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## Passive Aggressive Behavior

I received an email from a friend of mine on the left coast asking how to deal with this type of behavior. It's an unfortunate fact that this type of passive-aggressive behavior still exists in today's libraries. It must be dealt with head-on. This is just the type of attitude that leads to the cultures of perfect and no, [an issue I talk about](#) with Michael Stephens in this month's Library Journal.

Here's the email my friend sent to admin about a retention policy question:

*Dear Mr. Williams,*

*How long do we retain back issues of the New York Times? Thanks.*

*Mary at Smallville Branch*

And this is what she got in return:

*Dear Mary,*

*You'll find the answer on page 21 of the Retention Policy Manual in the System Manual, volume 4.*

*J. Williams.*

What could the letter writer have said that would still have been instructional but less passive-aggressive and more friendly?

*Dear Mary,*

*We keep them for 3 weeks. If you ever need this info in the future you can find it in our Retention Policy Manual in volume 4 of the System Manual.*

*Good luck,*

*J. Williams.*

Posted by Michael on April 8, 2007 06:26 PM | [Permalink](#)

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Wow--responses like that are really frustrating, but I am not surprised to see that sort of behavior from librarians. Unfortunately, the average librarian seems to fuss so much about procedures and policies that s/he loses sight of the big picture and becomes cranky if you ask for something that supposedly should have been obvious. This happens to me as a patron, so I can just imagine how impatient and self-righteous and passive-aggressive librarians can be with their own kind. (It's quite honestly one of the reasons I've been turned off from practicing librarianship after I graduate from library school.)

At any rate, back when I used to work in student services at a college, we talked openly about "internal customer service" and what the expectations were for handling questions/communication with colleagues, how different media affect the tone of cooperation, etc. I can even remember us looking at sample emails and doing role playing during an in-service training session on internal customer service. And it had its own line on our staff evaluation process!

Besides trying to address it in training (which means adding it to the list along with everything else that barely gets fit in), my only other ideas for dealing with this are: 1) trying to model effective communication and hoping that it rubs off on people and 2) confronting someone face-to-face when a pattern like this develops, being careful to present the concern in a tactful way. I

know a lot of people would prefer never to confront coworkers, but I think that's what members of a good working team are willing to do/accept with each other.

Posted by: [Brian Want](#) | [April 9, 2007 01:27 PM](#)

And you can take it a step further: "Do you think we're holding the NYT long enough, too long...? How's it working out for the Smallville branch?" I think that extra step can really help for departments that don't really communicate that often. Too bad that not everyone wants feedback!

Posted by: [Mark](#) | [April 10, 2007 07:35 PM](#)

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