

Value-based Practice and Strategies in Restorative Justice

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Good morning!

If you're here, you've already heard about RJ values and principles. Chances are you know all about it. Chances are, you could even give this presentation.

So, why is it important for us to talk about this here, as a large group? Why would we gather here to re-hash a topic that, for many of us, is nothing new. In fact, it's foundational to the work we do.

It's the fact that the values and principles are foundational to this work that make it so important for us to come together in this way and, in this collective space, affirm what we believe, what we strive for and MOST IMPORTANTLY set the stage for moving forward together.

I'm going to show a short DVD clip from "Healing River", and thanks to Larry Moore and Cathie Douglas for producing this film....

PLAY CLIP 32:44 – 35:10 (Kay Pranis video clip ---here she notes that she has done exercises around the world with groups asking what their basic values are, and that no matter where she goes or what group she is working with, groups tend to always come up with the very same list)

When Kay talks here about "it's always the very same list"...which values do you think she's talking about? FIRST, I want you to take a moment, and write down one or two values on the YELLOW STICKY NOTE in your folder. Just use ONE sticky note, and write down one or two values that you think Kay is talking about here. One or two of your "favourite" RJ values. (WAIT 30 SECONDS)

Okay, let's hear some of these....(get audience response)

Great. I'd probably list some of those same things. In fact, almost without exceptions, the core-values that emerge include:

Respect

Presentation by Catherine Borgen at "Building Restorative Justice in BC" Conference 2010

Accountability
Empathy
Openness
Curiosity
Humility
Compassion

....and many more

We sometimes make efforts to “distill” these values...what are the TOP values of RJ? This can be a thoughtful and meaningful exercise to engage in as it gets us closer to understanding ourselves and what is important to us. This type of exercise was referred to by the Lower Mainland Group this morning related to the Visioning Exercise they are engaging in.

It’s also pretty safe to say that the values we **don’t** tend to see show up would include domination, shame, chaos etc...which are perhaps values, overtly and covertly, within some systems. Or more positive values that still don’t tend to be associated with RJ—at least not that I’ve heard-- such as efficiency, ambition, hygiene, obedience etc..

Okay. So what if I gave you a few “sample” lists of values, and you can tell me if you’d be in favour of adopting them for your RJ program. What about these:

Integrity, Dedication, Accountability, Caring

(Wait for response, then reveal that this is from **ICBC’s** core “vision and values” statement).

Teamwork, Open Communication, Mutual Support, Mutual Respect

(Wait for response, then reveal that these are straight off the **Walmart’s** corporate website for “what makes us special”)

Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Duty, Integrity, Loyalty and Personal Courage

(Wait for response, then reveal that these are from the **US Military** “the Army ethic which rests on a bedrock of these ‘seven army values’”)

Okay then. So what sets us, as RJ practitioners, advocates and programs, apart? What does it mean to OPERATIONALIZE our values within the RJ movement? Because guess what? Pretty much every movement or philosophy out there has values...and they look kind of like ours! I don’t know about you guys, but I sometimes get all jealous and protective of the RJ values...hey! Those are OURS! But, alas, they are not. We can’t claim them for ourselves, we don’t own them.

Which leads me to ask, then, how do we live out value-based practice and strategies in our programs and in our interactions with those we serve? Because just knowing the values, just writing down the values, doesn't seem to set us apart from Wal-Mart. And I think we are wanting to be known for something else here.

Here again is a dilemma, as it doesn't always help to WRITE DOWN our values, or put them in our strategic plan, or simply to TELL our clients that we have these values. For example: "Our processes are respectful, check. We maintain a safe environment, check. Our agreements ensure fairness and balance, *check*." Indeed, these things are DIFFICULT TO MEASURE!

So how do we ensure a value-based practice—given that it cannot be enforced or prescribed or put on a chart or a checklist?...much as we might like to try.

The only thing I can think to say about this is that WE—individuals and PROGRAMS-- must breathe life into the values. The values DEPEND on US. WE must all become, or strive to become, people and in fact PROGRAMS that embody our values to such a degree that we naturally bring these values into the situations we are part of.

But of course, EMBODYING VALUES is not a destination, and it is not a switch we can just flip on. So a key part of breathing life to the values is a willingness into entering into becoming **reflective practitioners and programs**.

Here is a definition I came across of reflective practitioner (and you can too, if you just type reflective practitioner into Google!):

A 'reflective practitioner' is someone who, at regular intervals, looks back at the work they do, and the work process, and considers how they can improve. They 'reflect' on the work they have done. They are not happy to carry on at the current standard, they want to improve.

Reflective programs then, might read like this:

A 'reflective program' is one which, at regular intervals, looks back at the work they do, and the work process, and considers how they can improve. They 'reflect' on the work they have done. They are not happy to carry on at the current standard, they want to improve.

So, when we are practitioners and programs that live our values, integral to this is that we will ask QUESTIONS of each other and our practice, and continually strive to get there, instead of ever thinking we've arrived there.

This must be an alive conversation that doesn't end with a bunch of check-marks. I would love THEREFORE, to see us, the RJ BC community, become known for our excellence as reflective practitioners and programs, striving toward living out our values. Does anyone else want that too? I'm serious, raise your hand if you want this, I'm trying to get a read on this situation. This

is the connection I want to make. If later someone asks you—hey, what was that presentation about, I hope you will be able say: the connection between living our RJ values, and being reflective practitioners and programs.

I've got an example of how to do this and it might raise a few eyebrows. In my current workplace, which as most of you know, is a provincial government office, I am REQUIRED to report on how I live out my values as defined by the BC Public Service. It's part of something called an EPDP (Employee Performance and Development Plan). Incidentally, I was SHOCKED that I had to do this within government. I had never, for example, asked anything about this while working in community in the RJ context. The reasons for this may be multi-fold, and I'm not going to go into all that now...

Anyway, back to this EPDP. In addition to outlining the tasks and objectives that will shape our workload, we are required to reflect on and GIVE EXAMPLES of how we live out the "values of government"...which are Courage, Accountability, Passion, Teamwork, Service and Curiosity. So, for example, when asked to give an example of how I showed courage I talked about a time that I wore a giant blonde wig when giving a presentation to a room of 90 bureaucrats. True story, and those of you here who know me know it's true. Anyway, the point is, this isn't rocket science to connect our values and our behaviour, but it is useful to take moments of reflection and ask "How DO we live out our values in our context, in our programs?" And for us here today we want to talk about the RJ context.

I need to go into a specific example here. When we applied for the grant to get the funding for this conference, which was for the Department of Justice Canada, Youth Justice Fund...one of the things they wanted to know from us was : HOW IS THIS CONFERENCE GOING TO MAKE THINGS BETTER FOR YOUTH? SPECIFICALLY, HOW WILL PEOPLE AT THIS CONFERENCE ENSURE THAT THEY HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF BALANCED AND PROPORTIONATE OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH?

At first I wondered about the choice of focus. After all, there's all these things we could work on within the field of youth and RJ. Well, not one month later, I received a call from a mother who had gone through a restorative justice process with her son. Without going into all the details for the sake of confidentiality, her son and his friends had been caught in a minor act of vandalism, and they had done this act in a community about 1 hour from theirs. They willingly participated in the RJ process, but this mother was uneasy about the outcome of the agreement. Oh? I said, why is that? Because the people in the circle wanted the boys to do community service and everyone was okay with this. But know one knew how much would be fair. An authority in the group mentioned that they thought 100 hours would be about right, and that the boys should do it in the community within which the offense was committed. All the boys and their families agreed to the conditions, as they felt badly about what happened and were not sure how to say NO. The facilitator apparently kept saying "it's up to all of you." So each boy in that circle committed to 100 hours of community service in a community 1 hour away from their homes. Many of you know that this is way out of proportion. Even the

maximum allowable under the criminal code for Extra Judicial Sanctions is in the realm of about 50 hours, and that's for very serious offenses. Anyway, this mother was distraught, and she was looking for recourse. She was worried that her son would become bitter due to the experience.

This is just an example of one of the ways in which we may not always be "on top of things" when we are living out our values. If BALANCE or FAIRNESS was at all in our list of values, this would be an example where we fall short. And this is not to cast blame, as we ALL fall short in one way or another, and it happens more often than we'd like. The question is, HOW DO WE IMPROVE? HOW do we get CLOSER to living out the values?

I'd like you to look at the value you've written out on your sticky note. Now, on your other sticky note, I'd like you to consider ONE ACTION or BEHAVIOUR you can take that would bring you closer to living out this value more often in the context of your life...preferably in the context of your RJ program, but any context will do. For example, if you wrote down RESPECT, what is an ACTION that you can take that will demonstrate respect? Please take a moment to write this down on your other sticky note. And yes, you will be talking about this with others, so don't choose something you don't want to share about.

Turn to 3 or 4 people around you and talk about what value you chose, and why, and what action you chose, and how you are going to bring this action into your RJ context.

(Allow 10-15 minutes)

It's our actions and our LIVING conversations about the values that truly get us closer to where we want to be. We need to remain in dialogue with one another about what we value and HOW we live these values. I'd like you to turn back to your group now and discuss:

After this conference, when we get back to "real life" HOW are you going to ask your organization to consider incorporating these? How will you start these conversations with your organization/program and do some similar brainstorming so that you truly capture the values that are most dear to you and your program.

(Allow 10-15 minutes)

I'm going to invite you to place your values on the piece of flip chart paper over there so we can keep these ALIVE with us over today and tomorrow, and also invite you to place your VALUE ACTION ITEM on the flip chart as a source of inspiration for us all. Make sure you have it in your own notes too.

Thanks very much, I'm looking forward to spending the next 2 days with you.

(End)