

Summary



Is This Totally Normal? / Dealing with Users Who Overstep Boundaries – Practical Advice for Everyday Practice (Maria Klupp)
(pp. 322 – 325)

Anyone who works in a library today, particularly in a public library in a big city, is confronted on a daily basis with situations that an outsider can hardly imagine. And it is not only children and adolescents who are very loud or do not obey the rules. There are also plenty of adults who do not behave in the manner expected of library visitors. Examples range from excessive talking on cell phones – despite it being forbidden – to the daily discussions about why bags and coats must be deposited in lockers, and continues with impolite or impertinent behavior toward staff members, to extremely personal insults and even sexist and racist commentaries. There have even been cases of physical abuse and outright violence, though these remain the exception.

Some cases are quite bizarre: a user who eats his fish sandwich between the library shelves; the customer who hangs her underwear over the balustrade; a woman who enjoys shifting around the library's potted plants; the man, who »corrects« library books with a red pen when he believes to have found an error; a professor who treats all the library's employees as his own personal staff; the homeless, who value the library lobby as a warm refuge in the winter months. And the list goes on and on.

The most challenging part of working in a library is that staff members have not been prepared for these kinds of situations during their training and education. Of course, they are not social workers, not streetworkers, and certainly not psychologists. But today there is need of a different set of »tools« to be able to deal with conflicts competently and to de-escalate acute situations.

Legal Disputes over Theft of Library Holdings / Experts Dokument 61 Cases in 23 Years and Give Advice to Victims (Andrea Nikolaizig)
(pp. 326 – 329)

Is the theft of library holdings a widespread phenomenon? Andrea Nikolaizig, Professor at the Leipzig University of Applied Sciences, and Conny Schwarzer, a graduate of the School of Library and Information Science at that university, followed up many cases in the course of researching their book »The Library as Crime Scene: Robbing Books and Stealing Pages.« In their investigation of 61 thefts which took place during the 23 years they covered, they discovered that the majority of the criminals were driven by greed. Primarily carried out in academic libraries with collections of historical and rare books, the thefts the authors could document amounted to at least 328 million Euros. And the immaterial value is, of course, much greater. And for publicly funded libraries with very limited budgets, the theft of CDs and electronic games creates serious gaps in library collections. There is one thing that all the thieves have in common: the highly useful ability to identify the (commercial) value of books, but, unfortunately, they employ this skill for criminal purposes.

Most discoveries of theft are made by library staff members – during inventories, when re-shelving materials, or even catching a thief red-handed. In such cases, employees must be careful to act within the limits of the law in order to avoid being liable to prosecution themselves. This includes not making accusations in the presence of other library users, examining the contents of bags only with the consent of the visitor, and not detaining a potential suspect on the library premises.

In the majority of cases in which a loss has been discovered and theft is suspected, it is advisable to report the incident to the police. Even though finding the proper method of dealing with individual cases must be weighed carefully, the threat of pressing charges often acts as a deterrent.

»The dramatic situation of the whole country is played out in the microcosm of the library« / The Former Director of the Argentinean National Library, Horacio González, Describes the Current Political Conflicts in Argentina
(pp. 338 – 341)

Already this year, about 240 employees, or one-quarter of the staff, have been let go from the Argentinean National Library. Free services for the country's inhabitants have been cut back. Projects such as the new Digital library and the recently opened Museum of Books and Language are endangered. The reason for this plight is the massive budget cutbacks in the public sector under the new Argentinean president, Mauricio Macri. When he was inaugurated in December 2015, the director of the National Library in Buenos Aires, Horacio González, resigned. Because this position is a political office, the country's political conflicts are often reflected in the most important library of the land. The journalist Sandra Schmidt spoke with the former library director, on behalf of BuB, about this unusual, and in Germany quite unimaginable, situation.

González's most famous predecessor was the writer and intellectual Jorge Luis Borges, who suffered from a life-long condition of poor eyesight and began to go blind in 1950. In 1955 he lost his vision entirely, and in the same year also became the director of the Argentinean National Library. One of those who read aloud to him was Alberto Manguel, who in 2015 was appointed as the successor of González. Manguel, who is a well-known writer, university instructor, and translator, will take up office in July 2016. But further conflicts can be expected, especially after Manguel stated in an interview with the newspaper »La Nación« on the occasion of this year's book fair in Buenos Aires at the end of April that, in future, the Argentinean National Library should be nothing more than an institution in which one can read books. This idea has not been well received by the library staff.

Translated by Martha Baker