

## ***Black Belt Librarians Author Graham Gives Workshop at Southeast***

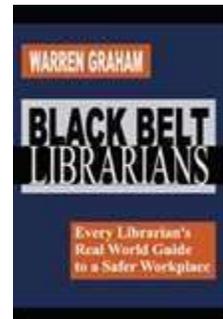
by Iris I. Jones, SEKLS Library Consultant

Many years ago, when I did my student teaching in a Topeka junior high art class, I was a bit shy and intimidated by a roomful of seventh graders. It was one of my first days to be there without the supervising teacher. I had given the assignment and most of the students were busy, but a cluster of boys was goofing off in the middle of the room.

I went straight to the ringleader, nearly got in his face, barked at him in my Dad's best Marine Corps Drill Instructor voice, and told him to get to work. The boy turned to me. I saw something change in his eyes. Then he swung at me. I managed to block the blow and marched him down to the principal's office.

Things got hectic for a few days after that. The administration hustled the boy off to a treatment center, they called an emergency staff meeting to explain why they had allowed a mentally unstable student to be in class without warning the teachers, and they praised me for being a more-than-usually mature student teacher for the way I handled the situation.

The truth is I caused that situation. Had I known the techniques Warren Graham explained to librarians of the Southeast Kansas Library System on November 20 at his Black Belt Librarians Workshop, that boy would never have had cause to swing at me. Warren says, "Always remember that it's all about communication, rather than confrontation, with the patron." My first error was to come on too strong when I first spoke to him. The second was I left him no way out. The boy felt trapped. All he could see for an option was to swing. There are better ways to handle a problem.



I should never have gotten too close to him. People feel threatened when their space is invaded. I should have kept a desk or table between us. That keeps me out of his space, and it puts a barrier between us if he becomes hostile. Next I should not have shouted at him. I should have spoken calmly. Warren Graham says to start softly and escalate firmness. You can always get tougher, but you can't back off once you have been tough. I should have said something non-threatening, too. Always start out believing the patron didn't understand. "I'm sorry. You probably didn't know we have a no food or drinks rule in the library. Would you please finish your soda and put it in the trash?" I should have asked the boy if he understood the assignment, or asked if he had trouble getting an idea for the project. I should not have barked at him.

Warren Graham has been in security for over 25 years. For seventeen years he was Security and Safety Manager for the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County in North Carolina. Since leaving them he has been consulting with libraries of all sizes on security issues. You can learn security tips by reading his book, *Black Belt Librarians: Every Librarian's Real World Guide to a Safer Workplace*. He is in the process of writing his second book, so watch for *Advanced Black Belt Librarians*.

Warren's comments to SEKLS members were direct and usable; here are a few of them:

1. Have rules – Keep them brief and simple. One basic rule can be “We don't allow activities disruptive to the library.” That covers a world of territory. Enforce rules the same way with everyone, every time.
2. When you advise patrons about the rules, go by behavior, not by appearance. Treat the kid in sloppy, Goth clothing the same as a man in a business suit.
3. Be consistent.
4. Be serious about safety. Develop quiet awareness of your surroundings. To practice this, for the next 30 days stop every 30 minutes and take 30 seconds to look around the room and really see what people are doing. After 30 days, it will be a habit.
5. Have written documentation for security problems. These may become legal records down the road, so word them professionally. (Don't say, “The dork with the dog collar around his neck.”) The logs don't have to be formally printed sheets. You can keep them in a spiral notebook with columns drawn in with an ink pen and ruler.

Several different logs need to be kept:

**Potential Problem Log** - Note behavior that is out of order. Log should list the following: Name; Description (for when you don't know the name); Day; Time; What happened; Who saw it. This behavior may not have required you calling anyone down, but the behavior was mildly disruptive.

**Security Log** - Write down who you have had to call down and why. This lets you see if there are patterns developing. It also lets the next person know what has already been done if that person should become a problem again.

**Incident Reports** - Describe what happened, who was involved and who witnessed it. Date the form and give it to the Director or Board President within 24 hours of incident. (That keeps them aware of what's happening.) Incident reports are not just for discipline problems. Use them to document falls, emergencies, irate patrons, or any other situation that could escalate to an insurance claim, complaint to the Board or other problem.

Keep security awareness in people's minds. Train new staff to handle security issues when you hire them and have refresher training for experienced staff at least once a year.

Single-person libraries, even in small towns, are dangerous because there is no back-up for the librarian.

What will she/he do if a threatening situation arises or an emergency happens? Small libraries should have a backup plan. If the building doesn't have a second exit for a timely escape, have a "panic button" that will ring to someone who can call for help or come to the aid of the librarian. Your back-up may not be police or fire if you are a long way from emergency responders. Plan responses in advance and make sure the staff knows what to do before something happens. They won't have time to read the manual while the kid in the corner is lighting matches.

All libraries should have a good relationship with local law enforcement. Staff should get to know them. Invite them in to use your Internet to file their reports or offer them coffee. Let them see you aren't some timid milquetoast who calls for no reason.

All libraries should keep lines of communication open to schools and other organizations that serve the same people. They may be able to help you control problem behavior.

Even small libraries should have a fundamental camera system. It can help identify people if there is theft or other problems.

Money should be handled safely. Staff should not count money at a public desk when the library is open. A potential thief only sees bills, not quantities. Staff should never announce that they are making a bank run and wave the bank bag around. Money should be kept in a locked drawer or cash register. Purses should be kept in a locked drawer or locker.

Libraries should choose the right manager for each facility – a timid person won't do well in a high problem area. All libraries should have adequate staffing. There should not be anyone alone on one floor, on a bookmobile, or in a building if it can be prevented.