

Perception, Influence and Relationships

By Tina Stanislowski

We live in an era of rapid technological advancements, budgetary constraints and a user base that have come to expect express service for many of their needs. Convenience seems to be a deciding factor for many individuals wanting to conduct research, and who can blame them? This expectation of expediency is especially true for our primary target audience, Generation Z, as it is an intrinsic part of what their world offers them.

Whilst the majority of our patrons are our students, our client base extends beyond to include fellow staff members and parents of students. Recently, I posted a message on OztI_net asking how others felt their library was perceived. I'm pleased to say that overwhelmingly, the response was positive and encouraging, even from those who have experienced quite challenging situations. The reason why I say this is because the common thread throughout all the replies was one of commitment, enthusiasm and a love of the job. It's no wonder that there are sites on the World Wide Web such as www.llovelibraries.org.

The success of these libraries is a consequence of the passion library staff have for their work and an acknowledgement of their vibrant connection to delivering a service of excellence in the field. Moreover, it is reflected in the results they achieve and the relationships they build amongst their community. As Aristotle said 'Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work'.

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Success, however, is not achieved in isolation. It requires the skills and competencies of individuals, usually working in a team environment. Am I referring to the library team here? Well, yes and no. Of course, a symbiotic team dynamic provides a solid base from which to flourish within, and beyond, the library. Expanding upon that, the team can also be defined as being inclusive of colleagues and staff from the wider school community including the leadership team.

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However, a great team, strong work ethic and passion for the job can only achieve so much without the support of this hierarchy. Therefore, a good relationship with your principal is vital if you want to succeed and deliver the quality and level of service your community deserves. Being able to fully realize your ambitions

means that you must have a good rapport with your principal, the librarian / principal relationship is therefore fundamental to facilitating the good work which has been achieved by countless library staff in schools.

So what do you do if your fierce commitment to your work does not seem to be enough and you are not achieving the recognition your library deserves? Begin first by conducting a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses/Limitations, Opportunities, and Threats) so that you can objectively identify your strengths and weaknesses. Reframe your thinking to view your weaknesses as something which is a deficient quality to seeing it in a positive light. Do this by looking at the weakness as an attribute which is not as strong as you would like, but one which can be cultivated and improved.

It is important to amend negative thinking into realistically positive thoughts as this will provide you with the right sort of mindset to enable you to move forward. If you focus on the negatives then it will make the tasks you need to achieve seem unbearably arduous. Conversely, operating from a position of optimistic self-belief that you are able to realize your goals is empowering.

Having conducted a SWOT analysis you now have to act upon what you have learnt. Perhaps you have identified that your library does not have a high enough profile in the school community and that people are unaware of the work and services you offer.

To effectively raise the profile of your library you firstly need to gain an understanding of how your clients view your library and what their expectations are of a great library. Review your SWOT and identify the strengths

which match customer requirements. As for the qualities customers would like your library to have, but were listed as a weakness, see if there is some way that you may be able to develop the limitations to a point where you are able to offer these features.

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All these things require support from your principal if you are to maximise your chances of success. You will need to have a good rapport with him or her to be able to satisfactorily communicate and express your ideas, vision and concerns or any issues you have regarding the library. Don't make assumptions that your principal knows as much as you do about the library, customers and their needs. Also, don't imagine that your principal will magically know what your intentions are, or what you've achieved. A good relationship will facilitate the process of mutual understanding and cooperation. Think statecraft!

Whilst it may seem obvious, a harmonious relationship is fundamentally based on trust and on mutual dependence; you need your principal's support and your principal needs you to have confidence in you that you will successfully execute your duties. Your relationship should have a synergy about it and can grow and develop if managed well.

How do you demonstrate that you are worthy of your principal's trust and respect? Some simple strategies include:

- Showing that you're disciplined in your approach to your work – do what you say you will do.
- Adhering to deadlines – meet your principal's expectations.
- Being organised – a clutter free workspace not only visibly demonstrates that you are able to manage your workload; it can also have a calming influence on your soul.
- Comportment – walk tall! The way you hold yourself is a powerful non-verbal communicator of who you are. You will also feel more confident and empowered if you pay attention to your posture.
- View your principal as a role model, someone you can look up to and emulate. Finding positive attributes about a person will go a long way to enable you to consider them with courtesy and respect, which is a foundation of any good relationship.
- Introduce him or her to new ideas. You might want to brainstorm or simply present a well thought out concept and provide as much information as possible. Most people appreciate being approached with new and progressive ideas, so long as it's not change for the sake of change.
- When he or she deserves it, provide your principal with positive feedback or acknowledge their good work in some way. It can be lonely at the top and providing your principal with encouragement will not only assist him or her to gain an insight into what they are doing right, but will also likely be appreciated.
- Be aware that your principal needs your help to achieve goals and that by working cooperatively you can achieve much.

School libraries are a microcosm of their school community and there are many occasions and reasons to be proud of your choice of vocation. Yes, we are living in a digital age but as we know, the internet compliments libraries – it does not replace a library. Libraries will continue to evolve and adapt to cultural change primarily due to the dedication and commitment of progressive and dynamic staff. The opportunity to engineer and deliver a 21st school library is exciting!

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