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Where is the Hospitality in Your Library?

Corey Seeman, Director, Kresge Business Administration Library, Ross School of Business of the University of Michigan, cseeman@umich.edu

Abstract: In the library and information fields, we spend countless hours focusing on making our world a more self-service environment. While many students and faculty much prefer to work independently and easily find resources on their own, we have placed our emphasis on creating a self-service environment that removes the “middle man” from the information equation. And with the move that many have made away from conventional reference desks and reference service, we can (at times) look more like self-check express lanes at the grocery stores than like the libraries that we used to be. And while our patrons most certainly enjoy accessing resources in an unmediated fashion, there are many instances (especially with more difficult research projects) where they do need assistance with finding print and electronic resources. This presentation takes a brief look at how we have used the methods from the hospitality industry at the Kresge Business Administration Library (University of Michigan) to ensure that we are not only meeting the information needs of our patrons, but also being available to assist them when it is needed.

In thinking about hospitality, we are often driven to images of guests who do not appreciate or deserve our effort. Two quotes that were used to start the session speak to that very idea: “Hospitality, n. The virtue which induces us to feed and lodge certain persons who are not in need of food and lodging,” from Ambrose Bierce’s *The Devil’s Dictionary* (1911), and “Hospitality is making your guests feel at home, even though you wish they were,” – unknown saying. But when we get past this, we realize that there are many positive and successful models of hospitality that could enable libraries to do great things for the communities that they serve.

Good examples come from Disney, Nordstrom and the National Baseball Hall of Fame. At Disney, the model of hospitality is based on excellent customer service, attention to detail, smooth operations, and the feeling that they truly care about your experience as their guest. At Nordstrom, the employee handbook is a simple, yet powerful card stating: “our number one goal is to provide outstanding customer service” and our only rule is to “use good judgment in all situations.” When I worked for the Hospitality crew at the Baseball Hall of Fame for Induction Weekend, our goal simply was to make things right. Our group name was changed from Information to Hospitality to reinforce that (and that did make a real difference in the way that we approached problems). Additionally, we might think of the way that we engage people who come to our house, especially with the phrase “Mi casa et su casa”.

While librarians are excellent and amazing at providing service to patrons, we have been fixated over the last few years at developing and building upon a self-service mentality which empowers the patron, but potentially removes them from assistance. Many libraries (especially in the academic space) have removed reference desks and moved to more of a shared desk environment. This type of approach is ideal when

patrons know what they want, but it does not work when patrons do not know what they need. While most patrons do want to work independently, they also want to easily get assistance when they need it.

The remainder of the presentation focused on the activities at the Kresge Business Administration Library at the University of Michigan¹. The Kresge Library is an independent library, receiving its funding from the Ross School of Business and has 21 staff members (including 8 librarians). The library operates 108 hours a week and primarily serves a population of around 3700 FTE faculty, staff and students. The presenter joined the library in 2005 and became the director in 2006. My goal as director has always been to create the library I would want to use and I have always used the concepts of both hospitality and empathy to drive many of our service and collection decisions. As a rule, I am more concerned about what our students and faculty need than what libraries are doing elsewhere when evaluating services for the Ross Community. To this end, we have become a very strong proponent of the Nordstrom Way of making things right for our patrons. Our goal is nothing short of being the customer service champions at the Ross School.

The programs that we have launched at Kresge include the following:

- Embedded Librarians for Student groups (MAP): while this is not a recent idea, we have been able to expand the program as more group work is promoted at the school. Through these embedded librarian programs, we can provide specialized research and the ability for students to develop a relationship with the librarian, rather than always starting at the beginning.
- Strategy 502 Assignment: Students work in groups and explore one industry and two companies (a high and low performer). While we have guides for databases to use, we work closely with these students as they need assistance.
- Need Supplies? Many students do. And like hotels that provide toothbrushes, razors and other toiletries to travelers, we provide office supplies (name tents, envelopes, paper (for case interviews), pens, earplugs). We provide these items at no cost to students because it costs more to track the money than we collected.
- Supporting Recruiting: Company recruiters (who hire Ross graduates) have interviews in our building and need all sorts of services such as unlocking offices, printing items, replacement power cords (especially for phones) and other needs. Even though they are not part of the Ross Community, we seek to serve them as a guest of the school.

Not everything has been a success. We had a coat check during interviewing season and it turned into more work than we were able to accommodate and we have since cancelled it. So what does Hospitality Mean at Kresge? It means serving the students, faculty and other staff the best we can. It means listening to their needs without considering what other libraries are doing. It means not being bogged down with what

¹ For more information, please see <http://tinyurl.com/KresgeLibrary>

other departments are doing. Ultimately, it means treating our patrons the way that we would like to be treated.