

Stupid Rules

& how to change them

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and how to change them.

Why manners are
simultaneously outmoded
and tired and also the best
way to get anything done.

mostly this is a good story. If your experience with conflict resolution goes as far as "what I'm hearing you saying is you're frustrated with.... " this may be helpful. About me, I am an irritable person, but ultimately as a librarian I am a public servant. I have a few jobs. I teach computer classes in my town of 4500 people and I am the "intrepid part timer" at the public library in town. I also travel a lot and do this sort of thing. And since the first time I gave this talk, I've reconsidered the name

Suboptimal Rules

& how to change them

This is a little wordier but is more accurate. Most of these rules aren't stupid, they exist for a reason but the trick is figuring out what that reason is and seeing if you can work with it.

April 11

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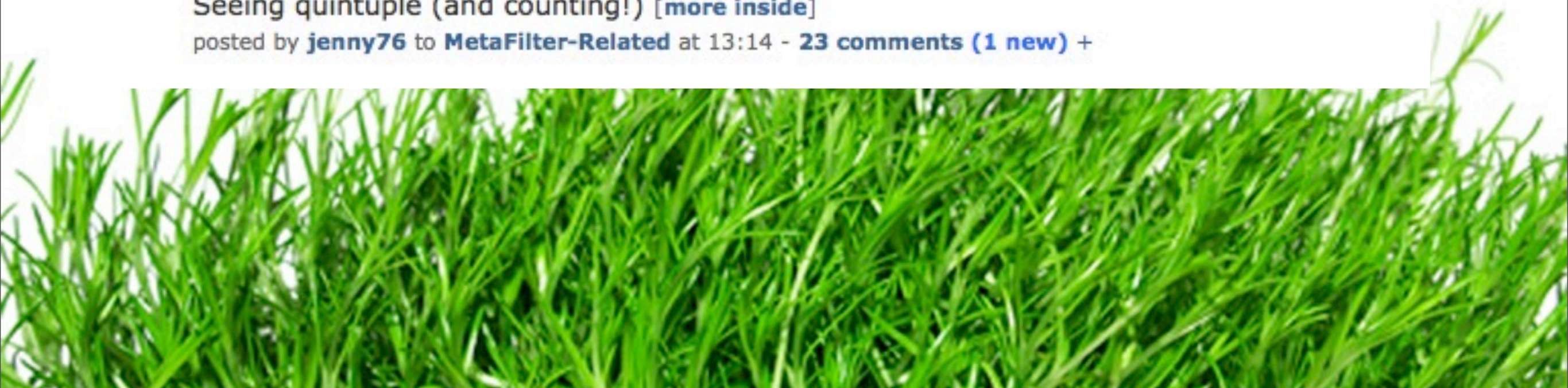
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posted by [jenny76](#) to [MetaFilter-Related](#) at 13:14 - [23 comments \(1 new\)](#) +



My main health-insurance job is running a web community. For some people this means I'm a den mother, for some it means I'm a censor, for me it means I'm an online librarian [hence the disguise aspect] and generally it means I deal with 1) rules and 2) irritable people all day long.

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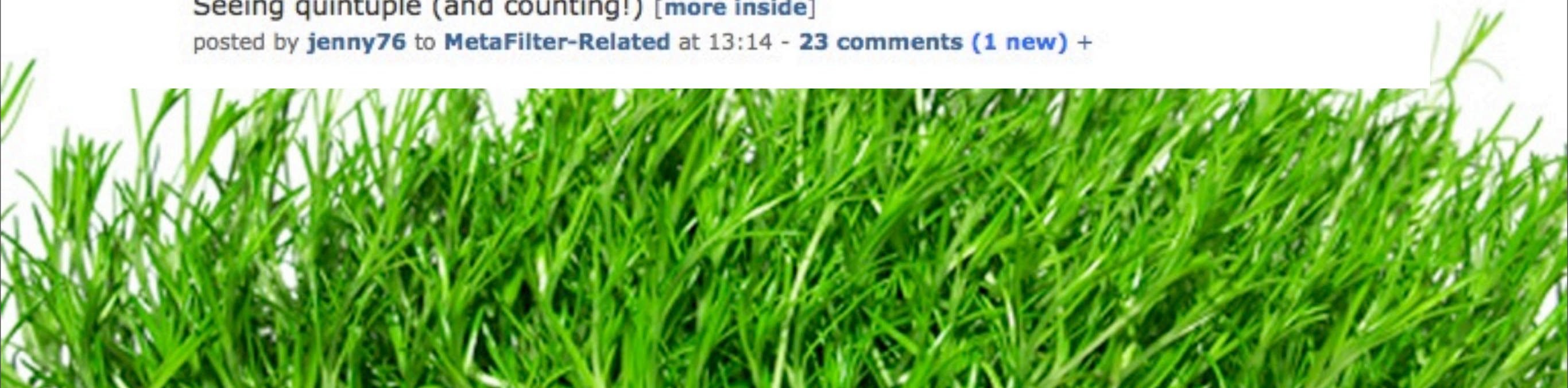
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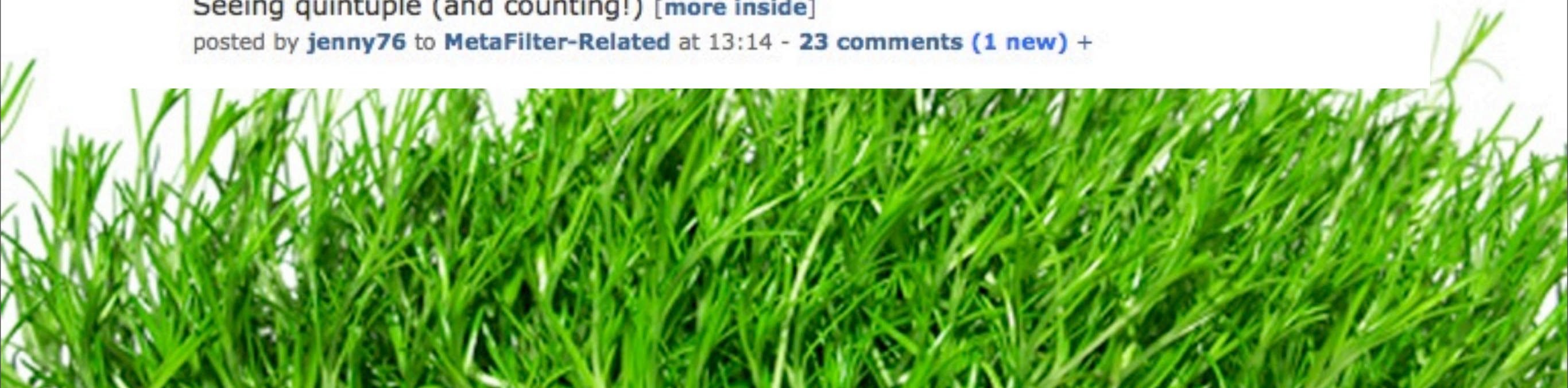
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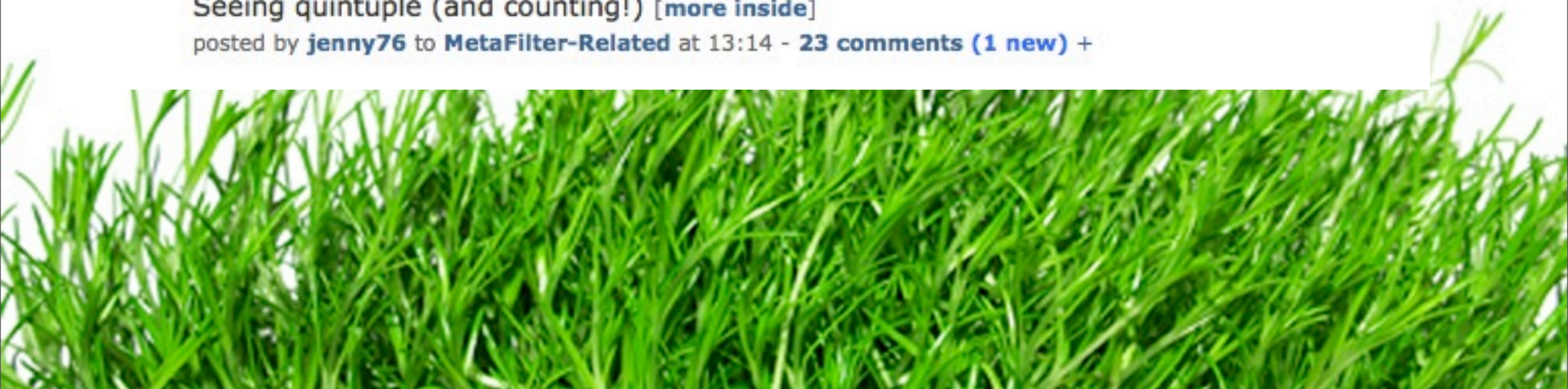
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ARE YOU COMING TO BED?

I CAN'T. THIS IS IMPORTANT.

WHAT?

SOMEONE IS WRONG ON THE INTERNET.



I never knew there were so many irritable people in the world. In some ways this is great because I'm sort of irritable, so it's nice to be around people who feel like I do when people use the wrong its. That said, irritable people can be exhausting and demanding and at the same time, I've got half a decade of experience with them. I'd like to tell you what I've learned using something from a few years back as an example.

nsfw-ish



unless you work where I do

First off, you don't call people's rules stupid. My number one tip, and really the only one you need is to ask yourself "do you want to be right, or do you want to solve the problem? Keeping in mind that you can't always do both." Many people opt for right. So, while there is a certain satisfaction to telling people they are dumb and wrong, this is rarely the solution EVEN IF TRUE.



Also, people don't like the "what I'm hearing you say..." stuff and they're not great with the "I'm sorry you got offended" sort of thing as a substitute for a real apology. Everyone's read the same self help books and they're getting better and better at knowing if you're being insincere or placating.

this picture
is illegal.



I speak to the public a lot. I get to go to illustrious places like Elko NV. When I went to the Iowa library association conference a while ago, I went to Des Moines Iowa. While I was there I checked out the public library (something we library geeks do). It's lovely, award winning even.

this
picture
breaks
the
rules



The library has all sorts of neat architecture inside, striking colors and neat signage. I enjoyed my time there and wandered around taking photographs.

flickr

Home You Organize Contacts Groups Explore

Des Moines Public Library

ADD NOTE SEND TO GROUP ADD TO SET BLOG THIS ALL SIZES ORDER PRINTS ROTATE EDIT PHOTO DELETE



"Are you taking pictures? Do not take pictures in here." the librarian said as soon as we walked into the library. I felt a little bad, but I took a few photos anyways.

Comments



[Mike McCaffrey](#) pro says:

Umm... aren't you allowed to take photos in public buildings? What reason could they have for you not to take photos?

However once I got inside and started taking pictures [not of people generally] a library worker came up to me and said "Are you taking pictures? Do not take pictures in here" I am a scofflaw and took a few photos anyhow, but basically holstered my camera. I am sure she didn't make the rule, in fact she told me as much. Once I got back home I uploaded a few photos. A few photographers chimed in on Flickr talking about the rights of people to photograph in public places. I decided to write the library, the director of library marketing who I was referred to, a nice note.



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librarian.net

putting the rar in librarian since 1999

leaving des moines

Posted in libraries | Edit | Friday, October 23rd, 2009 | 38 Comments » Trackback

Tags: desmoines, ila, iowa, iowa2009, photographs, photography, policies, policy, publiclibrary



note: new update from Des Moines PL and the architect's office below the fold. Short form: "it would be appropriate to change the policy"

As I wrote to her I also asked her if it would be okay if I reproduced our correspondence, saying that it was totally okay for her to say no. I wrote a few back and forth emails continuing to politely restate my position. Yes I was told to not take photos, no I didn't see a sign saying that I couldn;t, yes I wanted to see the policy, no it wasn't on the website.



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David Chipperfield



A lot of it came down to some previously bad communication between the architect and the library. The architect is sort of a fancy guy. And he didn't want promotional photos taken to show up in someone ELSE'S coffee table book before he could produce his own. I could sort of see why he doesn't like pictures taken... he's a vampire!



And so the story had a bit of a happy ending. The Des Moines public library revisited their photography policy and decided to dial it back a bit. They did restate for the record that “AT NO TIME has the Des Moines Public Library had a NO PHOTOGRAPHY policy” which was fine with me, if not quite true. But we each gave a little and each got a little.

Why can't I use a
cell phone in the
library?



Why don't we allow
 in
the library?



Why can't I leave a
DVD in the book
drop?



Why can't we write
the name of the
movie in the
newspaper?



Why do we have to
be quiet?



Why aren't we
open on Sundays?





- Re-evaluating rules lets you recommit to the ones that you think are truly important
- Having a procedure for re-evaluating rules lets the system self-regulate... somewhat.

● The enforcer != the rulemaker

● No one cares about you

● Don't be afraid to ask why

● Have a (polite) posse

● Choose your battles



most of all

- Assume everyone just came from the dentist. Give everyone a graceful out.
- Don't be in a hurry.





With great power comes great responsibility



"First they ignore you, then they ridicule you, then they fight you, then you win."

thanks!

