

Lessons from Lititz

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Everyday Advocacy empowers ALSC members to embrace their roles as library advocates by focusing on their daily efforts to serve kids 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. Contact **Jenna Nemec-Loise** at everyday-advocacy@hotmail.com with comments and ideas for future topics.*

If you've never been to Lititz, Pennsylvania, you should totally go, and make haste. About ninety minutes from Philadelphia and forty minutes from Harrisburg, Lititz is a not-be-missed treasure of Lancaster (pronounced "LANG-kiss-tur") County in the heart of Amish country.

You'll want to stay at Lititz House Bed and Breakfast, where innkeepers John and Heidi will welcome you like family. What's even better than relaxing in a gorgeous room and eating a delicious morning meal, you ask? Playing with John and Heidi's beagle, Sally. (She's a charmer—even if you don't like dogs.)

Not enough to tempt you? Then I've got two words that can: Wilbur buds. Everyone's mad for these melt-in-your-mouth chocolate drops, close relatives of the famed Hershey's kisses. Sure, you can buy Wilbur buds online, but why would you want to when you can visit the retail store on Broad Street and stock up in person?

I could go on about the charming storefronts nestled together on Main Street, the Lititz Watch Technicum (i.e., Rolex watch repair school), and Rock Lititz (a monolithic state-of-the-art rehearsal space for musicians and entertainers), but let's be honest: None of them holds a candle to the town's true gem—the public library.

This past November, I had the privilege of presenting a hands-on workshop called, "Why YS? Advocating for the Youth Services Profession" at Lititz Public Library. On that glorious autumn day, fifteen Youth Services staff members and I made advocacy magic that's sure to elevate the Library System of Lancaster County to a whole new level of awesomeness. Now I want to share my six Great Big Takeaways from that workshop with you and all the other Everyday Advocates looking to up their game.

1. Step outside your comfort zone. At the beginning of our workshop, I asked participants to look at a simple graphic comprised of two circles—one small and one large—placed some distance apart. Inside the smaller circle were these words: *Your comfort zone*. The words inside the larger circle? *Where the magic happens*.

When it comes to Everyday Advocacy, you don't get anywhere when you stay in that smaller circle. Yes, you might stay safe and cozy, but you also stay complacent. That just won't do. Take a deep breath and step into that space between the circles where you're willing to tolerate ambiguity and be uncomfortable. Be bold from your fingertips to your toes. It's the only way to channel your inner Everyday Advocate and keep the action moving forward for kids and families.

2. Listen to understand, not to respond. Next, we talked about the difference between listening to respond and listening to understand. While the two aren't mutually exclusive, they're definitely not the same thing.

Think about it. When you're listening to respond to someone, your mind is anything but silent. It fills up quickly with all the things you plan to say while the other person is still making his or her points. If you're already having a

dialogue in your head, are you really, truly hearing your counterpart?

Listening to understand means more than just letting someone else speak. It involves letting go of preconceived notions and the urge to respond right away, especially in difficult or heated situations. There's empathy rather than judgment, authenticity instead of artifice. It's in those silent moments that others teach you how to be their best and brightest Everyday Advocate so you can speak out for them when the time is right.

3. Temper passion with reason. To wrap up our morning, we went Greek and talked about persuasive communication using Aristotle's rhetorical triangle. The art of persuasion involves balancing between appeals to *ethos* (you and your credibility), *logos* (evidence presented through logic or reason), and *pathos* (an emotional appeal to your audience).

When making your case through Everyday Advocacy, tempering passion with reason can be the most critical part. Get too worked up about your issue and you come off as "emotional." Err too much on the side of reason and you risk appearing cold or insensitive. Much of your *ethos* hinges on your ability to craft statements that blend the perfect amounts of *logos* and *pathos*, so knowing your audience members and what will resonate with them is key.

4. Be the pebble. In my workshops, I frequently call on my experiences teaching LIS 777: Issues of Access, Advocacy, and Policy in Youth Services at Dominican University. You've heard of smart cookies? I've got a jar full of inspired students who never cease to change me in all the ways that matter.

During our fall 2016 semester, student Aleksandra Podraza connected the dots between access and advocacy by comparing the efforts of Youth Services librarians to a pebble in a pond. Toss the pebble in, and the ripples reach out farther than you imagine or expect. "Be the pebble" became our mantra that semester as we empowered one another to embrace our roles as Everyday Advocates. Thanks to Al, my students and Lititz advocacy workshop participants recognized how their seemingly small efforts can have huge impacts on kids, families, and libraries.

5. Open doors wider. Another one of my smart cookies, Hal Patnott, stopped us all in our LIS 777 tracks that same semester when he said, "We already open our doors to welcome patrons

Great Big Takeaway Summary

1. Step outside your comfort zone.
2. Listen to understand.
3. Temper passion with reason.
4. Be the pebble.
5. Open doors wider.
6. Advocate, don't justify.

of all backgrounds into our libraries. We need to figure out how to open them wider." Brilliant, right?

Opening our doors wider through Everyday Advocacy means engaging with your library communities to find out who's not using the library and why. You can't be the pebble that does that unless you step outside your comfort zone and listen to understand. See how all these Great Big Takeaways are connected? My workshop participants in Lititz did, and it was magical to see their confidence growing and their resolve deepening as our day drew to a close.

6. Advocate, don't justify. My final words of wisdom in Lititz? When it comes to the Youth Services profession, advocate, don't justify.

What happens when you justify instead of advocate? You feel and sound defensive. You and others get the sense you've done something wrong and need to answer for it. Well, Everyday Advocates, hear this now: You don't have to justify your existence as a Youth Services librarian who wants to improve outcomes for the kids and families you serve. You need to advocate for it. And how do you do that? By stepping outside your comfort zone, listening to understand, tempering passion with reason, and opening doors wider.

With a few tweaks in your mindset and approach, you can make good on all these Great Big Takeaways. You—yes, you—can be the pebble that keeps the action moving forward for kids, families, and strong and meaningful Youth Services librarianship. 🌱