweight material. After being outside for the first couple hours of the morning you realize even this is too warm. You unbutton the shirt and stop by the library to get out of the heat.

If the librarian doesn't handle their approach well, get angry. Ask why women are allowed to wear tank tops but you can't have your shirt open? Tell them to mind their own business. If they do handle it well, tell them you are really warm and feeling uncomfortable.

Scenario 4: Disruptive Phone Call – Librarian Role

You are helping a customer at the desk when you hear a raised, angry voice coming from the stacks. You glance over and see a male customer pacing and speaking loudly on a cell phone. The customer appears agitated and is starting to swear. Other customers are looking around to see what is going on. A mom with a couple kids looks nervously at you.

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- What facts will you be addressing with the customer?

What to do while talking to the customer:

- Start by greeting the patron and introduce yourself.
- Share the facts.
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What to do after talking to the customer:

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Scenario 4: Disruptive Phone Call – Customer Role

Your ex-girlfriend calls you on your cell when you are in the library using the computers. You are dealing with court paperwork which has you stressed. You are trying to get partial custody of your daughter, and she doesn't want you to have anything to do with your own kid. You don't want to leave your computer, but you need to take this call. Initially you go into the stacks trying not to disturb the other computer users, but she makes you so mad, before you realize it, you are swearing and yelling into the phone.

If the librarian handles it well, apologize and say you will move to the entrance to take the call. If not, tell the librarian, "yeah yeah, in a minute..." keep going, then hang up then tell her to leave you the H alone and call her names.

Scenario 5: Social Distancing Infraction – Librarian Role

In an effort to keep staff and customers safe, your library has removed most of your normal comfortable seating and rearranged the rest to maintain social distancing of six feet. You have signage up reminding customers to please respect social distancing norms and to not move the furniture. You notice one of your regular morning "chatters" pull a chair over to a table where another customer is reading the newspaper and begin chatting with him. He is approximately two feet away from the reader. You are wearing a mask, but neither customer is. The man reading the newspaper leans away from the chatter, but doesn't get up to move. How do you handle the situation?

What to do before talking to the customer:

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- What facts will you be addressing with the customer?

What to do while talking to the customer:

- Start by greeting the patron and introduce yourself.
- Share the facts.
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Scenario 5: Social Distancing Infraction – Customer Role

You have been stuck at home for three months “social distancing.” You think all of this COVID stuff is being blown out of proportion.... After all, you don’t know a single person who has been sick. You miss being out at the library chatting with your neighbors and reading the paper. You see the paper is in use, and you want to see if the person reading it will share part of it with you. In the past, it wasn’t a big deal to sit down next to someone and congenially share the paper, discussing the headlines of the day.

If the librarian handles it well, grumble “this is ridiculous... I can’t even read the paper these days...” and move away. If the librarian doesn’t handle it well, dig in, and say you “aren’t breaking the law... what’s your problem!” Refuse to move.

TIPS FOR THE OBSERVERS

Read both parts of the scenarios. Does the librarian introduce him/herself? Does (s)he stay calm and appear genuinely “sorry” to give the bad news? Does (s)he appear to listen respectfully to the customer? Does (s)he make it safe?

Step in and coach if they get stuck or off track. At the end, give the librarian feedback on what went well. You may also want to give additional ideas on how to make the situation go better.

FOLLOW-UP

What are some other common issues you might need to address (or have had to address) in the library?

List them here. Plan out how you might deal with those issues in the future.