

PATRONS ARE PEOPLE

HOW TO BE A MODEL LIBRARIAN

*Prepared by a Committee of the Minneapolis
Public Library Staff.*

Illustrated by

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AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
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THE LIBRARY AND ITS PUBLIC RELATIONS

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This pamphlet was prepared by the Minneapolis Public Library for its own use. It is issued for general distribution only because the publisher sees in it something which every library can use and which it is believed libraries will welcome.

Some references in the pamphlet are specific to Minneapolis. It goes without saying that the user will read into the text names and places specific to his own locality.

Foreword

In presenting this guide to the perplexed librarian, the Committee begs that all librarians, perplexed or otherwise, will remember that it is a guide only.

Road maps are indispensable to the tourist, but he must find out which oil suits his car best before he starts out.

He has to fill up with his own brand of gasoline. The map alone will not get him there.

Similarly, this booklet offers signposts and advice on the best routes to follow, well aware that not all roads suit all travelers, and that you may know a cutoff that will get you there much faster.

The important thing is for all of us to arrive at the right destination.

SARAH L. WALLACE, *Chairman*
VIVIAN MAGNUSON (Mrs. Elmer J.)
LOLITA NEWMAN

Contents

<i>Roses by Other Names</i>	7
<i>Second to the Right and Straight on Till Morning</i>	8
<i>Too Much and Too Soon</i>	10
<i>Annie Doesn't Live Here</i>	12
<i>Don't You Trust Me?</i>	14
<i>It's Bound To Stay</i>	15
<i>Shoulder Chips</i>	16
<i>It's More Fun To Be President</i>	17
<i>If You Want a Thing Well Done</i>	19
<i>Spare the Rod</i>	20
<i>I Only Work Here</i>	21
<i>Smile When You Say That, Pardner</i>	22
<i>Consider the Taxpayer</i>	23
<i>The Way It Looks to Me</i>	24
<i>We Have a Rule</i>	25
<i>Alexander Graham Belles</i>	27

<i>Don't Answer That Question!</i>	30
<i>Catching Flies</i>	31
<i>Strictly Business</i>	33
<i>Getting Along With the Help</i>	33
<i>Thou Shalt Not</i>	34
<i>Linger a Little Longer</i>	35
<i>When I Was Your Age</i>	36
<i>Bending the Twig</i>	37
<i>Super-Service</i>	38

Roses By Other Names

To many lay people, library phrases are no more understandable than Japanese nautical terms are to a librarian. The Model Librarian never forgets this and she sacrifices the purity of the exact phrase for lucidity of expression.

She never says, "Charge your books here (or there, or yourself)." She knows that to most people this means bills at the first of the month. They suspect money in the deal somewhere.

Instead she says, "Have your books dated here," or "They will stamp your books at that desk."

Departments and branches having pages might profit by the experience of one new assistant who turned in a patron's slips and told him helpfully that she had "sent" for the books. A week later the patron came in and asked if his books had been delivered yet.

Make sure that explanations are clear. The Model Librarian would have said: "The boy ['page' might be confusing; in war-time she might also say 'girl'] will get the books for you and bring them to this desk in a few minutes."

"Call Slip," "Book Slip" and "Date Taken Slip" are all confusing if thrown at the patron out of a clear sky. A successful librarian *shows* a call slip to the patron explaining what information it should have on it and how it is used. She pulls a book slip out of the pocket and names it as she shows it. She indicates the date taken slip in a book or magazine.

The Model Librarian would never tell a patron to look at the "Standard Cat." or the "U.S. Cat." Besides being misleading to

the patron it lays her wide open to the retort discourteous.

She realizes that "Mudge," *Readers' Guide*, "Granger" and the other names which come so trippingly to her tongue may fall flat on the stranger's ear.

She qualifies such titles with brief identifying phrases.

"Granger's *Index*, which lists poetry by author, title and first line," she intones sweetly.

"*Readers' Guide*, which indexes articles in magazines—" she begins.

Whenever possible she demonstrates the use of the tool in question.

Second To The Right And Straight On Till Morning

Fixed formulas for directing patrons from one place to another cannot be given since they vary with the department and branch. Nevertheless, the Model Librarian early in her career memorizes a clear, simple formula for directing people to other parts of the Library and to the rest room.

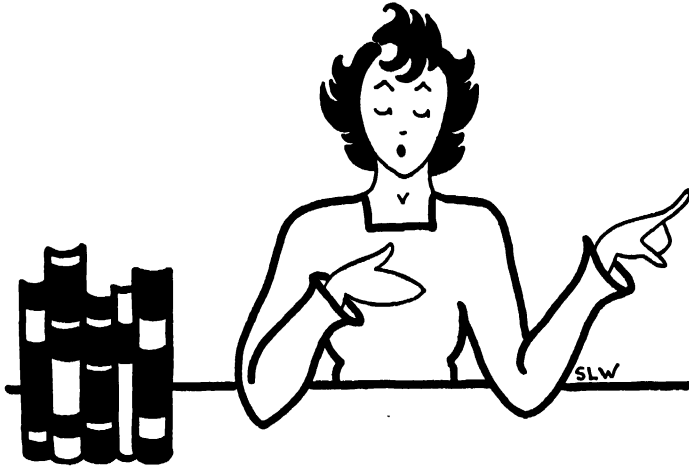
At the Main Library all directions should stem from the department in which the librarian is working. It is well to locate other places from one that the patron knows or can see.

A Reference Department worker might say: "That is in the Art Department, the room right above this"; or "That is in the Technical Department, the room right below this."

Information Desk workers can also locate rooms on other floors in a similar way. The Children's Room is directly below the new Open Shelf Room which the patron can see; the Parent-Teacher Room is under the old Open Shelf Room, also visible to him.

In the Main Library it is not always successful to say the number of the floor. Sad as it may seem, what the Library calls the first, second, third and fourth floors, will always be basement, first, second and third to the public. A successful librarian

partially overcomes this by saying the ground and main floors but she cannot very well go above that. Again there is always the chance that to Dimitri Mitropoulos or Russell Plimpton the third floor would be the main floor,* and there is no doubt but that the main floor would mean Museum to half the school children in Minneapolis.



She does not keep her eyes cast down

Remember that the Model Librarian need not keep her eyes cast down nor her head dead center. She knows it is quite permissible to turn from right to left in indicating directions.

The Model Librarian stays at the desk when she is on duty there, but that does not mean that she takes root. In time of stress, with lines of waiting patrons before her, she will not desert her post. But when not another creature is in sight, there is no reason why she cannot rise from her chair and walk the few steps that will show a bewildered patron the elevator or the nearest stairway. She need not give him a personally conducted tour to a department two floors below. She simply sets his feet on the path he should tread.

*Dimitri Mitropoulos, conductor of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra; Russell Plimpton, head of the Minneapolis Institute of Art. In the Minneapolis Public Library the Art and Music Departments are on the third floor.

Again, in the Main Library when sending a patron to another department for reference material, she first establishes a telephone contact. This should always be done if there is any doubt as to whether the second department can supply the information. Then in sending the patron on, she gives her action a friendlier air by naming the person he should see in the second department.

"The Technical Department, the room right below this, has material on that subject. If you go to the desk and ask for Miss Whiffet, she will take care of you. She knows you are coming."

This makes him feel that he is being well taken care of and not passed on from pillar to post. The Model Librarian never gives an assistant's name without first checking with that assistant. She may be waiting on another patron or out to lunch.

In case of unusual names she does not hesitate to spell them so that the patron can go to the desk and ask for Miss Kilfobecax with confidence instead of sliding up furtively to ask for Miss Unf-uh-unf.

Too Much And Too Soon

All unsuspecting, the advertising man bears down on the Overeager Librarian and asks for something on George Washington. He sits down at the table, hat in hand, and eye on clock.

Soon the Overeager Librarian staggers up to him, twenty-one biographies of Washington in one hand, his diary, speeches, and "Rules of Conduct" in the other and a Washington dictionary on her head, Mexican-wise.

The advertising man protests his gratitude and assures her this is plenty, "But puh-lenty!" She is not to be halted. She scuttles away. Soon she reappears, loaded down with tributes to Washington.

He stammers, he blushes. He assures her that he has more than enough. She waves her hand and is soon back with: (a) clippings; (b) magazine articles; (c) encyclopedias. By this time the

advertising man is cowering behind his chair, begging her to let up. She murmurs something about documents and hurries off



The Overeager Librarian

while the ad man grabs his hat and slinks furtively out of the building.

The Model Librarian finds out first what the patron wants.

The advertising man says "Washington." She looks interested. She inquires, "Do you mind telling me how you want to use the material?"

He is glad to tell her. His firm is doing a series of calendars on the presidents and he wants a good quotation about Washington. She gets him two or three of the best quotation books, opens them to the section marked "Washington," and leaves him with

the cheerful message that there are other books if he does not find what he wants in these. If he will let her know she will be glad to get them. Often she can keep an eye on him and perhaps later, if conditions at the desk permit, ask him if he is finding what he wants.

She does not overload a patron. If he doesn't want to take a book, the Model Librarian doesn't urge him. She knows it is better for him to go out empty-handed today and come back later, after he has painted his porch and finished his course in Russian, than it is for him to go out with a book that he does not want.

"I took it just to shut her up," he tells his wife.

When a patron comes in, the Model Librarian offers her help but does not press it. She leaves him free to shop about the shelves if he desires, just the way she likes to poke around the dress racks at a sale without feeling that the store detective is watching to see if she slips a \$12.95 bargain up her sleeve.

Annie Doesn't Live Here

In dealing with the patron who has come to her desk for something handled by another department or branch, the Model Librarian remembers how she felt last Christmas when the nearest department store sent her from basement China, to the fourth-floor Gift Shop, to the third-floor Housewares for a teapot for Aunt Jerusha. So she tries to soften the blow for her own "customer."

She must make him think that she would like to serve him herself but that he will get much better results in the right department.

She looks sympathetic because he must walk: (1) upstairs; (2) downstairs; (3) eight blocks; (4) one mile; and then she says:

"Most of our material on that subject is at our Social Service

Branch in the Citizen's Aid Building. You will probably get much more information there."

"We have fine material on old silver in the Art Department, the room right above this. I'm sure they can help you."



She looks sympathetic

"That book is kept at our Business Branch at 508 Second Avenue South. That branch is open until 5:30."

For a book at a branch she can do one of several things. She can offer to have it sent to the Library agency most convenient for the patron. With deliveries rationed, most people would rather not wait for that. She can also call to see if the book is in, arranging to have the branch hold it at the desk. Lastly, she notes on a slip of paper the address of the branch so that the patron need not stride along mumbling it over and over to keep from forgetting.

The Model Librarian, in referring a patron from the Main Library to one of the two special branches for a subject, always calls the patron's attention to the fact that all the books on that subject, including those at the branches, are listed in the Main Library catalog. This may save his going to the branch.

Before sending a patron anywhere, the Model Librarian

makes sure she understands his question. Because he asks for "books about China" does she pack him off to History and Travel? No, she knows he may want the Royal Doulton section in the Art Department.

Don't You Trust Me?

Occasionally a person asks why he must sign for a reference book. The librarian has explained that it is to be used in the room. He has agreed. Then she pokes the slip at him and asks him to sign his name and address.

He rears back. "But I'm only going to use it right here in the room," he says resentfully.

The Model Librarian never says, "We've had entire city directories carried out from under our noses by people who used them right here in the room."

She never says, "The last time we got back a civil service manual that was used right here in the room, you couldn't read it for the marks in it."

No, she never says that, because she assumes every man innocent until he is proved guilty.

She *smiles* and says, "Yes, I know, but these books are in great demand and we like to be able to locate them immediately." Or she might say, "Yes, I know you are. This serves as your receipt. The name is crossed off when you return it."

Both answers are true and both are usually acceptable.

In the same way, she never asks for a "reference." The average patron does not object to supplying "identification"; he is used to that question. "Reference," however, smacks of a doubt in the librarian's mind. The registration card now carries a regular form to take care of this but even so it must sometimes be explained.

The best form of the question seems to be: "Will you give me the name of some friend or relative in Minneapolis who lives at a different address?" Most patrons will immediately want to know

why. A good answer is simply, "We like to have someone who will know your new address in case you move."

It's Bound To Stay

Bound newspapers are not to be handled lightly.

The Model Librarian who deals with the combination of bound newspapers and the public has to go some to remain a Model.

Her first step is to find out why the paper is to be used—and most people don't want to tell. Some of this hesitancy arises from the feeling that they must reveal all the details of their past.

"My brother ran into a truck in 1932 and was sued for \$60,000," or something similar may be dragged out of them eventually.

The librarian can help overcome this hesitancy by suggesting general categories.

She explains: "You must have special permission to use the bound newspapers; they are so fragile. Do you mind telling me what you are looking up: birth records, accidents, law cases . . .?"

This often brings out the information. If the material can be obtained in another form she explains that and helps to get it. Many people do not know about clippings or documents, for instance, and think that the best way to look up Coolidge's speech in Minneapolis is by pawing through bound newspapers for several years back.

If the year that is asked for has been filmed, then the intricacies of microfilm must be explained with care, for many patrons think that they have to have an operator's license to run the Recordak. The Model Librarian does not say airily, "Oh, that's on film," and leave the patron to think he is going to be treated to the latest Warner Brothers opus, willy-nilly.

If the patron's reason for using the paper is legitimate and he must have the bound volume, then the Model Librarian must ask him to use it carefully.

She does not say, "Now you be careful of this," as one does to a little child.

By waiting until the newspaper is brought out and placed on a desk, she has an opportunity to show that the paper is fragile and the pages must be turned carefully.



We find it works best to turn the pages this way

She might say, "You see how brittle the paper has grown. We find it works best to turn the pages this way," and she demonstrates.

Again she acts as an interested helper rather than a guardian ogre.

Shoulder Chips

When the patron declares, "That book is always out," there is no use arguing with him. The Model Librarian never tells him that she saw it on the shelf last week with her own eyes.

In some cases she can ask if some other book will do, perhaps suggesting a title.

She checks to see that he has copied the number correctly and that the book has not been reclassified. In the Main Library she makes sure that it is not shelved in the Open Shelf Room or in a special collection. The patron is impressed with her solicitude. If all this fails she can look concerned and ask, "Have you tried to reserve it? That costs five cents but it's worth it if you need the book."

Mentioning the charge saves embarrassment to the nickel-less patron.

If he does know that he can reserve it but doesn't want to, there is nothing much left to do but sympathize with him.

Now and then patrons declare, "There never are any good books in," or "Doesn't this Library ever get any new books?"

The Model Librarian does not lose any sleep over these. She sympathizes with the patron and knows that these outbursts are born of the moment's exasperation, just as she declared last week, "There isn't a decent dress on Nicollet Avenue, not one that I'd be caught dead in."

It's More Fun To Be President

The Model Librarian never maintains that she is right. She does not even maintain that the Library is always right.

The patron insists that he returned the book. He gives you the exact hour, he tells you what tie he had on, and describes the girl who took his book.

Does the Model Librarian pound the desk and say, "The Library records must be right"?

The patron says there is no card for Shakespeare in the catalog.

Does she raise her eyebrows and inform him haughtily that of course there is a card for Shakespeare in the catalog?

She does not. That's why she is *successful* and has patrons following her around like swooners after crooners.

She says, "Our records all agree but, of course, we could be wrong."

She says in dismay, "No card for Shakespeare! There should be. Do you mind showing me where you looked?"

There are three reasons for admitting that she is wrong before she is proved so.



No card for Shakespeare!

First, her admission immediately gets the patron off the offensive. He begins to try to match her in politeness and soon we have a happy picture of both patron and librarian claiming to be at fault.

Secondly, if the Library really is wrong (it can happen) her face remains a nice peaches-and-cream instead of becoming as red as a Victory Gardener's prize Ponderosa. If the book turns up on the shelf or she finds that some prankster has removed Shake-

spare from the catalog in toto, all she has to do is thank the patron for calling the error to her attention and he goes off feeling like Public Benefactor Number One. The patron is happy and the librarian doesn't need to backwater.

Third, the Guardian Angel of Librarians, more often than not, will see to it that she is right, and then she can graciously accept the apologies of a humbled and willing patron instead of forcing a grudging acceptance of her victory on an embittered enemy.

If You Want A Thing Well Done

War changed grocery stores into self-service markets. Banquets became waiterless Edens with guests toting their own trays. The more daring hotels announced a make-your-own-bed policy.

The Library asks the reader to charge his own books. The Model Librarian does not assume because the practice has been in effect for years that each patron who comes up to her knows how. If the books are uncharged, she says, "Do you know about writing your own numbers?" If he does not, she shows him how, adding, "Then take it to that desk (or bring it back to me) to be stamped (or dated)."

If the patron wants an explanation she tells him that this system makes for speedier service especially in times of help shortage or when work is heavy.

There will always be the patron who forgets her glasses or who does not want to mark her own books. The Model Librarian accepts this stoically and even with sympathy. It takes only a few minutes to mark these few extra books herself. A disagreement might run into hours and the bad feelings linger for months.

Many university and high school students are well able to use the catalog for themselves. When time permits, high school students should be shown how to look up their books. It's up to the Model Librarian not only to lead the horse to water but also

to make him drink. She can show the student the subject heading he should use, supply him with pencil and call slip, and tell him to feel free to ask for more help if he gets stuck. In a large system, a catalog can be puzzling even to a librarian with a B.S. in L.S., an M.S. in L.S. and an honorary degree from the British Museum. A successful librarian remembers this in dealing with the public.

Spare The Rod

In spite of her sentiments at the end of a long, hard day, the Model Librarian will admit that the average patron is not a confirmed criminal.

Most of the library crimes he commits are because of ignorance of the rules. He does not necessarily need the third degree nor sentence to Alcatraz because he has disobeyed a rule.

The patron has returned a book with the book slip in it. This is clearly an accident or he would never have returned it. The Model Librarian thanks him for bringing it back.

She is wise enough to know that her casual attitude is a red herring dragged across the trail to keep the patron from realizing that, in reality, the Library could not trace the book were it not for his honesty. To a new patron she might explain the charging system.

The Muddled Librarian, on the other hand, scolds him like a naughty child. That is why the Muddled Librarian has no books in her library. Patrons who make such a mistake a second time keep the books rather than risk the embarrassment of a similar encounter.

Sometimes the Model Librarian must raise her rod to keep from spoiling the reader. But she does it judiciously and it hurts her more than it does him.

She avoids reprimanding a patron in front of others if possible. She does it calmly and not in a temper.

She tries to explain the reasons for objecting to the patron's

procedure; i.e., if he has answered all the questions in a civil service book with indelible pencil he has spoiled it for the other 450,000 citizens to whom the book belongs equally. If he has kept a book out for three months, he has prevented others from using it. She keeps the situation on a broad, social, rather than a personal, plane.

I Only Work Here

The Model Librarian does not come equipped with a built-in superiority complex. When tempted to acquire one she remembers that through library portals pass the world's greatest minds, as well as some of its lesser ones.



She laughs with the patron but never at him

She knows that the man who asks her for books on the Mesozoic age in Minnesota may not know how to use the card catalog but he can run rings around her in geology.

The woman who asks for a recipe for marzipan may not know how to spell the word but chances are she can turn out a better batch of it than the Model Librarian.

The reader is often funny, but no funnier than is a librarian

at Lockheed. The Model Librarian does have a sense of humor. She laughs with the patron but never at him.

Smile When You Say That, Pardner

Everybody has heard someone say morbidly: "It wasn't so much what she said; it was the way she said it."

The Model Librarian was born knowing this. She never commands a patron to do a thing. She asks him.

Instead of, "You *have* to return this in the Art Department," she says, "This is an Art Department book. Do you mind returning it there?"

Instead of, "This *has* to be returned where you took it," she says, "Will you please return this in the Technical Department?"

Instead of, "You *have* to have your card copied," she says, "Your card is full; would you mind taking it to the Registration Desk to be copied?" She often takes the time to add, "There is no charge," because many timid souls think a new library card costs anywhere from ten cents to a quarter.

Even when there is a line of waiting patrons she realizes that the fifth of a second spent in giving a little explanation such as "Your card is full"; "This is an Art Department book"; helps the patron understand that she is not cracking the whip to see him jump but has a logical reason for her request.

If the patron questions her, she is always ready to supply a polite explanation:

Nonresidents pay a dollar fee because the Library is supported by Minneapolis taxpayers; yet even if one lives outside the city he may enjoy library privileges by paying the fee.

Books are returned in special departments because all the records are there.

But above all, she remembers a *smile*, not one that looks glued on, but the friendly smile that is in the voice and eyes as well as on the lips.

And she watches the tone of her voice, the *way* she says it. She knows that *she* can smile and say the rejected phrase "You have to return this in the Music Department," and the patron will love it, whereas a co-worker with vinegar veins can use the formula and, looking down her nose, grate out, "Would you *mind* returning this in the Music Department?" and the patron will whip out his trusty old forty-five.

Consider The Taxpayer

Up to the desk comes a busy man. At the desk stands a librarian. She has a book open in front of her and is running her finger up and down the page. The busy man stands there. The librarian continues to read. The busy man fumes. The librarian is oblivious to him. Finally he erupts.

The busy man does not know that the librarian is waiting on the equally busy woman who is sitting at the first table behind him.

He does not see the receiver off the hook. How can he know that the librarian is answering a question for a patron on the wire?

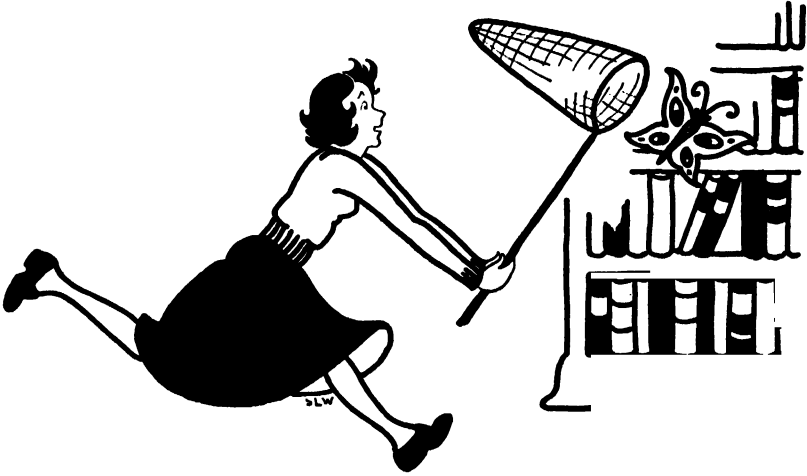
The Model Librarian looks at such situations from the borrower's side of the desk. She knows it takes her only one second, even when she is swamped, to raise her eyes so that he knows that she knows he is there, perhaps even smile and say briefly, "I'll help you in a minute; I am on the phone"; or, "I am helping someone; can you wait just a minute?"

Usually courtesy is matched by courtesy and the patron will wait and will wait more patiently.

When filing cards, checking reviews, indexing books, or doing other so-called busy work, the Model Librarian is aware that such work, although important, is secondary at a public desk and she drops it immediately when a patron approaches. This is especially important when such tasks involve reading, for it

would take an oath on a stack of Bibles as high as the Foshay Tower* to convince a borrower that the librarian was working and not just “reading a book.”

Personal interests are left at home by the Model Librarian. She does not pursue them at work. She would never think of making out her income tax report at the desk. She doesn't look for the hallmark on her great-grandmother's teaspoons while patrons line up before her. She doesn't haul out Dyke's encyclo-



She does not pursue personal interests at work

pedia to see why her engine was missing on the way to work that morning.

She leaves her knitting and her butterfly collecting for after hours.

The Way It Looks To Me

“And when I walked in, there were three of them all standing talking at the desk,” complains the borrower.

How was he to know that the “three of them” were holding a solemn conclave as to whether a book should go into the 355's

*Tallest building in Minneapolis.

or the 940's? They were so busy taking care of the future borrower they forgot the present one.

The borrower has no way of telling whether the conversation at the desk is about subject headings or the new spring styles. The way it looks to him is that the librarian is not earning her salt. The Model Librarian realizes this and makes an effort to hold all conferences in the office or when no patron is in sight.

Groups of assistants at a desk give an impression of over-employment. No librarian, successful or otherwise, wants to encourage this notion. Some librarians, ostrich-like, try to carry on their conversations in a pseudo-privacy by turning their backs to the desks.

A back, even the Most Model Librarian's back, is not pleasing to the patron.

Cartoons, signs, jokes have inoculated the public with the idea that the library and quiet are synonymous. The Model Librarian does not chatter, she is not noisy, she does not gather in groups. The Model Librarian has *never* been "sh-h-hushed" by a patron.

Still, she believes in a library that is alive. Funereal whispers and gumshoe tread are not for her. She tries to preserve an atmosphere somewhere between a cathedral and a night club.

We Have A Rule

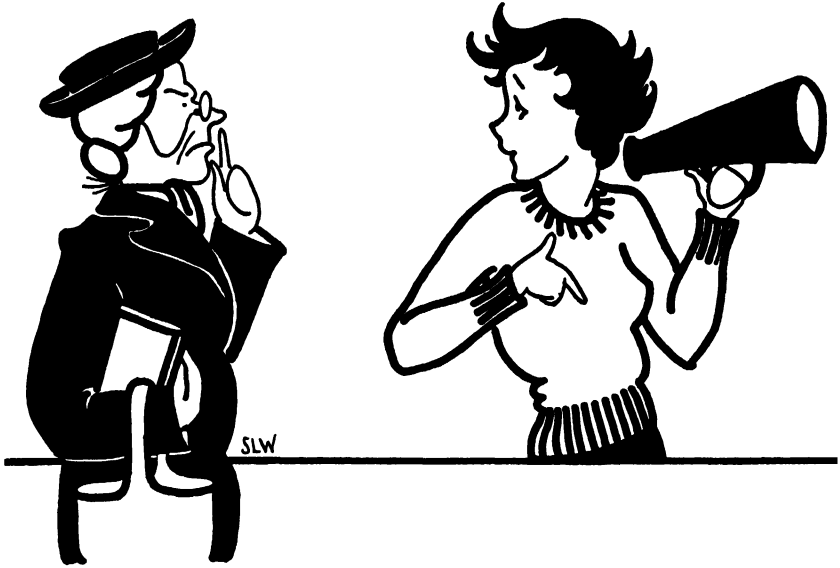
The world is' made up of two kinds of people: the ones who think rules are made to be broken and the ones who think that a rule broken is a god destroyed.

Rules are made not for the joy of breaking them but to insure fair service to the greatest number of patrons. The Model Librarian resorts to rules with this in mind and not with the air of "I dare you to get this book away from me."

Occasionally rules may be broken. Assistants never have to worry about this and can hand the matter on for their chiefs to grow gray over. The Model Librarian remembers that in

breaking a rule she is setting a precedent. If she breaks it for Mrs. J. Van Dusen Van Smythe, she must, as a democrat (small "d"), do the same for Joe Doakes.

She remembers that she must never break a rule that will reflect upon other departments and branches. She would rather die than have one of her patrons go to another branch and say,



The Model Librarian has never been sh-h-hushed by a patron

“But over at the Casablanca Branch they let me keep three-day magazines for two weeks.”

Her patrons do not exclaim, “But I never pay five cents at my own branch when I leave my card at home.”

When she thinks that general library rules are wrong she takes it up with the administration so that the whole system can let three-day magazines go for two weeks or books be returned as free as the breeze without cards.

To the taxpayer who pounds the desk and demands that he be allowed to take out the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* she explains that it is to protect the taxes he pays that she cannot let him. Two mills would never supply enough *Britannicas* for every

taxpayer, so the Library, to allow the whole city to share the set equally, keeps it available to all. The Most Model Librarian leaves the irate taxpayer convinced of the Library's wisdom and contentedly thinking up a question for "Information Please" so that he can win his own set.

However, in some departments, because of the specialized material handled, particular rules apply only to that department. Here it is the responsibility of the department head to see that rules are handled so that they fulfill their purpose of doing the greatest good for the greatest number.

A book of fine costume plates may be far more useful in a class of thirty art students than in its proper niche in the 391's.

A particular book may do more for the preservation of freedom and justice in a law court than hiding behind its protective asterisk.

Maps of Japan and Italy and the South Pacific can serve the country more effectively in an Army office than in a library cupboard.

The Model Librarian uses her head. She knows that there is a Special Permit card for some good reason.

Alexander Graham Belles

When she answers the telephone the Model Librarian gives the name of her department, branch or division distinctly.

She answers it in a friendly tone. She rations the syrup but keeps her voice on the sweet side. The person at the other end has no way of knowing that she has already answered the question "When does the Library close?" eighty-nine times that morning. He thinks he is the one and only. The Model Librarian keeps him thinking that.

She answers it as calmly as possible. Her telephone public would never suspect that she has raced all the way from the other end of the Library to answer. Since the phone invariably

rings when she is on her hands and knees looking for an 1890 *Who's Who* or perched on a ladder with a shelf list in each hand taking inventory, the Model Librarian learns early in life to sprint ninety feet, pick up the receiver and proclaim, "Blank-dash Library," in tones as unruffled as a limpid pool on a windless day.

After she has answered the phone, the patron and the Model Librarian are on a nice friendly speaking acquaintance, each one introduced to the other. He asks his question. Quick as a flash she decides on her course of action.



The Model Librarian learns early in life to sprint

If she can answer it in one minute or less, she astounds him by doing so. If not, she takes his number and calls him back. Some departments have the policy of asking the patron himself to call back. In this case she estimates the time it will take and says something like this:

"It will take a little time to find that. Can you call back in half an hour?"

The patron may ask for her name. She gives it to him and just to keep things chummy asks for his, explaining that she

will note the information under it and anyone in the branch or department will then be able to relay it to him.

If, instead, she is to call him, she writes his number carefully. In this case also she asks for his name since numbers can be transposed. Moreover, cases have been known where she called back and got a department store. Switchboard operators have a hard time telling which one of a thousand employees wanted to know on what day Easter fell in 1932. Many people are suspicious about giving their names. One good way to ask is: "And whom shall I ask for?" It seems less formidable than "What's your name?" She may have to take "Joe" for an answer but the Model Librarian tries to get more complete identification.

To keep the patron from thinking she is enjoying the blue plate special while he hangs on the wire, the Model Librarian never makes him hold the line while she runs to the stacks for a book or paws through the *Readers' Guide*. There may be others waiting to call her, so she keeps the line free.

She remembers the telephone is a sensitive instrument and so is *her patron*. While the receiver is off the hook she does not remark about the caller. He can hear. Even a remark to a co-worker may be interpreted by the caller as idle chatter while he waits and *waits* and *waits!*

Everyone knows that personal calls are not always the fault of the employee. People who call a librarian at work are hard to handle. The Model Librarian cuts them off as quickly as possible.

Strange as it seems, perfectly legitimate library calls may sometimes sound like social ones, as when the assistant is giving someone a recipe over the phone or advising the groom's mother to wear a street-length gown and white gloves. In cases like these, the Model Librarian is as businesslike as possible. The thing she should remember is that she is on the horns of a dilemma. Once she realizes this comfortable position, the Model Librarian makes the best of it and tries to convince the patron on the wire that she is giving her all, while she satisfies the taxpayer who stands at the desk taking it all in that she is worth his two mills as an efficient dutiful worker.

The Model Librarian can do several things at once but another Model Librarian never asks her to talk to two people at one time. If a fellow worker is on the telephone, she never tries to carry on a second conversation with her on the side. If done too often this will put even the Most Model Librarian on the patron side of the desk in an institutional library.

Don't Answer That Question!

Some questions are not to be answered over the phone. The Model Librarian breaks this news to the patron, at the same time convincing him that she is only too eager to help him if he will but come to the Library in person. Phrases like these are calculated to take the edge off the refusal:

"I'm sorry. We cannot answer school questions over the telephone but if you come in we'll be glad to help you."

"I'm sorry but the Library cannot attempt to answer contest questions over the telephone. If you come in we can show you material which may help you."

"I'm sorry, but we are not allowed to answer medical (or legal) questions over the telephone. If you come in you may use our medical encyclopedias and home medical books (or Minnesota statutes, copies of the marriage and divorce laws, etc.)."

The Model Librarian tries to mention types of books in the Library's collection which might help the inquiring patron but avoids mentioning specific titles which might be out when he comes in.

In a legal matter, the Model Librarian, in refusing to take the case herself, might add, "The Legal Aid Society, 404 South Eighth Street, may be able to help you."

The Model Librarian cannot afford to confine her efforts to one person by doing long and involved search for a telephone patron. If it develops that the question will go beyond reasonable bounds, she invites the patron to come in.

“The Library has material on this but it involves a great deal of search. If you come in we will be glad to get out the material for you.”

The patron is usually quite agreeable to this and in many cases the librarian can further soften the blow by some such phrase



The Model Librarian is ashamed

as, “And since you know all the background you will be able to find what you want more quickly than we could.”

She is truthful if she can be, but tactful if it kills her.

Catching Flies

Honey’s merits over vinegar as a flycatcher do not need to be demonstrated to the Model Librarian. She knows them.

She accepts early in life the fact that some patrons may be classified politely as “difficult.” That isn’t what she calls them in the privacy of her inner sanctum.

To "difficult" patrons she is her own sweet self. She never shows signs of irritation. She does not flounce, nor bounce the books, nor throw ink, when patrons are obstinate or unreasonable.

She tries good humor. She retreats to reason. When all else fails she takes up her stand behind a calm, consistent firmness.



Oh! What you did!

Calmness besides being a virtue has the effectiveness of a secret weapon against the overwrought patron.

When the irritation arises not from the borrower but from the conditions at work or her own bad breakfast, the Model Librarian is *ashamed*. It may get her down to wait on fifteen people while the rest of the staff disappears to other parts of the

building. She may be annoyed when the public descends on her just as she gets all her cards laid out for filing. She may want to continue the argument she had with the butcher over red stamps with the first unwary patron—but does she show it? Never! What, never? Well-ll-ll, hardly ever.

Strictly Business

“How,” asks one assistant, “do you get a patron to give his last name for a call slip without making him think you want his telephone number and a picture to stick in your mirror?”

The Model Librarian admits it is hard. After long years of pausing with poised pencil over the slip and asking, “And what is your last name, please?” only to be answered by an indignant glare and a truculent “Why?” she has settled on another procedure.

She has found it more acceptable to hand the slips to the patron, saying “Will you please put your last name on these? It serves to identify your books when they come to the desk.”

Getting Along With The Help

Although the Model Librarian seldom makes mistakes, not every librarian is a model, and she occasionally finds some of her fellow workers in error.

Does she point the finger of scorn and shriek, “Oh, what you did!”

Does she delight the patron at the desk by turning to her sister worker and accusing, “You didn’t copy this man’s card number right!”

Ah, no, the Model Librarian never undermines the patron’s confidence in librarians by reprimanding a colleague in public.

Moreover, she does not even feel called upon to correct her in private. That is the duty of the head of the department or branch. If the matter is serious, she calls the mistake or defection to her chief's attention, and washes her hands of the whole matter, but it must be serious. The Model Librarian never was and never will be a *tattle-tale*.

Not a branch or department exists that does not have its share of borrowers that are "simply impossible." All the wiles, tact, blandishments and maneuverings of the State Department's ace diplomat would fail to please them. An encounter with one spoils the whole day.

When the "simply impossible" borrower walks in does the Model Librarian disappear under the desk? Does she suddenly discover pressing business in the stacks or down the stairs? Does she leave her defenseless co-worker to cope with him?

She does not. She would be indignant at the idea. She believes in her own maxim, that each assistant should take her share of the "simply impossible" borrowers.

Thou Shalt Not*

There are certain books in the Library which can never be taken out. This is usually a blow to the patron.

To soften that blow the Model Librarian might say, "I'm sorry but this book does not go out of the Library. Can you use it here?"

If the patron cannot use it in the Library, the librarian immediately asks if it must be *that* book. Often information of the same kind can be found in another book or form.

In a case where it does have to be that particular book, the patron will probably want to know why it cannot go out, and will lay a wager that he is the only one who has asked for it in ten years.

*For another phase of this problem see page 35.

A wise librarian will not argue this point with him even though the five people just ahead of him asked for the same book. She must convince him that the Library's reason for keeping the book inside its walls is a good one. Documents are easily explainable since this is a depository library. (But the Model Librarian will check to see if there is a duplicate in clippings or the proper department.)

Other acceptable reasons for not circulating material are demand, fragility, rarity and value. Bound serials contain more than one issue and it is often impossible to replace back numbers.

The reasonable person, when explanations are given clearly and with insight into both the Library's and the patron's problems, will see the Library's point. The unreasonable person must be handled as carefully but the librarian will probably have to fall back behind her old breastwork of calm, consistent firmness.

Of the wide-eyed student who asks for a book of synopses, the Model Librarian inquires helpfully, "This is for school, isn't it?"

Even the wise ones fall for this helpful attitude and answer "Yes," in nine out of ten cases.

Then it is her sad duty to say, "The schools have asked us not to give out synopses to students."

When parents come in to back up said student, the situation should be explained but the Model Librarian does not make an issue of it.

Linger A Little Longer

There is another situation in which the librarian must induce the patron to stay. He has come in for a book. The book is out. There is a reference copy, however.*

Now comes the test for the librarian. She must persuade him

*"Reference copy" refers to a noncirculating copy of a circulating title. See also preceding chapter.

to use the reference copy if he will and yet convince him that it must remain a reference copy.

She says, "I'm sorry; all the circulating copies of the book are out but we do have a copy to use here in the Library. Have you time to use it now?"

Sometimes the patron will want to know why he cannot take that copy out with him. The Model Librarian must show him that it is to take care of just such emergencies that the Library keeps a reference copy. Since she has the demand for the book well proved (all copies out plus his own desire for it), she usually wins her case with ease, both patron and librarian emerging unruffled. The patron should be left with the feeling that it is pretty white of the Library to foresee such situations and provide for them.

When the patron is in search of material rather than a specific book, the problem is similar. Like the specific book, it may be out. The librarian must show the patron that the Library has prepared for such eventualities and can serve him anyway, if he can do his work there instead of elsewhere.

The Model Librarian does it so charmingly that the patron is *overjoyed* to stay.

When I Was Your Age

One of the nicest things about the Model Librarian is that she never forgets that she was young once herself, so when the bobby-socked, lipsticked, shirt-tail-out high-schoolers come in she sees in them her own equally foolish high school fads.

She remembers her own uncertainties and inferiority complexes so that she takes all the rules for meeting adults and applies them to the adolescents, only more so, since they are especially anxious to be treated as "grown-ups."

With the teensters, the question of age is a touchy one since they themselves are aware that they are betwixt and between.

The Model Librarian is especially careful in approaching the question, "Are you over sixteen?" for application purposes and "What grade are you in?" for book reviews.

Set formulas cannot be given for these inquiries since they depend too much upon individuals. The Model Librarian holds ever before her the principle that it is the tone and not the words which means the most to the sweet young thing. A tone of interest and equality rather than one of boredom and superiority will bring the best results, she finds.

In all cases, she feels that in dealing with the adults of tomorrow she gets back what she gives.

Bending The Twig

Whether six or sixty, a person is a person and should be treated as such, so the Model Librarian avers. In dealing with children she follows the same general rules she would use in dealing with their parents.

She treats them with courtesy and consideration. She knows that family pride has no age limits and proceeds cautiously when application questions reveal an abnormal home situation. She respects a child's privacy.

She never laughs *at* them but finds her day a good deal brighter from laughing *with* them.

She and the children operate on the same level, so she never talks nor looks over their heads. Rather she talks *to* them and looks *at* them.

When it comes to clean hands for a clean book, the Model Librarian walks warily. She knows that there is no express formula for meeting this situation. She maintains that on his first visit to the Library a child should never be told bluntly to "go wash your hands." After he has become a habitue of the Children's Room she will know a bit more about his background and training and will be on a firmer foundation. She

may be able to predict with more accuracy his reactions.

For the librarian who shrieks across the room with Hollywood production set technique for "Quiet! Quiet!" the Model Librarian has nothing but contempt. And she would rather die than rap on a desk or table for order.



She treats them with courtesy and consideration

The Model Librarian, knowing children, knows the same principles of dealing with patrons apply to all ages.

Super-Service

By her deeds ye shall know her—the Model Librarian. It's the little things that give her work the mark of distinction.

She hands books to a patron; she doesn't shove them.

She looks *at* a patron when she talks to him, and not down at the desk or at the framed picture of “The Stag at Eve” over the door.

For two good reasons she never slams the books on the desk: (1) it wears out the books; (2) it wears out the patrons.

The average patron asks his question because he wants to know something; he hasn't lain awake nights thinking it up just to keep the librarian busy. The Model Librarian knows this so she answers his questions kindly and with interest. No borrower has ever accused her of indifference.

As she grows more and more successful, she finds that she can show a genuine interest in the patron and his needs and yet retain an impersonal perspective.



THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, established in 1876, is an organization of libraries, librarians, library trustees and others interested in the responsibilities of libraries in the educational, social and cultural needs of society. It is affiliated with more than fifty other library associations in this country and abroad. It works closely with many organizations concerned with education, recreation, research, and public service. Its activities are carried on by a headquarters staff, voluntary boards and committees, and by divisions, sections, and round tables, all interested in various aspects or types of library service. Its program includes information and advisory services, personnel service, field work, annual and midwinter conferences, and the publication—not for profit—of numerous professional books, pamphlets and periodicals.

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