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Reference: A Professional Practice Strategy Designed by Librarians

Factors That Influence the Success of a Reference Interview

- The environment
- The questioner (knowledge, abilities, perceptions, etc.)
- The question
- The mode
- The professional (knowledge/skills, perceptions, attitudes, etc.)
- Communication between the questioner and the professional

Let's Talk About Your Interactions

- In-Person Reference
 - Type & size of library
 - Any additional background
 - Proxy use issues?
- E-Reference
 - Type of library
 - Circumstances/
background
 - Proxy use issues?

What Happens First? Getting the Professional's Attention



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Ross et al: PACT. Increasing comfort (& trust) at the beginning.

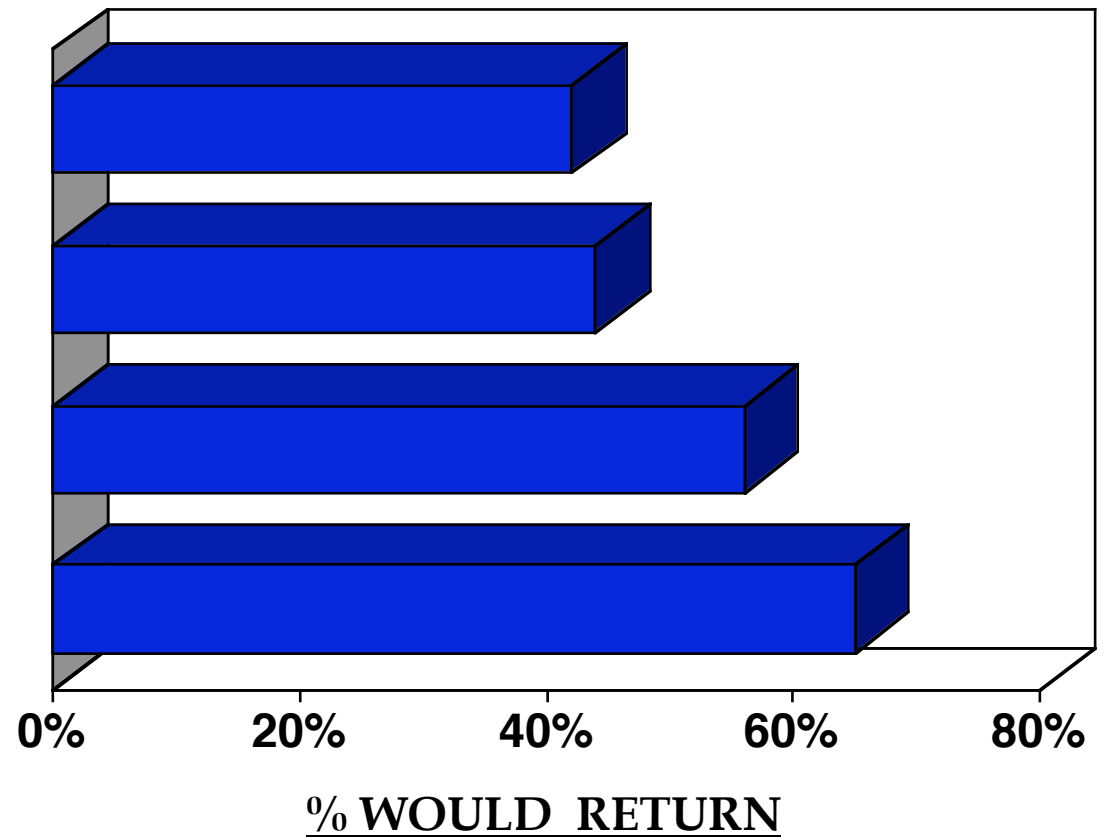
- Am I in the right **place**?
- Are you **available** to help me?
- Have we made **contact**? E.g., “Are you listening and willing to help me?”
- Have you understood my **topic** in general?

Ross & Dewdney

WtoR Early Findings: Impact of Staff Activity When Initially Approached

STAFF ACTIVITY

Doing work at desk
Work away from desk
With another user
Unoccupied



What happened at the VERY BEGINNING of the interview—Q IV on form:

- In-Person Reference
 - Examples of your question and what happened after you asked the question.
- E-Reference
 - Examples of your question and what happened after you asked the question.

From Your Worksheets, Let's discuss:

- How approachable was the staff member? (in person) Q1
- To what extent were you acknowledged. Q2
- How approachable was the staff member? (e-reference)
- To what extent were you acknowledged.

Did you experience any good open questions? (Checklist Q 3) In Person or E-Ref

- How can I help you today?
- What have you done so far?
- What would you like to know about X?
- What kind of help would you like?
- What else can you tell me about X?
- What would help you?
- What would you like to know about X?
- Can you tell me more about this problem?
- If you could have exactly the help that you wanted, what would it be?
- How would this help you?
- How do you plan to use the information [you just asked for]?

From Your Worksheets. Let's discuss:

Inclusion approaches at the reference desk or in the electronic environment (Checklist Q4)

- *Inclusion. Did the librarian take steps to include you in what (s)he was doing? How?*
 - *At the reference desk?*
 - *In the electronic environment*

Identifying Problem Areas (Which, BTW, Can Be Fixed)

**Cartoon of
“Conan the
Librarian”
removed.**

Pointers

**Cartoons of
“pointing
librarians”
removed.**

Did you experience any of these less effective staff actions?

- Answering **exactly** the question that was asked; various system centered responses.
- **Truncating** responses such as pointing-- ‘It’s over there.’ or “We don’t have what you want.”
- **Intimidating** behavior
- Poor listening skills (**suggesting lack of interest**)
- **Failure to involve** questioner;
- Making **assumptions** about the question
- **Lack of knowledge** of resources and systems
- **Failure to verify** (follow-up)

From Your Worksheets

- Identify the Most Problematic Actions/Responses in the In-Person Interaction
- Identify the Most Problematic Actions/Responses in the E-reference Interaction

Now The Positive: Let's look at qualities or behaviors that we've found are moderately successful

WtR Staff Factors Associated With
Moderately Successful Reference
Interviews (60-69%)

% Would Return	FACTOR	% of All Staff
63%	Staff member identified by name	14% (484)
63%	Librarian used instruction	15% (128)
65%	Librarian was free at beginning	28% (480)
66%	Interaction lasted 5-9 minutes	24% (485)
66%	Open q was first response	28% (484)
68%	Interaction lasted 9-14 minutes	8% (485)

Factors Associated With **Successful** Reference Interviews (70-80%)

% Would Return	FACTOR	% of All Staff
70%	Negotiated very successfully	16% (128)
76%	Asked a follow-up question	25% (484)
79%	Lasted more than 15 mins	3% (485)
80%	Was very approachable	28% (480)
80%	Showed a moderate interest	30% (485)

WtR Factors Associated with **Very Successful** Reference Interviews

% Would Return	FACTOR	% of All Staff
91%	Very interested in question	19% (485)
92%	Very good listening skills	22% (484)
94%	Found the need behind question	18% (482)
96%	Very effective open questions	10% (451)

From your worksheets, let's discuss:

- *How effective was the staff member's diagnosis of what you needed? (Cklist Q6) (18% in our study)*
 - *In the in-person interaction?*
 - *In the electronic interaction?*

For the record, how many of your librarians asked you a follow-up question? (Cklist Q7) (25% in our study)

- *In the in-person interaction?*
- *In the electronic interaction?*

From Your Worksheets

Identify the **Most Effective** Staff Behaviors/Actions You Observed:

- *In the in-person interaction?*
- *In the electronic interaction?*

The Key Question: Would You Return?

In-Person

YES

NO

NOT SURE

E-Reference

YES

NO

NOT SURE

Finally, overall, how successful was each interaction? (QV)

IN PERSON

- 1 Not successful
- 2
- 3 So-so
- 4
- 5 Very successful

E-REFERENCE

- 1 Not successful
- 2
- 3 So-so
- 4
- 5 Very successful