

LibraryCrunch

Service for the Next Generation Library: A Library 2.0 Perspective by Michael Casey

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If They Go Elsewhere, We Lose

When your first response to a new idea is a blanket no, when your face betrays your timidity to change and negativity towards "outside the box" ideas, when you can no longer listen to a new idea with an open mind... well, it's time to go. I cannot tell you how often I have heard library staff from around the country tell me that they have department heads and supervisors who simply do not want to hear new ideas. This is crushing. It's crushing the morale of our workers and it's crushing the ability of our libraries to change and move forward.

As one young and energetic librarian recently asked me, "What do you do when your youth services supervisor doesn't like teens and does not want to allow you to hold meetings to even discuss teen outreach?" Or, as another librarian recently recounted, what do you do when your library holds a wildly popular event and then chooses not to repeat it because the people that attended may never come back to the library? Or, as several have recently written me and said, what do you do when everything you want to do, every program you want to create, is met with a condescending look and a "we'll look into it" reply that goes nowhere?

Ironically, and sadly, all of these comments come to me from young staff, people with fresh ideas, the energy to carry out their ideas, and the desire to make the library a more popular and fun destination. But it's not simply young staff who feel this oppression. Older staff, beaten down over the years, also feel this pressure but are probably less inclined to speak up and complain.

Can you tell that I am angry? I debated whether to write about this subject because of my position as technology director. I often times have to say no to new ideas, but I try to do it only after an honest and thoughtful review that often includes going to other people and bouncing the idea off of them. I hope I have never outright said no to an idea simply because it did not fit within my own understanding of needs or guidelines. Sometimes ideas that serve our mission will push the boundaries of our current operating environment, but that's okay. We must be willing to change and evolve if we want to continue serving our communities to the best of our ability.

So what do I say to these great people with excellent ideas? I tell them to keep pressing. Keep asking. I tell them to talk the idea up to those around them and don't give up. As someone this morning said to me, you're like a dog with a bone and you've got to fight for what you believe in. If these excited staff go elsewhere, other libraries or other industries, then we lose.

Posted by Michael on February 1, 2007 12:26 PM | [Permalink](#)

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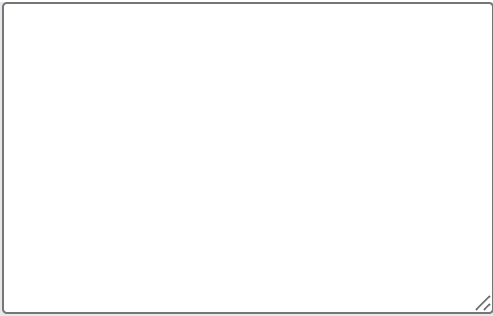
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