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WILLIS, MARK R. **Dealing with Difficult People in the Library.** Chicago, IL, and London, U.K.: American Library Association, 1999. \$28.00. 195 p. ISBN 0-8389-0760-1. ©

The author of this book holds a degree in communications and has worked for more than a decade as the community relations manager at the Dayton and Montgomery County Public Library. Although he does not have a library or information science degree, he shows significant insight regarding how library staff and directors should manage the "difficult patron."

Also, despite the fact that this book is written for public library staff, many of the depicted scenarios and offered solutions can apply to medical library settings. In fact, at least two scenarios use health care-related examples. One such scenario involves an overwhelmed library patron looking for health care information regarding her ill mother (p. 15). Another is an analogy to a hospital setting, where a nurse inadvertently dehumanizes a patient with a possible brain tumor by saying to a technician, "I've got a head for you" (p. 16).

These two examples, which occur at the outset of the book, unintentionally crystallize two important facts about the medical library setting: searching for medical information can be stressful, and patrons seeking such information—whether laypersons or professionals—can be harried or burned-out. Another book, *Coping with Difficult People in the Health Care Setting* [1], does not pertain directly to libraries but elaborates on the idiosyn-

crasies of dealing with health care professionals, who are described as "demanding" and as "expect[ing] special treatment" (p. 3). The book even devotes a chapter (pp. 111–117) to the high-tech professional (HTP), who "may become abrasive to others" (p. 113). So, in the medical library environment, guidance for coping with inherent potential conflicts can be used.

The first chapter of *Dealing with Difficult People in the Library* points out many reasons why the present-day library is prone to stress. One such reason is that the environment is constantly changing, to the extent that "change is our motto" (p. 4). This change is contradicted by the tendency and need to "control" the environment (p. 8). This contradiction causes tension for both library staff and patrons. The first chapter also highlights "workable solutions," which are elaborated on throughout the book, namely, developing communication skills, creating policies that reduce problems, and training for all library staff (pp. 4–5). Chapters 2 and 3 outline very specific techniques for how library staff can control themselves and thus control the difficult situation. The techniques are really keys to successful interpersonal communication in general.

The remaining chapters in Section I, entitled "Problem Patrons? No Problem!," are primarily devoted to specific types of problems or users. There are not only chapters on the more common occurrences of "angry" patrons or "complainers," but also chapters pertaining to dangerous, mentally ill, and homeless (with some fascinating statistics) patrons, as well as dealing with suspicions of child abuse. Many medical libraries are open to the general public, so these scenarios can indeed arise. Perhaps the chapter about dealing with children is the least relevant for the medical library setting. Most of the chapters about specific types of users and situations are structured

with goals, guidelines, and sample situations. This format, combined with the initial and closing general or summary chapters, leads to occasional redundancy across chapters of basic techniques such as "stay calm" (pp. 24, 32, 37). Nonetheless, having each chapter devoted to a specific type of scenario is useful.

The chapter called "Real Problem Cases" suggests, in some instances, referring the problem patron to "the director or some other management person" (p. 27). Following this suggestion are very practical tips as to exactly what the director should do and say. For example, the director should tell the patron exactly "which behaviors are prohibited" and that "repeating these behaviors will result in banning from the library" (p. 27). Advice follows to put that information in writing for the patron. The importance of listening to the patron's point of view is emphasized, because "the patron may point out some issue that causes or exacerbates his or her behavior" (p. 27). Although these tips may seem obvious upon reading them, under stress, a director or manager may not have the presence of mind to take these steps without some advance training or advice to do so. In fact, much of the advice in the book boils down to seemingly obvious "common sense" and good communication skills, but many of us do not demonstrate those traits when stressed.

Also in Section I is a chapter on "Taming the Internet." In this chapter, the book's intended audience of the public library is apparent. This chapter is not as helpful for academic or medical libraries. Certainly, some issues and tips do relate, but the chapter takes a somewhat simplified perspective, comparing the taming of the Internet to the taming of videos (p. 45). The chapter does not fully address the very complex role the Internet plays in our libraries.

Section II is entitled "Talking about Communication." Skills included in Section I are further developed. Section III, entitled "Preventing Problems," introduces new ideas and elaborates on previously introduced ideas. It begins with a chapter about the importance of good customer service as a means of preventing problems. Indeed, discussing "dealing with difficult people in the library" is impossible without discussing good customer service. Perhaps such a discussion would have been more useful at the outset of the book. Nonetheless, the illustrated points would be useful in devising customer service guidelines.

Section III also includes chapters about the importance of developing policies, training staff regarding policies, and improving staff morale and safety. The chapter about creating policies focuses on creating a "Rules for Patrons" document (p. 113). The guidelines are specific and very helpful, but, at least in one instance, the chapter does not draw upon some of the excellent advice stated earlier in the book. An outstanding example relates to the chapter on the homeless, which wisely advises that "when writing these rules, we need to focus on the behavior we are concerned about, and not focus on any certain group [of patrons]" (p. 59). That tip is not reiterated in quite the same way in the chapter about policies. Because of some scattered information such as this, it is important when using this book to take it in its entirety and not to skip to a particular chapter.

The appendixes include sample policies and patron rules, a sample procedure manual, and an overview of mental illnesses.

The content of *Dealing with Difficult People in the Library* is similar to two comparable books, *Serving the Difficult Customer* [2] and *Defusing the Angry Patron* [3], both part of the How-To-Do-It Manuals for Librarians series from Neal-Schu-

man. One difference is that the Neal-Schuman books take more of a workbook format. *Serving the Difficult Customer* categorizes difficult customers slightly differently than Willis's book. For example, there are chapters on passive-aggressive behavior (chapter 6) and unresponsive people (chapter 8). It also includes a useful appendix outlining guidelines from the American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee for developing policies and procedures (pp. 155-157). These books are useful complements to Willis's book.

Dealing with Difficult People in the Library is recommended for staff at all levels, from paraprofessionals to administrators. The book can be used as a tool for assisting managers to write policies, and it gives managers important advice such as the need to empower employees to make on-the-spot decisions (pp. 111, 147). The book is also full of useful tips for front-line staff.

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References

1. UMIKER W. Coping with difficult people in the health care setting. Chicago, IL: American Society of Clinical Pathologists, 1994:268.
2. SMITH K. *Serving the difficult customer: a how-to-do-it manual for library staff*. New York, NY: Neal-Schuman, 1993. (How-to-do-it manuals for librarians, no. 39.)
3. RUBIN RJ. *Defusing the angry patron: a how-to-do-it manual for librarians and paraprofessionals*. New York, NY: Neal-Schuman, 2000. (How-to-do-it manuals for librarians, no. 100.)

Medicine in Quotations: Views of Health and Disease Through the Ages. Edited by Edward J. Huth, M.D., and T. Jock Murray, M.D. Philadelphia, PA: American Col-

lege of Physicians, 2000. 524 p. \$49.00. ISBN 0-943126-83-5.

The great fun of browsing through a book of quotations comes from recognizing one's own personal and cultural beliefs echoed, validated, and challenged in the familiar and not so familiar phrases of medicine's canon. At its best, such an anthology chronicles the profession's scientific advances, as it conveys the shifting cultural perspectives of the society it serves. Essentially, the sayings vibrantly give voice to the evolving practice, role, and philosophy of medicine as they simultaneously recount the successes, failures, and developments in both the healing profession and in humanity. Part social commentary, part scientific and historical record, such a compilation is both entertaining and educational and reaches a wide audience. The general reader, historian, or practitioner can quickly glimpse entries chronologically arranged under broad subject headings to discover what has changed and what remains the same about healing, and about us, from antiquity through the new millennium.

Two distinguished medical historians, Edward Huth, M.D., editor emeritus of the *Annals of Internal Medicine*; and T. Jock Murray, M.D., professor of medical humanities and professor of medicine (neurology), Dalhousie University, have assembled the first major update of its kind in more than thirty years. Dr. Huth contributed to *Familiar Medical Quotations*, which is undoubtedly well known to many health sciences librarians. This latest collection should serve as a companion piece, because it includes the recent medical breakthroughs and the economic, social, and political changes that have occurred since the 1968 Strauss publication. The covered topics encompass such current issues and practices as: acupuncture, decision making, emotional growth, empa-