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Best Sellers -- Biographies

Francoise Crowell
Yankee Book Peddler, fcrowell@ybp.com

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As Americans we love to read about the rich and famous. Magazines such as People bring to our attention all the details we need (or not). Perfect reading while waiting at the dentist office. But whose lives interest us in academic circles? Whose lives populate our shelves under biography? The fifty top selling biographies at YBP this year cross the disciplines, with the politicians certainly bringing in the highest number of votes. In this list are biographies of Richard Nixon, Robert Kennedy, Madeline Albright, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Jimmy Carter, Al Gore, FDR, and John Adams. Also here are big names that have definitely marked our century: Lenin, Hitler and Gandhi. As a Francophile I was happy to see three French writers, Proust, Rostand, and Molière, and one queen (Marie Antoinette). But Virginia Woolf wins the prize with three top sellers and Alan Greenspan with two. My money is on biographies. Are these in your collection?


Bix, Herbert P. Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan. HarperCollins 2000 $35.00 Cloth 006019314X.


Sugden, John, 1947-. Blue Jacket: Warrior of the Shawnees. Univ of Nebraska 2000 $29.95 Cloth 0803242883.


Marder, Herbert. Measure of Life: Virginia Woolf’s Last Years. Cornell Univ Press 2000 $35.00 Cloth 0801437296.

Duiker, William J. Ho Chi Minh. Hyperion 2000 $35.00 Cloth 0786863870.


Lippman, Thomas W. Madeleine Albright and the New American Diplomacy. Westview 2000 $27.00 Cloth 0813397677.

Tadie, Jean-Yves, 1936-. Marcel Proust: A Life; Trans. by Euan Cameron. Viking 2000 $40.00 Cloth 0670876550.


Cooper, Barry, 1949-. Beethoven. Oxford Univ Press 2000 $35.00 Cloth 019513067X.


Cottrill, Robert C., 1950-. Roger Nash Baldwin and the American Civil Liberties Union. Columbia Univ Press 2000 $34.50 Cloth 0231119720.


Underwood, Thomas A. Allen Tate: Orphan of the South. Princeton Univ 2000 $35.00 Cloth 0691069506.


Levitz, Suzanne Jill. Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman: His Life and Fictions.continued on page 77
Inside Pandora’s Box — Suggestions for Improving Customer Service Today

by Michael Steinmacher (Assistant Manager, St. Matthews/Eline Branch, Louisville Free Public Library)

Column Editor: Jack Montgomery (Western Kentucky University) <jack.montgomery@wk.edu>

Improving customer service in any business is neither an easy undertaking nor is it easily accomplished. While the overall planning and implementation of a customer service strategy can be daunting, there are some simple steps that can be taken to immediately improve customer service. Today’s libraries must acknowledge the need for high quality customer service and integrate it throughout their daily operations. The suggestions offered below can serve as the foundation for an overall customer service plan. Such plans frequently yield increased customer satisfaction, which can lead in turn to a plethora of benefits for the library, including enhanced reputation and increases in budgetary allotments.

Libraries must make an effort now to solidify their increasingly tenuous grasp as the world’s premier provider of information resources. With the rise of the Internet, commercial information providers, and super bookstore chains such as Barnes & Noble and Books-a-Million, libraries are increasingly in danger of losing their position as the premier provider of information sources and services. Some may argue that libraries have already lost that status, a result of resting on their laurels having been the only “game” in town for years. Libraries, however, can learn much from business management approaches to customer service and re-imagine themselves as a hybrid between the information repositories that they always have been and the customer-driven organizations that they must become.

Library literature on improving and integrating customer service into daily operations is on the rise. While this focus on customer service in library science is a fairly new trend, business literature has focused upon it for years. Much of this is easily applicable to the library setting. The business literature contains a wealth of information for libraries seeking to formally implement customer service plans.

A good example of this trend is the brief article “Flying the Friendly Skies” by Jeffrey Gitomer. Gitomer’s article, which focuses upon customer service in the airline industry, is easily applicable to the library setting. He proposes five service lessons for the airline industry:

- Customers only want to resolve problems, not hear yours.
- Listening has nothing to do with hearing. It has everything to do with listening.
- Customers only want to hear one word, “Yes!” They get mad when you give excuses why you “can’t.”
- When you make a mistake, be professional enough to apologize.
- When you make a commitment, take ownership enough to follow through.

While Gitomer’s service lessons are suggested for the airline industry, one can see that they are equally applicable to the library setting. This is the case with much of the business literature concerning customer service. Libraries seeking to build a better customer service orientation should consult this wide-body of literature on the subject.

As noted earlier, however, a recent trend in library literature indicates that library scientists have become increasingly attracted to applying customer service principles directly to the library environment. Karen Hyman, in her article “Customer Service and the ’Rule of 1965,’” argues this position forcefully. She suggests a number of easily taken steps that can be the beginning of an effort to reshape the library as a more customer-driven operation. Her first point is to “Remember that the customer is not the enemy” (Hyman, 58). She states that many libraries operate on the theory that library users cannot be right and take an adversarial approach to providing service. Her suggestion is that libraries refocus that energy into trying to find methods to meet the customer’s wants and desires.

Another way to improve customer service immediately is to constantly remind staff that they should look at things from the perspective of the customer. Staff should be reminded to think how they want and expect to be treated when roles are reversed. Everyone is a customer at some time or another, so imagining this role reversal is a valuable tool in improving customer service.