

Top Ten Advocacy Myths—Busted!

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Jenna Nemec-Loise is Member Content Editor, ALSC Everyday Advocacy Website & Electronic Newsletter. Everyday Advocacy empowers ALSC members to embrace their roles as library advocates by focusing on their daily efforts to serve youth and families. Each lighthearted column features easy-to-implement strategies and techniques for asserting the transformative power of libraries both within communities and beyond them. Please contact Jenna Nemec-Loise at everyday-advocacy@hotmail.com with comments and ideas for future topics.

This past November, I packed my bags and a big box of ALSC loot so I could take the Everyday Advocacy show on the road. Sure, I'd already presented oodles of times at ALA conferences and the 2014 ALSC Institute, but bringing workshops to front-line youth services librarians in their home states was a new thing for me.

My biggest worry? Not having enough to talk about. (I know, right? I can hear you laughing from here.)

As I planned my workshops for both the Library System of Lancaster County (PA) and the 2015 Wisconsin Library Association Conference, I thought about how I'd frame the Everyday Advocacy content I wanted to present. I'm not one to lecture, and I'm certainly not Libraryland's foremost expert on advocacy. But I know a thing or two, and I can lead a great conversation.

That's when it hit me: A top ten list of advocacy myths would be an awesome way to get everyone talking. We've all heard them, and many of us have even believed a few of them at some point in our careers. What could be a better place to start?

Just like David Letterman, I'd present each myth.

But then just like an Everyday Advocate, I'd bust it.

It worked like a charm. And just in time for National Library Legislative Day and Virtual Library Legislative Day, I've got my list for you, too.

Top Ten Advocacy Myths

Ladies and gentlemen, live and direct from *Children and Libraries* magazine, here are the top ten advocacy myths—busted!

10. “It’s all politics.” True, sometimes things get political. But at its most basic level, advocacy is all relationships—with youth and families, with community members, with coworkers and supervisors, with library boards and administrators, and yes, with legislators and policymakers.

9. “It’s about asking for money.” Actually, it’s about being informed, engaging with your community, speaking out, getting inspired, and sharing your advocacy story. Sometimes these five Everyday Advocacy tenets include asking for money, but there’s a lot more at stake than dollar signs.

8. “It’s hard.” Let’s say it’s challenging but that you can—and should—rise to the challenge. Everyday Advocacy often means stepping outside your comfort zone and tolerating ambiguity to learn, share, and make a difference for the youth and families you serve.

7. “No one’s going to listen to me.” Keep the faith because someone will. Identify your key stakeholders and tailor your advocacy messages to them. Remember, it’s not always what you say. How you say it matters, and a thoughtfully crafted elevator speech using value-based language can be just the ticket you need.

6. “It only happens outside the library.” Advocacy has to happen inside the library, too. Cultivating relationships with internal stakeholders, including coworkers and supervisors, is equally important to those you build with schools, local businesses, and community organizations beyond your library’s walls.

5. “My library is fine (i.e., I don’t need to advocate).” Crisis advocacy has its place, but Everyday Advocacy shapes long-term relationships and impacts for libraries. The small steps you take on a daily basis help you grow a community of advocates who’ll be ready to help when times get tough.

4. “I’m not qualified.” You’re perfectly qualified! Who knows more than you do about the youth and families you serve through your library? You’ve talked with and listened to kids, parents, and caregivers, so that makes you the expert.

3. “Someone else is already doing it.” Maybe it’s true that other library staff members are already engaged in advocacy efforts. But no one can be an Everyday Advocate the way you can. Your work with youth and families puts you in the best position to speak on their behalf as well as your own. And if you don’t do it, maybe no one will.

2. “I don’t have time.” I’ll let you in on a little secret: You’re already doing it. Everyday Advocacy starts with the smaller-scale, but

significant, ways you touch the lives of children through programming, reference, readers’ advisory, and instruction. It’s not something extra you need to do.

And the number one advocacy myth (drumroll, please):

1. “It’s not my job.” Yes. Yes, it is. Everyday Advocacy is the heart of youth services and all library work by any staff member at any level. Daily we demonstrate the purpose and value of the profession through meaningful interactions with kids and adults. What job could be more important than that?

Be a Mythbuster!

As National Library Legislative Day approaches on May 3, why not be a mythbuster in your own library? You can talk up this top ten list with colleagues, mention it at your next staff meeting, or post it on the break room bulletin board to get the conversation going. Maybe you’ve even got your own advocacy myths to add to the list. Invite your coworkers to do the same!

When you’re ready for the next step, take your own Everyday Advocacy show on the road. Use the tips, tools, and techniques on the Everyday Advocacy website (www.ala.org/everyday-advocacy) to do some mythbusting in your library community. Engage with stakeholders to promote the purpose and value of the youth services profession. Dazzle ‘em with all the ways you improve outcomes for kids and families through the library.

And who knows? You may even bust some myths of your own along the way. &