

Cultivating Champions in the Municipal Environment

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The topic we're exploring today – strategies for winning the support of key people in the community so that they will speak up for the library when we need them to ...

What is a *champion*?



Dictionary definition:

- An ardent advocate or defender
- One who shows extraordinary interest and is willing to promote an idea, often amidst resistance, with an almost evangelical enthusiasm
- One who does battle for another's rights or honours

Activity: Turn to one or two people sitting near you and talk about someone in your community who champions/ speaks up for the library. **Why** do they do it?

Brief reporting back from a few participants ... what are some of the reasons people champion a service or institution?

Usually because they care about something the library does or stands for ... Let's remember the CARE principle – people defend what they care about!

As important as it is to have all kinds of champions, it can be particularly helpful to have people with influence – community leaders – champion the library.

How do we make this happen?

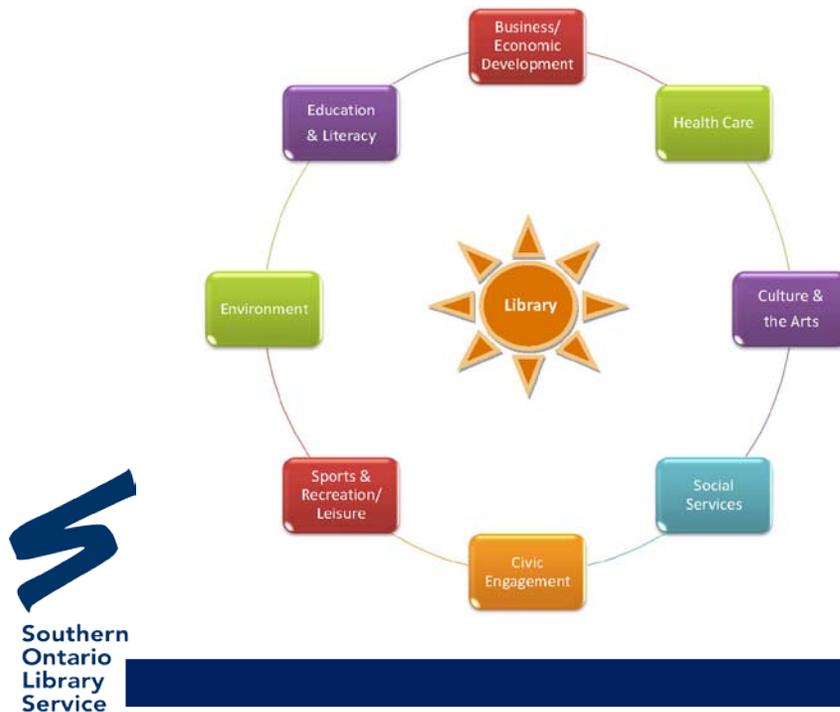
This morning I will focus on 7 strategies for cultivating champions for the library, in particular, cultivating the support and advocacy of community leaders.

1. Get to know the *movers* & *shakers* in your community



- ✚ Invite them to lunch/coffee and engage them in conversation - get to know them
- ✚ Understand what they care about
- ✚ Get to know their aspirations for the community; what is their vision?
- ✚ Talk about how the library contributes to what they care about
- ✚ Talk to them about the needs of their constituents
- ✚ Make your messages all about them/their issue – this is what the library does/ can do for your cause

2. Create *linkages* by sector:



- ✚ In a parallel process, start to analyze the community by sector; who are the leaders (movers & shakers) in each sector?
- ✚ Conversely, analyze by leader – what sector do they care about?
- ✚ The principle here is simple – start with what people care about and work backwards; show how the library helps (the public library makes a significant contribution to each sector)
- ✚ Speak the language of community outcomes, targeted by sector; how the sector and the community is better because of the library (at least one example for each sector):
 - ✚ Business/economic development – library as community anchor, especially in downtown core, contributing to money spent locally; in an increasingly digital economy, the library makes it possible for everyone to participate in the economy (the digital divide)
 - ✚ Education & literacy – all of the traditional services, collections, etc.; also literacy support; school readiness for preschoolers; one book one community promotes reading as a social activity

- ✚ Health care – the collection – print and electronic – especially when people receive a new diagnosis they consult the library’s resources to better understand their condition; also co-sponsored programs with health unit, eg. prenatal classes
- ✚ Environment – library can adopt green practices and serve as role model; public awareness of environmental issues can be raised by library programming and library as a distribution mechanism in terms of getting word out to the public
- ✚ Culture & the arts – many, many examples – programs, collections, meeting space, art galleries and exhibit space, promotion of local authors and performance artists
- ✚ Sports & recreation/ leisure – collections, bulletin boards (re news of children’s sports, for example); some libraries offer alternatives to sports, eg. chess or scrabble clubs; some libraries host yoga or t’ai-chi classes; some libraries partner with municipal recreational services; local exhibits, eg. historical sport displays
- ✚ Social services – huge area for linkages – the library serves families, children, teens, newcomers, seniors; seniors an especially important area because of the rise of this demographic; some libraries positioning themselves as a means of slowing cognitive decline; reading and intellectual pursuits; social opportunities; the library’s very reason for being is to level the playing field in terms of opportunity, the place where you can change your life, better your life
- ✚ Civic engagement – community gathering place/ public space; libraries help inform people about the community; offers opportunities for engagement, also a place where other organizations can publicize their community engagement initiatives; the library supports the election process, eg. all candidates meetings; library also reaches out to neighbourhood associations, urban league, etc.; the library in a very real way makes democratic process accessible for the average, every day person
- ✚ Use numbers and stories – a few well chosen numbers more powerful than too many statistics; use numbers to tell a story that’s actually about the community; every day x residents of this community rely on the library for access to the Internet; put numbers in context – that’s more coffee than Tim Hortons sells in an hour
- ✚ The science of stories – new neuroscience research sheds important light on why we are drawn to stories and how they’re good for our brains; stories actually activate multiple parts of the brain (unlike facts); because when we listen, we need to follow images and descriptions and even metaphors, we in fact, put our whole brain to work; the end result is the listener is more likely to remember the story and tell it themselves; simple story is better than complicated

Activity – In pairs, each of you identify a local community leader and talk amongst yourselves about how you might go about reaching out to that person, what library programs and services are most likely to appeal, given what you know about him/her and what sector he/she works in?

3. Identify yourself as a **community champion** & collaborator



- ✦ Understand the community's challenges and issues; become informed
 - “It is imperative that we provide services to address the biggest issues in our communities.” ~ John Szabo, Director, Los Angeles Public Library
- ✦ Value each of the sectors and all of the players
- ✦ Champion community resilience and well-being and equal opportunity; make it clear you care about the community and not just about the library (“if you don't care about the community, you're in the wrong business!” ~ Susanna Hubbard Krimmer)
- ✦ Talk about the public library as being a vehicle for the community to achieve its aspirations; speak possibility
 - ✦ Public libraries in the ‘better business’ – better information, better community, better lives
 - ✦ “I create an environment where people can change their lives.” ~ Director of Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library
 - ✦ Vision for Columbus Metropolitan Library – “A thriving community where wisdom prevails.”
- ✦ Make it known that you'll work with anyone for the good of the community
- ✦ Help others succeed because what they are doing is good for the community
- ✦ Be a catalyst and make something happen – bring the right people together to grapple with a situation
- ✦ Be at as many tables as possible; model collaboration; be part of the community development opportunities

4. *Share* what you know



- ✚ In their book *Reframing Organizations*, Bolman and Deal talk about 4 different frames, one of them being political. And in the context of understanding politics, they argue it is important to recognize your own power. Bolman and Deal identify 9 different sources of power, authority being only one of them. One source of power – very relevant to public library leaders is that of Information and Expertise. We are community experts and we need to share that expertise – what we know about newcomers; what we know about people’s interests and affiliations; what we know about grassroots movements that advertise on the library’s bulletin board, etc.

5. *Engage* the media in telling the library’s story



- ✚ Using the verb ‘engage’ very intentionally; need to work with media personnel; inform, educate, collaborate; make their jobs easier
- ✚ Take them to lunch/coffee – spend time getting to know them, understanding their views on the community, their vision
- ✚ Help them tell the right story – make the library’s story about the community
- ✚ Build relations over time - educate them in all that the library does; speak in terms of community outputs, highlight those things in keeping with particular reporter’s interests and vision for the community

- ✚ London PL approach:
 - ✚ Open door policy – always available to the media, including small outlets; a marriage in good times and bad; the library has enabled people across the organization to speak to the media about some things, well coordinated
 - ✚ Lots of information on library website, including board reports, interesting reports on library use; refer the media to the library’s website as background to any interview; suggest particular reports they should read
 - ✚ Pre-discuss the interview strategy – what is the reporter’s slant? What else do you need to tell this story?
 - ✚ Completely silent on divisive issues, especially when they come from Municipal Council, eg when a councillor recently blamed the public library for Blockbuster going bankrupt, the library had no comment
 - ✚ Pro-active in communicating with the media – eg, budget impact heads up in an email sent in June for coming year
 - ✚ Everybody knows and buys into the library’s key messages; clear alignment with overall board strategy and direction
- ✚ Recent budget deliberations in London – 0% budget – the library has received incredible support from the London Free Press; support coming from the reporters and editors themselves who have an excellent understanding of all that the library does to contribute to the community

6. Make library use *pervasive*



- ✚ What Susanna Hubbard Krimmer of London PL calls “subtle and continual presence” in the media; LPL tries to get coverage somewhere every week ... we are their (mainstream media) good news story; we are their local news story (important for large chain newspapers)
- ✚ Also effective use of social media – eg. London PL’s video on youtube: London Public Library – the Heart of the City [show video clip]; notice how it makes library use visible to

the broader community – well done, clever, fast forward conveys the library’s busyness, testimonials, comparison to JLC

- ✚ Louisville Free Public Library – as recognition for completing Summer Reading Program, gave each child who completed a yard sign – A Library Champion Lives Here – gave out 30,254 signs – also message of congratulations in the local paper – extremely well received by the entire community; yard signs very visible indication of how widespread library use is in Louisville; since adopted by other libraries
- ✚ Engage users in talking about how they use the library ...
- ✚ Other ideas – ask participants – [How can we make library use visible to the rest of the community?](#)

7. Endorse *relationships* as crucial work that takes time



- ✚ Relationships take time; time well spent; involve other staff, trustees

“Seek patience and passion in equal amounts. Patience alone will not build the temple. Passion alone will destroy its walls.” ~ Maya Angelou
- ✚ Understand the mutuality of relationships – our best chance of engaging community leaders as champions for the library is by being enthusiastic champions for the community
- ✚ It is through relationships that we do everything else!