

Influencing Skills: Advocacy for Public Libraries

In anticipation of the first webinar in Influencing Skills: Advocacy for Public Libraries series for FOPL members taking place on October 2, please read the following short excerpt. Before attending the webinar, think about one or two examples from your own library of each of these key concepts: promotion, public relations, marketing, networking, and lobbying.

Advocacy and Influence for Public Library Stakeholders: Key Definitions

"Advocacy is planned, deliberate, sustained effort to develop understanding and support incrementally over time." - *Dr. Ken Haycock*

We think of advocacy in terms of a one-shot deal, or something that we go out and 'do' all at once. Each component of the above definition is important, including the part about 'incrementally over time'. In other words, we can't go out and 'do advocacy' one day or another; rather, we need a holistic approach and indeed, perhaps the development of a cultural shift within the sector and the library profession around this notion. While many librarians in North America are familiar with Dr. Haycock's definition of advocacy, we have yet to see the results of understanding it in a widespread way. Here are some other key concepts that can help us understand the context.

Promotion really lies at the edges of our concern when it comes to advocacy, but like everything in life, its connection to the 'main players' is important. The work we do in promoting our services and collections can feed into the image we portray, and while we won't be talking too much about image management, we need to keep it in mind.

The specific products of promotion include (among other things) brochures, business cards, newsletters, direct mail materials, web pages, displays, and giveaways. This category can also include special events and the umbrella of 'branding' (Karp, 2002; Siess, 2003; Wolfe, 2005).

When we broaden our idea of 'promotion' to the planning that goes into the creation of these products as well as the ways we might use them effectively, we're starting to talk about '**public relations**'.

The public relations process can be broken down into many discreet components, including positioning the library, defining audience, developing key messages, creating a cohesive plan, evaluating effectiveness, working with the media, creating a welcoming environment in the library, and reaching out to users and other stakeholders (Wolfe, 2005).

With the introduction of 'public relations' and the idea of proactively reaching out to those outside our four walls, we're starting to close in on the sphere advocacy. We begin to see that this continuum of activities moves from a one-sided or monological approach to a distinctly dialogical approach. When we turn our attention to '**marketing**', you may have heard that 'advocacy is like marketing an issue'. Here we start to hone in on our audience and think about their needs in a way that responds to them, rather than our own interpretation of what might be important to our target groups.

"Marketing is both an art and a science. It involves planning, analyzing, and understanding customers. It is creative and offers insight through the analysis process that would have never been obtained otherwise. The process of developing a plan [...] reveals an incredible amount of information about what your library can offer customers. By using the step-by-step process of market research and analysis, you will reach a far more targeted understanding of existing and potential customers. As a results, you will be positioned to implement more successful, targeted programs that hit the bull's-eye. You will maximize funding; have the tools to think outside the box, with the analysis skills to evaluate your thinking. Marketing makes your efforts more targeted, directed, and successful, and it is built by implementing the planning process routinely," (Walters, 2004, p. 33).

Here's a summary of these first concepts on the continuum: "Marketing is determining who you serve and with what products. Publicity is getting the word out that you can help people do their jobs better-cheaper-faster. Public relations is talking to people about their needs and your strengths. [With advocacy], all of the above are combined to make sure we get the resources that we need to provide excellent information products and services to our customers. In addition, advocacy includes all of the aspects of professionalism that we use to accomplish the above: dress, attitude, continuing education, networking, and working to improve the image of our profession," (Seiss, 2003, p. xvi). We can extend these definitions by adding '**relationship marketing**' and start to reflect the core of we might also think of as '**networking**'.

"Relationship marketing is designed to bring a greater whole to a partnership or collaboration than either side could accomplish on their own. It calls for creativity, flexibility, and sensitivity. It calls for innovation, credibility and risk taking.... Often I hear librarians wish for a 'marketing director' within the library. Somehow that person would be responsible for identifying groups of customers and entice them into the library. In relationship marketing, we move to a new level. Marketing becomes part of everyone's job description, from the custodian to the librarian.... Close relationships can last a lifetime. If a library forms relationships with strong partners, that relationship makes the library stronger. Those relationships carry the message of the library in a personal way," (Walters, 2004, p. 152).

This view of networking or relationship marketing as it extends itself to the individual level is the kernel of the key points we'll explore. It leads us directly to the sister concepts of social influence and persuasion. The notion of '**influence**' is central one of the most important areas in advocacy. To set the context, here are some brief explanatory notes of the concept as a way to introduce it and to provide a preview of a more complete discussion.

Power is often associated with influence, and indeed, it's a closely linked concept. "Power is the ability of individuals to influence others to do something that they would not otherwise have done. At times, a distinction is made between power and influence, where power entails the potential to have influence and influence is the actual change outcome of power" (Jensen, 2007, p. 217).

It's also worth mentioning here a slight distinction in the term '*social influence*', which reflects the "change in the belief, attitude, or behaviour of a person which results from the action, or presence of another person" (Raven, 1990, p. 495).

Persuasion is a process, beginning with a person with a goal. A message is delivered to a target audience, and the process is completed when the target complies, commits or rejects the message (Benoit, 2008).

We would be remiss if we didn't cover one more concrete definition here. Certainly in other sectors, **lobbying** (both official and unofficial) is tightly associated with advocating for an issue, particularly within the political realm.

Generally, 'lobbying' describes activities undertaken with the intent of influencing government. Lobbying efforts fall into three categories and are hierarchical in their level of aggressiveness.

- ≡ The first set of tactics involves collaborating with another group sharing similar concerns and interests.
- ≡ The second is engaging in grassroots lobbying and can include the dissemination of information about the policies in question, rallies and demonstrations. Grassroots techniques are designed to inform and influence members of the public.
- ≡ The most aggressive set of techniques fall into the category of direct lobbying, such as financially supporting a campaign or meeting directly with elected officials to discuss specific issues (Nicholson-Crotty, 2005).

So we can really think about all of these techniques in the form of a pyramid, where 'collaboration' forms the base and 'direct lobbying' at the top. The lower-level activities reach a wider base of people, but usually produce fewer results. *How can this definition of lobbying can help us understand this process in non-legislative contexts as well? What are some examples of promotion, public relations, marketing and networking in your library?*

References

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