This questionnaire was distributed to allHoward County Library System staff to explore the strengths of the library.

INTRODUCTION

Before you get started, let me take a minute to explain the purpose of this interview.

As you know from Staff Development Day, the strategic planning process involves taking a look at who we are at our best and trying to find ways to become the best library we can possibly be.

For the next few months, all of us will be involved in what we call the Discovery Stage of strategic planning. During this stage, we are conducting interviews with everyone in the organization to learn what Howard County Library does best. In addition, everyone will be an interviewer.

The questions you are about to answer are called “appreciative questions.” They were written by staff and are based on themes or main ideas that emerged from the January and February Outlook Forums: winning teamwork, customer loyalty, everyone a leader and community partnerships.

You will be asked about times when you have seen things working at their best. Many times we ask about things that aren’t working well – the problems – so that we can fix them. In this case, we are trying to learn about the things that are working – the successes – so that we can find out what works and do more of it.

Each question will ask you to think about, remember, and describe the details of what you’ve seen, heard of, or imagined that really works. If you draw a blank, you can return to any question at any time.

Interviews should be conducted in private. An individual interview should take one hour, although you may not need that much time. You and your partner can interview each other consecutively or wait a day or so before the second interview. There are no strict guidelines for interviewing. You may read the introductory paragraphs of each theme to your partner before asking him/her each question. Or you partner may want to read the introductions to him/ herself.

It helps to think of the interview as a conversation with a colleague about your shared experiences. Interviewers may ask their own probing and clarifying questions at any time to facilitate the conversation. The probing questions we have included are optional.

While great care was taken to write the introductions and questions in a clear, concise and understandable style, printed words are always open to many
interpretations. If such a problem arises, your partner and you are the authority in determining the meaning of the contested language.

Finally, I want to assure you that the interview process is designed to preserve your confidentiality. Your name is not associated with your answers. Each interviewer will be taking notes only to remember what is said, not who said it. The notes will capture key phrases and thoughts. When the interview process is completed, a group will read the notes from every interview to identify themes or recurring ideas that will be the basis of propositions about the library’s future. From this vision, will come the services that will ensure our continued success.

The questions are not designed to test your knowledge of the library or measure your commitment. Please be assured there are no right or wrong answers. Your honest thoughts and feelings matter. You can answer as much or as little as you like.

If you have any questions or wish to share your observations and insights either before or after the interviews, please contact me.

Lew Belfont

Anne Gilligan, Marion Jackson, Cindy Jones, Phil Lord, and Karen Trennepohl wrote the appreciative interview questions.

Karen DeLoache, Susan Cooke, Debbie Crabtree, Debby Halperin and Kristen Blount provided editorial assistance.
WINNING TEAMWORK

In today’s complex and ever-changing world, teamwork is an essential ingredient for success. Teamwork, for example, fosters collaboration and innovation across departments that result in an organization successfully meeting its goals. It is teamwork that enables people to manage the daily routine and cope with the stresses and strains of constant change.

Winning teamwork begins when team members feel they are “in it together.” Respect and appreciation of each other grow from this belief. Most people work best, tackle challenges and strive for service excellence in an environment where enthusiasm and team spirit are high, where ideas and information are shared, and where team members work together to accomplish common goals.

It has been said that the results of teamwork are greater than the sum of the parts. Winning teamwork adds value to team members, customers and the organization.

1. Describe the best teamwork (HCL or elsewhere) you have ever seen or been part of. In your answer, please identify was it about the team’s activities that caused you to define them as the best?

2. What were the conditions that allowed winning teamwork to emerge and thrive?

3. What can we do to foster a higher level of winning teamwork throughout the library?
CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Thriving organizations create and maintain exceptional levels of customer loyalty. Loyal customers are great customers. They assume good will. They provide information and time that helps us give them what they need. They invite new customers.

Customer loyalty is something we earn. We earn it by listening to what our customers want and, whenever possible, exceeding their expectations. We earn it by treating them with genuine respect and by making service more customer-friendly.

It is cheaper and more satisfying to keep a customer than find a new one. By earning customer loyalty, we build ourselves a competitive edge, which puts us in a leadership position and keeps us there in the future.

1. Think about a time when you were a loyal customer. Your experience could be with a large organization, or it could be with a neighborhood babysitter.

   • What were the most important things that this person or the organization did to earn your loyalty in the first place?

   • How did this person or the organization learn about what was important to you?

   • How did this person or the organization anticipate your needs as time went on?

2. Put yourself in the shoes of one of our most loyal customers.

   • How would a loyal customer describe us to a prospective new customer?
• Why would a loyal customer say they’re so committed to Howard County Library?

“EVERYONE A LEADER”

Howard County Library encourages all staff, not just managers or supervisors, to be leaders. Leaders often go beyond procedures and their job descriptions to ensure customer satisfaction. They rely on their passion, creativity, and sense of fairness to make decisions and take actions that achieve department and library goals.
1. Describe the best leader you have worked with at HCL.

   • What made him or her stand out as a leader?

2. How did their leadership change the way you accomplished/carried your own responsibilities?

3. Please describe an instance when you were a leader. What made you take leadership?

   [Probing questions for interviewers: What happened as a result of your leadership? How did the outcome make you feel? How did the customer and you or your coworkers benefit?]

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Technology, economics and demographics are changing the traditional role of libraries as the place to go for information. Instead of waiting for customers to visit, we are reaching into the community and forming partnerships with diverse people and groups to customize information, programs and materials to their wants and needs.
Partnerships extend Howard County Library’s influence, creating the perception of the Library as a vital and necessary community resource.

The simplest and most effective partnership is saying “yes” to customers when they ask for individualized and personalized services. The largest partnership is the A+ Partnership, which has created local and national recognition of Howard County Library as an essential educational institution.

These are just two examples of how as partners in our community we add value to the lives of everyone we touch.

1. Please describe some ways you have seen partnerships and outreach enrich the community and us. Think of community in the broadest possible sense of the word—a citizen, a group or an organization.

2. Tell me about a time when you were part of a community-library partnership. Please explain what you think what made the partnership work.

[Probing questions for interviewers: What skills, resources, energy, or attributes do you think are necessary to form and sustain these partnerships?]

3. What are best opportunities for future partnerships?

   • What must we do to create and sustain these partnerships?
Closing

Each previous question asked you to think about different aspects of the library’s future. Now it’s time for you to think about how these pieces fit together. What will the Howard County Library look like and feel like when we achieve our future?

To conclude the interview, what is your vision of the Howard County Library in five years?