

The Library Effect: Advocacy through Storytelling

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is the planned, deliberate, sustained effort to raise awareness of an issue and create conditions to allow others to act on your behalf.

Some key findings from the research:

- People hold libraries in high regard but are unaware of funding challenges.
- Only certain people are likely to support the library.
- The biggest supporters may not be library visitors.
- Believing that a library can transform lives leads to support.
- Elected officials are fans of libraries, but funding them is not always a priority.
- Many people are familiar with traditional services but much less familiar with “value-added” services such as programs for seniors or digital content.
- If people know about these transformational services, they are much more likely to support libraries.

**Long Overdue (2006). Report by Public Agenda with support from Americans for Libraries Council*

People who believe that libraries are transformational believe that libraries help create who they are, empower them, and help them feel part of a social group. We want the public to view the library as a place of transformation, not transaction.

Key tips on communicating:

1. It's not about us, it's about our audience.
2. Feelings first, facts later. There are no exceptions to the rule that we must awaken the heart to arouse the mind. We have to move someone emotionally before they will take in information - or act.
3. Nothing beats a good story about one person. Including a good story about two, twenty or twenty thousand people. Research is clear: if we want to spark someone's empathy and inspire a donation, we must tell the story of our cause through one person.

**Katya's Non-Profit Marketing Blog: The Six Things I Wish I'd Known 20 Years Ago, Posted October 03, 2011*
http://www.nonprofitmarketingblog.com/comments/the_six_things_i_wish_id_known_20_years_ago

Telling your story

- Keep in mind the full spectrum of community needs when putting together your library's story. Effective advocacy means using stories to show how the library is meeting community needs and priorities.
- Know your audience. Build a custom story that will resonate with each unique audience by choosing the right story elements to convey what you know about them.

Creating your library story

A compelling story about your library and its users and services is a crucial part of building support for your advocacy efforts. Tell the right story to the right audience, and you'll be amazed at the results.

Effective stories share common elements: anecdotes, facts, and emotional inspiration. These elements work on their own and in conjunction with others to build a unique story.

Anecdotal Story: *a true story about library patrons, and specifically how they have used library services; does not have to be your own story*

- Grounded in real-life details that your audience can relate to and that connect the story with your library's contribution to the community.
- Provides an example of what makes your library special and vital as well as details that humanize your library's story.
- Can be used in conjunction with a data-focused story to associate the information with a real-world example.
- Most effective when dealing with an audience less interested in hard data and more interested in the human dimension of libraries.

Factual Story: *a story based on hard data that uses information and statistics to make a compelling case to its audience.*

- It's about the numbers; it highlights statistics that establish the library as a positive force in the community.
- Make sure statistics are relevant to your audience; it can't be just a laundry list of facts and figures.
- Data must be accurate, relevant to the point you are making, and used in the correct context. Don't use numbers to lie or mislead.
- Best used with an analytical audience that is more interested in hard data and rational deduction.

Emotionally Inspiring Story: *a story designed to touch the heart of an audience by evoking an emotional response.*

- The best way to forge an emotional connection between the library and the community.
- Intended to provoke an emotional response in the audience and encourage them to take some action to address that emotion. It may include a call to action.
- You must have something solid in your story beyond an emotional appeal: even the most inspiring words lose their effectiveness without some substance behind them.
- Use sparingly with more objective, data-oriented audiences and, when doing so, make sure you have made a compelling, logical case before presenting the audience with a call to action.

Advocacy is something we should be doing **every day**
on behalf of our libraries ... inside its walls and out!