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Judy Pearson  
*Unconquerable Spirit Programs*

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# Do You Own It?

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As a kid I never understood the people who work in libraries. They always seemed so stiff and strangely different. In the little town where I grew up it was Ms. Hensely who was Tehama County Library's gate keeper. She didn't rock, she ruled. Frankly, she scared me into submission. She was always shushing me over her dark, horn rimmed glasses and clearing her throat when she thought I had snuck enough peeks at the latest *National Geographic Magazine*. It was as if she thought she owned the place or something. Well, in a way she did. It wasn't until much later in life that I grew to appreciate that sense of pride and ownership.

I have often wondered: What is the spirit that drives these people to do what they do? I sense it is not "just a job" to them, it's much more. Maybe, it's their love and thirst for knowledge. No, that's not all of it. I get the impression it is that sense of pride of ownership and a place where they feel they can make a difference.

Pride of ownership meaning: Taking pride in oneself and the surrounding community. Nowadays, I feel that sense of pride and ownership when I visit my local library. People are friendly, extremely helpful and pride themselves on being of service.

This is extraordinary considering how much lip service corporate America gives to the word "service." Each year, millions of dollars go into training people to be courteous, friendly and helpful. Yet complacency seems to run rampant in our society. And a number of people, for whatever reason, believe in the "other guy will do it" syndrome. Well, the problem with that is that the other guy didn't do it because he/she thought you would do it.

It is my observation that the library is one of the few places where pride of ownership and service really mean something. Library employees consider the library more than a job or a place where books, tapes, computers, etc., are stored. They enjoy being of service. Scouring the halls of knowledge in search of whatever is requested, they will pursue and persevere until they have reached their intended goal. It doesn't matter if they're knowledgeable about the subject or not, they never say, "That's not my department," or that inarguable word, "no." Department stores of America and other such institutions should stand up and take notice of real customer service.

The library is a place where knowledge fires our imagination to unlimited possibilities. It has been said that the library is the heart of its community. If the library is the heart of its community then the people who work there are its pulse.

This past April, I was invited to speak at the Oregon Library Association's annual conference. In anticipation of this article I took the opportunity to ask a number of attendees their opinions on these three questions. Here is what collectively they had to say when asked:

**What do you like most about your job?**

The opportunity to express myself creatively: To be helpful in creative ways.

I like seeing light bulbs go off when a child learns a new word or phrase.



Meeting people from all walks of life is fun and sometimes challenging.

I enjoy learning about the latest technology and newest innovations.

I am surrounded by books. What more can I say?

**What would you say is the most challenging part of your work?**

Being sensitive to vastly different personality types is challenging to me.

Connecting with people from dissimilar backgrounds and languages can be challenging.

Understanding the needs of the public and how I can serve them best.

Keeping abreast of the most recent information on any given subject continues to test me.

**Can you recall a funny story or unusual event at work?**


We found a cat in the book depository one day.

It made me smile one day when a fellow got a crush on me because I was so helpful, supportive and upbeat.

The power went off and we conducted business by candlelight.

Isn't it curious that not one of the people I surveyed mentioned owning the library? Maybe I'm wrong about my observations of pride of ownership, but I don't think so. Wouldn't the world be better off if we took pride and ownership in what we do, who we are and how we serve the world around us? As First Lady/Senator Hillary Clinton puts it: "It takes a village to raise a child." I believe it also takes a vil-

lage to raise an adult to their full potential. We all have a stake in each other's futures; the library and its staff are an intricate part of the process.

Libraries, and to those who work in libraries, I salute you! Your pride of ownership and undaunted willingness to be of service to your community makes an unquestionable difference in the lives of so many. 

**About the Author**

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