

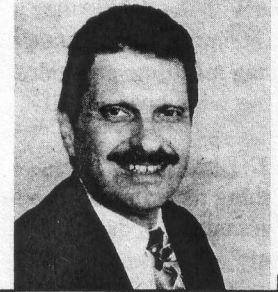
"LIVING IN NEW KINDS OF SITUATIONS"

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TRAINING FOR TODAY

It's All In How You Say It

By Thomas E. Pomeranz, Ed.D.



AN INSTITUTION IS NOT A PLACE, IT'S A STATE OF MIND

Historically, some professionals have characterized an institution only by its physical attributes: concrete block walls, metal beds, terrazzo floors, wide hallways, security screens and so on. Some merely define an institution by size and its degree of separateness from the mainstream of society: That large, cold structure, void of color, symbolized by the presence of a smoke stack and water tower.

As trainers we must not be fooled into accepting this simplistic characterization of an institution. We must proclaim, through our teachings, that an institution is not a place, but a state of mind.

There is great danger in characterizing an institution solely by its physical attributes. The quality of the relationship between those serving and those served is ultimately the key determinant of an environment's degree of "institutionality." It is with this concept before us that we must train our staff to prevent the environments in which we deliver our services from

becoming institutions.

If we fail to maintain our vigilance, it is not only possible but likely that institutional qualities will begin to reveal themselves in even the newest of residences. Thus our training must energize staff to attack the subtleties that give rise to an institution. Our training must not only provide staff with the knowledge of what constitutes an institution, but it must hone their sense of obligation to respond in destroying the demon.

Our job, as trainers, is to proselytize the staff whom we train to own this belief. We are competent and effective as professional trainers only to the extent to which those whom we train are competent and effective in preventing and removing institutional characteristics. Their removal is an imperative because the presence of institutional qualities precludes not only dignity but habilitation as well.

Read on--if the following issues are an inherent component of your training,

congratulations! If they are not, modify your training program and implement with a sense of urgency.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN INSTITUTIONAL STATE OF MIND:

1. Segregating Staff From the People They Serve - Segregation, whether the type motivated by racial prejudice or fueled by the "caretaker" mentality of the institution devalues those we serve and precludes a desirable quality of life.

Bathrooms with signs designating their use exclusively for staff are not unlike the racially segregated bathrooms of the South in years past. I, like you, have heard the myriad of explanations provided to prevent certain bathrooms from being used by those who live in a home, "He smears feces, he urinates on the toilet seat, etc."

Allowing people to utilize any bathroom in their home will quickly energize staff to put in place programs

to assist people in correcting these objectional behaviors.

Though I mention bathrooms as a site of segregation, they are merely a metaphor for the untold practices that separate and differentiate staff from residents.

Train To Achieve Equality (Integration) - Create an environment in which a visitor is unable to discern differences between individuals residing in the environment from those working there. Stress the importance of staff participating as equals in all activities with the people they serve, unless contraindicated. Staff should be instructed, for example, that they are to dine with the people they serve unless the attention and assistance required during mealtime precludes staff from eating with those who live in the home.

2. Limiting Choices - Food, clothing recreational activities, roommates and daily schedules are all firmly under the "control" of staff. Extending choice impairs staff control.

Institutional environments tend to deny individuals opportunities for choice because the choice selected by the individual may require staff to alter rigid procedural practices. Additionally, choice may be denied when the value of the opinion held by the person served is discounted. "He's too retarded to know what color his bedroom should be painted."

Train To Structure Opportunities For Choice - Give the opportunity for expression of choice, regardless of how limited an individual's ability may be.

Provide for a choice of activities, a choice of clothing, even a choice of salad dressing. Each opportunity for the smallest choice is a greater step toward self-independence. Train staff for extending choice by using scenarios and role play.

Explain to staff that choice needs to be provided in the context of a finite set of options. The presentation of finite sets does not impair choice, but rather teaches one how to make choices.

3. Failing To Assure Adequate Privacy - Or worse, no privacy at all.

An institution fails to recognize the sanctity of an individual's privacy. Bathing, toileting, sleeping or visiting with family are not treated as valued aspects of the person's life which warrant protection from intrusion. Quite the opposite. Institutions are structured to expose these activities in the name of assuring protective oversight. Solitude is an unknown.

Train For An Environment That Reveres Privacy - Our staff training efforts with respect to privacy should teach staff *not merely to give individuals privacy, but rather teach them to take it.*

Certainly the training must be focused so that staff understand that it is their responsibility to assure that, at a minimum, people have privacy. The fulfillment of this responsibility is to be realized by instructing people to close doors and pull window shades while dressing.

Giving people privacy is what staff do in nursing homes, *teaching* people to take it is what staff should be expected to do in habilitative residential environments.

Next month's column will continue the discussion of ways to create a non-institutional state of mind.

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