

LibraryCrunch

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

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It's About Me, and You

It's easy to complain about what the other person is saying. It's easy to sit back and say that it's the other person who speaks badly about staff or who fails to give the right level of internal customer support. But it's not just them. It's me, too.

This piece was going to be about the "others" – those people I speak to and hear about every day. But after some reflection I realized that it needs to be about me, and about all of us as individuals, because we're the ones that make the change. We're the ones that sit in those meetings where we say nothing (or precious little) as another staff person berates an entire class of our fellow workers. We're the ones – individually – who must speak up and make the change that needs to happen.

I have grown weary hearing from so many people in so many libraries about the utter lack of respect and understanding regarding our frontline staff. I hear, over and over, about administrators or bureaucrats who sit in their offices pouring over numbers or receipts or purchase orders and do nothing but undermine and question-to-death the good intentions of the library frontline. Those walled individuals who have never worked the desk, or have not worked it in so many years that their memories have become sick with the we-knew-best disease.

This is not a new subject for me. I've written about it both here and in [Library Journal](#). But it just seems to continue, unabated, at so many levels within libraryland (and, I am certain, outside of libraryland). I hear from branch staff that just wants administrators to listen, to simply acknowledge their concerns and needs. And I hear from library management who wants the numbers crunchers and penny-pinchers to realize that they do more each day than sit behind a desk and answer emails. Being heard and having a voice is one of the keys to feeling successful in your job.

But what frontline staff does not need to hear – never, ever needs to hear – is that they are being spoken ill of, that they are being treated with condescension and a lack of trust by those who provide their services at the administrative level. Once this mistrust slips into the equation the morale plummets and frontline staff feels abandoned.

Yet we all sit in meetings almost every day where someone offers up a blanket criticism of some class of frontline worker – the equivalent to a bigoted stereotype that few of us would stand for – and no one says anything.

This simply cannot be allowed to go unchecked. We, individually, must address each remark, each comment head-on and with the force it deserves. And we need to continue to give a voice to the frontline. We need to continue building our vertical teams, asking questions of those who serve our customers, listening to their requests and ideas, and including those staff in our regular daily rounds.

Morale is built and buttressed from both directions – from the bottom up and from the top down. We worry so very much about how friendly and customer-service orientated our frontline staff are to our external customers, but we give precious little weight to the level of friendliness or service our internal workers show and give to each other. That must change.

Posted by Michael on February 11, 2008 06:50 PM | [Permalink](#)

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I just forwarded your article to the rest of the Library Staff Support committee here at UIUC.

Bravo, sir, and thank you.

Posted by: [barbara trumpinski-roberts](#) | [February 14, 2008 08:28 AM](#)

Thanks for sharing this Michael. As a direct supervisor to an amazing team of frontline staff - and I myself am on the frontlines as well - I find it encouraging to have an administrator address such

an important issue. It comes down to respecting the perspectives and responsibilities of all employees in their various roles within an organization. Library staff and administrators need to break down the walls that prevent those behind the scenes and those on the front lines from understanding where the other is coming from.

As a middle manager I am charged with helping my staff understand the perspective of other departments while also being supportive and advocating for them. Of course, communicating the needs of both can be difficult if there is a negative attitude to begin with. An 'us verses them' mentality on either side is not productive and stalls communication.

Posted by: Laura Savastinuk | [February 14, 2008 01:50 PM](#)

thank you for your article, I want to know about library 2.0 so much. please suggest me to your article about library 2.0

thank so much

Posted by: [projectlib](#) | [February 18, 2008 03:32 AM](#)

Great post -- inspired, thoughtful, heartfelt. It really resonates with me. Thanks.

Posted by: [Darren Chase](#) | [February 22, 2008 08:20 PM](#)

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