

A Look Ahead: Spiraling Into Control !?!

Excerpts from Jeff Witman's presentation at the SRTS, April, 2009

Wait a minute, isn't it supposed to be "out of " not "into" with this phrase? Read on and I'll explain. My first exposure to the phrase spiraling out of control happened in fourth grade. Our teacher, Mrs. Albert, used the phrase to describe inflation- prices, in 1961, were spiraling out of control! She predicted that in our lifetimes the price of a candy bar would be 50 cents and a gallon of gas would cost a dollar. We thought she was crazy. She wasn't. They're even higher. Things change- prices, people, professions and if we don't consider that they will it's easy to be left behind. While there's no magic formula for coping with the uncertainties of evolving systems and situations the concepts which follow can be useful in ensuring that change will not cause our professional roles and positions to be obsolete. With competence and confidence we can achieve a level of performance which generates recognition of our value and which can allow us to obtain greater control of our destiny in the spiraling changes of our society.

Competence- having the knowledge, skills and abilities to do what we do at a standard that helps our consumers! This involves the challenge of refining ourselves and our programs to reflect best practices. A key component of this- evaluation and reflection- is too often not a part of activities and recreation therapy programs. We need to be open to rigorous review of our personal and program needs for improvement. We need to systematically capture the outcomes of our program offerings in order to improve them. We need to be in touch with others in our profession and to keep up to date with innovations. We need to be open to new service approaches as the needs of our consumers and agencies change.

Confidence- pride based on knowledge, skills and abilities to help consumers, to solve problems, to function as full members of treatment/service teams. If we're comfortable being on the periphery of services that's where we'll stay. This isn't about a false bravado based on hopes, it's grounded in the achievements of our consumers and agencies which we help create. We need to be advocates for the vital and special role that recreation can play in treatment and in quality of life!

Performance- accomplishing things. The high performance team or individual knows where they are going and has a clear plan of how to get there. The TASTE model offers one measure of this. Are you demonstrating high levels of :

Truth- Telling the truth to yourself in order to tell the truth to others. Choices with this concept include assertiveness over passiveness and openness over secretiveness.

Accountability- The ability to choose how you respond to events and the willingness to live with and learn from the results of your choices. This means avoiding blaming others or citing circumstances when interpreting unfavorable outcomes. It also means having specific examples and facts which demonstrate the efficacy (doing what you claim to do) of your services.

Support- Encouraging each other's personal and professional growth, not just for the good of the team, but for the good of each other. Actions include providing others with information, with empathy, and with honest feedback/critique. It also means actually helping them do something at times.

Trust- Trusting yourself and your inner wisdom. Then, trusting that your team members have your best interests at heart. A key choice with this construct- delegating rather than hoarding responsibility.

Energy- Having access to and control over the emotional energy required to respond optimally to life's opportunities. Persistence and passion are the signs of this.

Another model that can help to explain sustained productivity is LEAP. Dynamic performers need to cultivate **L**ove, generate **E**nergy, inspire **A**udacity and provide **P**roof. Specifically leaders need to:

- Find something you care deeply about and connect with colleagues and consumers;
- Keep coming to work day after day without waning in passion or enthusiasm;
- Be bold, courageous and daring- unafraid of change; and
- Do what you say you will do – be the change you want to see in the world.

Recognition- appreciation of the importance of our services at many levels: consumers and their families, the agencies/organizations we work for, and inclusion in the standards and regulations which influence the systems we're part of. At a basic level this is the pat on the back from consumers and colleagues which we all enjoy. It must be more though including formal (laws/regulations) validation that our services are important. In its broadest sense recognition suggests that a critical mass of individuals understand what Recreational Therapy is and why it is important.

Maximizing competence and confidence and optimizing performance and recognition- a tall order, I realize, but one worth striving for to promote enhanced opportunities for our consumers and ourselves. Best wishes to all of you involved with the SRTS as the spiral of your life and career unfolds. May you increasingly find yourself doing what you're meant to do and may our profession maximize its impressive potential.