


Setting Boundaries with Library Patrons

Setting Boundaries with Library Patrons
An **Infopeople** Webcast



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**Setting Boundaries:
The Pop Quiz**

Please complete this sentence:

Nothing is more _____ than
working with the public!

**So, What's the First Word That
Came to Mind?**

- Exciting? Worthwhile? Fulfilling?
Frustrating? Aggravating? Confusing?
Amusing? Frightening?
- It's a bit different for everyone — just as
everyone is a bit different
- Today: no guarantees—just best practices

Setting Boundaries with Library Patrons

Who Sets Boundaries?

- Good boundaries:
 - Equal freedom and piece-of-mind for library staff and patrons
 - Work best when they are the result of a team effort.
 - The individual—point of contact
 - The team—strength in numbers
 - The organization—the biggest complaint?

So We Need to Be Strict! Right?

- You get to decide
- We can create the library we want

Every Library Is Not the Same!

- Who are our patrons?
- How do we want our library to look?
- How do we want it to feel?
- How do we want it to sound?
- How do we want our employees to act?
- How do we want our patrons to act?

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Why Does 10% = 70% and 90% = 30%?

- Apply today's material to everyone

Who Needs Boundaries Most?

- Angry patrons?
- Entitled patrons?
- The mentally ill?
- Parents w/small children?
- The homeless?
- Lonely patrons?
- The overly-friendly?
- Entitled parents?
- Teenagers?
- The elderly?
- The developmentally disabled?
- "Soft touch" and "head in the sand" staff?

Where Do Our Difficult Patrons Come From?

- Some of you are going to hate the answer

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Let's Name Your Favorites

- As we continue, jot down three patrons, or types of patrons, that challenge the boundaries you would like to have in your library.
- As we continue, see if what we talk about would help you in these situations.
- We'll come back to this.

Nice People Who Are Difficult

- Be honest—it's OK to tell the truth
- Be nice—especially to the nice
- Value the magic of rapport
- Give and expect respect
- Difficult? Try "rebooting" them

Everyone Can Follow the Rules

- My favorite example

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The Four Cornerstones

- Teamwork
- Clarity
- Consistency
- “The Broken Window Theory”

Teamwork: Everyone Speaks with the Same Voice

- A team addresses problems with the same outcome in mind. Have a consensus.
- A team meets regularly. But keep it light.
- A team understands all policies.
- A team has an open but respectful communication style.
- A team can question authority, but doesn't sabotage its own hierarchy!

Clarity

- Everyone is clear about what is acceptable.
 - rules
 - norms
 - standards
- Without internal clarity (inter-team) there can be no clarity with patrons.

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Consistency

- Policies are reinforced the same way every time.
- Rules that are not always enforced are not rules; they are booby-traps for us and for them.
- Flexibility, exceptions, and appropriate personal relationships are good. Institutionalize and standardize them.

The Broken Window Theory

- Respond quickly before
 - a problem becomes a pattern
 - small problems become large
- Have a team response
- Remember: nothing is more fascinating than an irregular reinforcement pattern

Check Your Notes

- Your favorites list—where might the four cornerstones have helped so far?

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The Rules

Rule 1 - It's *Not* Personal

- What is the opposite of personal?
- What makes it personal?
- What is your goal?

Rule 1A—It Takes More Energy to Be Professional (but It's Worth It)

Always choose being:

- Empathetic over apathetic
- Attentive over indifferent
- Warm over cold
- Respectful over condescending
- Engaged over robotic
- Flexible over rigid
- Responsive over obtuse

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Rule 2—Triangulation, Not Polarity

- You and the patron are controlled by the same boundaries
 - triangulation: offering choices gives you power
 - polarity: giving ultimatums makes you weak

Rule 3—Focus on Immediate Behaviors As You Establish Boundaries

- Don't be distracted by plot

Rule 4—Restrictions Should Be Mechanical (Positives Are Personal)

- Computer use policy
- Closing times
- Off-limit areas

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Rule 5—Know What You’re Talking About

- Only say what you mean
- Always mean what you say

Walking the Walk—Talking the Talk

- Often, it all comes down to our face-to-face skills

Master “the Zen of No”

- How well people respond to boundaries is often determined by how confident and non-defensive we are when we establish them.
- Remember Rule # 1.

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As We Know, Sometimes People Just Get Upset

No matter what:

- Avoid the phrase of doom!
- Never ever, ever, ever, tell anyone to **“CALM DOWN!”**

Remember This Conversational Sequence

- “I understand that this is important to you...”
- “Let me make sure I understand what you’re telling me...”
- “You’re (fill in the emotion) because...”
- “Is that right?”

Think in Terms of the Formula for Compliance

- Current behavior = consequences
- New behavior = benefits

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Setting Boundaries: Remember These Key Points

- We all set boundaries
- Every library is not the same
- 10% does equal 70%
- We can be nice and still set boundaries
- Use “The Four Cornerstones”
- Turn to the rules—especially Rule #1
- Employ “the Zen of No”

Thank You!
