

Managing Challenging Patrons: Security for the New Library Environment – An Infopeople Webinar

January 20, 2016

Presented by Dr. Steve Albrecht, PHR, CPP, BCC

San Diego, CA 619-990-2685

DrSteve@DrSteveAlbrecht.com

Link to Archived Version: <https://infopeople.org/civicrm/event/info?reset=1&id=557>

Conducting a Library Employee Security Survey

When it comes to bad news, is it better to know or not know? As painful as the answers can be when it comes to better library security, it's better to know in advance what to expect, what we have to prepare for, and how to do it. If this is true, then why do so few library organizations conduct security-related employee surveys to gauge the perceptions of the level of safety at their facilities? Could we agree that we need to ask our employees what is safe or not safe at their library facilities, and do it on a regular basis? What follows is a ten-question survey that asks tough questions to library staff members, with the intent of discovering what they may want to say about their security, but they may not want to say aloud to their supervisors.

Critics of security-related surveys say that once they get the information, the organization or the facility is somehow "put on notice" and will have to take immediate steps to correct every single deficiency before they can open the doors again. This is an overreaction. The truth is that every public facility is already at a high watermark for liability anyway. We will always be questioned by outsiders as to the safety and security of our entire building, from slip and falls in a wet restroom to an attack by a mentally ill homeless person against a patron.

The value of a safety and security survey questionnaire is two-fold: it gives every employee who participates a voice in their own well-being at work, and it gives management a roadmap to make cost-effective, reasonable, and necessary physical security or security policy changes, by prioritizing the answers they get.

For the first issue, we know some employees want to be heard and want a staff forum for their concerns. But some would rather remain anonymous, unlike your more vocal employees, who will bring up security issues and problematic patrons during staff meetings. This gives both groups their chance to be heard, on paper.

For the second issue, we don't have to make every fix, but we can certainly demonstrate to the employees and others (library boards, city or county elected officials, and even plaintiff's attorneys), that we are taking steps to minimize security risks and maximize staff and patron safety.

Consider the following survey for your facilities. You can modify these questions (just a bit) to fit your specific organization, but be careful not to change the meeting too much because you are wary of the answers. You should tell all staff that your first step is to gather their opinions, analyze and prioritize their concerns, give them an overview of what you heard from them, and then discuss what you plan to do going forward.

Everyone who participates in the survey process wants to know their opinions were heard, valued, and acted upon. People need closure from these exercises, so make sure you build a recap into the project.

It's not about over-promising or keeping the results secret; it's about keeping your staff apprised and updated so we can share the message that we're all in charge of security at our libraries.

"This survey will help us conduct a risk management, safety, and security assessment of our library facilities. Your answers are anonymous. We want your opinions, not your name."

Library Branch: _____

Employee Type (check only one):

Fulltime Staff _____

Part-time Staff _____

Supervisor _____

Please circle your best answer.

1. How would you define your Library's current Code of Patron Conduct?

- a. don't have one or don't know if we have one
- b. needs improvement
- c. adequate
- d. excellent

2. To keep staff and patrons safe, would you say your Library has:

- a. no security policies and procedures
- b. poor security policies and procedures
- c. adequate security policies and procedures
- d. excellent security policies and procedures

3. How would you define yourself on most days, as you deal with all type of patrons?

- a. not afraid of any patrons
- b. somewhat afraid of some patrons
- c. afraid of some patrons
- d. very afraid of some patrons

4. How would you rate the level of support you receive from supervisors when dealing with challenging patrons?

- a. no support
- b. needs improvement
- c. adequate
- d. excellent

5. How would you define your Library's relationship with the police, in terms of visibility and response?

- a. no relationship
- b. needs improvement
- c. adequate
- d. excellent relationship

6. How would you rate the library's emergency evacuation plans for patrons and staff?

- a. don't have one or don't know if we have one
- b. needs improvement
- c. adequate
- d. excellent

7. How would you rate the number of lockdown or shelter-in-place drills done at your library?

- a. don't do them or don't know if we do them
- b. needs improvement
- c. adequate
- d. excellent

8. In the rare event of an active shooter situation in our Library, I'm familiar with the concept of "Run-Hide-Fight."

- a. True
- b. False

9. If you were ever concerned about a troubled co-worker (depressed, hostile, bullying, threatening), how would you rate the HR services that could be provided for that co-worker?

- a. no services
- b. needs improvement
- c. adequate
- d. excellent

10. How would you define the availability of community or social services (homeless outreach, churches, charities, elder care, mental health support) near your facility to help with challenging patrons?

- a. don't know about such services
- b. no services
- c. needs improvement
- d. adequate
- e. excellent

///

© 2014 Dr. Steve Albrecht, PHR, CPP, BCC

Steve Albrecht is a San Diego-based trainer, author, and consultant. He has taught his popular half-day library security workshop, "Dealing with Challenging Patrons," around the country since 2000. His book, ***Library Security: Better Communication, Safer Facilities***, was just published by the ALA. You can hear his weekly "Crime Time" security podcast and reach him at www.DrSteveAlbrecht.com