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## Introduction

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# Introduction

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**M**y second class in library school was all about service. I was very excited and happy because here was a subject that I actually knew something about. I had been raised in the restaurant business—my dad had a small cafe and I had worked for him for what seemed my entire childhood. (I used to think they wrote the child labor laws specifically for him.) My dad was a stickler for good service; I learned to wear a smile, understand that the customer was *always* right (no really, ALWAYS), and the coffee cup needed to stay full. However, in library school we were discussing learning styles and multiple intelligences. Not so timidly, I raised my hand and asked, “Where is the literature from the hospitality and retail industries? I mean, after all, don’t they know a thing or two about service?” You could have heard a pin drop after the professor gasped and firmly replied, “We are *professionals*; we serve from a more enlightened perspective.” Chastened and mortified to have revealed what an ignoramus I was, I vowed to keep my head down (succeeded) and my mouth shut (epic fail). Humbled, I eventually came to understand that service in libraries is indeed a nuanced phenomenon, and, as with Gardner’s multiple intelligences, there are also multiple ways to deliver, measure, and assess good (and bad) service.

In libraries we are always delving into what constitutes good service and how we should deliver it and why. Those considerations are the pervasive undercurrents to our specific missions and what ultimately tie us to our unique communities. It’s why my professor was right: we librarians do serve from enlightened and sophisticated conceptual understandings of what serves our patron’s needs. Having said that, the public’s understanding of service is informed by its retail and hospitality experience, and there are many paradigms that map well to our work.

At my dad’s restaurant, good service was atmospheric. The place was clean and bright and filled with the aroma of good food; you could *feel* the care that was put into making your meal delicious, promptly served, and piping hot. Of course we wanted the return business that friendly, efficient service would bring—and I wanted good tips—but it had the side effect of making the work more engaging and even fun. It also made the place a comfortable hangout for the locals. The mayor, the building inspector, the fire chief, and the premier long-board surfer of the world all made the back table at my dad’s place their de facto offices.

Libraries are all about the ambiance, too. Like cleanliness, metadata is invisible. When it’s done right we don’t notice it, and when it’s poor, it can literally kill the experience. In this issue, Friday Valentine (OHSU) explains how cataloging is foundational to excellent library service. Another atmospheric marker is what we have on hand: Karen Medjrich (Hillsboro Public Library) reports on the innovative use of patron-driven acquisition tools to build a collection that’s inviting to her community and served ‘piping hot.’ Robert Heilman, a non-librarian essayist from Douglas County and outspoken public library supporter, reminds us that a proletarian service attitude creates an atmosphere of acceptance, a welcoming space for all and a de facto gathering place for the community.

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And yet service is a personal act that we all come to with different motivations and perspectives. Many of us have learned a service ethic from experience or by example. Janet Webster (OSU) shares her personal inspirations around public service and asks some basic questions for all of us to ponder in order to keep that fire in the belly alive. Steve Silver (Northwest Christian University) writes thoughtfully about the blending and balancing of his personal beliefs and the management of his library as a cog in a larger academic community.

Service learning seeks to engage and challenge students of all ages through meaningful service experiences in order to understand community problems and issues. Jennifer Nutefall (OSU) describes how librarians can and should contribute to this philosophically aligned educational trend.

Sometimes giving service can ask a lot from us personally. Robin Milford and Tania Wisotzke (University of Western States) analyze the perils *and* the secret strengths of introverts that work with the public. Christy Davis (Klamath Falls Public Library) cheerfully observes that life as a small town librarian is an all-day/every-day service gauntlet.

This issue of the Oregon Library Association Quarterly is dedicated to exploring the multiple meanings of service, the way we accomplish service through our programs and policies, and the deeply held beliefs and feelings that drive us to serve. And, even though my professor taught me so much about delivering service in libraries, I just have to say that Dad was right too; sometimes a smile and a full cup of coffee says it all.

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