
“WWW. No Holds Barred”

Beta Phi Mu Address
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Beta Phi Mu is nearly 60 years young, having been founded at the University of Illinois in 1948 by a group of leading librarians and library educators who believed that such a society would have much to offer librarianship, as had been the case with societies of this type in other professions. Exactly twenty years later Beta Phi Mu was formally admitted to membership in the Association of College Honor Societies. In 1997 the society became an affiliate of the American Library Association. The intentions for the founding of Beta Phi Mu are impressive, especially those assertive librarians who led those efforts, but it is its motto: *Aliis inserviena* meaning “Consumed in Service” that is the signal focus of this organization. To help address this motto I shall focus in this presentation on the following questions: What is service? What does it mean to be consumed in service? What does it mean to be consumed in service in the Information Age where the World Wide Web has become so commonplace? If one is consumed in service it must be to a group of people – who are those persons, or consumers? Who *should* those consumers be?

In addressing the issue of service, it appears strongly to me that the field of Library and Information Science has responded to the issue of service for many years – from the time that reference services were first introduced in the late 1800s at the Boston Public Library as one of the ways of justifying the spending of public funds and to increase library effectiveness. The wave of consumerism which touched the LIS profession as it did other professions in the 1950s is another such instance. For it was an emphasis on consumerism that helped to propel an emphasis on instruction in the *use* of libraries. It seems that the thrust in service today is related to many factors – increased use of technology, different needs based on different populations and stratifications, and the need for new managerial approaches and strategies based on increased use of technology. One such case is an emphasis on Total Quality Management (or TQM) or at least a new focus on quality and excellence in services. The use of TQM is also another example, as was scientific management of a use of a managerial approach that was initially intended for businesses. More and more libraries are adopting and have adopted traditional business practices as they have come to know that libraries are also businesses and should be run as such, but also as a cultural institution. Two other business practices are also gaining momentum, benchmarking and marketing.

Marketing is defined by Philip A. Kotler¹ (1975, 5) as the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational goals. Marketing is identified with the Marketing Mix or the four P’s (Place, Promotion, Price and Product) intended first for the not-for-profit sector of society. Kotler was criticized for the use of his four P’s, observing that they were more product driven than service driven. Kotler would respond to those criticisms by expanding the four P’s to include the four C’s:

- Place becomes *Convenience*
- Price becomes *Cost to the user*
- Promotion becomes Marketing *Communication*, and
- Product becomes *Customer needs and wants*

Further, due to criticism of the four P’s Kotler would begin writing for both the for-profit sector and the not-for-profit sector with the publication of *Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations*. This publication and probably the 1979 White House Conference on Libraries espousing training in marketing for librarians was also an impetus for more focus on marketing. Shortly thereafter, Diane Winegand published two books (*Marketing/Planning Library and Information Services* (1987) and *Future Driven Library Marketing* (1998) and several articles on marketing for libraries to improve services. She also edited a special issue of *Library Trends* (Winter 1995). Included in that volume was an article that demonstrated for readers exactly how marketing had worked in several instances to improve library services. Winegand (1998, 2) also modified the marketing mix as it relates or should relate to libraries:

- Product = Those programs and services that the library provides to its customers.

- Price = What it costs to produce its product, plus any user fees that are assessed.
- Place = How products and customers (or patrons) are connected; distribution channels.
- Promotion = How the library communicates with its customers, relating details on how customer needs have been identified and what responses have been developed to meet those needs.

Despite more recent progress, marketing is not a new phenomenon in the LIS field. In a conceptual sense, some aspects of marketing have been around for a long time.

Later, the establishment of branch libraries to fulfill the needs of various disciplines and departments in a changing environment are two such examples. Some facets of marketing was used on the professional level as well as with the use of segmentation. Segmentation is a marketing strategy that groups customers into segments, where they will be most receptive to particular product or service. One of the first of these was the recognition that there was a need within the American Library Association (ALA) to establish a division specific to the needs of academic librarians—thus the establishment of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), with other similar divisions to follow such as the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Special Library Association (SLS).

One of the problems with marketing was seemingly universal. What was true of marketing in the private sector held true in the non-profit sector as well; there were misunderstandings. With the publication of “Marketing Myopia,” Theodore Levitt² cited the classic example of the misunderstanding of the railroad companies who thought they were just in the railroad business, when, in fact, they were in the transportation business, and as new technologies came along, they didn’t see them as part of their mission. That misunderstanding nearly led to the demise of the railroad system at the time. In LIS the misunderstanding was in how marketing was defined. More often than not marketing was perceived as promotion and public relations (only a portion of the marketing mix). As a matter of fact a search of 920 articles in Library Literature indexed under “marketing” reveals misunderstanding of marketing as well. Marketing was understood to be PR and promotion, with public relations being a subset of promotion. As I continue to view such articles there is some improvement in that understanding. That improvement has been made due to some primary authors who have written with a higher level of understanding of marketing.

Another helpful instance of improving services in libraries has been the use of SERVQUAL another entity beginning in the business world and adapted for libraries with the acronym LibQual. Libqual (<http://www.libqual.org>) is described as a suite of services that libraries use to solicit, track, understand, and act upon users’ opinions of service quality. These services are offered to the library community by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). The program’s centerpiece is a rigorously-tested web-based survey bundled with training that helps libraries assess and improve library services, change organizational culture, and market the library. There are five goals of Libqual+, these are:

- To foster a culture of excellence in providing library services
- Help libraries better understand user perceptions of library service quality
- Collect and interpret library user feedback systematically over time
- Provide libraries with comparable assessment information from peer institutions
- Identify best practices in library service, and enhance library staff members’ analytical skills for interpreting and acting on data.

More sophisticated, yet helpful systems aside. There are times when service encounters come to us in ways we might never have imagined. Over the summer since moving to North Carolina I tried to read books that would assist me in my new position: *Leadership That Matters: The Critical Factors for Making A Difference in People’s Lives and Organization Success*; *Courage To Lead*; *The Friendship Factor*; *Power for Living*; *Durham’s Hayti*; and a biography, *I, Tina*. These books all reflect my interest in people and the human spirit, and of course mostly they relate to leadership and service. As you will note however there is one on biography, *I, Tina*, and this book surprised me more than any of the others. We are accustomed I think to reading books on leadership in general where we are not surprised that libraries are not mentioned, and gratefully there are many books on leadership strategies for libraries and information centers. But biography is another issue. I have long admired Tina for both her talent, intelligence, and her growth through the vicissitudes of her life. In both she has elevated herself to be recognized simply by her first name, Tina. In that respect she is in that category of entertainers that includes Oprah, Cher, and others. There are some who are known by their full name as if it were one name, enter, Tony Bennett, Frank Sinatra, James Taylor, and Ray Charles (I doubt if any of us know Ray’s last name). There is one person, and probably others who are recognized by either of names. The person who comes most readily to mind is the senator from Illinois: “Barak” or “Obama” and if you say “Barak Obama” you are likely to send electrical waves into a room. I was not fortunate enough to hear his keynote address at ALA this summer, but I read it, and I understand he got a standing ovation for merely “walking into the room.” He had said nothing but in his speech he spoke powerful and receptive words, after all he said that in the beginning there was the word and he developed his speech magnificently around that phrase. If

you did not hear his keynote address, and have not read it, reading it is a worthwhile endeavor.

I've diverted a bit so allow me return to Tina. She grew up in and around Flatbush, Tennessee. In her young life she was moved from one home to another, sometimes with family, sometimes not. The point in the book that so warmed my heart and surprised my interest was when she described a new school and her experiences there. She writes:

"Carver turned out to be a pretty good move in my life. The principle there, Mr. Roy Bond, took a liking to me. Maybe he noticed some bits of refinement I'd picked up from living with the Hendersons, because they had raised me, basically. One day, when I'd been sent to his office for some misbehavior, he told me he expected better of me. "You're not like the other kids," he said. And you know, I never thought about it exactly like that, in those words, but it was true. I had always felt different. Mr. Bond seemed to understand that. Some of the teachers were very supportive too. They saw that I was not with my parents, and I guess they thought there was good in me, so they gave me guidance, tips on things... The School Librarian told me once, "Don't ever let me see you walking around with your stomach hanging out"—and I've been holding it in ever since!"

Was this service the librarian provided? Was it simply caring for another human being and being interested in her development? Was she (the librarian) delivering information and service? I'd say yes to all these questions. Sadly in one sense, this librarian is nameless in the book but the encounter for Tina was and is longstanding. It would be nice to know who she was and for her to see herself being quoted in *I, Tina* and to know the impact her words and the care represented in her words had on this now, international star.

Another instance of words having a profound effect on a person is, for me, an instance for self-disclosure and a chance to convey how the words of a person I came to admire and his words helped to change my life. When I was an MLS student at the University of Maryland I had the opportunity to work with a person whom I came to admire greatly. It was the dean of that school, Dr. Michael Reynolds. He was initially my advisor. He would later select me as his assistant, after sending me a most cordial note (which I still have) saying that it was somewhat insufficient to simply see me in the halls and wanted me to set up a time to meet with him. I did. Very soon I was working with admissions and with one of his research projects. This period of time at the University of Maryland and other schools and universities, was a time of some strife. Most of this strife centered around LIS programs trying to recruit more minority students. A few or any of these persons working on either side of the issue were comfortable with the approach, yet realized that the efforts were necessary. To shorten the story in the interest of time, I served on the Admissions Committee and was provided with opportunities that exceeded both my expectations of what I considered a level of responsibility for a mere graduate student, yet I was committed to the task. Despite the circumstances, I was very serious about my degree program, which I shared with pride and humility among family and friends.

So much so that one day Dr. Reynolds approached me and said: You only missed Beta Phi Mu by a very small percentage point. I thought, oh, really! I later wondered why he chose to report this to me. Did he expect me to make Beta Phi Mu? Did he think I should have made Beta Phi Mu? Did he think that I thought I might make Beta Phi Mu? I do not know the answers to these questions, and I am not sure at this point (or then) that the answers even matter. Except to say that, at that time I was not aware of Beta Phi Mu, so I could not really have been disappointed. Yet I responded on a visceral level and in a way that said, I did care and I am grateful for his report. When I enrolled as a master of arts students at Howard University while working full time as the director of that library, again I took seriously my studies because I cared about doing well in my position, especially since Howard University was one of those places where librarians were expected to have a subject specialization in addition to their professional degree. By the time I completed that degree, my GPA and services to the university warranted the Associate Dean's nominating me for distinction of membership on the National Dean's List. I felt somewhat redeemed in making the National Dean's List since I had missed Beta Phi Mu by such a small margin. While at the University of Texas at Austin I was one of three professors in the School of Information who had been selected for induction into Phi Beta Kappa. It would seem that I have learned a good lesson—keep stretching.

By way of summary let me return to my original questions. What is service? What does it mean to be consumed in service? What does it mean to be consumed in service in the Information Age where the world wide web has become so commonplace? If one is consumed in service it must be to a group of people—who are those persons, or consumers? Who should those consumers be?

Service is a word that is hard to define, as hard, probably as many others, including, human computer interaction or HCI, Andrew Dillon³ (1997, 965) writes: It is not easy to give a concise definition of this subject; it is part behavioral science, part design. It contains elements of Computer and Cognitive Science, and it seeks to understand users at the individual, group and organizational level." Is a definition of service equally as complex to define? It certainly has many parts: education of subject specializations (content); behavioral science, teaching and listening acuity; skills-based, and care for human beings. What does it mean to be consumed in service? It is service with the "sharpness" of the librarian who helped Tina. We may not be able to tell young people these days to "pull their stomachs in" but what

would be the equivalency today to help someone change their lives (of course within moral and legal realms)? To be further consumed in service would be to identify and work toward solutions to the critical questions of our day. Many would say that in the recent devastation of lives left by Hurricane Katrina we've seen one of the most stark gaps between the haves and the have nots. Others would say that even before that there were many challenges. My colleague, Dr. Ismail Abdullahi writing in his essay: "From Oral Tradition to Electronic: Accessing and Disseminating Information", "It is likely that new forms of communication will continue to evolve because of the human desire for information sharing, though the change is not for everyone on the planet because not every society has equal opportunity to access information or possess the tools required for access. The more information technologies are created the more information gaps they bring."⁴ The omissions in services we have can be identified by gap analysis (or Disconfirmation Theory), often used with LibQUAL Studies, we can identify the critical questions of our day and place them in service topologies and work on them, and we can remember that as a profession we have come a long way, we have been enhanced by an organization such as Beta Phi Mu and all of us can decide to be consumed in service, identify new consumers and non-consumers and with those continue to move our profession forward, there are no "holds" on any of us!

References

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²Theodore Levitt, "Marketing Myopia," *Harvard Business Review* 38 (July-August; 1960): 45-56.
³Andrew Dillon, "Introduction," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 48 (November 1997): 965.
⁴Ismail Abdullahi, "From Oral Tradition to Electronic: Accessing and Disseminating Information," in *Perspectives, Insights & Priorities: 17 Leaders Speak Freely of Librarianship*. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005).

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