

Customer service: The heart of a library

By Hardy R. Franklin

A message from the President of ALA

Service is the heart of our profession. Thinking of patrons as "customers" is an apt way to remind ourselves—and our staffs—of the manner in which we wish to associate with the public.

Our customers—whether they be students, faculty, or members of the general public—are why libraries exist. We must not take them for granted.

It is not enough to simply deliver service. We must market our services in a way that assures our libraries are addressing real needs and that our customers—current and potential—are aware of the benefits available to them.

In a letter to ALA in which he shared how the library had made a difference in his life, Nobel laureate Linus Pauling said he used his college library not to pursue his scientific studies but to "develop a broader view of life" by reading works by George Bernard Shaw and Edgar Allan Poe. How many of us would have assumed the opposite?

One of the biggest mistakes any organization can make is to assume it knows the needs and wants of its customers. Corporations spend millions of dollars "listening" to their customers via customer service surveys, but it needn't be that expensive or complicated.

That is why during National Library Week, April 17–23, 1994, the American Library Asso-

ciation (ALA) is asking all types of libraries to participate in taking a national "snapshot" of library customer satisfaction.

Why do a customer satisfaction survey? There are at least four good reasons. One is to determine the level of customer satisfaction with your services; two, to identify areas for improvement; three, to identify needed services; and last but not least, to let your customers know you care what they think.

We know that libraries of all types have millions of satisfied customers. This survey is an attempt to document that fact.

We are not pretending that this is a "scientific" survey nor are we expecting 100 percent satisfaction, although similar surveys conducted by libraries have generally found high levels of satisfaction.

We are expecting to gain valuable insights into library customer service satisfactions

that will help us to promote library use and legislative support for libraries nationwide.

A camera-ready survey form appears in this issue of *C&RL News* (see page 65) for you to reprint "as is" or customize for your library. Libraries are asked to report their survey results by May 15, 1994, to the ALA Public Information Office, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611; phone: (800) 545-2433, ext. 5044.

All responses are confidential and will be used solely for the purpose of compiling a national picture of library customer satisfaction to be used for promoting library use and support. Thank you, in advance, for your help. ■



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Hardy R. Franklin is director of the District of Columbia Public Library and the 1993–94 president of the American Library Association. Franklin chose "Customer Service: The Heart of the Library" as the theme for his presidential year.