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Working Safely in a Rural Location: Security for Staff When Help is Far

MY LIBRARY TRAINING BACKGROUND

Started teaching library security workshops in 2000.

Started teaching webinars for ALA in 2010.

Library Security (ALA, 2015)

The Safe Library (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023)

I have taught my classes live and online to thousands of library employees in several hundred libraries in 28+ states.

I post two podcasts and two blogs per month at Library20.com.

Free training materials at www.TheSafeLibrary.com

The Power of Intuition

It's "knowing without knowing why."

Human beings are the only creatures who ignore it, suppress it, or allow themselves to be talked out of it.

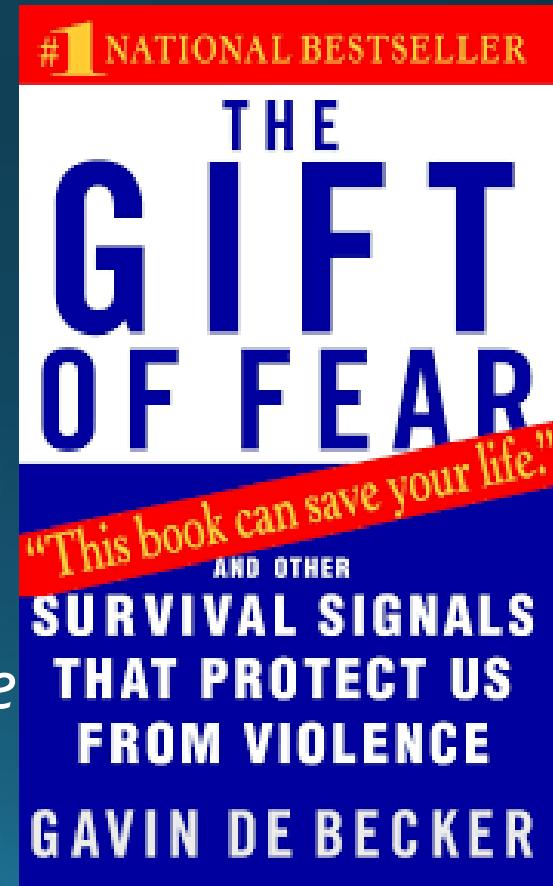
We all have examples where we wish we had listened to and honored our intuition.

It creates mental focus and physical reactions (called "piloerections").

Read Gavin de Becker's 1997 book:

The Gift of Fear: Survival Signals That Protect Us From Violence

View his Master Class at www.GiftofFear.com



Our On-Going Goals

Keep all library employees safe, even with varying degrees of patron compliance.

Remind library staff and the patrons about our facility use rules: opening and closing hours; kids left behind; student use; Internet use; no “special favors.”

Maintain employee trust and continue to build public trust.

Help all library employees use patience, empathy, flexibility and support, starting with each other and then the public.

Remember the Lifeguard Model.



Some of Our Patrons Are Dealing With...

Trauma histories.

Fear of the future, frustration, anxiety, anger, rage.

Delusional beliefs, political drivers

Financial, healthcare, food, shelter concerns.

Substance use to cope.

Untreated mental health issues.

Criminal justice system immersion.

The Digital Divide / FOMO / FOBLO.

Hopes that you can help them?

Our Daily Responses...

Dignity awareness: eye contact; non-judgmental body language

Patience: with patrons who can be impatient, rude, angry, fearful, anxious, entitled, confrontational; not skilled listeners, and who are frustrated.

Calming tones and empathic approach: with people who are angry, depressed, fearful, trauma-exposed, stuck in a dire life situation.

Boundary-setting: Always striving for the “Negotiated Behavioral Agreement.” Assertive responses, without being aggressive or passive.

Firm, fair, consistent, reasonable treatment, and safety and security awareness. Disengage and/or get help, as necessary.

Some Emerging Issues For Rural Libraries

One-room libraries, one or two-person staffs.

Law enforcement response is from a distance.

No security guards, few security devices.

One way in, one way out.

“Safe Room” might be the bathroom.

A sense that the library employees have to “hold down the fort.”

Indifferent or uninformed elected officials or cops?

Different types of problematic patrons? Travelers, local eccentrics?

The need for different (unique, untried, untested) ideas.

More Emerging Issues For Rural Libraries

Code of Conduct compliance challenges continue.

Patrons who Open Carry in our libraries.

Changes to the “Service Animal” laws.

The need for consistency of messages, policies, and responses.

Open Carry in Our Libraries

Holstered versus unholstered guns? Long guns versus handguns?
Ammo?

Consider the context. Politely discuss or let sleeping dogs lie? Don't debate the law with the patron or the reasons the patrons is acting like this. (Use "Therapeutic Wonderment" questions.)

Who has the best alignment with the patron? (An employee or a helpful patron "can talk guns" with the patron?)

Try to determine the patron's motivations or end game: a confrontation with staff; the arrival of the police; self-created videos;



Animals: Service vs. Emotional Comfort

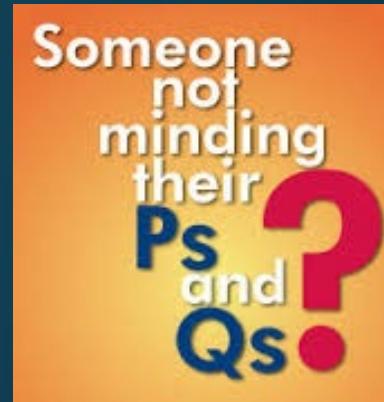
New laws now specifically define “Service Animals” (trained dogs and miniature horses), as opposed to allowing “emotional support animals,” “emotional comfort animals,” “therapy dogs,” or other “comfort animals.”

Be empathic, firm, fair, consistent, reasonable. (Don’t say, “I’m just following the law” or “I don’t make the laws; I just enforce them.”)

Recognize the optics and the context. Explain the “Maintain Control of Your Service Animal At All Times” guidelines



The Need for Consistency: The Best Use of Our Code of Conduct



“We are firm, fair, consistent, assertive, legal, and reasonable in the application of our Code of Conduct.”

“We use praise when patrons comply. We are flexible, empathic, and patient at all times. We can ‘bend the rules’ when necessary and act as the patron’s advocate.”

“We are the ‘shepherds’ of this library building, meaning we have the right to protect it and ourselves.”

Some Important Steps . . .

Don't take "No!" or "That's just how it is . . ." or "That's how it has always been . . ." as answers.

Take ideas from other libraries and librarians with similar issues.

Use Security Incident Reports to build your case for policy changes and security improvements.

Develop an on-going list of both local or nearby "Safety and Security Stakeholders" and problematic patrons.

Some Important Steps . . .

Ramp up your assertiveness as you implement your Code of Conduct firmly, fairly, consistently, and reasonably.

Talk your way out of confrontations (or out of the building).

Make bold safety decisions when you feel you must.

Working Alone

Create a twice-daily check-in call protocol. Hire a security patrol?

Install a camera system that can be monitored offsite. (Post “smile” signs.)

Install a panic alarm that rings to a monitoring alarm company.

Get permission to have OC pepper spray. (Carry it on you, not just nearby.)

Get permission to bring your dog to work?

Working Alone

Talk to your “phantom co-worker.”

Have an escape plan: park your car near the exit door; hide your valuables; create a “robbery pack” (fake keys, wallet, purse, old cell phone).

Create a safe room where you can lock or barricade the door and shelter in place until LE arrives.

Leave (creatively but quickly)!

Working With One or More Colleagues

Develop code words that mean: Call the Police/Sheriff; Leave the Building; or Come Help Me Now.

Talk about how to handle your “frequent fliers,” using a consistent approach.

Use alignment when handing challenging patrons.

Working With One or More Colleagues

Discuss when a permanent ban or civil order may be necessary.

Create better sightlines, eliminate blind spots, do your walkarounds.

Create an ICE Box for all employees – In Case Of Emergency – with a first-aid kit (including tourniquets), callback numbers, keys.

Talking to Appointed/Elected Officials

Use national cases and incidents to support your need for changes.

Discuss your concerns about employee safety; more worker's comp cases, claims, costs; employee retention and morale issues; increased liability for staff and patrons. Keep the focus on the people side of the library business.

Talking to Appointed/Elected Officials

Use the phrase “bad optics,” as it relates to negative public opinions and media stories about employee safety and security.

Make your case (using SIRs) to a variety of audiences: Library Boards; Friends of the Library; local civic and community groups; businesses that can donate security equipment.

Let the electeds be the heroes; just get what you need.

Personal Safety

Who can help? State Police? Fire Department? College police or K-12 school security or SRO?

Firearm laws and local policies?

Personal panic alarm? Duress alarm on the building's burglar alarm?

Install a desk-mounted front door lock.

Insist on a rear exit door.

Personal Safety

Visits by family, friends, and well-known patrons? Connect with nearby businesses, neighbors, schools to check on you?

More community programs? More group programs? Let community service groups use your space more often?

Have situational awareness: daylight behaviors versus nighttime behaviors.



PERPETRATORS OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PER OSHA

Type 1: Criminals.

Type 2: Taxpayers, customers, students, patients, passengers, vendors, etc.

Type 3: Current or former employees.

Type 4: Current or former spouse/partner of an employee.

(Type 5: Cyber attacks resulting in injury or death.)

THE “ACTIVE SHOOTER OR ARMED ATTACKER” RESPONSE



Knowing the Ins and Outs:
Where?

Run (Get Out, Evacuate)

Hide (Lock Out, Barricade)

Keep Out

Spread Out

Fight (Take Out, Protect)

Cover vs. Concealment?

A 15-minute Drill

**Filmed July 2012,
just two weeks
before the Aurora,
CO movie theater
shootings that left 12
dead.**



A rare but catastrophic event.
Awareness training (use the videos).
An annual 15-Minute Drill.

**A joint project
with DHS and
the City of
Houston, TX.**

RUN. HIDE. FIGHT.



CSU The California
State University



Scenario #1

A man comes in and asks you for the time. You tell him and he nods and goes to sit at nearby table, where he just stares intently at you for the next two hours . . .

Scenario #2

A woman comes in and tells you she is living on the streets. She asks if she can use your restroom. She goes inside and locks the door. An hour later and she's still in there . . .

Scenario #3

A group of local teenagers come into your library and start messing with your displays, rolling the book carts around, and making noise. You ask them to leave and they refuse . . .

Scenario #4

A man who is angry at the Town Council comes into your library to ask you for legal advice. When you tell him you cannot give him that type of help, he takes a gun out of his backpack and places it on the counter . . .

Scenario #5

A man comes into your library near closing time. He sits and reads quietly. You can tell by his bags that he appears homeless. When you tell him it's time to close, he nods and begins unrolling his blanket and pulling a pillow from his bag. He says, "I don't have anywhere else to go, so is it okay if I sleep here tonight?"

Closing Thought

Have the courage to do what is right for you, your colleagues, the public we serve, and your agency. Strive for peaceful solutions.

“Educate with Patience; Enforce with Kindness.”

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