

Sandra Dobson

# Bridging the gap between law enforcement and librarianship

## Common goals of communication

**F**or 25 years, I have worked in a 911 dispatch center handling police, fire, and medical calls. My community has a population of more than 100,000 citizens. While not a huge city, it nonetheless generates a large volume of calls ranging from routine to tragic, and everything imaginable in between. I have been trained to handle robberies, kidnappings, assaults, home invasions, and all sorts of other violent crimes. I work with a dedicated compassionate group of people valiantly trying to balance sympathy with the ever present need to remain distant to protect our own emotions. When any rational person would long be gone, we stay behind to retain order and a sense of calm.

Several years ago, I decided to balance out my life with a second career in what I thought was a much different environment. I also work as an adjunct reference librarian at a local community college system serving students in one of four branch libraries. We have a small staff dedicated to helping both faculty and students. My co-workers are educated professionals trained in the latest trends and needs. They are unfailingly friendly, polite, and respectful. I have never worked in a happier place with more productive people. Our students may not always be excited about their projects, but they have never been rude or disrespectful towards me.

The differences between the two work environments are obvious. There is no talk of weapons at my library and, although possible, no drunk has ever stood in front of my reference desk. While this is something

that some public libraries may battle on a weekly basis, we do not see much of it at a community college library level. I try not to assess each person entering the library with police eyes and remind myself that most people are decent. Indeed, in all the years I have worked at my library, I have never had a problem with anyone.

Librarians learn how to keep up with the constant stream of new technology and how to satisfy an ever growing demand for new services on a tight budget. The continuing education I receive is much different in law enforcement. We learn how to initiate Amber Alerts for missing children, talk knife wielding attackers down, and keep suicidal callers alive. But behind everything, a 911 operator does is the basic goal of solving problems through communication. Without a good exchange of ideas, houses burn down and people die. A 911 dispatcher is simply a conduit between those in trouble and those who can help.

Although it would seem that the two jobs would be as different as night and day, there are many similarities. Like emergency dispatchers, librarians are the channel between bewildered, flustered patrons and the information they seek. Librarians work toward that same common goal of communication. Whether on the phone with a heart attack patient or helping a scared student facing his first foray into electronic databases, the

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job is essentially the same. Before anything can be accomplished, the patron must be calm. There is a level of quiet hysteria at the reference desk. While the screaming and threats found in a 911 call may be absent in the reference interview, the panic itself can still be seen. Frightened students lining up pleading for help is not really much different than a grave call for help. My purpose is to assist regardless of whether I sit at a reference desk or in front of a police radio. It does not matter if I call my customer *patron* or *victim*. What is important is that they need help and are coming to me to provide that assistance.

Once the patron is calm, I ask what the problem is. Do they need to locate a journal article or hard-to-find book? Do they need a police officer or an ambulance? This is where the details come into play. What do they need and when? What type of help are they looking for?

A 911 call is a lot like a reference interview. You have to start at the beginning and

keep digging until you understand exactly what the user wants. Sometimes it is easy and other times it is incredibly hard to provide the help the patron needs.

Because both careers are service oriented, I work directly with the public. Although I realize the reference desk is not ordinarily an emergency situation, somehow I cannot trivialize a student's desperation. Research for their paper might not be a crisis situation to me, but it is to them. The one thing law enforcement has taught me above all else is that an emergency looks different in each person's eyes. Who am I to pronounce how significant each question is? My purpose is to help, not to judge.

I am indeed fortunate to be able to serve my community in both areas. My experience as a 911 dispatcher teaches me to be more appreciative of the good I find around me. At the same time, my experience as a librarian makes me realize how very hard so many people work to better themselves. I am proud to be a part of both worlds. *~*

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*("The impact of open access..." cont. from page 85)*

• **Collaborating with other open movements.** Shared goals across communities working for greater openness in other areas of the research process (such as data, teaching, and even the basic conduct of science) are becoming more apparent. Opportunities for new, productive collaborations abound.

• **Developing local policies.** Faculty and researchers on campuses and in research institutions are increasingly interested in exploring how institutional open-access policies can help them leverage the impact of their work. There will be important openings to help shape and implement policies on a local level.

• **Signing the Berlin Declaration.** Institutions continue to examine and sign the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities, creating one more valuable avenue to continue focused, productive discussions

and deepen understanding of the benefits of open access.<sup>3</sup>

The Berlin 9 Open Access Conference was an important opportunity to further advance understanding of the potential of open access among key stakeholders. The evolution of the conversation to focus on the positive impact that open access can have—and is having—on the scholarly research process marks yet another important milestone in the movement towards making open access the norm in the way scientific and scholarly research is shared.

## Notes

1. [www.berlin9.org/](http://www.berlin9.org/).
2. [www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/11/07/request-information-public-access-digital-data-and-scientific-publications](http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/11/07/request-information-public-access-digital-data-and-scientific-publications).
3. The declaration can be found and signed at <http://oa.mpg.de/berlin-prozess/berliner-erklarung/>. *~*