

Six Good Excuses that Won't Work

1. *"My library (public, school, college/university) doesn't allow me to lobby."*

Frontline advocacy isn't lobbying. The goal of lobbying is to persuade lawmakers and other decision makers to vote in a certain manner, and it is primarily the library administration's responsibility. Frontline advocates' goal is to inform the individuals they encounter in their daily customer service interactions as well as individuals they may personally know (neighbors, colleagues, friends, etc) about the value of the library, with the intention of fostering positive feelings and support. Library staff must work with their administration and management to ensure that all staff are "on the same page" regarding frontline advocacy. It's essential that administrators guide employees in appropriate initiatives to be discussed, appropriate phrases and words to use – and timing! For example, smiling at a library customer as they're leaving the building, and saying, "Thanks for coming. It was good to see you." Or "Don't forget to vote!" Or "Your support made these materials (or program) possible!" are all great approaches.

2. *"I'm shy."* Speaking up on behalf of your library is harder for some people than for others. Start by telling someone you know well something they might be interested in at your library. New DVDs that just arrived? Some cool new music software? Longer hours on Sundays? Enhanced bibliographic services? Get comfortable talking with people with whom conversation comes easily, and you'll find that talking to those you don't know well gets easier and easier!

3. *"I don't know what to say."* Sure you do. What you say will depend on who you're talking to.

- Is your best friend expecting her first baby? Your library has books and perhaps DVDs on pregnancy and parenting. Tell her!
- Is a student struggling with a research paper? He should know that your library has experienced research staff who can replace anxiety with confidence.
- Is an undergraduate pondering the choice between grad school and a job? Your library has great information on graduate programs and careers that you can direct him to.

- Is your marketing manager looking for competitive advertising campaigns? Your information professionals can put their fingers on those.
- Is your library facing the threat of reduced hours? Help users and staff understand the impact that reducing hours will have on them, and enlist their help to spread the message that decision makers need to find an alternative plan for budget cutting.

4. *“My library job doesn’t put me in direct contact with library customers.”*

No problem! You still know many, many people who think of you as a library representative because they know you work there. Talk to them! *You* are a frontline advocate, and everyone you encounter is a potential listener.

5. *“There are already people who do this.”* Sure, your library’s administrators all know that advocating for the library is part of their job. But the truth is that most people who use your library never come in contact with these individuals. They come in contact with *you*.

6. *“What difference could I make?”* Plenty! Every time you talk about your library in a positive way – what it has, why it’s valuable, why it’s a great place to work – you inform, influence and persuade. And *that* is what frontline advocacy is all about!