

The Best Way is to Ask

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Abstract

This workshop is designed to help school librarians build a case to convince others of the value of the school library in the education of students and the teaching strategies for teachers. Action research models will be presented including evaluation techniques to measure outcomes. Finally suggestions are made to turn the school librarian into an effective presenter so that audiences respond in a positive way to requests.

The time we spend together at this workshop is to help you decide what you need and how to prepare to ask for it. We're going to share successes and learn about new, methods to assess needs and identify and report accomplishments using action research. We're going to look at the downside just so you won't think I don't appreciate there is one, but we're going to move the downside to an upside by choosing the best way to ask, the public relations aspect of this all. Throughout this process, we will be sharing both questions and our best answers to those questions. What questions do you have?

Here are some you can help me with.

- Why don't we have more school librarians attending IASL?
- Who funds your professional development including conference attendance?
- When did you last get an increase in your book budget?
- Why do you have no library assistant?
- Why don't you have what you need?

(Handout)

During this workshop, we're going to look at why we don't ask so that we can change into people who are willing to ask. We're going to help each other understand what we should be asking. We're going to help each other understand why these things are important. We're going to discuss the right person to ask. Have we really been asking the right persons? When to ask and how to ask are equally important for us to discuss. Finally we are going to talk about what to do if at first you don't succeed.

Children learn early on how to ask their parents. They seldom hesitate, and they expect success. In many countries, the illusion of a jolly someone to bring gifts is a regular part of their lives. In the U.S. it is Santa Claus and lately, the Easter Bunny as well as all that candy they get going trick or treating at Halloween. Who do your children expect to bring presents?

Children always know what they need. It may be things they see on television, but it's usually what they hear from their friends or see in stores. They have found out that their best way to get what they want is to ask, and they rather expect their wishes to be granted. They have trained us well to respond affirmatively to their requests. By their calculations, they make an offer we can't resist.

To turn this to the school librarian, how do you learn what you need? Where is your "television promotion," how do you learn what your friends have, and what do you see in your stores? Let's think about television, friends, and the store.

You are attending this conference. That's very like a "television promotion" because you will see things you want as you attend sessions. You will communicate with your friends and find out what you need based upon what they say is successful in their school libraries. The exhibits here become your store to see things you want to buy. If we accept the premise that this conference does this, let's see how we learned about the conference, what made you decide to come this year? Do you have others in schools around you who aren't here, and why not?

Time for discussion

What are the excuses we often hear about why others don't get to this conference or other conference opportunities? Examples:

Can't get time off (means won't take "vacation")

Can't get time off with pay or they don't pay my way (means I don't think it important enough to invest any money myself.

The administrators/headmasters/ won't allow this. ...

How many of you have ever thought to ask your administrator to come to IASL – and why not? In my years at Pittsburgh, I encouraged students to come to attend Pennsylvania School Librarians Association because it was always valuable. It was a good place to take an administrator so they could meet good school librarians and hear about best practice. Would it be worthwhile for the administrator to come to IASL? Why not invite your administrator to help you present a program. This way you will get them to attend?

Your administrators need to come to the store so they will be aware of the costs of things. It's why you don't get a regular increase in your materials budget? Or when did your not getting an increase really become a decrease because of inflation? They can't imagine how much things really cost unless you can show them. When administrators visit the store, you will be surprised at their suggestions when you are back at school. They will understand why you are asking for those items and why the cost is that amount of money.

This is only one of many requests that we never ask? Why not?

Discussion here.

Why We Don't Ask (A Generic Approach)

Many of us take pride in not asking. Many of us who work in school libraries try to provide opportunities for teachers to be better able to teach and for students to be better able to learn, and we do so in the context of limited funding. We sometimes take great satisfaction

in how well we continue to offer services in the face of adversity when, in fact, it is accepting the situation rather than treating it as a challenge to do better. Making budgets stretch, finding substitutes for more expensive items, learning how to “make do” allows us to feel pride that we can offer more for less, to keep our level of service high within the slender allowances we are given.

Admirable? Maybe yes, maybe no. Who is being cheated in this picture? Good school libraries and well-prepared staff members who manage good collections of resources make a difference in the lives of teachers and students. Research shows this over and over and over. To accept a poor situation without letting others know what should be happening is giving up without a fight and the loss of the battle is a critical loss to your students teachers.

What are we doing when we don't fight for better collections, more training, when we accept, with only minor flinching, the status quo? How will anyone learn just how important the school library is to the teaching of teachers and the learning of students if we never tell?

Why don't we ask? Do you have any suggestions? Let's make a list so we can see how to overcome these?

Discussion here.

Some possible reasons:

We don't ask because we are new to the position (I haven't been here long enough.) or so long in the position that we don't notice how bad things are anymore. We accept the status quo.

Sometimes new is better because if you are new you can just expect it and it becomes embarrassing to Harry or Mary that they haven't been wise enough to provide it before. You may even act as if your predecessor was too kind to point out their lack of knowledge about this necessity.

We never have enough money to go around or funding is seriously cut back this year. (Myth or truth, it makes a good excuse!) Do you honestly believe that the need for new of anything, even stoves for the family living instruction in how to cook, are more important than information resources for students to learn how to think?

Money is always available for the necessities. Look at the school's budget and find where the item you want fits. You just need to point out why what you are asking is a necessity

Sometimes we don't ask because we don't want to be told, “No.” Some suggestions here will help you understand that to be told, “No.” only means a different, more exciting approach the next time. Hopefully after today, you will be able to build a case where it becomes impossible to say, “No.” We aren't going to be dissuaded by a “no.” It only gives an opportunity to devise a new strategy.

Sometimes we don't ask because we think someone else is taking over anyway. We feel threatened by the advent of technology, with the hiring of technicians and discussions of how everything is now available on the Internet when that's what makes us even more important – but more about that later.

Why don't you have a library clerk – your own teacher's assistant? It sometimes relates to the prep period assignment – you're becoming *defacto*, a teacher's aid!

Having clerical help is the best means to provide that necessary time to collaborate with teachers. This is a key to improving teaching and learning.

Sometimes we don't ask because we don't believe in it anyway. Or, because we don't think there is a Santa Claus. Or we are so worried about what we think is our image. You must start with a belief in what is being asked. If you don't think it is worth having or doing, why will anyone else. You need to know that you are the most important teacher in your school because you reach all the teachers, all the students, and you should be working with all areas of the curriculum. What does it take for you to become committed to something new, some change, some better way to approach a task?

- (1) Someone once told me it was good for you
- (2) I read about it once and it seemed an interesting idea at the time
- (3) It would be nice if
- (4) It would be nice
- (5) It would help
- (6) I'll do it if the principal says I must
- (7) Some of the teachers think it is a good idea
- (8) It's been successful in another school in the state
- (9) It's been successful in another school in the district
- (10) It is essential

Do we hesitate to ask because to be granted our wish may mean we must change something we have been doing and we treasure that way? Have well do you accept change? You will need to consider not only how you will adapt to change, you must also consider how you are going to get your teachers to change.

What are you asking for? Do you know?

Having considered why we don't ask, let's move to deciding what we should be asking. Do we really have our needs identified? Are our needs in priority order, or do we just open up in the fall and close in the early summer dusting off our hands and not thinking about the next fall? Have you prepared a strategic long-range plan for information services in your school? While we won't discuss this at length, your plan includes your attending conferences to learn more, and it includes budgeting for your principal to attend your conference? What you discover as you analyze your needs will become an integral part of your strategic plan. It makes the needs process even more important.

You ask for funding to attend conferences where you will update and improve your skills, to choose materials including the best databases for your students. You come home with a buying list of "can't miss" selections, you are on the way. It's where you say, and I am parroting your children – "EVERYONE ELSE HAS IT." You learn about the activities of clerical assistance for the library so you can collaborate.

Conferences are where you learn what's going on in other parts of the county, state, country, world especially those parts where funding is about the level of yours, but where they seem to spend it more wisely on school library staff, materials and services. This sort of

comparative analysis is more likely to convince your principal/superintendent than anything else. In the U.S., we have a ploy to compare ourselves with others like us in size and wealth but who have more than we do. Then we tell the administrator that we need to be like them, that we want to “keep up with the Joneses.” It works, and it works better if you can bring persons of influence with you to meetings and conferences.

How else do you determine what you need? You may ask your teachers and your students and their parents. What are your students and teachers requesting? What do parents go looking for in the evening to help their children with their homework? If for no other reason, this may help them understand what is missing. We will get more specific later, but here are some beginning hints.

Collection Needs

Learn what resources your teachers and students need if they are going to be more successful and you do this in terms of the resources you have to offer. Develop a collection analysis plan, not just age, although that has been revealing, but a collection development analysis and plan for purchases in the future.

Have you mapped your collection against the curriculum offered in the school? Have you thought about what will happen next year and the year after that? Curriculum does change, and historical events alter what students are going to study. Does your strategic plan include adding what you will need based upon the curriculum?

Service Needs (that can be expanded with clerical assistance)

You learn what happens in a school with paid clerical help in the library even for two hours a day. This gives you freedom from changing paper in the printers, helping (not teaching, your job) children access databases especially those new to your school. Can you make a list of exactly what this person would be doing every minute of the time in the library? It can't be help shelve books, help put up bulletin boards, help do anything that the principal perceives as your role as librarian. You must move your administrator's perception of what you should be doing. Unless you have made a case for it over time, their image of the school librarian is someone who stays at the charging desk, stamps out books, gives a library lesson or tells a story or gives a book talk and then returns the students to their classroom. This has little relationship to classroom assignments.

What should a teacher's aid be doing? Perhaps they should be helping organize volunteers as well as return materials to the shelves and drawers. Let's talk about what volunteers could be doing, and what this would cost if you had to pay them.

Let's talk about having a practice teacher in the library and how they need to see a library with clerical assistance. Do you know where a school exists with clerical help at all levels so you can point them out to administrators? If you are in such a school, perhaps you should consider giving a talk at IASL next year, with your clerk to back you up, so that the rest of us can bring our administrators to hear what happens.

You need to build the case for your responsibility for teaching information literacy. You have access to a variety of information toolkits and more being created all the time. You need to build a compelling case for how students MUST become information literate if they are going to be able to survive in a global community and you don't do that by just talking about it, you must show everyone around you how this happens and how important it is.

You must have an idea of what additional services you could provide – how many more times a week students could come to the library – how much more planning time you could provide while instructing students who are in need of help. Do you have other ways to move Harry or Mary into a different mindset?

Discussion here

Let's begin to look at ways to identify what we need and how to show it best.

Action Research

The most effective action research projects involve persons who are interested in the results. You need support from administrators, teachers, parents, students, and the community to help with the data gathering and to help you decide how to share results later. While we're going to talk about action research that will help you discover what you need to support your requests, we will then help you with sharing results after the study is completed. Involving the school community in the process gives them the opportunity to buy into results.

The purpose of action research is to learn what you are doing, make some of the proposed improvements, and test the outcomes of your activities. We will do this in the context of the following questions for you when you begin: What do you need to find out (your question)? Has anyone asked your question before (your review of the research)? Who will you ask – who can help you with the information you need for the answer (your population)? What will you ask (the answers you need)? How to ask (what method will you use)? When to ask (when will it be most likely you will be able to reach your population)? How will you analyze the answers (what methodology will you use)? To whom will you report (who are the decision-makers, the advocates)? How will you prepare the report (the writing, the describing)? What do you expect to happen? What happens next?

How will you do this? You must decide who to ask, how to ask, when to ask, how much to ask, and what will you do with the answers you get. Finally you will ask who to tell? What are some questions you might ask?

Your questions

Work Sheet with small group discussion

- 1) Do your services meet the needs?
- 2) What would a paid clerical in your library help you improve services?
- 3) How well will the collection meet student and teacher needs? Have you mapped your collection in relationship to the curriculum?
- 4) What about checking bibliographies of research reports to see if the citations were from materials in your library?
- 5) How do you check to see if you're helping someone with research made their research report better? You could, of course ask them.

- 6) Does it make a difference if you work with teachers BEFORE they bring students to the library?
- 7) Does it make a difference if the teacher stays with students during their time in the library?
- 8) Let's see what happens if you do something that improves reading scores in schools. Will this change anything?
- 9) How do you determine if you're working with students helps them get into a college or to get better jobs?
- 10) How do you determine if the program you presented resulted in more use of ____?
- 11) How to determine the impact of a reading program with upper class students who read to younger students in your library on Saturday afternoon?
- 12) What happens when?
- 13)
- 14)

For each research question to be answered, how do you find out the other items?

Reviewing the Research

One opportunity is to go the research and find research that will help you plan what to test and also help you see what findings were with a similar study. You will add to this information as you do your own action research projects, but here is where you start. It's there. Keith Curry Lance in a recent presentation told the audience that research in school libraries has been ongoing for more than fifty years. If you can't find it easily, call you nearest educational institution, although much of this is available on the Internet. Much of how students learn how to use information is available in a book Dave Loertscher and I collected, *Information Literacy*.

Lance also mentioned work done by Mary Virginia Gaver. Her studies of the impact of elementary school libraries on reading were the foundation for much of the research on location of materials available in libraries today. Lance himself has conducted landmark studies of the value of school libraries in the achievement of students in schools. Others have looked at how administrators, teachers, and students view the school library and the librarian. Still others have addressed teaching and learning styles, the impact of access to information, among many, many others.

Who (your population) or what will you ask?

Once you have determined your research question, you must decide whom to ask to help you find answers. Will the students or teachers be able to help? What about the clerical staff in the library and in other offices in the school. They often have a very close contact with students and teachers and can help you learn about their needs. Will they give you true answers to your questions, or can you phrase any questions in such a way that they can't tell you what they think you want to know? Do you need an outside person to observe you? Will

you just be looking at records and making judgments yourself or will you ask someone else who might have less bias to look at those records (test scores or purchase orders or, probably not so good, circulation records and make judgments from that?

After this question, return to worksheet with small group discussion for each of the following questions.

How to Ask

What methods will you use? Focus groups, questionnaires, surveys, interviews?
What might you count, why, and what results do you anticipate?
What can you compare contrast? With whom?

Worksheet

When to Ask

What is the best time to ask these questions?
Where will you find the persons to question?
Will you have time to tabulate the results before you must make a report?

Worksheet

How Will You Analyze Your Answer?

Count checkmarks?
Use a spread sheet?
Statistics program?

Worksheet

How Will You Prepare the Final Report

Only narrative?
What graphs? Charts?
What other graphics?
On disk?
Video?
Combination of Media?
On your web site?

Worksheet

What Do You Expect to Happen?

Yes,
No,
Maybe?

Worksheet

Reports back from individual groups.

BREAK HERE

Best Ways to Ask

School libraries are important places for administrators, students, teachers, parents to come. School libraries are important places for governments to fund. Libraries are important, and everyone seems to agree. Yet, how do we get others to support us. No one ever has enough money, but many often do not get the amount of money that they should; however, sometimes school libraries don't get the share they are supposed to receive. This often means that the persons who handle the funding find it easier to cut the library than to cut elsewhere. They need to learn that a population of non-thinkers will not help any country survive in a global economy. The school library and its contents are more important to lifelong learning than any other part of the school. How do we get our teachers to help us get our message to our funding persons who must support us?

Some concepts are observations from my own career and some of the principles I have learned and believe in that I have gathered over time. Today you will hear a total of eight. Getting affirmative answers begins with each of us as an individual.

1. Be a good example of an information professional in every situation, at home, at work, at meetings, at church.

One of the most frequent concerns our students express is what their image will be in the world after they have graduated. They expect someone else to do something or be doing something, usually a professional association such as the American Library Association or the Special Library Association. What they don't seem to realize is that these organizations are made up of individuals, and they will be one of those individuals in those professions. The image we project to our students and teachers in relationships in the school sets the image that they who are not librarians will carry. We need, at all times, to be able to be proud of our profession, to serve, it is a service profession, and to show others that it is a position to be sought after, too. In many areas, the recruitment of all types of librarians is critical. We need to model the joy and rewards of being school librarians for the public at large and especially within our schools.

2. Love your school library and be proud of your profession. Make sure YOU believe in the worth of your library and your services. Make sure you believe you should be telling others all about it.

You have chosen to be a member of the school staff and provide school library services to your patrons. That means you want to work closely with students and teachers and to help them locate the information they need to function in their worlds. You want to help prepare your students for higher education, to be able to go directly to work, to have a healthy life style and become good parents, to achieve as high a level as is possible, and to be good citizens of the world. You must want to do that and you must have a commitment that is more

than salary since very few of us in this profession make large sums of money. Our service makes a difference in people's lives. We are important, and we need to make sure others understand this.

3. Know that you need to ask.

This section has two points, one that we should not sit and wait to be given support just because we are good and the other is that sometimes we think that doing more for less is good. Many of us who work in school libraries try to provide materials and services for our patrons in reality of limited funding. As stated much earlier, we sometimes take pride in how well we continue to offer services in the face of adversity when, in fact, it is accepting the situation rather than treating it as a challenge to do better. Making budgets stretch, finding substitutes for more expensive items, learning how to "make do" allows us to feel pride that we can offer more for less, to keep our level of service high within the slender allowances we are given.

This does not build good library services in a global world. Keith Lance has shown in four states in the U.S. that good libraries and well-prepared staff members who manage good collections of resources make a difference in student achievement. We owe it to our students to have the resources to make sure they have an even chance for success in a global community.

We most strive for better collections, continued training as our field changes, and the ability to see other opportunities to improve our services. How will anyone learn just how important libraries in schools for the teaching of teachers and the learning of students if we don't tell them? Truly, few libraries are funded just because libraries are good things. Know that you must ask, and accept the challenge of asking. Be willing to ask.

4. Know that you are willing to ask.

Know that it is important for you to ask whether you are new to the situation or a veteran.

Know that, even when funds are limited, funds are available for the most important things and that providing resources for your students is critical to their growth and learning.

Know that being told, "No," means a different, more exciting approach the next time. Hopefully after this lecture, you will be able to build a case where it becomes impossible to say, "No." However, if you are worried about your image in case you aren't successful, get someone else to make the request.

When we ask, the way we stand before the group, the tone of our voice shows people we aren't all that sure and that we might not believe in our request anyway. It's easy for your audience to turn you away without help.

If you think it will happen, you are poised on the brink of success. You must start with a belief in what you are asking for or you don't begin the process.

We ask confidently even though granting our wish may mean we must change something we have been doing and treasure, or, even more difficult, we must change our teachers and students and some of them may lose something they treasure.

5. Know what you need to ask for and have supporting evidence for your request.

We know what we need to ask for and we have the supporting evidence comes from our action research projects discussed earlier. You will just move your evidence from there to here, but first we need to settle on the first priority for our request.

We have decided what we need, what should be in our request? How do we decide what we want to target in our campaign for better school libraries? Does your school library need to buy books and technology for your students, access to databases as a part of your "materials" budget.

Building your case will be strengthened by your attending as many conferences as you can. Here is where you learn what's going on in other parts of the world especially those parts where funding is about the level of yours, but where they seem to spend it more wisely on library staff, materials and services. This sort of comparative analysis is more likely to convince your administrators/funding sources than anything else. Keeping up with the Joneses (a saying in the U.S. that means you must have what the Jones family next door has) still works.

Meeting others at sites other than your library helps you learn what you should be buying for your patrons. You must return to your library with a buying list of "can't miss" selections, you are on the way. It's where you say, and I am parroting children getting ready for the December holidays with, "EVERYONE ELSE HAS IT."

Others can help you determine ways they have found successful at all levels of the library and information science professions. You learn how to help your teachers and students, what the trends in the information world are. You learn how others work on the image of the library, how they negotiate change in what's been happening. Unless you have made a case for any change in your library over time, the image of the librarian that your school community may have is not the one you would wish them to keep.

You have determined what you need. You have asked the appropriate persons, teachers, students, and their parents. You have assessed your collection for the gaps in it and you have lists of materials, equipment, software, online databases to fill those gaps. You have definite numbers matched to something concrete, for example, we can't help our biology teachers with what they need to teach. We have X number of topics that we had no information at all. Much that we do have is dated, irrelevant information. Here are the titles, databases, etc. I would like to purchase and their costs. Then we need materials on X and here are the numbers of references queries we have been unable to fulfill, here are the materials and costs.

You have built the case for your responsibility for teaching information literacy. You have at your fingertips your own plan for teaching. You need to build a compelling case for how your students MUST become information literate if they are going to be able to survive

in a global community and you don't do that by just talking about the problem, you must show everyone around you how this happens and how important it is.

6. Know who to ask for help.

Sometimes we don't seem to understand who to ask. As stated earlier, in the U.S., children learn early on to ask Santa Claus. They know that their best way to get what they want is to ask, and they rather expect their wishes to be granted by their parents and grandparents or maybe a favorite aunt or uncle. We, as they do, must believe in our need and we must ask the right person to honor our request. The key is to go to the person(s) who can help you get what you need. You must have some idea of the financial or human resources of the persons you are going to ask or you will have no hope for success. It is often easier to go as a group.

Discussion here.

Never underestimate the ability of a group to help you do what you want to do. We can start with creating an advisory committee for your library. Who do you think should be on this committee?

Who else will you ask for help? Don't miss anyone!

Students have little financial resources at their disposal, but they can offer other kinds of help and, in the process, they may be able to show positive results of their efforts. Have older students read to younger students, especially if reading is in need of improvement for the older students and help build their skills. You see, not every request needs a dollar amount attached to it.

Teachers can also be helpful with their involvement in your studies. Remember that their time is valuable and if they help you with building collaborative projects, they may be doing so, at least the first time, without reward. It will only be after the first successes that they will see the benefits of their involvement.

If you have involved parents in the work you have been doing in preparation for the request, they can let you know what they can do. They must be totally behind you in everything you are trying to do. You may need to locate the leaders and the gatekeepers in your community of parents to help you build up the support of all. Do I need to define "gatekeeper?" These are the people that everyone goes to for information. They may not be in a position of authority, but they do have authority. They may be the ones who speak out in meetings, but they may not. In fact, they may almost be silent in meetings, but they have talked with others in the audience about the topic of the discussion and they do effectively problem solve.

Your administrator is a possibility for assistance with financial returns. This is an interesting situation, and I may be totally incorrect, but you should have gone to your administrator with the discussion point that you want to work with him or her to make the library a better place for your patrons. Administrators need to be bombarded with clever reports of the good things that happen in your library so that they can brag to other administrators in meetings they attend.

What do your administrators or others who fund you (and in the U.S., this is the School Board) think about library materials? Do they believe that they are essential or that they are obsolete? Do you know? When is the last time you talked with your administrators as individuals or going as a group? What did you talk about? Or did you only whine? Could you take your staff and students with you when you go to ask? Can they demonstrate their success in the use of information in your school library?

You need to report to all these who hold your professional life in your hands. Many of them are persons who need to be given at least a once-a-year report. Sometimes information can be "leaked" to your administrators through volunteers who work in the library. Any student aids you might have are also useful in this type of campaign.

Your community is full of persons who might help if you were careful to develop a great picture and then tell each person which part of the puzzle they represent. In funding campaigns, most fundraisers say you should have half your goal before you go public. So, if this is true, who do you want to fill in the missing piece(s)?

7. Know when to ask.

When: Before you need it, before you are desperate. But, when you know whom to ask, when will be when and where you can meet with them to explain the situation in such a way that they are compelled to grant your plea.

The political approach is to do some background to know what is on the agenda at the time you are going to ask. If there is a big discussion about major funding that needs to be done your agency has just been asked to cut funding in half, it is not a good time to ask for additional funding. Better to wait aside until things have become less of a problem.

For school librarians, the time to ask is at the parent-teacher meeting, for the district it is your school board meeting. For organizations for adults in your community, we have Kiwanis, Lions, and Rotary Clubs, who have regular meetings, take some patrons along to speak for you. If there are service organizations, agree to do an interesting program for them, or get your teachers or students to prepare an interesting program and go with them to the luncheon. If you have prepared them, through your description of your school library and maybe a modest need for something, you should get a contribution for the effort with an annual gift anticipated.

Tell about your school library. You need to let the audience know what your school library offers so that they can put into perspective what you are asking them to fund. If you are going to give a compelling case, you want as wide and affirmative an audience that you can gather so that you have many friends in the audience.

For the community in general, go to as many meetings as you can get invited. If you become adept at presenting a program, you will be much sought after, and, if you can't do it alone, draft other staff and patrons to help you. It doesn't need to be any more difficult than preparing a book talk of what is new for them to read – and make it a wide variety so you have something for everyone. How you plan to do this is equally important.

8. Know How to Ask.

Once you've discovered whom to ask, and assuming you are going to do something directly related to your library and more than a book review session, what information about your library will be so compelling for them to learn that they can't refuse you? Your choices are wide. If you remember our discussion of preparing our reports of our action research projects, you have written reports, personal presentations, a well-prepared video, a combination of media, and all added to your web site. **How else?**

For personal presentations, a great deal of advance planning is necessary. You won't have the ability to "edit the document" that you do with a written report. Knowing how to ask is directly dependent upon your audience. To ask when you are at a meeting, especially if you offer them a formal presentation, means you can tell them your success and then you can discuss how they might help you with something directly related to your library. Plan your presentation with information about your library. This should be so compelling for them to learn that they can't refuse you?

A first step is one that has great impact and little to do with your mission. Dress for the part. One of my friends, a psychologist, has always said to wear pink or blue because no one ever attacks anyone wearing pink or blue. Another says it won't matter what you say as long as you look very professional saying it. If you are going to make a presentation, make sure you have one very nice outfit to wear to the meeting to meet the group.

The focus of what you are asking is audience dependent. If you are asking from a group that would like their name on whatever is purchased, suggest that whatever you are asking will have the name on it so that everyone in the neighborhood will see that when they go by.

If you are talking to your parents or the community, you may want to stress that a purchase will be useful for more than a single time. Most people who make gifts like to know they will have a longer life span than a sack a bag of cookies.

Another clue is to state your case with pizzazz. Prepare your presentation using the best and most glitzy presentation you can create. Use GREAT power points and GREAT visuals. Any handouts should be of professional quality. If you can take students along to demonstrate, their "evidence" will be especially compelling.

If you have a web site for your school library, much of the information about the library, its successes and its needs can be placed there, and you can prepare newsletters that keep parents, advisory committee, administrators informed about the activities of the library. Tell them what can be done if something you need is in place, i.e., if you had access to a database rather than the Internet, would you be better able to protect students from something you didn't want them to see?

In your library

- Create your own website that you share the successes of your library to the greater world. Make it exciting!
- After your students have graduated, you need to remember to report their successes on your school's web site. I'm sure you will have room for success stories from graduates who are either in the workplace or attending a university.

- Keep your website up-to-date and exciting. Allowing students to help with this increases their knowledge and takes some of the burden off you. You need only recruit interested and reliable students.
- Constantly collect statistics about services offered and about needs. It is very stressful to have to collect statistics when the need is there rather than looking at your spread sheet
- When you prepare anything that the public will see, make sure it looks professional
- Hold focus groups of teachers, parents, from the community to find out what you are doing well and what you could be doing better.
- Write letters to influential persons who might be interested in improving the information resources at your school
- Report what is going on in the library to all interested groups.

Making it difficult to refuse, requires making careful choice of words do you use? Make a case for which there is only ONE answer, “yes!”

Handout with group discussion and then sharing ideas.

If at First You Don't Succeed

Try, try again! You must never apologize for asking, even if you don't get a “yes” the first time. You need only find out what would make a better request and change yours to reflect the suggestions.

Increase/widen efforts from “How to Ask”

What is real and true is that.....

You hold the solution to the learning and teaching needs of students and teachers. If you don't ask for resources for your school library, how will your students be prepared to become educated adults in this new century? If you don't accept the challenge of creating a vision and your school library colleagues, who will?

Can Your School Really Survive without You?

Can your school really survive without you? I've been giving a similar talk to school librarians for a long past. When a colleague of mine is worried – and he's been in Canada a lot lately because school librarians are having serious cutbacks everywhere – where one school librarian himself believes they are doomed, I pause to listen. Students don't need a library; they have the Internet in every classroom. Wow! A technology person is on board to help keep those machines running. Wow!

And, are you really going to believe that? I can't make you believe me if you won't, but information is a priceless commodity and helping students learn how to make accurate judgments for life decisions based upon critically thought-out solutions to problems, large and small is in your hands. Teachers and administrators and students need the best possible quality information that only you really know how to find.

Your school may be able to survive without **you**, but they can't survive without an excellent information professionals doing what you do -- to help teachers teach, students learn, and even administrators administrate. It's up to you to ask for what you need using the best possible approach.

You hold the solution to the learning and teaching needs of students and teachers. If you don't ask for resources for your school library, how will your students be prepared to become educated adults in this new century? If you don't accept the challenge of creating a vision and your school library colleagues, who will?