A photograph of a white martial arts gi (uniform) with a black belt, folded neatly on a light-colored wooden floor. The gi is the central focus, with the black belt draped over it. The background consists of the wooden planks of the floor, creating a sense of depth and texture.

WARREN GRAHAM

THE

# BLACK BELT LIBRARIAN

REAL-WORLD SAFETY & SECURITY

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THE  
**BLACK BELT  
LIBRARIAN**

REAL-WORLD SAFETY & SECURITY

WARREN GRAHAM

American Library Association | Chicago 2012

[www.alastore.ala.org](http://www.alastore.ala.org)

WARREN GRAHAM has worked as a security professional for more than twenty-five years, seventeen as the security manager of the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Graham left the library in 2006 to establish Warren Davis Graham Training and Consulting. He has made countless presentations and is a leading speaker internationally on practical day-to-day library security procedures. Contact Graham for training and consulting through his website: [www.blackbeltlibrarians.com](http://www.blackbeltlibrarians.com).

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# CONTENTS

Preface / xi

Acknowledgments / xiii

Introduction / xv

<b>1</b>	<b>: INMATES RUNNING THE ASYLUM</b>	
	STORIES FROM THE FRONT TRENCHES	1
<b>2</b>	<b>: DEMYSTIFYING THE CONCEPT OF A SECURITY PROGRAM</b>	
	TWELVE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF REAL-WORLD LIBRARY SECURITY	7
<b>3</b>	<b>: THE LIBRARIAN IN THE MIRROR</b>	21
	Finding Your Personal Rhythm: Five Questions to Ask Yourself / 22	
	A Self-Support System: Three Vital Aces to Keep Up Your Sleeve / 24	
<b>4</b>	<b>: THE TAO OF “NO”</b>	27
	Approaching Patrons Who Are Not Following Rules of Conduct / 27	
	Dealing with Teens and Children / 29	
<b>5</b>	<b>: PLAYING CHESS WITH THE CHECKERS PLAYER</b>	35
	With Strategy Comes Confidence / 36	
	Recognizing and Responding to Anxiety, Belligerence, Out of Control, and Calm / 37	
	Banning Patrons and Keeping Them Out / 44	
<b>6</b>	<b>: DAY-TO-DAY SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS</b>	47
	What You Can Do Immediately to Make the Library Safer / 47	
	Designing a Secure Library / 49	
<b>7</b>	<b>: A STRATEGY FOR BASIC SECURITY DOCUMENTATION</b>	53
	Daily Security Log / 53	
	Trespass Log / 56	
	Potential Problem Log / 56	

<b>8</b>	<b>: SECURITY PERSONNEL WHO ACTUALLY HELP YOU BE SECURE</b>	<b>61</b>
	What to Look for in a Security Officer / 61	
	The Look of a Professional / 63	
	Contract or Proprietary Officers? / 64	
	When to Call Security / 65	
<b>9</b>	<b>: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER</b>	<b>67</b>
	Management / 69	
	Handling and Evaluating Staff / 69	
	 IN CLOSING: Questions for All on Planet Library / 73	
	Index / 77	

# INTRODUCTION

CHARLOTTE AND MECKLENBURG County library director Robert Cannon called me up one afternoon during my duties as security manager for an uptown mall that was situated right across the street from the main library. The library was closed temporarily, being refurbished and expanded from 60,000 to 160,000 square feet. He asked me how I went about controlling the many potential problems in my facility. He then quickly stole me away. Two weeks later, I was working for the library, only one short month before its grand reopening.

The late Nina Lyon, the finest overall librarian I have ever known and then manager of the main library building, took me on a tour and laid out the situation. She told me that in the old building she had to handle multiple security situations every single day. There had been no formal rules for library use and no consistency in the attempts to control behavior. The library had gone through several contract security companies that had all categorically failed. There was no standardized record keeping, and most of the daily “patrons” were using the building not as a library but as a home.

“But, what could really happen in here?” I silently asked myself as I was given a tour of the main library. Could they really be having the level of problems that was being described to me? Or was I simply working with a bunch of frightened librarians who were afraid of their own shadows?

To my genuine surprise, it was soon evident that the former was indeed the case. On the library's grand reopening day, after the building had been closed for two years of renovation, I can honestly say I was astounded at the situations I encountered. Intermingled with the majority of patrons, who were there for all the right reasons and enjoying the facility, were a mix of behavior problems than ran the gamut from the innocuous to the insane.

There were people who apparently had waited patiently for the previous twenty-four months to take a bath in our restrooms. Someone actually asked me if he could rent a shower. Many children ran rampant like baby cheetahs, and it was their oblivious parents who were at fault. More than a few thought this was a new library in every sense, and thus they owed nothing for lost or overdue materials. A few perverts experimented with new techniques of staring through the stacks at female patrons. One fine fellow actually had a small mirror duct-taped to the top of his shoe to facilitate looking up skirts, but only of patrons who were at least fifty years of age! And to round it all off, there was a good dose of genuinely disturbed people who had nowhere else to go and nothing else to do but come visit us. One fellow had a briefcase full of metal washers. He just wanted to sit at a table and see how high he could stack them, and he told everyone in no uncertain terms to stay away from him.

Though a few of the staff thought we should never ban or deny access to anyone no matter what they did, I countered by saying that they *would* be denying access to the regular, true library user if they didn't control the environment and keep it conducive to library use. Yes, it is indeed a public building, but what type? Well, it's a bloody *library*, and it should look and feel like one. It's not a place for people to come in and do anything they want. Just because we are a "public building" doesn't mean you can build a campfire in the middle of nonfiction.

We were successful in our security efforts thanks to my development of a solid, *simple* program and procedures. We involved all of the employees and trained them properly. We were more than fair in our advising patrons of the rules, and most important, from day one, we made sure that we treated *everyone* the same.

A few years later, a librarian called the director with a problem. A speaker on security had canceled at the last minute on a talk he was to give at the PLA conference in Atlanta, and the caller wanted to know if Bob was aware of anyone who could fill in. In a very short three days, I was standing in front of a couple thousand librarians, literally crammed into a ballroom, presenting my first talk on the subject of day-to-day safety in the library.

That's how my second career started, and since that day I have traveled the nation, training thousands of library staff. I always thought my home state of North Carolina had some rural areas, but I have visited some *extremely* remote library locations.

In one presentation out west, I was describing how one should go about calling 911 to solicit the best response. This petite, elderly attendee gently raised her hand and sweetly but anxiously asked, "But son, what if you don't have 911?" That was news to this city fellow. I had always thought having access to a 911 emergency response was a given.

Another time I was being driven from library to library by a director who had to stop the car and honk to get the buzzards out of the middle of the road. I had never seen a buzzard and had to ask what they were. I mean, it's not like we were in the desert, and I thought that was the only place buzzards lived.

In another state, we stopped at a convenience store filled with customers, and each and every one of them stopped pumping gas, playing video games, buying beer, or whatever else they were doing and just stared at me. The cashier actually had her mouth open. "Not from around here, are you, boy?" a gentleman dressed in overalls but no shirt asked me, as he completed his Slim Jim and Mountain Dew purchase. The dinner of champions.

And I will never forget the first time I traveled to a state far up north (which will remain unnamed here). The South has always had the reputation for having all the good ol' boys, but I will tell you that I saw more Confederate car license plates and stickers on this visit than I had ever seen before at home. Quite the eye-opener.

You name it. Go ahead, name it. I have more than likely either heard or personally witnessed it—on my own or in someone else's library. On the very serious end of things, I responded to a police call at one of our branches early one morning just a couple of months before I retired. The landscaping crew for a neighboring building discovered a body lying on the steps of an outside storytime area, located just by our children's area. Tragically, a twenty-one-year-old had committed suicide by shooting himself. Worse than the terrible effects of the bullet was the sight of such a young person who had given up before his life really began. I will never forget how much that affected me.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, during the late afternoon of the very same day, back at the main library, I was called to the computer area. A woman had screamed "Fire!" several times and was acting erratically. It turned out that she felt she was not receiving the level of help with her computer that she expected and

had yelled to get some attention. Of course, the attention she received from me was not quite what she had in mind.

I think that was the day I decided to leave and did so soon after, in August 2006. After twenty-five years in security work, I was simply weary of it all and realized that I had been for several years. I was ready to help others learn how to handle these situations, and the demand for me to come and train staff was higher than ever.

You may be surprised to hear me say that I do not consider myself a security “expert,” even though a lot of folks refer to me that way. Actually, I don’t believe there is any such thing, and I will explain.

First, there is no way you can keep up with the physical security field—alarm systems, cameras, building access systems, and the like—unless you actually work in that specific industry. Security technology is growing so fast that new products are constantly being produced, and the products that are available to you today are really already dated. I have some key contacts in that profession who keep me posted.

Second, no two security situations are quite alike. Human interaction is always dynamic and never static. It is always in flux. Rarely is there a black-and-white solution to an incident; it is almost always gray. Even though I had been doing this for quite a while, I still made mistakes and found challenges in ascertaining what was really going on and picking the best response I could. I could certainly be taken aback by the mental state of some of our “reality-impaired” patrons. Some days I felt as though all I was doing was trying to keep the patients calm.

The one advantage I do have in my attempts to help you over most others in the security field is that I did indeed work on the front line in a library for seventeen years. Within the library system in Charlotte there were twenty-four libraries of all shapes and sizes in all types of areas. Their staffing varied from very large to a single librarian minding the store. In most cases, the library staff also wore the security hat along with their other duties. The point I am trying to make here is that I know exactly what a librarian goes through. I witnessed it firsthand every day.

I wish I could have had the information that I am now sharing with you when I first started working with the public when I was very young. Even though I had dealt with the public for ten years in retail before I stumbled into the security field, many of the principles I work by today would have readily applied, and I would now have more hair.

As you may have guessed from the title of the book, the martial arts have influenced my perspective in interacting with the problem patron. Don’t jump to the

conclusion that I am talking about *physical* encounters and that my martial ways imply that I think I am some sort of tough guy. It is the *mental* aspect of that discipline that I want you to consider.

In this book, I share with you the basis of everything I know about dealing with all levels and all kinds of people in various security situations. I am rather straightforward and downright blunt at times. I call this, after all, a “real world” guide. I prefer to tell it to you the way it really is versus what you may want to hear. I relate the stories as they happened—colorful, earthy language and all.

The information contained within is simple. There is a great strength in simplicity, but our oh-so-magnificent intellect convinces us that the best solutions are the most complicated, and we sometimes end up outthinking ourselves. Einstein once said that, when you can’t find a solution to a problem, you need to go back to the basics. I am reminded of that popular expression these days that tells everyone to “think outside the box,” but that presupposes that one can think *inside* the box to start with.

However, *simple* does not always mean *easy*. These tactics that I am providing you take practice, especially if you are passive by nature, which many (but certainly not all) librarians are. I don’t mean that in a demeaning way. We are all born passive (as I was) or aggressive by our very nature, and we tend to follow that genetic predisposition throughout our lives. I am going to help you be more assertive if you need to be.

I believe that you have to have a certain level of people skills to be able to keep your sanity when working with the public. Not all patrons are pleasant to deal with, but the problematic patrons are still patrons nonetheless. Every day at the reference desk is not going to be full of moonlight and canoe rides. I am sorry if they failed to teach you in library school that all the nuts aren’t in the nuthouse. Some of the librarians I have known don’t even like the public, and I have often wondered why in the world they ever became involved in a profession that demands helping people.

The whole idea, and my fervent wish in producing this text, is to empower you to be able to *respond* to a situation rather than simply *react*. Animals react, people should respond. However, since we humans are creatures of emotion as well as logic, we often do something and then think about it rather than the opposite. I show you a way to put a plan of action in place, then you can take the first step in controlling your environment.

After traveling constantly ever since I retired from the library (only stopping for six weeks for the birth of my son) and feeling fulfilled by the overwhelmingly positive response to my presentations, I can say that I definitely made the right decision.

I have enjoyed it so much that I can honestly say I have not worked a day since I left the library. This subject of library security still energizes and fascinates me.

This marks my twenty-second anniversary in the library world. I may not be a librarian, but I think I understand your world quite well. I want you to be safe, and I want to help you see the best way of accomplishing that.

You are a professional librarian. You go the extra mile for the patrons and want them to get the information they are seeking. In turn, you ask only that they treat you in a civil manner and not abuse you. I think that is quite fair enough.

Everywhere I go, I gain a great feeling of efficacy when I can help empower a fellow inhabitant of the Planet Library we share. I will always be thankful for the many new and lasting friends I have made over the years. I sincerely hope this little book helps you through your day.

# INMATES RUNNING THE ASYLUM

STORIES FROM THE FRONT TRENCHES

*And we are here as on a darkling plane, swept with confused signals  
of struggle and flight, where ignorant armies clash by night.*

—Matthew Arnold

BEFORE WE GET TOO SERIOUS, I start on the lighter side, including a few abbreviated tales from my tenure as a library security manager. I could dedicate the entire book to such stories, but I've just picked a few of the best. Of course, they are all true. Who could make these up?

To begin with, some folks will try to tell you that there is no such thing as a dumb question. Obviously they never worked in a library. The top ten dumbest things I have been asked while standing by the circulation desk:

10. "If it's a cloudy day, will they postpone the eclipse of the sun?"
9. "Do your elevators go upstairs?"
8. "Who was that Wells guy and how did he build that time machine?"
7. "Who didn't sign the Declaration of Independence?"
6. "Can I flex something in here?" (They were actually looking for a fax machine.)
5. "Do you have books on witchcraft? My ex-wife has put a mojo on me and now I can't have sex with my girlfriend and my trailer has been repossessed."
4. "Do you have an Orlando newspaper? They have a bunch of felony warrants out for me there and I want to see if I'm in the paper."
3. "How late can I use the computers after you close?"

2. “There’s a sign out there that says ‘NO PARKING’ in big letters. Can I park there?”
1. “Just where in the hell is uptown Charlotte and where is the damn library?”

During my first week at the library, a woman exited a taxi in front of the library. She said hello to everyone at the front desk and said she was leaving town but wanted to do something for the library. She pulled out a checkbook and wrote us a check for one million dollars. After giving it to the stunned circulation staff, she got back in the taxi, never to be seen again. The check was phony, of course.

Another lady happily greeted me one morning as I opened the front door. She asked me where the closest copier was and I took her to it. She then proceeded to pull off her wig and make a copy of it. She thanked me for my help and left.

I once walked into the bathroom to find a fellow who was at least six foot six standing nude in front of the sink and mirror. Nude, that is, with the exception of one sock, pulled up over his knee. He was busy lathering up his entire body, and he turned toward me with a fierce, confrontational look in his eyes. Knowing he probably had an issue or two, I wanted to approach him as easy as possible and decided to use a little humor. “Hey, my friend,” I said smiling, “You’ve lost a sock, haven’t you?” pointing to his bare foot. He looked at me, down at his foot, and then back to me. “Hell, boy,” he grumbled, “I just found this one!”

I was standing by the front entrance when a huge, boatlike ’72 Buick screeched halfway up onto the sidewalk and slammed on the brakes, almost hitting a prominent “No Parking” sign. The micro-miniskirted driver jumped out, leaving the engine running, and ran past me and up to our typewriter room. The room was windowed, so I could clearly witness the woman pulling out a huge pile of blank business checks and typing frantically. I called the police, and as I was waiting for them to arrive and check things out I got a good look at the woman. *He* was over six feet tall and very slim. His black Tina Turner wig was askew on his head, and his falsies were protruding above his knit top. I don’t know where he got a pair of heels to fit his huge, narrow feet, but they must have been a size 18. The police arrived and arrested the fellow, who had just stolen the checks from a car uptown. To this day I have never seen another thief bring so much attention to himself.

One afternoon I was called to the nonfiction reading room to find a man face down on a table in a huge pool of gooey, dark burgundy liquid. The mess covered the four-by-six-foot table and dripped over the sides. My first reaction was that he had hemorrhaged somehow, somehow, and that he was DRT (dead right there). The

responding medics proved me in error. The man had actually guzzled a half-gallon bottle of wine before coming in and was so drunk that he had thrown it all up as he passed out. The maintenance staff was very excited about having to replace twenty-six carpet squares.

I'll never forget the petite little lady who came out of the bathroom one morning. This was a young woman, probably in her twenties. On every inch of exposed skin, including her face and neck, she had hundreds of tiny, open and bleeding sores. I still have no idea what she was suffering from, but she was obviously very ill. She had taken toilet paper and had pressed it over the sores on her arms. I immediately asked her if I should call a medic, trying to find out if she needed help. In twenty-five years of security work, I have never been cursed at like that. She called me everything, and I do mean everything. Luckily, she said all of it as she was walking out the door, and I never saw her again.

I was once called to the women's restroom by a patron who said something weird was happening in one of the stalls. I walked in and under the stall wall I saw four feet extremely close together. I knocked on the door, and after some hesitation and rapid adjustment of clothing a man and woman came sheepishly walking out. He explained that they were having an affair and that the library was the only place they could meet. She was married and he was an ex-felon on parole. She wailed not unlike someone at a Pentecostal funeral and begged me not to call her husband. He was literally on his knees, pleading with me to not call his parole officer. All this made for quite a scene.

Another memorable restroom moment was when I discovered a huge area of excrement on the floor of a stall, right in front of the toilet bowl. When I returned less than one minute later with a maintenance person, someone was sitting and using that very toilet. He had his legs spread to keep his feet out of the previously mentioned mess.

I was called to the reference area on 9-11-2001, just an hour or so after news broke of the tragedy at the World Trade Center. A seventy-eight-year-old gentleman was fistfighting with a sixty-eight-year-old over a business reference book. They were swinging in slow motion, but both obviously had bad intentions. One had already bitten a chunk out of the other's shoulder. I remember thinking that the whole world must be going crazy that day.

My friend was having one heck of a game. He was obviously at the end of the second half, and winning or losing the game was all on his shoulders. He moved in all directions, constantly dribbling and putting moves on his opponents that left them guarding air. He came down the middle, entered the paint, and dunked home

two points. There was only one problem with this scene. He was in the middle of the reference area all alone and had no basketball. I went up and asked him to give me his best forward pass, which he did. I challenged him to take it from me and proceeded in an imaginary dribble to the front door. I then gave him back the “ball” and told him he couldn’t play basketball in the library because someone could fall and get hurt. He readily agreed and apologized for not thinking of that himself. He came back the next day just long enough to find me and give me a thumbs up. “The Bobcats [Charlotte’s basketball team] picked me up in the first round!” he cheered as he dribbled his imaginary ball out the door. We never saw him again.

A fellow came slowly walking into the library one night. He was looking at the ceiling for the most part, and he caught my attention. He then went by one of the service desks and just stood there, looking straight up. I decided to talk to him, but as I started to go over he moved on to the elevators and went to the second floor. My instinct told me that I needed to go up and check him out. I found him in the men’s room, where he had taken six rolls of toilet paper and was proceeding to cram them into the commode with his foot. When I approached him, he stopped and turned and just looked at me. I escorted him to the security office and informed him that I was banning him. The entire time he never changed his blank, calm facial expression and never said a word. It was the first and last time I ever saw him.

One fellow was obviously intoxicated, and I escorted him to the security office. He didn’t have any liquor on him, but in his duffel bag I found two huge bottles of mouthwash, one with only a couple of spoonfuls left. I assumed that he had the mouthwash to cover up the booze he must continually have on his breath. Then I noticed the alcohol content of the mouthwash and realized that was how he was obtaining his buzz.

There’s the old saying that when you have to go, you have to go. At least that is what the woman told me while she was sitting atop a trash can at two o’clock in the middle of a beautiful day right outside the library. She asked me what someone was supposed to do when she couldn’t find a restroom uptown. In her frustration, she had dropped her pants and was using the trash can as a toilet. Her “business” was complicated, so she was reading a magazine to pass the time. The police, much to their joy, had to lead her away.

Trapped in the park bench of doom, a man was yelling for someone to help him. He needed all the help he could get. In a park outside the children’s room, we had several benches that were four feet long and were capped by circular arm rests that were about eighteen inches in diameter. This fellow had decided to sleep off his intoxicated state by lying lengthwise on the bench. He had put both legs through

the far arm rest and somehow, someway, had gotten both of his arms over his head and through the other arm rest. You should see that bench. It was an impossible physical feat, but he had done it. When he awoke, he could not get his arms down and was trapped. By the time I arrived at the request of the children's staff, I found about twenty kids looking out the window in amazement and watching what the man was going to do next. I saw that he was drunk, so I called the police to meet me out in the park. During his struggle to free himself, his pants had dropped down to his lower hips, exposing him to the world and to the kids. As the police arrived, he stated that he had to "take a piss" and that we needed to stand back. With that he relieved himself straight up in the air, not unlike Old Faithful at Yellowstone. We adults didn't care for the show, but the kids got a big kick out of it and were pointing, yelling, and cheering as the police freed the guy and carried him to the police car.

Over the years I have seen people drink all kinds of cologne (the cheaper the better, patrons told me). Glue-sniffing stayed popular as well. I began to notice that our automatic deodorizers were seldom working. Eventually I discovered a fellow huffing one of the cans that he had taken out of the dispenser to get high—so *that* was what was going on.

I was in the process of dealing with a man who had cut into a 1920 newspaper from our stacks. "I just don't understand why you are making such a big deal out of this," he screamed. "The damn paper is almost a hundred years old!"

Enter the master of disguise. A white male, about five foot seven and 250 pounds, was banned from the library for being intoxicated and cursing staff. He was dressed in army green camouflage pants and shirt and was accompanied by his companion, a very short black female who was easily as wide as she was tall, with a hot pink snow parka and wildly splayed-out hair. They were banned from the library, but later that evening he came back with his girlfriend and they were both dressed the same way as earlier, but now he had a ski mask on with only his eyes visible. "You guys are really good," he commented as I led him to the security office. "How did you recognize me with my mask on?"

While walking through the Popular selection area I noticed a woman sitting and reading quietly at a back table. Something caught my attention, although at first I didn't know what it was. As I stepped over, I noticed the lady had a huge rat on her shoulder. For a moment I thought she was being attacked by the thing, but as I started to say something I saw her pass a piece of cracker to it. I then saw that the rat had a string around its neck and the other end was attached to the lady's wrist. I can't describe the conversation we had because it made no sense whatsoever. Let's just say that she could not understand why she couldn't have her pet rat Mickey

in the library, and I eventually had to have the police help me escort her out and ban her.

A fellow was in the administrative office demanding years of back rent from the library. He stated that he had the original lease he and Andrew Carnegie had agreed on and that he was owed millions of dollars. I told him he would have to return with someone from the Carnegie family, which he readily agreed to and said that would be no problem. The last I saw of him was when he rode away on his little pink girl's bike.

Every once in a while I got a reminder that I never know who I might be dealing with and that no one is necessarily harmless, no matter how they look. A police officer was placing a seemingly hapless gentleman under arrest, and I was helping the officer search the man's pockets. In every pocket of his pants, jacket, and shirt—even in his shirt breast pocket, we found some type of weapon. He had several box cutters, knives, and even a sharpened screwdriver—a total of fourteen weapons. I couldn't resist the temptation to ask him if he was some type of ninja.

I literally saved a pervert from his victim one morning. He had exposed himself to her in the stacks, and she really got upset. He actually came to me for help. I had more trouble keeping her away from him than I did actually banning him. "Go ahead!" he begged me. "Take my damn picture so I can get out of here!"

Okay, before you ask me for another top ten list, here you go—compiled by my security officers and me over the years in a sometimes desperate attempt to find the humor in the midst of what could be very serious duties. These are the most rejected library marketing phrases:

### The Public Library . . .

- . . . Where the Possessed Go to Mingle!
- . . . A House of Knowledge. Do You Fit?
- . . . Patron Dress Code: Four Tooth Minimum
- . . . Don't Force Us to Call the Circus!
- . . . Where There IS Such a Thing as a Stupid Question
- . . . No, Our Staff Members Do Not Want to Date You
- . . . Where the Demons Go to Hang Out
- . . . All the Nuts Are Not in the Nuthouse
- . . . Yes, We Are a Public Building, but No, You Can't Do  
Anything You Want

# INDEX

30-30-30 exercise in awareness, 14  
911, calling for, 42

## A

A.A.A. sign, 24–25  
administration  
    need for support from, 12  
    reports of incidents and potential  
    problems to, 59  
    support for security staff, 67  
analysis of security incidents, 26  
anxiety level in patrons, assessing, 39–41  
    useful phrases, 40–41  
approach to particular situations, 25–26  
approach to patrons who are not following  
    rules of conduct, 27–29  
argumentative patrons, 10, 29. *See also*  
    belligerence level in patrons,  
    assessing  
assistance, calling for, 42  
assumptions based on appearances, 8, 13,  
    28  
attitude of staff  
    evaluation of, 71  
    self-support for, 25

awareness  
    practice of, 8, 14  
    and security, 68  
    when alone in building, 49

## B

bad days, self-support for, 24–25, 28  
banking deposits, timing of, 48  
banned patrons  
    guidelines for ban periods, 11  
    support of administration for banning,  
    67  
    and use of video cameras, 51  
bathroom checks at closing time, 49  
bathrooms, visibility of, 50  
belligerence level in patrons, assessing, 38,  
    41–42  
    useful phrases, 41  
    *See also* argumentative patrons  
bias, avoiding  
    and guidelines for implementation of  
    rules, 11  
    in names for patrons on logs, 56  
    *See also* equal treatment of all users  
bias against library in problem patrons, 39

body language and anxious patrons, 40  
 book alarm, placement of, 50  
 breathing in confrontations, 43  
 building design, 49–52  
 building layout and teen spaces, 32

**C**

calmness, assessing, 38, 43  
 caution in approaching problem patrons,  
   28, 32  
 children, unsupervised, 32  
 children's areas as playlands, 50, 51  
 circulation desk, placement of, 50  
 closing procedures, 49  
 clothing for security staff, 63–64  
 comfort zone, respecting, 28  
 compliance, expectation of, 27  
 computer areas, supervision of, 50  
 confidence, developing, 37  
 consistency  
   among security officers, 63  
   importance of, 7, 8, 14  
 contractors, security staff as, 64–65  
 customer service, abuse from patrons as,  
   74

**D**

daily security log, 53–56  
 disruptive behavior, rules against, 10  
 documentation, simplicity of, 8, 15. *See*  
   also logs  
 dress for security staff, 63–64  
 drug-influenced or intoxicated patrons, 25,  
   29, 55

**E**

eating in library, rule advisement for, 53, 55  
 emergency plans, development of, 8, 19  
 emotion, levels of, in patrons, 38–39  
 emotional personality types, 23  
 emotional response to danger, 43  
 equal treatment of all users, 8. *See also*  
   bias, avoiding  
 ethical behavior in staff, 71

evacuation plans, 19  
 evaluation of staff, 71  
 eye contact, making, 41–42

**F**

fight-or-flight reaction, 43  
 food in library, rule advisement for, 53, 55  
 frontline staff, 8, 30. *See also* staff

**G**

gestures used with problem patrons, 28  
 guidelines for implementation of rules,  
   10–11

**H**

harmlessness, assumptions about, 13  
 homeless shelters, relationships with, 18–19

**I**

“I know you didn’t know . . .” approach to  
   problem patrons, 28  
 incident, definition, 55  
 indecent exposure, rules against, 10  
 insulting language, ignoring, 29  
 interpersonal skills, development of, 22  
 intoxicated patrons, 25, 29, 55  
 introversion-extroversion personality  
   types, 22–23

**K**

karate, lessons from, 36–37, 74–75  
 key control, 8, 48  
 key control system, 17  
 keys to money drawers, 48

**L**

latitude  
   for problem patrons, 26  
   with teens, 31  
 leadership, 69–70  
 librarians  
   interpersonal skills, 22  
   personality types, 22–24  
   *See also* staff

lice and relationships with social service agencies, 18–19

limits on computer use, 31

listening to anxious people, 40, 41

logs

daily security log, 53–56

potential problem log, 56, 58

trespass log, 56, 57

loitering, guidelines about, 11–12

loss of control, assessing, 38

## M

management, importance of, 69

martial arts, lessons from, 36–37, 74–75

master keys, control of, 17

mean people, dealing with, 39–40

medical situations, 19

money handling, 47–48

## N

names, use of, with anxious patrons, 40.

*See also* nicknames for problem patrons

nasty people, dealing with, 39–40

nicknames for problem patrons

inconsistent application of rules, 13–14

*See also* names, use of, with anxious patrons

no, refusal to take no for an answer, 39

no, reluctance to say no, 12, 74

noise in library, controlling, 73

nonlibrary workers, admitting before or after hours, 49

nonsensical rules, 9

## O

out-of-control patrons, 42

## P

parents and failure to supervise children, 32

passive and aggressive personality types, 23

patrons' responsibility for behavior, 73

personal space, respecting, 28

“please,” use of, 8

police, relationships with, 18–19, 42

potential problem log, 56, 58

prejudice, accusations of, 29

privacy issues and video cameras, 52

privacy screens on computers, 50

procedures review, 8, 17, 68

## R

ranting by patrons, 40, 42

realistic awareness. *See* awareness

relationships with outside entities, 8

repeat offenders, guidelines for, 11

requests vs. rules, 8

resistance to change, managing, 70

respect for teens, 31

role-playing exercises, 15–16

rule advisement in daily security log, 53–56

rules for use of library

need for, 8–12

sample, 11

## S

scenarios for role-playing exercises, 16

schools, relationships with, 19

security, when to call, 65

security checklist, use of, 8, 18

security staff, characteristics of, 61–63

self-support systems, 24–26

smells from patrons, rules about, 10

social service agencies, relationships with, 18–19

speech, level of, and anxious patrons, 40  
staff

attitude of, 25, 71

communications about potential problems, 58

discretion by, 8, 25

relationship with security staff, 65

responsibility for advising patrons of rules, 12

security of pocketbooks and briefcases, 48

staff (cont.)  
 and security staff, 61–63  
 teen staff, 31  
*See also* librarians; training of staff  
 staff areas  
 doors for, 50, 51  
 locking of, 48  
 strategies for approaching patrons, 36

## T

teen areas, supervision of, 50  
 teen staff and supervision of teen  
 activities, 31  
 teens, relationships with, 29–30, 31  
 thinking personality types, 23  
 threats from patrons, 42  
 tornado warnings, 19  
 touching of patrons, 28, 32, 62  
 training of staff  
 need for, 8, 15–16  
 and resistance to change, 70

security techniques, 62  
*See also* staff  
 trespass log, 56, 57  
 turning your back on a patron, 28

## U

understanding, lack of, between librarians  
 and patrons, 39  
 uniforms for security staff, 63–64  
 unsupervised children, 32

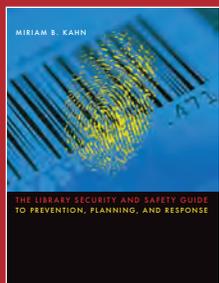
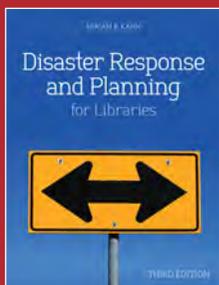
## V

venting by patrons, 40, 42  
 vestibules, design of, 51  
 video cameras, use of, 51–52

## W

weapons and security staff, 63  
 willingness to engage the patron, 22  
 working alone in building, 49  
 writing skills in security officers, 62–63

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