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Five Keys to Public Relations Success

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by Joan Shear

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Boston drivers have a bad reputation. I was reminded of this the other day when I saw someone go right through a red light. It was only through Divine Providence and the skill of the other drivers on the road that a disaster was avoided. My husband and I wondered why that driver would put himself and his passengers at risk. Didn't he see the light? Didn't he leave himself enough time to react? This led to a discussion of the Smith System of Driving.

Many of you who took Driver's Education class may have learned "The Five Keys To Driver Safety" of the Smith System: Aim High In Steering, Get The Big Picture, Keep Your Eyes Moving, Always Leave Yourself An Out, and Make Sure They See You. Keeping these keys in mind while you drive improves your driving. Keeping these same five keys in mind while you do your job can also improve your public relations.

Aim High In Steering

Poor quality work makes good PR difficult. Steer your efforts toward offering consistently high quality services and products. Make sure your staff is well trained and that you are well organized. Don't take on extra services that you and your staff can't give the attention they deserve. It's better to do fewer things well than many things poorly.

Get The Big Picture

Most law libraries are components of a larger organization. Whether you are part of a law firm, a university, or a public library system, make sure that your public relations efforts, like all your library services, promote the overall goals of your parent organization. Sell yourself as an essential part of the whole, not a free-standing service organization.

Keep Your Eyes Moving

The legal landscape is constantly changing. Information technology is changing faster than anyone can follow. Don't put all your attention in just one

direction. By constantly scanning the horizon we minimize the possibility that important changes in the delivery of legal information will sneak in under our gaze. We can't afford to be blind-sided. It is our job to introduce all this change to our parent organizations in ways that they can accept and assimilate.

Always Leave Yourself An Out

Things go wrong. Have procedures in place before disaster strikes. Does everyone know whom to contact if they receive a phone call from a member of the press? Does everyone know how to graciously accept a complaint as a suggestion for future desired services? Thank patrons for bringing a problem to your attention, and agree to look into it, but don't promise a specific resolution without first examining the issue yourself. Don't box yourself into a corner by promising more than you can deliver.

Make Sure They See You

Don't assume people know the good work you are doing. Public relations programs should build on your successes and increase awareness of your most popular and appreciated services. Showcase your strongest and best services: report your library's accomplishments to those in your organization who make decisions. Quantify whenever possible: the library billed x number of hours this month, we answered x number of reference questions, we spent x hours helping attorneys, etc. Sign your name to your work, or insist on a footnote that says, for example, "the bibliography accompanying this article was prepared by the library reference staff."

Good public relations, like good driving, is a skill that is learned through repeated practice. Remembering these keys can help good public relations come just as naturally over time. And you won't get blind-sided by the other guy.

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