Overview to Week

Welcome to week three of Library Advocacy Unshushed.

Week 2 Review

Last time, we looked at perceptions of libraries. We saw that, generally, libraries are well loved and well used. We also saw that there’s a lot that people don’t know about libraries. Even frequent users don’t know the many dimensions of library service; and most people don’t know the impact of the work of libraries and librarians on the lives of individuals and on the social and economic fabric of our communities.

Remember also that, in advocacy, we are not talking about promoting use, because there is no direct relationship between use and support. In looking at the evidence of advocacy we are not looking at promotional campaigns to sign up new members or PR to promote a new service, or efforts to raise the image of libraries or librarianship. We have already seen in the OCLC study, From Awareness to Funding in 2008 that “super-supporters” of libraries are not, in the main, users.

We looked at some particular impacts of libraries in different kinds of communities, such as hospitals, corporations, neighbourhoods, and universities. We were reminded that we have to collect and tell our stories about the impacts of libraries. And we need to match these stories with the priorities of the people who will hear them from us. So - hospital administrators need to hear the evidence of impact of medical librarians on diagnosis and treatment, because we know that hospital administrators’ priority is the impact on the work of their clinical teams. That selective telling of stories is one way we develop understandings and deepen our credibility within our relationships.
We need to pay attention to the perceptions of library members, decision makers, and supporters. In particular, we need to avoid the mistake of thinking that these are all the same people. In fact, members and supporters have quite different perceptions.

Finally, and most important, we know there’s a huge gap out there between the high regard people have for libraries and the relative invisibility of libraries to decision makers.

We are in urgent need of focused and informed advocacy to close that gap – to convert that high esteem into concrete policy and funding support for the future, a future that can’t be taken for granted. Libraries can and do die of moral support.

**Week 3 Overview**

To do this we need to know more about the decision making environment, the factors that influence decision makers, and approaches for building relationships of influence. We address these questions this week.

- We’ll learn what research teaches us about exercising influence in practical situations. Our natural impulse to mobilize others to flood legislators or other decision makers with advocacy messages doesn’t, in itself, work very well.
- We’ll examine the all-important role of relationships in advocacy, and delve into proven ways of influencing others. It is much easier to influence someone if we have already established a relationship and if we are informed and intentional about influencing..
- We know that human decision-making is not entirely rational. In many areas of our lives, the facts don’t carry the day by themselves. So what does carry the day? To answer this we will examine the exercise of influence.
- We will look at the kinds of people who have disproportionate influence and punch above their weight in giving ideas traction.
- We will note factors that drive support for libraries.
- We will review the six key principles of influence identified by Robert Cialdini, a social psychologist. We can apply these principles ourselves in nurturing and building credible relationships over time.
Throughout you will recognize a continuing theme: the indispensable value of being front and centre, with our sleeves rolled up, in the gatherings (assemblies?) where the issues of our communities are identified and the strategies created.

About the Research

Before we begin, just a note about the research. We see many references to advocacy in our library association literature and newspapers and through our social software and professional connections. However, most of the approaches that we read about are not evaluated systematically. They may not be harming us, but they may not be the best use of our time and effort.

In much of the professional literature, there is a blending of promotion for library use and advocacy for library support. This is not helpful when we are trying to identify factors and processes that strengthen library support.

There have also been many advocacy training programs, but very little in the way of evaluation of these programs. Indeed, such research is hard to do, because the results play out over a long time.

For the evidence to guide us in advocacy, we have to rely on sound research set in libraries and other non-profits. As well we can draw on the writing of Robert Cialdini and Malcolm Gladwell about the dynamics of influence in relationship.

I want to acknowledge, in introducing this video about research, a huge debt to two researchers who have mined the research and in fact contributed to it. Both are contributors to this course.

- Dr. Ken Haycock, who leads a new library science program at the University of Southern California. I will summarize a review article by Ken Haycock that outlines the research that’s been done.
- And Dr. Cheryl Stenström, on the faculty of San Jose State University, whose doctoral thesis, completed in 2012, focuses on advocacy for public libraries.

Lastly, some studies mentioned this week are only available from proprietary sources. Not everyone will have access to scholarly data bases. You are not required to read these studies, but we provide the full references to these and a few others for those of you who want to follow up.
Part 1 Decision Makers and Influencers

Introduction

Advocates are most effective when they understand the dynamic of relationships between decision makers and their influencers, and are seen by them as respected and trusted colleagues. In this section we look at the decision-making dynamic and show that libraries will only have a voice, as Ken Haycock has made clear, if they are at the table when programs and funding for the community are discussed and decisions are made.

Decision making

Let’s begin by acknowledging that people are not necessarily rational when making decisions. We all like to believe we are influenced only by what we call the facts, but human behaviour demonstrates, again and again, that we are influenced by many non-rational factors as well. Robert Cialdini, a social psychologist who has spent a career researching the process of influence, gives us this example. He observed that people are more inclined to follow a well-dressed jaywalker across the street than one who is less-well turned out, even though the jaywalker is doing something they know to be risky. People will regard a person as an authority based on the suit alone (Cialdini, 1984).

We are naïve if we think we can just present facts, as we see them, to decision makers, and immediately receive their agreement and support. The facts help, but they are not going to carry the day. The facts are not going to trump the values, beliefs, priorities, and experiences of the decision maker. Nor are the facts likely to be persuasive if they come from a stranger who has no relationship with the decision maker.

By decision makers, I mean people with the power to make the decisions we seek, and by influencers I mean all the people who exert a strong persuasive impact on those decision makers.

For example, a mayor, as a decision maker, may be strongly influenced by the chief administrative officer. This administrative officer is an influencer in relation to the mayor. The administrative officer is influenced, in turn, by senior staff members. In some situations, the chief administrative officer is both a decision maker and an influencer. For example, that person has the power to decide what advice from a subordinate that he or she will recommend to the mayor. Thus we have a chain of influence and decision-making all the way up and down the hierarchy. Even top decision makers must be good persuaders, or influencers. It was said that Lyndon Johnson, by any measure one of the most powerful
politicians of the 20th century, complained that as the President of the United States, he didn’t seem to have any power at all, but had to keep getting permission from people who had gone to Harvard. So even Lyndon Johnson was both a decision maker and an influencer, and had to influence a lot of people in order to engage support for his decisions. And of course the culture of an organization, and the informal relationships within the organization, can be just as powerful a driver of influence as any position in the formal hierarchy.

I will insert here a reference to stakeholders, a word we also hear in connection with advocacy. Stakeholders are all the people who have some kind of interest in an issue, but they are not necessarily decision makers in it. Children are stakeholders in school libraries, but they do not make decisions about the funding or staffing of school libraries, and they don’t influence the decision either – at least, not directly.

Research by Ken Haycock and Cheryl Stenström points to several key factors that influence the behaviours of decision makers in the library sector. The strongest of these key factors is the relationship between an advocate and a decision maker or between an advocate and someone who influences a decision maker (for example, our chief administrative officer of a town). This relationship, to be successful, must be one of credibility and trust, qualities that take time to develop, and are related to context.

At the Table

To cultivate those relationships with the decision makers and influencers, advocates have to be “at the table”, so to speak. Ken Haycock states its importance very clearly: “The best advocacy is of course being ‘at the table’, not only when solutions are proposed but when problems are identified. In current parlance, this is becoming a player. This is where we need to be, in our cities and towns, in our universities and colleges, in our schools and in our larger organizations, at the table when the issues are raised and analyzed and solutions worthy of support are proposed. This is where the library’s resources and services are leveraged to improve the quality of life and experiences in our communities” (Haycock, 2011).

I agree. -- “the table” is where the knowledge and facilitation skills of librarians, and their strong identification with their communities, are going to be evident and helpful.

Despite our efforts, people just don’t know what it is we can do. They still associate librarians with purchasing and warehousing, running lending operations, and reading to children.
David Lankes, as we saw last week, says that the “mission of librarians is to improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in their communities” (Lankes, 2011). This is the core of the librarian’s mission. The mission isn’t what he calls “artifacts” – items in the collection - or even information, but about facilitating conversation.

The more deeply and productively embedded librarians are in the actual activity of community, whether it is research and development, the development of family literacy improvement strategies, or the work of teaching in a school, the greater the opportunity for the knowledge and skills of librarians, and the true potential of libraries, to be visible and relevant.

In contrast, placing librarians entirely in “sage on the stage” positions, like the traditional reference desk, can have the unintended consequence of hiding this potential and make that relevance harder to see.

It’s been observed for the past 10 years that librarian roles that simply say “information transfer” or “information service” place us in a very crowded sphere, as so many organizations are in the information business, and people are used to getting their own information quite conveniently on the Internet. One of the really shocking findings of OCLC’s From Awareness to Funding study is that librarians were not seen by politicians as working with community leaders and elected representatives to improve the community (OCLC, 2008). Yet, ask any librarian, and you will hear all about their devotion to the community and their essential role in improving it. The difference is being at the problem-identifying, problem solving, and decision-making table of the community, whatever that community may be. It’s also being seen to be at the table, listening and participating and being an effective, proactive presence.

I have worked in a couple of public libraries in communities where there were community-wide task forces dealing with the serious issues of unemployment and under-employment. High-level executives were involved from public education, post-secondary schools, local government, chamber of commerce and other community organizations. If the library had not been heavily involved in these task forces, contributing to strategy creation and development – and not just taking notes, and supplying reference-type information - most of the community leaders would not have understood how much the library can contribute to employability skills development. They would not have seen the library as a major player in the community’s strategy to get back on its feet.
You can imagine relevant examples in many library settings. For example – if a university is creating a strategy for MOOCs, it behooves the academic librarians, as advocates, to get involved – be at the table. They have relevant knowledge and skills: They know how students learn; As instructors in information literacy, they are experts in course design and evaluation.

What should they do if they aren’t asked to the table? Should they sit back and wait, or complain bitterly that they weren’t asked? Indeed, if you don’t take the initiative, your cause can actually be a great deal more vulnerable, as you’re out of the decision-making circle and farther from the influencing opportunity. Sitting back will make you appear completely irrelevant.

In the next video, we will look further into qualities of relationships and influence.

Part 2 The Well-Connected Advocate

Introduction

What does the evidence tell us about what to do to be more effective advocates? Everything points to the impact of relationships that have certain qualities in common as we will see in video 3.

We are influenced, not so much by strangers with sound bites, but by people with whom we have existing relationships. We’ll look at Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point* for some clues about people who exercise influence – way out of proportion to their numbers.

We’ll also see through studies of factors driving library support that successful libraries are conspicuously involved with their communities, deeply embedded in its processes and task groups, and opportunistic about ways of demonstrating value. They do not leave key relationships or understandings to chance.

Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen

One source of useful information, though not a product of scholarly research, is the work of journalist Malcolm Gladwell. Gladwell’s ideas and methods have encountered some pushback, but some of the observations in his book, *The Tipping Point*, have high relevance for advocates.

He describes three types of extraordinarily connected people – he calls them connectors, mavens, and salesmen. Each of these types influences an exceptionally high number of people. That is why advocates need to know them.
1. The first category are the **Connectors** – they know and are in communication with a lot more people than most of us. In fact, connectors have at least 150 people in their network with whom they are in real personal contact. Do you know any of these Connectors? One’s chances of becoming a Connector increase with age and experience, of course. Every community has its visible Connectors. How can we engage them in our advocacy for libraries? Do they know what they need to know to advance the cause?

2. **Mavens** are people who know a great deal and are eager to share their expertise to help others. Who are the mavens within library land? Who are the mavens outside our ranks who could be important to the advocacy of librarianship, and how could their engagement be strengthened? I think of author Cory Doctorow and copyright experts Lawrence Lessig and Michael Geiss. These people are mavens who have become engaged in library-related issues. And perhaps we can all think of some high-profile journalists who are regarded as experts in their specialties.

3. Gladwell calls **Salesmen** those whose enthusiastic promotional and negotiation skills influence large numbers of people. I think of Professor David Lankes, author of the *Atlas of New Librarianship*, within our ranks. Again, who are the salespeople out there who could be most persuasive for libraries?

These three types of people are the agents of change who impart critical mass to movements. Gladwell calls this the Law of the Few, and **one obvious lesson** for library advocates is to identify the people who can move the cause forward and develop relationships with them, and provide them with stories and information to share.

The **second lesson** for advocates is also clear: we need to not just ENGAGE connectors, mavens, and salesmen, but also BE connectors, mavens, and salesmen. When you observe successful library advocacy in communities – whether for public or academic or school or special libraries, you will see all three types in action, inside and outside the libraries themselves. Sadly, the OCLC 2008 study From Awareness to Funding found that politicians and community leaders tended not to see passionate librarians engaged in community leadership around them. Why not? Do you have this kind of leadership potential? Of course you do. You are not powerless, and you care about it.

You can read a capsule summary of Gladwell’s ideas on his web site, but I’d highly recommend a reading of the whole book, *The Tipping Point*. 

Factors driving library support

What factors are associated with decision makers’ support of libraries? There are some striking conclusions and a few surprises in scholarly literature noted by Ken Haycock in his comprehensive review of that literature, presented as the Follett Lecture.

In a 2003 study about public library funding in the U.S., Bryce Allen floated the hypothesis that increased demand for public library service would be associated with increased funding, and that positive public opinion on the quality of service of libraries would be correlated with increased per capita funding over time. Wrong on both counts. We have seen this message before.

These factors, based on his study, were not in themselves drivers of increases. This confirms what many public librarians know – that political decisions about public library funding take place in complex environments, and in an environment of contention, where many causes compete. In fact, a higher public demand for service might occasion greater demand for efficiencies, rather than higher funding, to manage the situation. This is a cautionary message to advocates not to rely on numbers or outputs to carry their case for support.

A few years later, McClure, Feldman, and Ryan (2007) wrote a paper that “identifies the factors that are critical to a public library’s success in advocacy, community support, government relations, and ultimately the perceived importance of the library in the community.” The authors looked at factors influencing political support, including the working of the local political system. They acknowledge that the decision-making environment of each community is unique, and so are the personalities of those involved. They note that the management of the successfully networked library is not leaving any of these relationships to chance. They found that libraries that are successful in getting support have five characteristics in common.

(1) proactive (i.e., they do not wait to be invited to the table);
(2) led by directors who are active in the community as well as the library;
(3) opportunistic, i.e., able to recognize a chance to go for it, even when the opportunity doesn’t appear to have the library in mind;
(4) prepared, i.e., better prepared than other organizations when they have a chance to make their relevance known and to get money for their work; and
(5) having the relationships in place: “year-round positive relationship with elected and appointed officials and government agency and non-profit leaders as well as community opinion makers.” These managers are “not meeting strangers when they go to the annual library budget hearing.”

These librarians are front and central in the vision of the community and its leaders, and they are known to know what they are talking about.

I will add here that, based on my own experience and that of many former colleagues, this work of positioning the library is often unseen by front line staff, who wonder where the leader is. Some see this intensive relationship development as some form of “schmoozing” that is a substitute for real work. Nothing could be further from the truth, and all the evidence supports this relationship development. Exactly the same could be said for library leaders in academia and schools and companies.

**McClure and his co-authors** suggest doing a “political audit” as a foundation for an advocacy plan. They cite the Cuyahoga County Public Library as a worked example of this strategic approach to advocacy, applying each of the 5 factors I mentioned a moment ago, with specific examples. You could do this with any type of library in any setting. All of this material about Cuyahoga County Library is consistent with other research on influence.

This is echoed in a doctoral thesis by Elizabeth Hubbard in 1996 on the funding of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh in three different decades. Hubbard examined factors influencing funding. One of the findings is that the values and views of colleagues among decision makers were significant drivers, the funding of the library just did not make the priority list. These decision makers tended not to disagree with one another in their consistency with their values, with the result that the funding situation of the library was one of “benign neglect”.

**Dr Joanne Marshall** at the University of North Carolina has frequently explored the value of special libraries through her research. *The value of library and information services in patient care*, in 2013, is the most recent. The aim of the research team was to identify the differences that the service made to the health care professionals in working with patients. As she explains in the video interview this week, “to be effective in advocating, you have to address the issues that people tell you are really important for decision making”. In studying health library services, it is critical to have evidence of the library’s impact in patient care, and to be able to relate it to the priorities of decision makers. That study showed that library services had a clear impact on the work of the health care professionals, leading to
better decisions, advice to patients, and also saving time – all aspects that mattered to the hospital administrators.

In a study of academic libraries, **Beverly Lynch and colleagues** asked senior university administrators about their libraries. It was clear from their answers that the academic library is in a new and more competitive environment in which behaviour counts: one Provost commented, “that the head of the library ‘is present at a lot of significant conversations because she is charismatic, visionary, energetic, smart, and engaging. I don’t think it is organizationally determined.’” It was also clear that the library leaders needed to position themselves as effective team members of senior decision-making bodies.

**Summary – what have we learned?**

1. A small number of people exert influence well above their numbers. (Gladwell)
2. Increased demand for public library service does not lead to increased funding (Allen)
3. Decision makers follow the views and values of colleagues (Hubbard)
4. Library management must be proactive in the community, opportunistic, prepared, and have established relationships with decision makers and those that influence them (McClure, Lynch)
5. Having evidence of impacts that are aligned with the priorities of the decision makers in the organization (Marshall)

In the next video, we review Robert Cialdini’s six universal principle of influence.
Part 3: Principles of Influence

For a framework for exploring practical advocacy and influence, Ken Haycock turned to Robert Cialdini’s research on influence. Cheryl Stenström wrote her doctoral thesis on public library advocacy on these concepts as well.

Influence and Persuasion

Robert Cialdini has written three very popular books about influence and persuasion. His research included study of scholarly sources, and practical exercises in which he immersed himself in the environments of influencers. In *Influence: The psychology of persuasion*, he posited six “universal principles of influence”. (Cialdini, 2007)

(1) **Reciprocation:** people tend to feel obliged to return a favour. You can see this in so many examples, including the tablets and pens and address labels sent to you by charities soliciting donations. Haycock comments that even adding a hand-written post-it note to document you are giving to a colleague is effective in reciprocation. This gets better and better when you create a relationship of exchange and mutual help over time. Government relations consultant Huw Williams makes the point in his video interview that libraries can help give elected people media exposure by inviting them to events, for example. This sets up reciprocation and helps to build a relationship.

(2) **Commitment and consistency:** generally speaking, we behave consistent with our values and our existing commitments. We act to justify our earlier decisions once we have made those decisions. Cialdini found that once we’ve agreed to put up a small window sign in support of something, we’re more likely to agree to put up a large lawn sign next time. In the political environment, it is essential for advocates to appeal to the values and principles of our target groups, to make our case in alignment with their known priorities. So if you can get an initial agreement on one or two basic points, you are better able to expand the range of that agreement in the future, because your decision makers will act consistently with the values they have already expressed. Libraries are allied with many causes that decision makers across the political spectrum value, for example, the importance of early
literacy.

(3) **Social proof (or consensus):** one of the ways we try to find out what is correct is to see what others are doing. We tend to think behaviour is more correct if we see others doing it. Cialdini says this explains the success of canned laughter on TV shows, even though most people claim to dislike it. Example of hotel towels. In advocacy we must always be aware that university presidents and administrators talk to other university presidents, mayors talk to other mayors, school principals and directors of education talk with their counterparts. Haycock also notes his research finding that city administrators may not be consistent with one another with regard to the public library grant per capita, but they are remarkably consistent with each other about the percentage of the municipal budget that is allocated to public libraries. We also saw that factor play out in the Hubbard thesis, mentioned in the last video, in which the decision makers did not disagree with one another in assigning the library a low priority.

(4) **Liking:** we will tend to say yes to people we know and like. Cialdini calls the Tupperware party “the quintessential compliance setting”, in which people are influenced by many of these principles, but one especially: you are invited to participate by a friend. Factors that affect liking are physical attractiveness, similarity to us, compliments paid to us, familiarity through contact and cooperation, and conditioning. This means that there is a lot of value in simply being present.

Huw Williams, whose experience in government relations in both Canada and the US is shared with us in his video interview, talks about the importance of the library community being “a player in every relevant government policy milestone”. He means that we should touch base with our government during budget consultation hearings, the work of caucus committees, and so on. This is very different from turning up only when we want to ask for something. Multiple contacts establish a running dialogue, and they help to nurture familiarity and trust – in other words, liking. These personal relationships are the opposite to what he calls “hit and run” advocacy – that is, just hitting them with our messages. The liking factor also means that people sense it when we like them. So we need to be open to what is good and likeable about them. This may feel hard to do, but it is an important habit.
to form in what feels like an increasingly cynical and debunking time.

(5) **Authority:** we have a tendency to comply with those who strike us as authorities, even if this has no rational foundation, e.g., celebrity endorsement of products unrelated to their expertise, such as an actor Robert Young who once played a wise and avuncular doctor, shilling for a decaffeinated coffee brand called Sanka. The evidence shows that we attribute authoritativeness to people for reasons that are not always rational – that well-dressed jaywalker, for example. What to do about this? For one thing, ensure that anyone speaking for a library program is an expert who knows the library and the field, who can inspire respect and respond to tough questions. Library advocates need to know not just the data about their library, but be able to relate that to the broader environment, to the priorities of their communities. They need to be able to convey know the significance of trends such as e-books and legislation like copyright on their communities, and so on, because this knowledge imputes authority.

(6) **Scarcity:** when something is scarce, we want it more. Shopping frenzies are an obvious example. But this runs deeper – when something we have had, like rights or choices, becomes threatened, we will want them. Cialdini uses the example of the new freedoms introduced by Gorbachev, threatened by a coup; with the result that there was a street uprising. Scarcity is an interesting dimension of influence for libraries. Library services are traditionally free, or free with a package such as tuition at a university. So how do we position them as a uniquely valuable combination of places and ideas and community and help? A threatened loss of a community library, however, usually encounters a strong reaction. Perhaps unfortunately for us, however, threats by libraries to reduce services if their budgets are reduced often just strengthen the resolve of the decision makers, so threats are generally not effective for them.

Cialdini writes for the general reader. You can see it in his books, and there is great deal of summary information on this framework on the Internet.
Meaningful Connections

Dr. Cheryl Stenström used Cialdini’s principles in her study of funding decisions for libraries in three Canadian provinces: Alberta, where funding was increased; British Columbia, where it declined; and Ontario, where it stayed the same. She did extensive interviews with high-level decision makers and influencers to find out what were the drivers of the decisions made. She found that the principles of authority, consistency and commitment, and liking were relevant, but that liking was especially important.

- Applying the authority lens meant “is someone with hierarchical power telling me to do this?” and “are these requests legitimate?”
- The consistency and commitment lens meant “What are my values? What would my party do?”
- Liking meant “how much do I know about and like the requester?”

The take-home point for the library community’s advocacy strategy is clear: “The ability to create meaningful connections with individuals in many communities and across all levels of government should be emphasized as a key factor in influencing funding decisions.” (Stenström, 2012)

For a more detailed account of this study, view Dr Cheryl Stemström’s videos in which she described the methodology and findings.

Summary – what have we learned?

I hope that this short survey of factors that influence support of libraries and librarians gives you some practical insights about framing and responding to advocacy challenges where you are. No matter what the setting, it is the development and nurturing of the relationship of credibility and trust that is the key path to presenting our cause.

Therefore, how do we, as library advocates, need to approach our task? There are no quick fixes, and all this plays out over a long time, but some things are blindingly obvious.

1. We have to be superbly well connected – not just within our libraries, but within the communities that our libraries serve.
2. We must be well informed about what our libraries do – particularly about the outcomes and impacts of what our libraries do that really advance our communities.
3. We have to have at our fingertips information and stories about what matters to the people who make and influence decisions. It is not a matter of guesswork to find out what they care
about, what they value, and what they are inclined to support because it’s consistent with their values, and their past decisions. It is a matter of getting to know them or those who influence them – to make a positive impression by showing respect and consideration of the choices they face.

4. We have to establish reciprocal relationships, too – being useful when we can, as in being a good source of information to governments.

5. And it is also a matter of being personally likeable!

There is room for a great deal more research on how decisions are made, and how the changing landscape of librarianship might imply a changing focus for advocates. However, it seems quite clear that the relationship of credibility and trust is a key pivot – and that the relationship is the advocacy.

Next week, we will look at the practical components of planning advocacy.

References


