



## Shortcuts to Greatness

or 10 things that great libraries know  
and maybe you don't...

Karen Hyman  
[karendhyman@gmail.com](mailto:karendhyman@gmail.com)  
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**Karen Hyman** has worked in public libraries, as a State Library Consultant, and as Executive Director of the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative, a multitype cooperative where she developed services for 600 member libraries. Her chief inspiration is her role as a library user which "clears the vision wonderfully."

Karen's 12-step *Reinventing Your Library* programs have been a feature at every Public Library Association Conference since 2000 and have been presented at library conferences, staff days and trustee workshops in 41 states/provinces in the US and Canada.

Publications that people remember include "What Makes a Project Work?" (*American Libraries*, April 2006); "Struggling in a One-Stop Home-Shopping World, or People Want What They Want When They Want It --Don't You?" in *Library Networks in the New Millennium: Top Ten Trends*, American Library Association, 2000; and "Customer Service and the Rule of 1965: Stalled on the Way to the New Millennium" in *American Libraries*, October 1999.

## Today we will explore

- What gives your library the best chance of continuous success for many generations of technology, people and economic well-being?
- What can jumpstart your library's moves to greatness?

## Who's here?

### My library's funding situation is... (choose all that apply)

- Scary
- Desperate
- Depressing
- Shocking
- Confusing
- OK, but I'm looking over my shoulder
- As good as ever
- Very good and growing

### The premise

- Excellence and a history of support are not working as well as they used to.
- Smoke & mirrors and inertia are not working as well as they used to.
- For many, fun is in short, or at least shorter supply.
- Moving toward greatness was never more necessary, rewarding or entertaining.



**My goal:  
As a result of this session, you will...**

- Clear the decks of whatever is holding you back.
- Identify low cost, low labor, high impact changes you could make now.
- Be a long-term integral player in the success of the community.
- **Go home and try something different.**



Pre-step #1

# Get a grip.

**Dakota tribal wisdom says that  
when you're on a dead horse  
the best strategy is  
to dismount.**

*Gary Hamel. Leading the Revolution, 2000.*

## Of course there are other strategies (2011 variation)

- You can put the horse on dry ice. Maybe cryogenics will bring it back next year.
- You can get a committee to study the dead horse.
- You can declare that it's cheaper to feed a dead horse.
- You can harness several dead horses together.
- You can keep riding. Maybe the horse is just stunned.



**But after you've tried  
all of these things,  
you're still going to have  
to dismount.**

## What makes a library great?

- Money?
- Size?
- Luck?
- Use?
- Staff?
- Customers?

**What makes a library great?  
Some traditional answers...**

- Excellent committed board.
- Extremely supportive town government.
- Beautiful new building.
- Wonderful staff – a star in every position.
- Substantial funding from public and private sources.
- Wildly enthusiastic public who love libraries and reading.
- Very high use.



**Great libraries  
believe they could  
be better  
than they are.**

**Great libraries**

- Actively and persistently work to improve.
- Believe that things change.
- Know the strategic value of their library to their community.
- Are willing to experiment.
- Believe that greatness is a continuing adventure (or a constant struggle depending on the day.)

**Great\* libraries can be...**

- Pretty terrific already.
- Not exceptionally large, well funded or staffed.
- Anywhere.

\*MONEY COUNTS but it doesn't buy greatness.

**Inertia...**



- Has been our friend.
- Has been built into our organizations.
- Has been our enemy.
- Is working less and less.

**It's a different world**

- Shrinking, sometimes plummeting budgets and resources. Cost cutters are heroes.
- Rapid technological change in all of our service areas.
- Ubiquity of rapid access to media of all kinds.

Truth #1



**Great libraries have great leadership. There is no alternative.**

*The Yin and Yang of Great Leadership*  
**Leaders...**



- Set an inspiring and effective vision.
- Are confident that they can notice and fix what doesn't work.
- Have courage.
- Take care of business.
- Ask questions and listen to the answers.
- Model the behavior that they want from others.

**In other words, great leaders are high in emotional intelligence...**

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Regulation
- Motivation
- Empathy
- Social Skills

**Which can be developed through experience and effort.**

Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ.* Bantam, 1995.



**Leadership is NOT a charismatic individual with assorted troops.**

**If you want to be a great leader, you can...**

- Set the expectation for yourself and learn all you can.
- Find coaches – among mentors, colleagues, and staff.
- Notice and eliminate energy depleters e.g. handwringing over the past and negative predictions about the future.
- Remember that courage is a choice, not a personality trait.

**If you want to have great leaders, remember that...**

- Their greatness is in your self-interest.
- Their leadership skills are developed through your observation and feedback.
- Perfect leaders, like perfect mothers, are fictional.
- Growing yourself can make other people better.



Truth #2

**Visionary leadership  
relies on  
wonderful staff.  
How do you get (or be)  
great staff?**

**You want passionate,  
enthusiastic staff.  
How do you get them?**



- Hire/look for some.
- Inspire, liberate and cherish the staff you have. Your front line staff are your heroes.
- Make passion and enthusiasm driving values of your organization.

*Hire some:*

Some common attributes in Anythink\* job descriptions

- You engage well with others and are passionate about providing exemplary customer experience.
- You're a team player who thinks quickly on your feet.
- You're excited about the prospect of growing and learning in a changing environment.



\*anythink TM = Rangeview (CO) Library System

**Dilbert on Motivation**



*Inspire, liberate, cherish*

**What really motivates people?**

- A great workplace is the chance to work with great colleagues i.e people you can respect and learn from. (Netflix)
- Progress. Clear, meaningful goals, resources, encouragement. Harvard Business Review January-February 2010
- Autonomy. Responsible people thrive on freedom.
- Mastery. Doing things they like and are good at.

**What really motivates people?  
Doing things...**

- Because they matter.
- Because they are interesting.
- Because they are part of something important.

**What doesn't work (for even rudimentary cognitive skills)?**

- The carrot and the stick.

(Dan Pink on The Surprising Science of Motivation at [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com))

Truth #3



**Visionary leadership and great staff can create a great culture.**

**Culture is how an organization operates. You need...**



- A culture that supports innovation/flexibility and quality execution .
- A culture that supports effective teamwork
- A culture that avoids rigidity, politics, mediocrity, complacency, the aura of failure\*.

\*Aura of failure includes ineffective combat, victimhood, blaming the customer, looking like you lost.

**Do you have a vision/driving values statement?**

**Do you remember and use it?**

Enron Had A Nice-Sounding Value Statement with 4 Values

Enron headquarters



- Integrity
- Communication
- Respect
- Excellence

Their 4 values were chiseled in marble in the main lobby, but had little to do with the real values of the organization



Netflix: Reference Guide on our Freedom and Responsibility Culture

**Values are what we value. Real values are shown in how we treat the people who...**

- Work in our library.
- Walk in the door (really and virtually).
- Fund our library.
- Don't use the library – yet.

**Inspiring and effective visions...**

- Don't have to be brilliantly innovative or original.
- Are short and focused on the community served.
- Inspire key players - customers, non-users, funders, community leaders and staff – and meet their needs.
- Set easy-to-understand direction, context and values for the organization.

**Are not mystical.**

 COLUMBUS METROPOLITAN LIBRARY

A thriving community where wisdom prevails.

 anythink  
We open doors for curious minds.

Glen Carbon Centennial Library  
More than you expect!



 TOPEKA & SHAWNEE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Your place. Stories you want. Information you need. Connections you seek.

### Ann Arbor Library District “gets to the yes.”

A strategic plan adopted in 2004 set us up to develop a culture of generosity in our library system. Everything that has happened since evolves from a simple mantra, “get to the yes” with the patron/ customer.

If our intent is always to say yes, then we will do more than expected most of the time, and the response has been a tremendous surge in use in almost all of the services.

Models You Can Use from America's Star Libraries  
Library Journal, 2/15/2009

The naysayers to this philosophy use fear of the “what ifs” or “might happens” to deter generosity. We were told if you don't limit renewals on available items, if you don't limit requests on available items, if you don't require registration for programs, if you don't don't, then people will take advantage of you. Well, yes, some will, but most do not. We have chosen to act in acknowledgement of the overwhelming majority of people who use the library respectfully. The payback in terms of goodwill and support is outstanding.

It is also much more fun to say yes.  
—Josie Parker, Director

- ### To build a great culture...
- Involve staff, trustees and the larger community (users and non-users).
  - Set an inspiring vision.
  - Develop core competencies & expectations of everyone at all levels.
  - Reinforce the vision in job descriptions, hiring, assignments, library PR, website and everyday choices.

Truth #4 

**The library belongs to the customers.**

**Visionary leadership and great staff are there to make the experience that the customers love.**

**There is no alternative.**

- ### If we aren't the library that people want, that's...
- a) their fault.
  - b) town government's fault.
  - c) the former director's fault.
  - d) our fault.

## Basic premises

- We adjust to them, not vice versa.
- Customer focus means reaching out and continual renewal.
- Your library is as friendly as your least friendly public service employee.
- Mothers' Day is over.

## Customer focused libraries get to first base...

- Ditch the rules/burn the signs.
- Observe and respond to cultural shifts.
- Choose their fights; some "problems" don't need to be solved.
- Rethink their fines or at least their message.
- Show respect and affection for their customers.

**Deciding the perennial issues (noise, cell phones, food etc.etc) in favor of the 21<sup>st</sup> century customer frees up time and energy for things that could make a big difference.**

## When it comes to customer service

- Every choice has a down side – including your current "choices."
- Err on the side of customer service that is positive, welcoming, and empowering for the customer.
- Acknowledge and accept the cost of doing business.

## A loyal customer

- Feels great about dealing with you.
- Has needs that are consistently met or exceeded.
- Will proactively talk about and refer someone to you.

Your delivery was great! The service was great! The experience was great!

Jeffrey Gitomer, Customer Satisfaction is Worthless, Customer Loyalty is Priceless: How to Make Them Love You, Keep You Coming Back, and Tell Everyone They Know, Bard Press, 1998.

Truth #5



**How do you solve problems?  
Great libraries practice rapid recovery.**

## Two Types of Necessary Rules

1. **Prevent irrevocable disaster**
  - E.g. Financials produced are wrong
  - E.g. Hackers steal our customers' credit card info
2. **Moral, ethical, legal issues**
  - E.g. Dishonesty, harassment are intolerable

Netflix: Reference Guide on our Freedom and Responsibility Culture

## Mostly, Though, **Rapid Recovery** is the Right Model

- Just fix problems quickly
  - **High performers make very few errors**
- We're in a creative-inventive market, not a safety-critical market like medicine or nuclear power
- You may have heard preventing error is cheaper than fixing it
  - Yes, in manufacturing or medicine, but...
  - **Not so in creative environments**

Netflix: Reference Guide on our Freedom and Responsibility Culture



**Good processes help your library get more done.**

**Bad processes try to prevent recoverable mistakes.**



- The key to responsive service is creative problem solving.
- The key to creative problem solving is having a problem.



## Houston Public Library solves problems

- Respond to any customer complaint within 3 days.
- The low hanging fruit, they handle right away.
- They work on uniformity of response with selected phraseology for given situations.
- But, if staff make a change and customer goes away happy, they may suggest a different approach or revisit the policy to see if it still makes sense.
- Result is a continuous improvement process with flexible policies that can be followed.



## Responding Rapidly

- Look outward: at people's behavior, media, etc. The major focus of people's lives in your community needs to be a major focus of your library and its services.
- Have a mechanism in place: someone's job? small group?
- Look for the sweet spot... fast, low labor, high impact choices.
- Follow the 80/20 rule.
- Try, evaluate and build on what you learn.

Truth #6



## Great libraries know and show their strategic value to their community.

## Your strategic value\*...



- Community specific
- Time specific
- Involves stakeholders
- Focuses on meeting their needs, not yours.

\*Lyn Hopper Consulting 2011

## To know and share your value...

- Continually reach out, listen and communicate.
- Couch your message in terms of community needs not library needs.
- Forge partnerships.
- Be at the table when decisions are made.
- Start now.

Truth #7



## Great libraries seize opportunity.



## Houston Public Library collaborates...

- In regular contact with Health Department and Parks & Recreation with whom they share constituencies.
- New Vinson Neighborhood Library partners with Houston Health Department.
- New Kendall Neighborhood Library, built with Parks and Recreation includes ½ court gym.
- HPL Express, housed in existing buildings and multi-service centers, connect neighborhoods at a fraction of the cost.



### Truth #8



## Great libraries have heart and soul.

### Great libraries have heart and soul.

- Emotional bonding - a heartfelt connection – makes it 3 times more likely that customers will stay loyal.
- The ideal - flawless service, delivered exactly as people want, in an atmosphere of caring.

Joseph Michelli, *Leadership Beyond the Recession*  
 OCLC Symposium at ALA Annual Conference 2009





## Overcoming Overdues

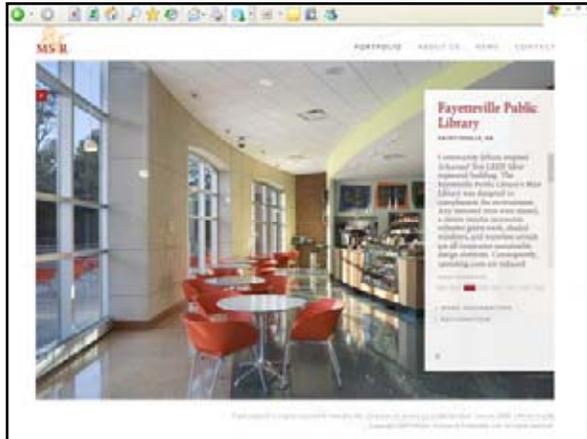
- Pay when you reach the \$10.00 threshold.
- Fine free Fridays.
- No overdues – but we love donations.
- Courtesy email reminder with a hot link to renewal screen. Consider Library Elf.
- Multiple renewals based on use and requests.
- A new motto: “Late is great!”

Fine Free Fridays: Wellsville (KS) Public Library  
No fines/donations: Effingham (KS) Public Library & Oskaloosa (KS) Public Library  
“Late is Great!” Princeton Public Library

## Truth #9



# Great libraries look cool.

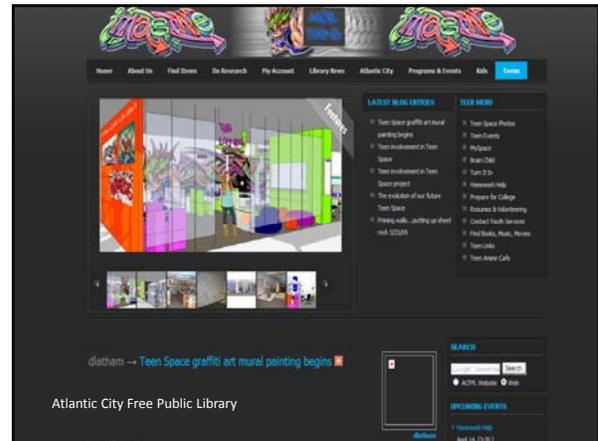


San Jose Public Library, Vineland Branch Library





Monroe Township (NJ) Library



## Reconfigure to fit their needs. From Paco Underhill...

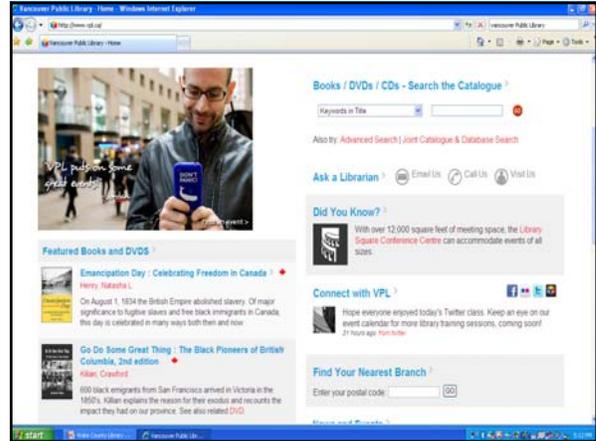
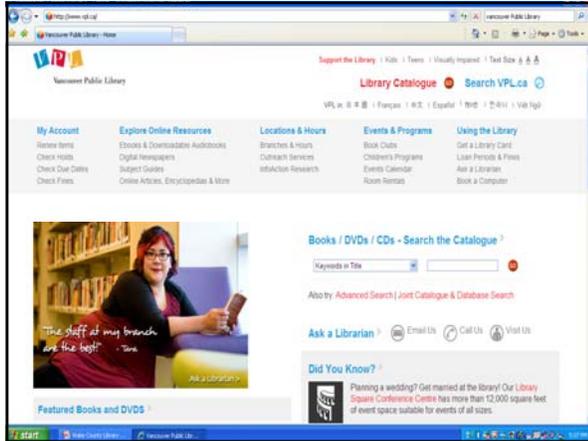
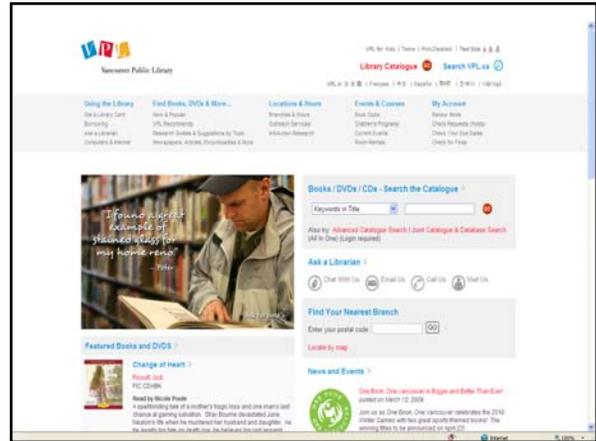
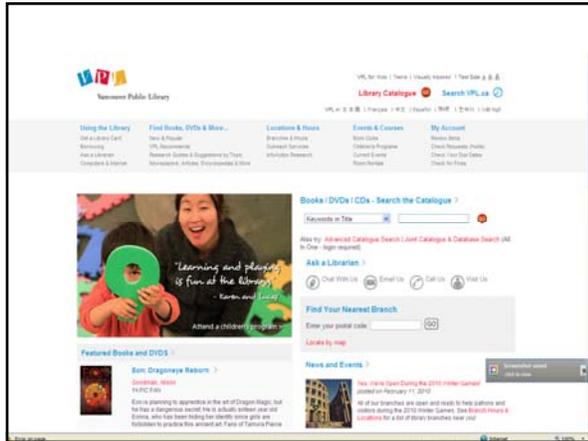
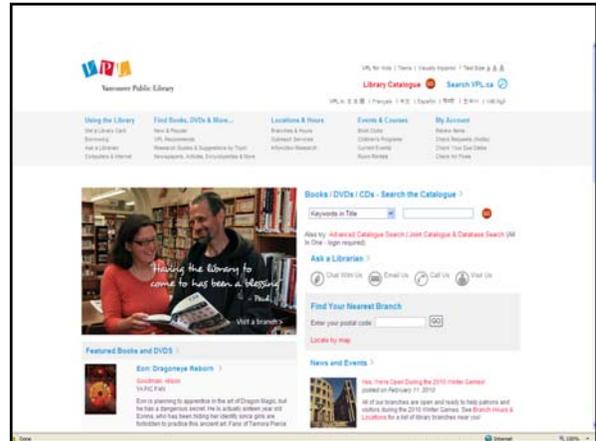
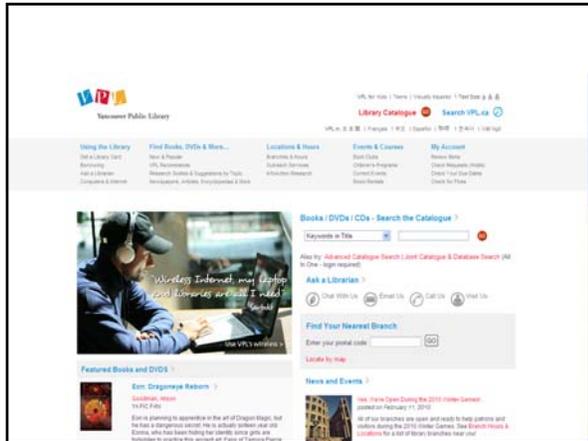
- Watch what people do.
- Record what people do.
- Interview people.
- Combine stuff.

From Data to Wisdom: An Interview with Paco Underhill  
by [Liz Danzico](#)



## Change your look online.

- Have a cool looking website.
- Make your impression on your homepage.
- Try out social media.





### Focus on results for the customer will help you to...

- Choose among flawed options.
- Avoid “compromises” that produce no results.
- Handle the down side of a great choice.
- Do the extra work that makes a real difference.

### Things that might work in many settings...

- Make sure people know what happened to your . services. Deliver that message in a positive, multifaceted, controlled manner.
- Take advantage of any opportunities to restructure, reorganize and outsource. Plan NOW.
- Make choices. Action increases energy and improves morale.
- Go with robust strategies when you can find them.
- Enjoy your accomplishments. The good old day could be today.

### 5 Things you can start today

1. Set a simple, inspiring and usable vision , share it with your customers and potential customers, and make it the touchstone for all your other choices.
2. Develop core competencies/expectations of everyone at all levels to match that vision in terms of enthusiasm, flexibility, etc. Define the job that you want done and celebrate what you want to foster.

### 5 things you can start today

3. Practice rapid recovery. Notice what’s not working and respond quickly to customer and staff feedback.
4. Change your look. Increase the coolness factor of your staff, your space and your website.
5. Go the extra mile. Put heart & soul and a spirit of fun into your library service.

Thank you to Heidi Cramer, Newark Public Library and Linda Lobdell Graphic Design for use of Libraries Rock logo.

