

Lessons from the Ice Cream Parlor

Four goals to improve customer service and individual attitudes

by Linda C. Brown and Benjamin Layne



After visiting Disneyland in 1959 for the first time at the ripe old age of 11, I wondered why more businesses couldn't be that pleasant. You can imagine my elation when a few years later a date took me to Farrell's Ice Cream Parlor and I found an environment just like Disneyland right there in Portland, Oregon. We were served by such genuinely cheerful and enthusiastic "team members" that I've remembered that experience fondly for 44 years.

Some years ago, as I planned training for my 25 circulation desk student workers, I discovered a videotape on customer service produced by Bob Farrell, the founder of Farrell's Ice Cream. In the presentation, titled "Give'em the Pickle," the dynamic septuagenarian reveals the customer service principles and methods he's used to train his outstanding team (the video can be ordered through Corporate Training Shop, Media Partners, 800/408-5657). The following four suggestions from Farrell have become the basis for several of my personal goals and my ongoing employee training programs.

1 I Will Make People Happy

During the past 23 years at Brigham Young University's libraries, I have found that the business of helping people is common to every position. During that span I've tried to notice what common obstacles in library service must be surmounted in order to make patrons happy, and I've found that prompt and thorough library service is atop the list.

Beyond these basic requirements, however, Farrell suggests that we seek additional ways to assist the patrons we serve. The simple things—an early book delivery or a pleasant and gracious attitude—will go a long way toward making patrons happy. I am not suggesting monumental changes. For example, students noted that our circulation desk rarely had pens. We ran through so many pens that we attempted the usual theft-prevention methods: taping flowers to them and chaining pens to the desk. But we recognized that these tactics were not geared toward making patrons happy—they wanted free pens. We decided to adopt Farrell's attitude and purchased pens embossed with our organization's name and address. The little change has worked wonderfully. We now hand out pens freely, and our employees and patrons are happier.

2 The Power of My Attitude Can Change Lives

Like me, you may have asked yourself if it's really possible to have employees who place serving patrons as their No. 1 priority. I believe that the key is found in Farrell's emphasis on attitude. To borrow some of Farrell's terms, it's best to start by realizing that to every user, from young children to deans, we are the face of our libraries.



Author Linda Brown visits some old friends at Disneyland. The pleasant atmosphere at places like Disneyland and Farrell's Ice Cream Parlor was the inspiration for her library's customer service goals.

Therefore, when a librarian meets the patron's needs, that librarian improves the library's reputation for service.

Those who enter libraries don't know about the responsibilities that librarians have. Often when librarians struggle to maintain a positive attitude, they are placing fulfillment of their other responsibilities as a higher priority than the first goal, seeking the patron's happiness. Setting personal matters aside and cheerfully helping patrons is the key to fully realizing goal No. 1: make the patron happy.

I believe that it was the positive attitude of the individuals at Disneyland and Farrell's Ice Cream that made such a tremendous impression on me in my youth. Recently I went back to Disneyland with my grown children and grandchildren. The 12 of us ran between venues and lines, 14 hours a day for four days. For those 56 hours, my silly questions were answered and my desires met by magnificently trained, cheerful personnel. The great benefit of this level of service is found in the reciprocal nature of service—these “cast members” who served me and thousands of others seemed genuinely happy themselves.

3 Be Consistent

Once high standards in goals Nos. 1 and 2 are met, Farrell preaches consistency. He states that true success is possible when individuals set high standards, practice those standards every day, and hold to high standards by making them non-negotiable.

Our library staff and faculty meet regularly to set high personal standards for friendly, quality service and expect the same level of personal commitment from student

employees. Those high standards, consistently repeated, provide effective training for student workers.

4 Emphasize Teamwork

“A team is a group of people who go out of their way to make each other look good,” Farrell says. I've sought employees who adopt this philosophy, and when our team helps each other look good, the results are marvelous. That teamwork permeates the library. Our library makes more people happy, and it becomes a joy to work in and visit our library.

When we reach this goal, as problems occur, our team works together to fix them instead of pointing fingers of blame. We've recognized that teamwork in fixing problems is critical to improving the quality of service in all areas of our library. In training, we strive to face challenges by asking ourselves, “How will I make the whole library team look good?”

I believe that when library personnel set goals to incorporate these four keys of service, individual attitudes will make a positive change in themselves and their teams. And as this change gains momentum, it can improve entire organizations. As we seek to provide those non-negotiable, high standards of service consistently, our libraries will be places our patrons will want to come back to. ■

Linda Brown (brownl@lawgate.byu.edu) is circulation manager at Brigham Young University Howard W. Hunter Law Library in Provo, Utah. Benjamin Layne (layneb@lawgate.byu.edu) serves in administration at Brigham Young University Howard W. Hunter Law Library.

Photography 101: Composition and Content

To get ready for the upcoming “A Day in the Life of the Law Library Community” photo contest (April 10-16, 2005), the AALL Public Relations Committee presents some tips on taking good photographs. This month's “Photography 101” focuses on composition and content. Tips are provided by photographer Elizabeth Farina.

1. Light—how it interacts with different materials, surfaces, and spaces—is at the heart of photography. Look around for interesting light interactions and capture them in your photo.
2. Try to avoid including reflective surfaces (e.g., mirrors, windows) in your composition, especially when using flash.
3. Incorporating varying depths of field can make for some excellent photos. For example, include a large object or prominent person in the forefront with an interesting background.
4. The most appealing photos typically involve people, action, or a combination of both.
5. Try placing the subject of your photo at the edge of the frame instead of the center to create a very different, and potentially interesting, composition.
6. If you are the subject of a photo ...
 - Stand up straight, and pull your shoulders back.
 - Wear comfortable, flattering clothing—it will increase your confidence in front of the camera.
 - Choose solid color clothing instead of loud patterns.
 - Avoid low-cut shirts and high-cut skirts to prevent accidental embarrassments.

The AALL Public Relations Committee welcomes any feedback about this contest. Please send any questions or comments to Chair Erika Wayne at evwayne@stanford.edu. Visit www.aallnet.org/dayinlife/index.asp for more details about submitting photographs and contest rules and guidelines.