

# The Safe Library: Security, Safety, and Service

## Webinar Highlights

Innovative™, a part of Clarivate™, was honored to host a webinar with Dr. Steve Albrecht, who has trained thousands of library employees on handling challenging patrons who may want to disrupt the library.

In this session, **The Safe Library: Security, Safety, and Service at the Moments of Truth**, Steve shared practical and realistic communication, service, and de-escalation tools which will make your library a better, safer place to work.

In addition to discussing his real-life experiences as a 24-year library security consultant, Steve also shared a number of valuable resources on the topic of library safety, including books and websites. Of those who participated, 96% said this session was very or extremely valuable, and 95% said they could use the information right away.

## Five takeaways from this informative session:

### Objectives for library leaders and workers

Effective library security requires a multi-faceted approach:



**Service:** Tailoring services to the diverse needs of library users.



**Safety:** Ensuring a safe environment for staff and patrons alike.



**Security:** Implementing measures to protect both people and property.

Library staff must rely on their intuition and awareness to gauge when to assist or disengage in potentially volatile situations, Steve explained.

Understanding personal tolerance for risk and recognizing feelings of discomfort during confrontations are crucial. In situations where safety is at risk, staff should feel empowered to move behind barriers, call for a manager, or contact law enforcement. This concept, often referred to as the “gift of fear,” underscores the importance of trusting one’s instincts.

## Defining a Safe Librarian

A safe librarian embodies several key qualities:



**Physically safe:** Ensuring safety in and around the workplace.



**Mentally safe:** The ability to focus on job responsibilities without undue stress.



**Emotionally safe:** Maintaining personal boundaries and emotional well-being.

Steve explained that librarians must be assertive and aware, acting as guardians of their environment while providing support to patrons. Prioritizing staff wellness and reducing stress are essential for maintaining a healthy work environment.

## Duty of Care and OSHA Compliance

According to OSHA guidelines, libraries have an “invitee relationship” with anyone who enters their premises. This means libraries are obligated to protect their staff, patrons, collections, and facilities.

Establishing and communicating a clear code of conduct is vital. Interactions with patrons, especially those in crisis or dealing with mental health issues, should be handled with dignity and empathy.

Effective communication involves:



**Firm but fair:** Addressing behavior issues consistently and assertively.



**Empathy and patience:** Understanding the challenges faced by patrons and working towards cooperative solutions.



**Behavior focused:** Discussing guidelines for acceptable conduct in the library (which are ideally visible to library visitors) rather than resorting to bureaucratic language like “policy” or dismissing a patron’s concerns by telling them to “calm down.”

## Managing Challenging Patron Situations

When dealing with patrons in crisis, an empathetic approach is crucial. Negotiating behavioral agreements and setting clear boundaries can help manage difficult situations. For instance, stating “you can’t do that if you want to stay here” or “our insurance won’t allow that” can encourage compliance while maintaining respect.

## Personal Resilience: The Q-Tip Approach

Steve also emphasized that it is essential to not take challenging interactions personally. The Q-Tip approach—Quit Taking It Personally—helps minimize the impact of tense conversations and stressful situations. By managing one’s own emotions and not allowing others to make you miserable, library staff can maintain a positive and productive work environment.

## Watch this webinar

See “The Safe Library: Security, Safety, and Service at the Moment of Truth” in its entirety.

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