

Assignment 1: Library Customer/"Secret Shopper" Rating Form

Instructions: Visit a local library and rate the following items on a scale of 1-10, with a lower score indicating dissatisfaction and a higher score satisfaction. Plan on asking one or more staff a question, in order to rate their response. Your specific assignment should include a numeric score and 2-3 sentences of written analysis and, finally, a total numeric score.

Location is convenient:

Score: 9

The library I visited, the Y branch of the X Library System, is located a few miles from my home, but in an area that I don't generally have occasion to visit. It is, however, easily accessible by car, bus, and nearby walking trails. It is located across the street from an elementary school and within walking distance of a bank and several retail outlets and is surrounded by residential neighborhoods, so for area residents, the location is convenient.

Parking is convenient:

Score: 7

The branch has its own free parking lot with plenty of parking spaces; most of them are, however, a bit of a distance away from the building entrance. There are two driveways from the parking lot to the street, one designated as the entrance and one as the exit. The signage indicating which is which is not entirely visible from the street, and unfortunately, as I approached the library in my car, I passed the entrance only to discover that the second driveway was a one-way exit and had to drive up the street, turn around and come back.

Library is attractive from the outside and grounds are well-maintained:

Score: 7

The library building and its architectural style are clearly several decades old. While the building is not ugly, it just seems dated. (To be fair, the branch will be moving into a brand new facility up the street in a few months). The grounds are well-maintained and the library is adjacent to walking trails and fields which are pleasant to look at.

One can see from a distance (i.e. from a moving car) if the Library is open or closed:

Score: 5

I visited the library at about 5:45 PM on a Tuesday in the spring, so it was still light outside, meaning I could not see light emanating from within the building, which would generally be a good way to assess whether the library is open in the evening. Since the parking lot is behind the building as you approach from the street, it is difficult to ascertain whether there are cars parked there until you drive in. The library hours are posted next to the front door, which is not visible from the street.

The Library was open when I wanted to visit:

Score: 9

I visited the library on my way home from work, which is generally a convenient time for me to visit. As I entered, I looked at the open hours sign and noted that the library stays open until 9 PM Monday through Thursday, which is convenient for people who work or go to school. The reason I gave a score of 9 rather than 10 is that this branch is closed on Sundays, and many people visit the library on Sundays since they are off work or doing research for school assignments.

Upon entering the Library, it is easy to get oriented to where things are:

Score: 6

Upon entering the library, I felt a bit overwhelmed because the branch has clearly outgrown its space and it felt a little crowded. There were so many things to look at, and it wasn't entirely clear where the staff desk was located or how to find my way around. After walking around for a bit, I noticed a staff person near the self-checkout stations; I'm not sure if there is even a designated staff-assistance service point in this branch or not. The holds area is tucked away in a nook that is not visible from the entrance, and I overheard another patron asking the staff person where to get her holds, so that area is not very easy to find.

Bathrooms are clean and well-maintained:

Score: 7

The bathroom was clean but looked like it could use some attention. The trash can was full and a few bits of paper towel were strewn on the floor; the toilet paper roll was sitting on the counter next to the toilet rather than in the dispenser on the wall.

Staff was available, friendly, acknowledged me, and met my need(s) readily:

Score: 7

I didn't see a staff person in the public area until I'd been in the building for a few minutes. I was able to see into the staff room and saw someone in there, but I didn't see a service desk. After a few minutes, a woman came out of the staff room and stood near the self-checkout station. I observed her helping another patron. I did see a young man walking with a book truck through the library, but he had his iPod on, so I wouldn't have felt comfortable approaching him with a question. After the woman at the self-checkout station helped the other patron, I approached her to ask about the new library. She was very friendly and gave me the information I needed.

The building and collections were easy to navigate:

Score: 7

The building is fairly small, so there was not a lot of space to navigate. The layout seemed a bit haphazard, but the children's and teen areas were clearly designated with signage (the teen area was walled off and had its own door). Each collection (e.g. fiction, DVDs, audio books, nonfiction, ESL, etc.) was clearly indicated with color-coded signage. The holds area, as mentioned above, was one of the least visible areas, which is a major drawback, since holds probably account for a high percentage of circulation.

I would visit this Library again:

Score: 8

I would visit this library again because of its proximity to my home, especially to pick up a hold item. I will definitely visit again when the branch moves into its brand new facility up the street in a few months!

Total Score: 72
(Maximum 100 points)

Assignment 2: Seattle Young Professionals Library Outreach Plan

Background: The Seattle Public Library (SPL) has identified a significant underserved population in the city of Seattle, namely, young professionals aged 18-35. While many members of this demographic used libraries as children and young adults, library usage tends to fall off during the period of time after they enter the workforce and before they have children of their own. SPL recognizes the importance of its services to area residents through all phases of their lives, and in order to bridge the gap in library usage during this important phase of life for Seattle residents, SPL is implementing a plan of outreach.

Goal: To provide increased relevant library services to young professionals in Seattle, Washington.

Objective #1: By May 15, 2010, SPL will convene an outreach committee consisting of the Library's Communications Director, a young professional currently serving on the Library's Strategic Planning Advisory Board, and one librarian from each of the following Library departments: Teen Services; Arts, Recreation and Literature; Business, Science and Technology; History, Travel and Maps; General Reference Services; and Fiction.

Objective #2: By June 1, 2010, the outreach committee will convene a focus group consisting of area young professionals and one representative from each of three local young professional networking groups (Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce Young Professionals Network, Seattle Urban League Young Professionals, and the Seattle chapter of BEAN); the total number of participants will be ten. The focus group will be moderated by the Communications Director, and her Administrative Assistant will take meeting minutes. Dinner and a donated \$10 Starbucks gift card will be provided to each participant. The objective of the focus group will be to determine the information needs of this demographic, and focus group participants will be entered into a drawing for several prizes donated by local businesses, including a Zune MP3 player (donated by Microsoft), a spa package (donated by Gene Juarez Salons & Spas), and a \$25 Amazon.com gift card (donated by Amazon).

Objective #3: Based upon the outcome of the focus group, the outreach committee will develop a series of monthly outreach events, six months in duration, to commence in July 2010. Each program will cover a different topic relevant to the information needs of this demographic, and programs will be developed by committee members drawing upon their subject areas of expertise in order to showcase library resources. Possible topics include career resources and entrepreneurship, a workshop on buying your first home, retirement and investment planning, travel and recreation, dating and relationships, green living and conservation, and cooking and interior design. At each event, library staff will highlight relevant library resources and educate attendees about resources and services available to them through the library, and library card registration will be promoted. Guest speakers will be utilized as needed for the chosen

topics. All events will be held in the Microsoft Auditorium at the Central Library and refreshments will be provided. The roster of events will be finalized by June 15, 2010.

Objective #4: By July 1, 2010, the Communications Director and her staff will develop a press release promoting the program series and distribute it to local publications with high readership among the target demographic; it will also be distributed to local young professional networking groups for distribution to their membership and to local businesses employing significant numbers of young professionals (e.g. Microsoft, Starbucks, Nordstrom, etc.). The series will be publicized on SPL's homepage and in its email newsletter, and flyers and posters will be posted and distributed at the Central Library and all branches of SPL. Specific programs will be posted on SPL's online Calendar of Events, which will feed to the homepage as each event date draws near. The Library will also purchase a limited number of newspaper and magazine ads and produce a PSA to be run on local radio stations.

Objective #5: At each event, a brief questionnaire already in usage by SPL will be distributed to attendees to evaluate their satisfaction with the event and with library services in general. Each participant who completes the questionnaire will be entered into a drawing, to be held after the final program in the series, for an iPad; two runners-up will be awarded \$25 iTunes gift cards.

Budget:

Two catered dinners for 10 focus group participants + two library staff members @ \$15/person=\$720

Refreshments for 6 outreach events @ \$100/event=\$600

Printing of questionnaires and flyers=\$240

Newspaper/magazine ads and PSAs=\$1,000

Posters=\$200

iPad for event participant drawing=\$499

2 iTunes gift cards for event participant drawing @ \$25 each=\$50

Ten Starbucks gift cards @ \$10 each=DONATED

Zune MP3 player=DONATED

Spa package=DONATED

One Amazon.com gift card @ \$25=DONATED

TOTAL=\$3,309, to be provided by SPL Outreach Budget

Evaluation: In January 2011, questionnaire data and numbers for library card registrations, event attendance, and volunteer recruitments among the target group will be compiled by the Communications Office and the focus group will reconvene to review the results. Dinner will again be provided for all participants. Based upon the group's evaluation of the plan's successes and areas for improvement, additional services or programs will be planned.

Assignment 3: Angry Customer Scenario

In dealing with an angry customer who had periodically been verbally abusive toward my employees over the past couple of months, my first step would be to make sure that my employees are well-equipped to handle her. This would most likely involve meeting with the staff as a group to discuss the types of problems that have occurred and to review communication techniques that can be employed to diffuse such situations. I would follow up with staff after enough time had passed to evaluate the success of the strategy.

If the situation didn't improve and the same customer continued to abuse staff, I would talk with her myself. I would let her know why her behavior is problematic and what the consequences will be if she continues. I would also emphasize to her that we want to help her in the best way we can, and try to understand why she is so angry. Is her anger stemming from something that the staff is doing that could be improved? I would try to see things from her perspective. If there seems to be a customer service problem, I would let her know that it is a situation we plan to address. I would also try to empower her to change her behavior and help her calm down and get to a positive perspective about how she can successfully use our services and have a good experience. It is possible that the woman's anger is rooted outside of the situation and in that case, she needs to be told what is and is not acceptable behavior when she is on library grounds. I would let her know that she needs to leave the library, but that she is welcome to return when she is not exhibiting this behavior.

If, after offering the customer the choice to change her behavior, she still continued to abuse staff, I would escalate the situation to library security or to the police, depending upon whether she was violating the library rules of conduct or the law. This would most likely result in her temporary exclusion from library property.

Assignment 4: New Ideas Linking Strong Libraries to Strong Communities

In our course lecture and readings this week, we were presented with many new ideas about strengthening libraries and enabling them to better serve their communities. The ideas that I am most excited about are those presented in our instructor's article, "A Psychological Approach to Creating Stronger Public Libraries" (Reynolds, 2000). In particular, the idea that people's use of libraries is driven by, or is at least an important aspect of, their fundamentally human quest for meaning and personal identity resonated strongly with me. My own life experience has made me all too aware of "the anonymity and isolation of the present" (Reynolds, p. 127), and the desire to transcend that has been one of the major factors in my decision to work in libraries. My own life has been changed for the better through the people and resources I have discovered in libraries, and I derive satisfaction from working to help others make similar discoveries. I spend a significant portion of my work hours at a circulation desk, performing many less-than-glamorous functions, and sometimes I get tired of dealing with a never-ending stream of people. But then I see the excitement on a boy's face to be checking out the next book in a series he is reading or receive a heartfelt expression of gratitude from one of our regular patrons for my service, and I know that what we are doing at our library is really making a difference in people's lives.

Several months ago, in the August/September 2009 issue of *American Libraries*, there appeared an article entitled "From Gatekeepers to Gate-Openers," in which Steven Bell argues that the future of libraries lies in designing meaningful library user experiences (Bell, p. 51). Today, in the wake of a severe economic recession, as people seek to simplify their lives, a value that is emerging is the desire to collect experiences rather than possessions in order to create meaning. Bell argues that "libraries can offer meaning across the entire spectrum of what is important to people," by helping them gain a sense of accomplishment, being a place where they can indulge in the appreciation of the arts, stimulating creativity, and connecting them to their communities (Bell, p. 52). I agree with our instructor's assertion that "[library] activities need to be marketed to people's emotions, biases, and prejudices—not to rational, intellectual characteristics" (Reynolds, p. 140), because these are truly what drive people's use of libraries and where libraries have the opportunity to help people create real, meaningful value in their lives.

One other idea from this week that I would like to respond to is that libraries need to be careful not to misuse electronic technology. It is easy to get caught up in the hype and excitement around each new gadget that comes out on the market, but libraries need to be careful not to alienate their existing users by requiring them to constantly acquire new skills in order to continue to use the library. On the other hand, libraries have come to play an increasingly important role in bridging the "digital divide," so they must stay current and try to meet the needs and expectations of their users, many of whom may expect to be able to access content in all the latest formats. I agree with our instructor's assertion that "we need less study about electronic gadgets and more about how people do/do not use them successfully" (Reynolds, p. 121). Information from studies such as these will be invaluable for libraries as they make decisions about adopting new technologies.

Assignment 5: A Lesson in Leadership

This semester, I learned about my own leadership style. I have never really thought of myself as a leader, and I have never held a job where I managed people. To be chosen as the Team Leader for our group project was a bit daunting to me because of my lack of experience in this area. However, I think it was a really valuable experience, because it took me out of my comfort zone and tested me. I found that what felt most comfortable and authentic to me in leading my team was striving to build consensus while also keeping us focused, motivated, and decisive. In my own work experiences, I have worked with supervisors and managers who employed a variety of different management styles. The situations in which I felt good about my work and my job were those in which I felt valued, appreciated, empowered, and as if my voice was being heard. The situations in which I felt bad about my work and my job (and which consequently caused me a great deal of internal strife) were those in which I felt like I was treated like a child, micromanaged, disposable, easily replaceable, and in which there was a very low level of mutual trust. I know that if, in the future, I am in a position in which I am asked to lead a team or manage people, I want those people to feel good about the experience, not bad. I would never want to employ a style that would cause people internal strife such as I experienced. I found through my experience as my team's leader that I didn't need to do all the talking or tell people what to do. By listening to my team, asking for their ideas, and helping us reach consensus, I allowed everyone on my team the opportunity to have her voice heard and influence our decisions. I believe that the experience was positive for everyone on the team. Thus, in comparable future situations, I will definitely employ a similar style.