

# 10 THINGS I KNOW TO BE TRUE ABOUT LIBRARIES

*Toni Garvey, Director of the Phoenix Public Library and a Library Strategies consultant, recently gave this keynote address as part of a unique strategic planning process for the joint Southeastern Libraries Cooperating (SELCO)/ Southeast Library System (SELS) in Minnesota. Garvey used her remarks as the foundation for the planning process which focused on preparing public and multi-type libraries for surviving – and thriving – in the future.*



A Consulting Group of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

## If all types of libraries are to be vital to the communities they serve, there are 10 things to hold true to:

- 1. “Focus on the user and all else will follow.”**

The world has changed and libraries have fierce competition from all directions. Focusing on our users is critical to staying competitive. We need to ask our customers what they want ...*then deliver.*
- 2. “Reference is *not* our niche.”**

*Google has won this competition!* A recent OCLC study showed that 84% of individuals begin their search for information on a search engine. When compared with a library, they find the search engine more reliable, available, cost effective, convenient, easier to use... and faster.
- 3. “We need to run our libraries like businesses.”**

Libraries can’t afford to keep things that don’t circulate. We need to approach collection decisions like we’re paying rent on every foot of shelving. We need to study our competition to learn how they choose, display and sell or distribute books and materials.
- 4. “Environment matters.”**

Customers of all ages react to the physical spaces in libraries. *They love it! They hate it! They find it welcoming or they can’t wait to get their books or DVDs and get out.* Library spaces should be clean, uncluttered, bright and comfortable. *Again... look at your competition!*
- 5. “You don’t need all the answers to move forward.”**

Libraries need to be nimble. They need to stay tuned to the changes in their communities and respond. They need to be led by individuals willing to take risks, make mistakes and keep moving in new directions.
- 6. “Libraries must have a seat at the table.”**

Decision makers need to see that the library is a critical asset to the community and a problem solver, not a financial drain. Community issues are library issues and library leaders (staff and volunteers) need to be a voice for stakeholders and the community at-large.
- 7. “Whining gets you nowhere... and it’s so damned annoying!”**

Everyone’s suffering in these tough economic times and it doesn’t get us anywhere to focus on the plight of libraries. We need to find solutions, partnerships, be creative about funding... and spending. Libraries need to be the positive spirit of the community *in good times and bad.*
- 8. “Marketing is critical.”**

A marketing consultant once told me that no organization was worse at telling their stories, extolling their contributions and promoting their services than a library. We don’t have to have big PR budgets to get the word out about what great places libraries are and all that we have to offer. Make marketing a priority and find creative ways to get your message out.
- 9. “There’s strength in numbers.”**

Libraries that thrive have partners and collaborators everywhere – public and private. A unified voice– with many speaking the same message–gets more attention.
- 10. “Great customer service trumps everything!”**

Think of the places that you love to return to as a customer – usually it’s because of the way you’re treated. Make sure that every one of your staff understands that *customer service is your #1 product.* Hire staff who genuinely like people. Define excellent customer service, then insist on it and reward it.