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It's more than my job's worth

One of the interesting facets of customer service is looking at what are the priorities from both the patron's perspective and the librarian's perspective. Often the priorities can be viewed in different ways.

Firstly, let's review it from a consumer's perspective. The most important priority we expect as consumers is cleanliness. Whether visiting a restaurant, library or market, customers believe that one of the most important aspects of service is cleanliness, in its widest perspective. This means that we expect bins to be emptied, aisles and shelves to be clean and toilets to have toilet paper and be clean. Surveys show that the biggest reason we do not return to businesses is due to a lack of cleanliness, not bad verbal communications. A dirty establishment tells us that the team concerned do not care.

In workshops I often get strange looks when I bring this up, as it is often not in the top priorities as far as the librarian is concerned. I am not suggesting that they have to do all of the cleaning jobs, but in the customers eyes, they have the responsibility to maintain a minimum standard of cleanliness.

When dealing with the public, which is all of us, we need to 'walk in the customers shoes' and identify the priorities from a consumer's perspective. Customers don't really ask for a lot, but at the same time they often don't receive what they want: a clean library, to be genuinely greeted, acknowledged and genuinely farewelled.

Some libraries employ 'mystery shoppers' organisations to check their customer

service standards, which I believe is an excellent idea. Banks, restaurants and other retailers use mystery shoppers and it is a natural management tool to introduce into libraries.

Do use a professional shoppers anonymous organisation to ensure that the service is carried out proficiently and to a consistent standard. Ensure that the organisation has a copy of your customer service standards so that they can assess them. Tell the team that you are introducing this management tool as a means of measuring customer service consistency, but do not tell them when it will take place. Once you get the results, praise in public and reprimand in private.

I have come across libraries that resent such a process being introduced, which often puzzled me. Introducing a consistent customer service policy is critical to business success. Many businesses will argue that it is one of the most valuable measuring tools that they have found to measure their success, and if all of your team has signed off on a customer service charter, it should become part of your culture and prove that you are one of 'the best of the best'.

John Stanley is a conference speaker and retail consultant with more than twenty years experience in fifteen countries. John works with libraries around the world assisting them with their merchandising, staff and management training, customer flow, customer service and image. John Stanley Associates produce an e-newsletter specific to library retail. If you would like to receive a regular copy please visit <http://www.johnstanley.cc> or e-mail newsletter@johnstanley.cc.

Creative fellowships to explore library collections

State Library of Victoria Creative Fellowships call for applications

Writers, academics and researchers are invited to apply for Creative Fellowships to explore the State Library of Victoria's collections in 2003-04.

The Victorian Government announced its support late last year for the \$600 000 Creative Fellowships Program, which aims to encourage the scholarly, literary and creative use of the State Library of Victoria's rich collections. The State Government and State Library will jointly fund the Fellowships.

The Fellowships are for periods of six or twelve months, with stipends of \$25 000 for six months or \$50 000 for twelve months. Research projects can be in any area of the library's collections, and are open to Australian residents who may be independent scholars, creative writers, artists, composers, academics or developers of new media across a broad range of disciplines. The Fellowships will be awarded annually by the State Library, on the advice of an independent committee of the Library Board of Victoria.

Applications close on Wednesday 30 April. The announcement of the awards in July will coincide with the completion of the refurbishment of the library's domed reading room — the La Trobe Reading Room — and the creation of study facilities specially designed for researchers.

For general information about the awards visit the State Library of Victoria website [<http://www.statelibrary.vic.gov.au>], or contact Dr Dianne Reilly, State Library of Victoria, phone 03 8664 7182, dreilly@slv.vic.gov.au.