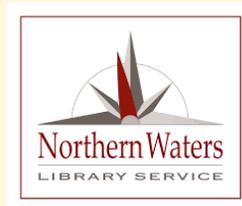


# Dealing With Hostile and Potentially Dangerous Library Users

Wednesday, April 8, 2020



## Customer Service Webinar Series

Presented by the Wisconsin Valley Library Service,  
with support from the Northern Waters Library Service  
and the Southwest Wisconsin Library System.

with Pat Wagner—[patternresearch.com](http://patternresearch.com)  
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# Are All Hostile Library Customers *Dangerous?*



# Key Idea

**We need to plan as if  
anyone might turn out  
to be dangerous.**

***Not paranoid: prepared!***

# Key Idea

Therefore,  
practice  
consistent courtesy.  
*And trust your gut.*



# Outcomes

- **Ensure everyone on the staff knows what to do in emergencies.**
- **Lower the drama of difficult encounters with library customers.**
- **Develop consistent responses to challenging customer behavior.**
- **Improve basic security features of your workplace.**
- **Institute regular safety programs with professionals.**



# Agenda

- **How We Influence The Behaviors Of Others**
- **Setting Limits On What Is Acceptable**
- **Prevent Escalation: Don't Engage Emotionally**
- **Distractions, Alternatives, Disengagement**
- **Trust Your Gut: When To Call Authorities**



# Assignment #1

*How prepared is your library today?*

- Cheat sheets for procedures
- **Emergency phone tree**
- Staff meetings with leadership
- **Law enforcement speakers**
- Supervisor meeting:
  - Consistent responses



# Your Internal Customers

- **Applies to employees and volunteers**
- **Yearly program on personnel issues:**
  - **Grievances and employees' rights**
  - **Management rights**
  - **Clarifying issues**
- **Take all threats seriously.**
- **No one is exempt from the rules.**



# Agenda



**How We Influence  
The Behavior of Others**

# Caveat

Do you use your “*disapproval*” face  
with library users and co-workers  
you don’t like or know...  
so they know to shape up?

*Did you put that chip  
on their shoulder?*

# First Impressions

## *Verbal and nonverbal messages*

- **The look of your face**
- **The tone of your voice**
- **Your posture and mannerisms**
- **The first words you say**

# Your Environment



- **Community policing strategies**
- **Outside: No trash, clean windows**
- **Inside: Clean, uncluttered, pretty**
- **What staff wears**
- **How they see/hear you treat others**
- **First signs they read at your library**

# Hire for Emotional Maturity

- **Calm and friendly demeanor**
- **Flexible and willing to learn**
- **Treat others with respect: Manners**
- **Understand personal boundaries**
- **Don't default to blame/complain.**
- **Take responsibility for mistakes**

# Hire for Emotional Maturity

- Like children and teenagers
- Have life outside of work
- Understand they're part of a team
- Like folk, even when they misbehave
- Can build/maintain healthy relationships
- Have sense of humor about themselves



# Caveat

*People who do bad things  
are opportunistic.*

**They look for: people  
who seem weak, dark corners,  
and the chance to do wrong.**

# Two Levels of Service

One for people we know and like  
For people who look like us  
For people who are *“nice”*

~~~~~

One for people we don't know or like  
For people who don't look like us  
For people who are *“unpleasant”*



# Supervisor Issues

- Supervisors not on same page  
Different sites; different rules
- No supervisors on weekends  
or evenings: *False economies*
- One person staffing small branches
- No one's alert to dicey behavior.

# Assignment #2

If you *watch the faces*  
of library personnel  
as they interact with customers,  
what would this *show* you about  
their opinions regarding  
the people they are serving?

# Assignment #3

If you *listen to the voices*  
of library personnel  
as they interact with customers,  
what would this *tell* you about  
their opinions regarding  
the people they are serving?

# Agenda



Setting Limits on  
What is Acceptable

# Caveat

**Manipulative behavior  
by library customers  
is a sign of inconsistent  
enforcement of the rules.  
*The problem is library staff,  
not the library customer.***

# The Policy Process

- **Transparency breeds respect and trust.**
- **Include library stakeholders in processes.**
- **Meetings and advisory boards**
- **Invite professional advice:**
  - **Law enforcement and social services**
- **Engage the media in education**
- **Commonsense signs in library**

# Typical Mistakes

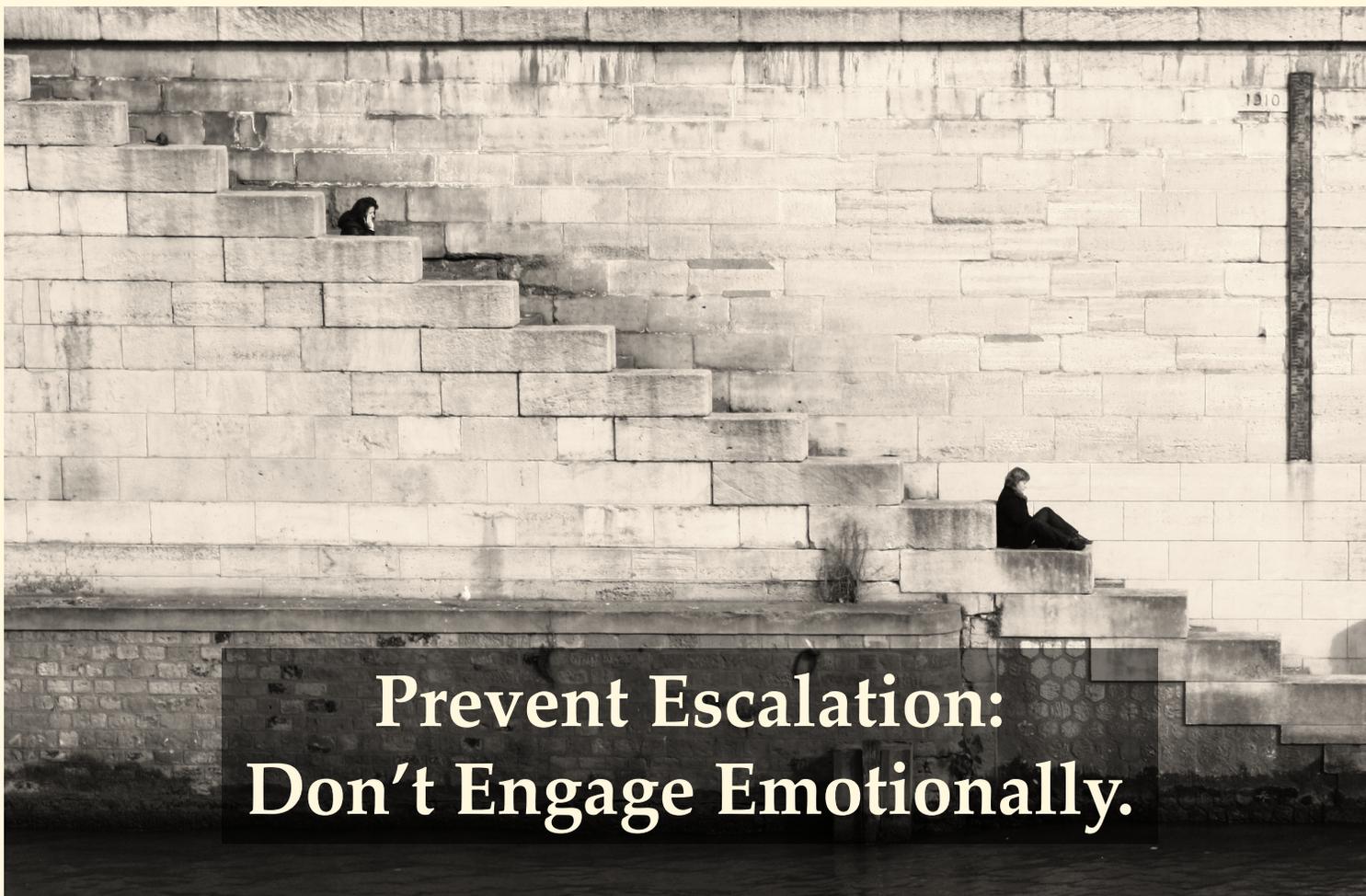


- **Too many rules**
- **Rules dominate interactions.**
- **Old ladies versus teenagers**
- **Few people enforce the rules.**
- **No way to test/evaluate rules**

# Assignment #4

How many *employees*  
would be able to accurately  
*describe* the library's  
or institution's *rules regarding*  
*unacceptable behavior?*

# Agenda



**Prevent Escalation:  
Don't Engage Emotionally.**

# Avoid Triggers

- **Status issues:**
  - Who knows more?
  - The “*Credentials*” Contest
  - Correcting customers
- “*Singsong*” condescending voice
- *Domination under guise of service*



# Stop Arguing

- **It's about the library, not your opinions.**
- **Provide information for their concerns.**
- **Find a way to say *yes* or agree with them.**
- **Find a way for them to say *yes*.**
- **Avoid political discussions.**
- **Change the subject:**
  - **Ask their opinion about something safe.**

# Assignment #5

*Do you know  
your own triggers?*  
Ask your friends,  
family, colleagues.



# Agenda



**Distractions,  
Alternatives, Disengagement**

# Distractions

- **Ask for advice.**
- **Create a toy basket.**
- **Sitting down and writing**
- **Prepare something they like.**
- **Offer them a glass of water.**



# Alternatives

- **Generate options and choices.**
- **Learn the customer's goals:**  
**Will another path serve?**
- **Substitute something more interesting than their anger.**

# Disengagement

- Can you say *no thank you*?  
Learn to interrupt politely and deflect.
- The formula:
  - Thank them.
  - Set the limit.
  - Offer an alternative.
- Walk away or hang up: Stay calm.



# Assignment #6

Discuss with co-workers  
how to develop  
the “*option*” frame  
of mind.

# Agenda



**Trust Your Gut:  
When to Call the Authorities**

# Education

- **Legal and law enforcement community**
- **Who has jurisdiction for what issues?**
- **What you can and can't do**
- **Consistent and transparent process:  
Communication, rules, and  
the consistent enforcement of rules**

# Resources



- *The Gift of Fear*. Gavin de Becker
- *Prisoners of Hate*. Aaron Beck
- *Stop Walking On Eggshells*. Mason and Kreger
- *I Hate You--Don't Leave Me*: Kreisman and Straus
- *Don't Shoot the Dog*: Karen Pryor
- *Fixing Broken Windows*: Kelling and Coles
- [www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/)
- [ala-apa.org/newsletter/2013/11/12/workplace-violence-are-you-prepared-to-manage-a-crisis-situation/](http://ala-apa.org/newsletter/2013/11/12/workplace-violence-are-you-prepared-to-manage-a-crisis-situation/)