

# What's Worth Working For?

John O'Brien has written a valuable guide to re-orientating services\*. Here are some quotes.

## Vision

- 'Vision animates and directs people's action toward a desirable future that is unlikely to happen without effort and learning.'
- 'Expressions of vision arise from careful listening and thoughtful reflection on the experience and interests of the people concerned. Vision energizes by creating tension with current reality; it communicates how the people involved want things to be different.'
- 'A human service organization whose members discover and commit themselves to a common vision has an alternative to bureaucratic control mechanisms. People with a common vision have a sense of direction. They find it easier to face difficult situations, cooperate, deal with conflicts, create innovations, and stick with their work when things get difficult than do people controlled only by hierarchal relationships.'
- 'The attractiveness of having a vision tempts some managers to counterfeit one by imposing a statement through administrative authority. However, there are no shortcuts. Only listening, reflecting, and testing understanding shape and communicate vision.'
- 'Vision of an inclusive community sets direction.'

## Organisational purpose

- 'Organizational purposes identify the distinctive ways a human service organization contributes to building inclusive community by assisting people with severe disabilities to discover and pursue desirable personal futures in ways that support valued experiences. Making progress toward the vision depends on continuous improvement in capacity to manage the problems created by assisting people with severe disabilities to take their place in community life. Clearly defined service accomplishments guide ongoing work on the stream of problems arising as service resources align with people's desires for a positive future.'
- '..... service policy makers and providers who want change in community practices and attitudes encounter the necessity of confronting and changing themselves as their efforts at changing community members become entangled in the constraints of their own system. Many service policy makers and providers experience understandable reluctance to assume purposes which call for so much change.'

## Strategy

- 'Some people think of strategy only as what an organization does planfully, on purpose. We think it's useful to think of strategy more broadly as including both plans and the long range effects of the many decisions that shape key relationships between people who use services, community life, and service resources.'
- 'In many places, .....the human service organization is at the center. Most of its attention is focussed inside: how to get and keep staff, how to process people and papers, how to manage relationships with the larger service system to maintain legitimacy and maximize resources. In theory the organization takes people in, processes them to produce changes, and discharges them cured or retains them.'

The basic strategic tasks change this self absorbed picture. Effective services refocus the people and money available to them on opening more community opportunities to people who might otherwise be excluded.'

## Leadership

- 'Leadership means mobilizing people's resources to make progress on difficult problems.'
- 'Anyone leads when performing the activities that enable people to face and deal with the complex situations that arise when a service organization works to learn how to assist people to make better lives for themselves.'

## Summary

- 'Developing high quality human services for people with severe disabilities demands active engagement in complex, emotionally charged, ambiguous situations. It calls for reallocation of service resources, working outside traditional boundaries, and renegotiation of the service's position in community life. This essential work calls for the motivation arising from a vision of inclusive community, the boundaries set by a clear and realistic sense of organizational purpose, and the focus offered by well defined service accomplishments. It requires effective leadership from service workers, people with disabilities, and their families and friends if all those concerned are to face the difficult problems of creating high quality services and to make progress toward resolving them.'

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\* O'Brien, J., 1990 *What's Worth Working For* Responsive Systems Associates: Lithonia, Georgia.