

Iowa Small Library Online Conference 2009

***Ethical Standards
for Library Leadership***

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The Big Myth

The Myth:

Library ethics is about censorship, filtering, and material challenges.

The Reality:

*It's about “**safety for the stranger**”.*

Agenda

- Why is ethics important?
- What is library ethics?
- Four ethical standards.
- Practical standards.
- Your first steps.

Why is Ethics Important?

- Builds credibility:
 - *earns trust and respect*
- Sets standards for decision-making:
 - *increases productivity*
- Reduces unhealthy conflict:
 - *establishes rational rules*

Q: What is Library Ethics?

What do you think **ethics** means?

Please give **two** examples and compare your answers to what we have compiled on the next slide.

A: What is Library Ethics?

- *Study* of morality: right and wrong.
- More than just how you feel.
- Requires research.
- Requires evidence.
- Decisions and actions.

Why is Ethics Hard?

- Conflicting ethical systems.
- What if: *no good* answer?
- What if: *too many* good answers?
- Clock is ticking.
- Mistakes made in public.

Typical Ethical Problems

- Who might be forgotten?
- What are the costs and benefits?
- Is the law ethical?
- What are our hidden biases?
- Will we ever be sure?

Q. Typical Ethical Problems

What do you face in your library?

Please give **two** examples and compare your answers to what we have compiled on the next slide.

A. Typical Ethical Problems

- Friendship or privilege.
- Gossip at the service desk.
- Indifferent decision-making.
- Forgetting invisible users.
- The cost of ethical behavior.
- Expedient decision-making.

Four Ethical Standards: Intro

- Rule of Law.
- Common Law: tradition.
- Governance: how we decide:
 - democracies: devolve into mobs
 - republics: devolve into oligarchies
 - checks and balances

Rule of Law

- Ordinary and accessible:
 - easy to understand
 - transparent process
- Applies to everyone equally:
 - no special privileges
 - no special class or group

The Four Standards

- Transparency in governance.
- Equal treatment for everyone.
- Privacy: for information users.
- Access to information for all.

Transparency

- Follow state open meeting laws.
- Avoid library/academic jargon.
- Rules written and posted.
- For average people to follow.
- No secret services.

Equal Treatment

- No special treatment for friends.
- No special treatment for elite.
- Rules written, not verbal.
- Young people treated with respect.
- Avoid the middle-class trap.

Privacy

- No discussion of library users.
- Protection of records:
 - respond only to court orders
 - question subpoenas
- Physical privacy in library.

Access to Information for All

- Hours convenient to working class.
- Services for all residents:
 - illiterate
 - non-English-speaking
- Access & information in many formats.
- Online services for 21st century.

The Main Problems

- Standards clash:
 - *transparency versus privacy*
- Ethical process takes time:
 - *pressure for quick solutions*
- Ethical decisions cost money:
- Are our choices really prejudices?

Practical Standards: Trustees

- Learn and follow state library law.
- Create written guidelines:
 - trustee by-laws
 - rules for meeting
- Execute and enforce rules.
- Review rules at least yearly.

Practical Standards: Director

- Establish written rules of conduct.
 - *include everyone, not just director*
- Strategic plan is main contract.
 - *objective means of evaluation*
- *Build ethics into budget.*
 - *planning prevents expedient choices*

Practical Standards: Staff

- Civility clause in job description.
- Clearly written expectations.
- Ethics included in evaluations.
- Staff meetings regarding ethics.
- Involvement in state association.
- Professional development collection.

Practical Standards: Everyone

- Training on current library ethics.
- No special privileges for insiders.
- Strict guidelines regarding nepotism.
- Strict guidelines regarding cronyism.
- Yearly review of state library law.
- Legal review with library attorney.

Your First Steps

What are two things you could do in the next week?

Compare your answer to what we have listed on the next slide.

Your First Steps

- Share this information with others.
- Write down your four standards.
- Review policies for consistency.
- Study the bigger picture.
- Learn other professional ethics.

Support

- You can reach Pat at:
 - pat@pattern.com **or**
- Pat can call you, if you like.
- Bibliography at librarything.com
 - member name: **patternresearch**
- LE@D and PLA classes in 2009