

Is it a sacred cow, or a time-honored principle?

A *sacred cow* is a person, institution, idea (often a "pet theory") or ideology that is immune (usually unreasonably so) from criticism or opposition.

A *pet theory* is any theory that one likes more than other theories, whether or not it is true. It is hard to be objective about a pet theory.

If someone is unwilling to test a principle against evidence, they are a *true believer*

If no evidence will satisfy them, they are a *true believer*.

1. Check the current facts as opposed to relying solely on history.
2. Look for physical evidence, not just hearsay.
3. Look for corroborating evidence, not just one person's opinion.
4. Everyone has to justify; no one earns *entitlement* or *exemption* based on age, seniority, experience, credentials, title or other status.
5. Ask for information in sensory-specific terms, not just emotional interpretations.
6. Does adhering to the principle help us achieve the better future?
7. If we compare the current and future costs versus the current and future benefits, is the current version costing more than change?

What are some of the potential sacred cows of the library profession, other professions and trades connected with libraries (literacy, tech services, support services), the Washington Library Community, your library, your community, your board or your staff? How could you test them?

Leaving Sacred Cows Behind

Leaders in Action–WILL 2005–Workshop in Library Leadership–Olympia, WA

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Trends to Consider—What Affects Our Choices?

Technology Has Affected Library User Expectations

1. Computing Power—How *fast* can I get it?
2. Storage—How *much* can I get?
3. Software—What can I *do* with it?
4. Connectivity—Who and what can I *talk* with?
5. Mobility—*Where* can I be?
6. Custom services—What about *me*?
7. Integration—How many *ways* can I get it without thinking?
8. The creator distributes *directly*—the independent press online: the blog and the wiki capture and share facts and opinions.
9. Official sovereignty versus *open* source.
10. There is more than one authority—The *end* of the age of the professional as we know it:
11. More choices, faster—Ecology starts with the *mulch* pile.
12. More and different people to *connect* with—The walls are coming down among people, applications and tools.
13. More uses for *technology*—Flexibility rules.
14. The rise of the interactive game over movies—*Follow the money* to know how influence is changing.
15. The power over the market moves to the customer— *Customer-driven* strategic alliances replace surveys and focus groups.
16. What I think is interesting today— *more personal power*
 - a. How the changing issues of *status* are changing libraries.
 - b. The *disenfranchised* are not going to wait for you.
 - c. What happens *after* the Internet: Each to their own.
 - d. More demands for *justification*.

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New Library Principles

A library is a space designed for people, not for books. (Most libraries are warehouses for books; new libraries are designed for library users, not librarians.)

People comfort— chairs, tables, lighting.
People magnets—nontraditional activities and services.
Conversation areas, sound systems, music.
Food, drink, dance, animals, art, television, fun!
People-friendly, cover-out book displays on shelves and end-of-aisles.
Staff walking around, stand-alone lecterns instead of counters.
Integrated service desks instead of separate circ and reference desks.
Drive-up windows, dial-up services, more services outside the building.
Electric and neon signs, open signs, positive customer service signs.
No jargon (*circulation, ILL, juvenile fiction, AV, stacks, policies, serials*)
Hassle-free policies: less paperwork, fewer thou-shalt-nots.
Sign-up for library cards anywhere, borrow and return more places.
Use of color throughout library—walls, carpets, signs.
Staff and volunteers matches demographics of community.
Polyglot is a given.

Materials organized around topics and themes, not Dewey or LC

Consumer nonfiction displays by general topic (ie, all writing books).
Topic signs in both adult and children's areas.
Staff and user recommendation displays.
Intershelve children and adult nonfiction.
Interdisciplinary displays.

Material is fresh

Trade paperbacks without library bindings.
Ruthless weeding and faster turnover of circulated material.
New displays weekly or more—variety and novelty.
Less mending—cheaper new replacements.
Integration and increased dominance of the electron.

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Challenging Sacred Cows

Getting To Yes by Roger Fisher and William Ury
Still considered “the book” on negotiation.

Systemantics by John Gall
A hysterically funny book about why almost all systems fail.

Democracy in Small Groups by John Gastil
Practical advice for running groups.

Socrates' Way by Ronald Gross
Ron's latest book on critical thinking and character.

Systems of Survival by Jane Jacobs
How the public and private sectors points-of-view differ.

Victims of GROUPTHINK by Irving L. Janis
How easy it is for smart individuals to become a stupid group.

When Talk Works: Profiles of Mediators by Deborah M. Kolb
Successful mediators break the rules.

Managing By the Numbers by Chuck Kremer and Ron Rizzuto
A commonsense way to make sense of financial information.

Prisons We Choose To Live Inside by Doris Lessing
How and why we are so easily seduced by the power of the group.

Philosophy and the Real World by Bryan Magee
Magee does an excellent job of explaining Karl Popper's theories.

Obedience to Authority by Stanley Milgram
Seminal study of how average people can torture or kill.

The Captive Mind by Czeslaw Milosz
The classic story of spiritual slavery and totalitarianism.

Learned Optimism by Martin Seligman
Why pessimists are right today, and optimists are right tomorrow.

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