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AALL Spectrum

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Errata

In the November 2009 issue of *AALL Spectrum,* author Loretta Orndorff's name was misspelled. *AALL Spectrum* apologizes for the error.

On Holiday Decorations

On December nights, the holiday decorations in our neighborhood amuse me. I smile at the inflatable ones in particular. There is such a wide variety now: the paperweight/snow globe thing-y, Grinch, Pooh, Tigger, Santa on a motorcycle, and so many more.

In the morning, though, the homeowners have turned off the fans and the devices lay limp on the grass in a sad, pathetic way—totally relaxed, yet full of promise and waiting to play on the world's stage again.

By Mark E. Estes

Design, construction, materials, power, and air dictate the performance of the yard decorations. They have no choice. Power on and they inflate; power off and they sink to the ground, waiting for the next command.

As law librarians, it's tempting to act like the inflatable yard decorations. A call or an e-mail comes from a customer and we respond by filling the request exactly. Task completed, we kick back with a cup of coffee or tea and wait for the next request.

Such an approach once appeared attractive when information seekers had few choices of where and how to look for their answers. Now, however, the information seeker can choose between many tools to find what they need themselves. That means that if we only provide the bare minimum, we risk becoming like the yard decorations—of limited value and discarded with the next season's whim.

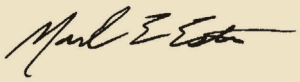
Avoiding obsolescence demands dedication, tenacity, and creative empathy. For each request, first ask "why?" of the requester. If that's not possible, ask it of yourself. Why does he or she want this? What will he or she do with it? What can I do to make it easier to use it that way? And then follow through by making it easier to use.

Next, continue redesigning the services you offer by imagining what you could do to anticipate the request you just completed. Could you redesign a process to make it easier for seekers to find the information themselves? Or does the request suggest a new product, publication, or service you could offer?

Inflatable yard decorations lack the capacity for self-reflection and learning. An inflatable Santa can't consider how he might inflate better the next time, but we can reflect on how we might better handle a situation. We can learn from many sources, including AALL publications *Law Library Journal* and *Spectrum.*

In this issue of *Spectrum*: Tori Covington and Diane Goldstein write about how specialized recruiting firms can save law librarians time (page 10); Kris Helge describes how another technology, affective computing software, may save us time and improve service (page 14); Marcia Baker describes how the University of Nebraska College of Law used a newer technology—Twitter—in a PR campaign (page 18); in the PR column, Maureen Anderson reminds us how circulation policies and employees play a key part in successful public relations (page 6); Jocelyn Stilwell reports how the *College Cost Reduction and Access Act* helps with student loans (page 9); and Ryan Valentin describes building a specialized database of University of Kentucky law school alumni (page 12).

As the New Year approaches, seek to embrace life with a positive attitude and laughter. Act like more than the inflatable yard decoration because you have so much more to add to the library and its services.



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