

**Successfully Dealing with Changes in Reference**  
**Dougherty & Associates Workshop**  
**Cherry Hill, NJ, January 23-24, 2003**

There were 24 participants, 4 from academic libraries and the rest from public libraries.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Examine issues that are currently redefining reference services
- Examine importance of listening to our customers
- Examine impact of organizational change
- Learn planning and implementing techniques

Various workshop techniques were employed in the course of the two days culminating in 4 separate groups developing action plans that could be modified and used “back at the ranch”.

- Identifying and Prioritizing Issues and Topics
  - Virtual Reference
  - Electronic vs print collection development
  - How to get everyone on staff excited about change
  - How to let the public know what we can do
- Comparing Similarities and Differences
  - Resistance to change
  - Preference of customers for internet
  - Combining reference desk
  - Change to no reference desk
- Events, Trends and Developments
  - Increasingly high expectations of users; instant gratification, 24 hour access
  - Information commons concept,
  - Wireless
  - Decreasing budgets? what to give up
  - Will the youth of today use libraries?
  - Funding
  - Library as community center -> expansion of what we do
  - Need to give students basic traditional skills to students
  - Electronic resources pricing and copyright mess
  - Librarians as instructors
- Core Values, we hold dear, have to add/drop
  - We hold dear: Accuracy, approachability, personal touch, having a reference desk, giving final complete, best answers,

Add: speed, get used to collection being in constant flux, market what we do, know limitations, technology savvy

Drop: Print is best, best answer model, MLS for reference work,

- Reactions to change observed back home
  - Gossiping, cooperation, fear/worry, passive aggression, lack of communication, adapting
- Best practices
  - Page button on cordless phone to call librarians during less busy times
  - Quest Line (Orange Cty Library System, call center for all incoming questions)
  - Shortcuts from Librarians (tip sheets for online searching)
  - Roving librarians with headsets, or cell phones
- Preferred futuring – priority images
  - Fully funded
  - Seamless online search
  - Virtual reference dept., 24/7
  - No unserved populations
  - Everything wireless
  - Filled with patrons – community center
  - Marketed more
  - Wireless technology=staff services where you need them
  - Copyright issues, licensing sorted out
  - Patron will be referred no more than once
- Where users get information
  - Google/yahoo/etc
  - School website
  - Television
  - Databases
  - Books/journals
  - Library catalog
  - Home
- What frustrates them
  - Don't support curriculum
  - Not open enough hours
  - Lack of private or group areas
  - Expanse of web
  - Poor research skills
- What can we do?
  - Become more proactive
  - More responsive to students as user group
  - Cross collection development/resource sharing
  - Better communication between public and college

- Words we use to describe our service  
Proactive, interesting, friendly, professional, courteous, helpful,  
nonjudgemental, approachable, underutilized
  
- Action plans
  1. *Reinvent a reference service that meets our present and potential customers' information where, when and how they want it.*
  
  2. *Design reference services that are responsive to the needs of a diverse community*
  
  3. *Re-imagining the structure in which we provide reference services*
  
  4. *Plan to promote reference services to community*
  
- What did I take away, in a nutshell:  
We have to listen to our “customers” much more, and try to give them what they want, not what we think they should want.  
We may have to drop some values and practices dear to our hearts.  
Change is going to happen – better to embrace it and direct it!

Anyone interested in more detail, please ask me for the 40 page booklet that captures the whole workshop.