

Ideas for Improving Patron Service at Your Library, Regardless of Your Department



Self-Checkout Machines

Improving patron service doesn't always mean providing the human touch; in fact sometimes it can mean giving the patron the option to *forgo* the human touch. One example of this is self-checkout machines.

There are many reasons why a patron might prefer to use a self-checkout machine. They may be in a real hurry and just want to pop in real quick, grab a certain title from the shelf, and dash back out. Or they may be checking out books on a subject that would make them uncomfortable to bring to the circulation desk for check out.

Providing this additional self-service checkout option improves service by giving these patrons exactly what they want – more convenience and improved patron privacy.

Staff Training and Cross-Training

There is perhaps no better way to improve patron service at your library than to ensure that the staff is well-trained on customer service strategies and able to handle any basic library function or patron request.

To ensure the first, regular customer service training should be an integral part of your library's staff development programming. Repeated exposure to different types of strategies and

techniques for improving patron service and tips on handling difficult patron situations with poise and tact will help foster a patron-centered environment.

Making sure that all staff members are cross-trained on the basic functions outside of their own departments will help ensure the second. When a patron stops a staff member to ask a question that falls outside of the staff members immediate duties and activities and that staff member is able to provide the needed assistance rather than having to go find the answer from another staff member, your patron service has stepped up to the next level.

Give Them What They Want

Finally, one of the best ways to improve patron service at your library is to provide opportunities for your patrons *to tell you* how you can improve service. This is easy because you don't have to be creative; you just listen and then implement.

The old-fashioned suggestion box is still a terrific way to solicit this feedback from patrons. Add the modern incarnation to your library's homepage – an online suggestion form – and you will have no shortage of projects to work on.

Improving patron service is an ongoing assignment. Use these techniques on a regular basis to ensure that excellent patron service in your library is no harder to find than the latest bestseller or local newspaper.