

Who doesn't get it?

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Doug Johnson, doug0077@mail.com

"My principal just doesn't get it."

"The teachers just don't get it."

"Bobby's mom just doesn't get it."

I always shudder when I hear anyone say that someone else doesn't "get it." Why might a person, "not get" something that seems obvious to the one expressing frustration?

- That the person is stupid. (Amazing the blockheads that get through graduate school.)
- That the person is being willfully ignorant. (Devious people exist, now if I could only figure out their motives.)
- That the person has not been properly educated. (Just frightful the number of people who missed the lessons on the goodness of libraries and technology in their parenting and education programs.)

Here is what I think is more likely - most people get "it" just fine - they just have a different reality that makes our "it" less important to them than to us.

The only "it" some principals get is how to raise the reading or math scores of certain groups of kids. The only "it" some teachers get is how to deal with 30 kids with different needs and abilities. The only "it" some parents get is that school may not be serving their own children adequately.

As librarians, we can offer the very best hammer in the world, but if your principal, your teachers or your parents really need and want a wrench, a screwdriver or a hacksaw, having a hammer, no matter how wonderful, is simply immaterial. They get "it" that you have a great hammer - it just isn't relevant or important to them. Even if you think it darned well should be.

Not only may others see libraries as irrelevant, they may seem them as simply being more trouble than they are worth. Gary Hartzell reminds us that too often the only thing that principals learn about libraries while getting their administrative degrees is about handling book challenges. In other words, principals only learn that libraries = problems. Unfortunately, the build-up of negative connotation continues for too many principals.

Ask yourself quite seriously:

What does your principal hear most often from you? Complaints about too few resources? Tales of teachers not cooperating? Indignity over others wanting to use *your* space?

What do teachers hear most often from you? Nagging about advanced planning?

Complaints about their students' behavior? Laments about equipment not being checked out?

What do parents hear most often from you? Reminders of overdue books? Warnings that their child is too often off task or not completing projects? Bills for lost materials?

As a supervisor, like your principal, I am expected to be a problem-solver. And solving problems is a job I really do relish and enjoy. But I also know the thrill of hearing the positives. What have you shared of a positive nature with your boss lately - that's personal, concrete and good for the school? What have you shared with a teacher that indicates the library can be an asset to him rather than a pain in the asset? Have you shared anything with a parent lately that doesn't involve her child behaving badly?

Here is the irony. I don't remember every visiting a school library in which something wonderful hasn't been going on. Not just because of a special event, but just as matter of course. Things like:

- Kids finding and enjoying books they actually read.
- Kids finding information about topics in which they have a real interest.
- Kids learning a new technology skill.
- Kids working together socially.
- Kids solving problems instead of memorizing facts.
- Kids who may not be successful in the classroom finding success in the library.
- Kids just plain feeling comfortable and happy in school.

My elementary librarian wife comes home with plenty of frustrations that she shares with me over a glass of wine or three. But often as not, she has a wonderful story about a child who was successful because of something that happened in her library.

It's vital that our positive communications extend to parents. If we don't have parents understanding, appreciating and backing our library programs, we are sunk as a profession. Leigh Ann Jones who writes the *Shelf Consumed* blog suggests a simple thing librarians can do to build a positive relationship with parents: call one each day with a good thing to say about working with his or her child in the library.

<tinyurl.com/parentadvocate> What a powerful idea!

Call a mom or dad today with good news. Say something upbeat to a stressed-out teacher. Relay a positive story to your boss. Perhaps your phone number will be in fewer call-blocked lists and more teachers will be willing to sit with you at lunch.

And for heaven's stake please stop saying, "They just don't get it." The expression reflects *your* lack of understanding, not theirs.