

LIBR 200 Discussion: Serving Needs vs. Wants

Should the job of a reference librarian in assisting patrons be to “Serve Their Needs, Not Their Wants?” In other words, if you couldn’t be both, what would you rather be: popular or right?

Discussion Answer

If I couldn’t serve both the needs and the wants of patrons I would rather serve their needs. In other words I would seek to be right over seeking to be popular. Rubin (2010) states in our text that an information need may or may not be recognized by the patron. Steve Jobs, the late CEO of Apple Inc., said it this way:

"[I]t's really hard to design products by focus groups. A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them" (Reinhardt, 1998).

What Steve Jobs said about designing products for people can be applied to reference librarians providing service to patrons. It's hard to provide reference service when simply listening to patrons’ wants because in many cases they may not know what they want until you help them see their information need. Rubin (2010) gives wise counsel about meeting a patron’s information need: “Merely answering a patron’s question might not be enough; the individual might want a particular piece of information, only to discover that something different is needed” (p. 275). This is why it’s important for information professionals to understand the information seeking behaviors of patrons to effectively provide quality service for them. I would hope that librarians providing high quality user-centered service and help, focused on meeting patron’s needs, would become popular to the patrons and communities they serve.

References

Reinhardt, A. (1998, May 25). *Steve Jobs: 'There's sanity returning'*. Business Week. Retrieved

from <http://www.businessweek.com/1998/21/b3579165.htm>

Rubin, R.E. (2010). *Foundations of library and information science*. New York: Neal-Schuman.