

## **Title: Values Authenticity And Integrity**

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### **The Importance Of Values When Lived With Integrity**

It is a matter of common sense that the values we hold and remain true to are intertwined with the well-being of ourselves as both individuals and as communities. What we place emphasis and importance on inevitably reflects aspirations and choices for both oneself and others. Should these choices prove astute then we are much benefited by them. For instance, if the worth and value of the lives of the people served by an organization are genuinely respected, then their experience at the hands of the agency will be uplifting. However, if we choose poorly then we may sacrifice much that is good. This question of what constitutes the “good life” has long been of interest to thoughtful people, and we are continually admonished to pay attention to values and to choose wisely. Obviously, by inference, living according to positive values is not as straightforward as we might imagine and thus the surfeit of advice to be careful.

In most ways our common values seem self-evidently a good thing, and we endorse them without hesitation. Few would quarrel, on the surface of it, with values such as peace, justice, mercy, compassion, equity, forgiveness, growth, healing, love, kindness and so forth. Yet as simple and as obvious as these are as goals, they can be immensely difficult to live as a daily matter. Values, once thoroughly and sincerely embraced, become internalised as behavioural ethics and suffuse daily life with their presence, often without our conscious attention. Yet for each of these stated values we also see behaviour that is at a divergence from them, often in the same person or organization. This underlines the problematic nature of values and the challenge they pose for us in both

defining and living them. All human services daily confront circumstances that challenge their values and expose their weaknesses, whether this is recognized or not.

While it may seem an obvious thing to point out that values and their associated behaviour can also be negative such as can be seen in greed, lust for power, selfishness, dominance, indifference, deception and what not. We are often confused by the fact that these sorts of “all too human” behaviours are often carried out under the banner of stated values that actually espouse their opposite. So, expressed values may actually serve as a cloak on reality rather than a guide to it, almost a form of social camouflage as it were. Consequently, the wisdom of sorting out values is in being willing to look beneath the surface of how people and social institutions present themselves. In this respect one ought not underestimate human nature in how values are actually used in reality. More to the point, all human services ought to be regarded as being suffused with all of the expected range of human frailties and potentials.

Positive values, when adopted and lived with some sincerity and precision, are commonly quite beneficial for both individuals and organizations. This is because the values help uphold how people should be treated and how people should behave. For instance, the common value of treating others as one would oneself want to be treated, can lead to a consistency and meticulousness of regard for others that can be quite inspiring, particularly when people at risk of social devaluation are the beneficiaries of such an ethic. This is why we are impressed when we see people and agencies that steadfastly uphold the rights, dignity and interests of socially disadvantaged people, particularly in the face of formidable opposition.

A normal way that people begin to approach the question of values, and the simultaneous possibility of their appropriate and/or distorted use, is to search for a standard of consistency between expressed values and actual behaviour. In doing so, they begin to erect not only a standard of what the values actually mean, but also a standard of fidelity to these values in how individuals and organizations actually behave. In this, the two key questions of whether the actual values being pursued are the right ones, and the question of whether these are lived faithfully, become quite pertinent. Taken together, they make it possible for people to both affirm or select values, as well as discern whether they are upheld in practice.

### **The Common Ways In Which Values Integrity Is Achieved Or Compromised**

The use of poor judgement, corruption and decadence of values is not, of course, a simple matter of “yes” or “no”, as there are seemingly various layers and degrees of personal and organizational fidelity to stated values. Nevertheless, one could see these as constituting several broad polarities of values and ethical integrity, ranging from high conformity to expressed values to considerable inconsistency and unprincipled conduct. It is useful to consider these, as they serve as a useful starting point for reflection and appraisal of the values embodied in the way we live.

- **Hypocrisy Versus Values Scrupulousness**

In regards to this value, we can easily recognize the well-travelled failure that is represented by hypocrisy. In this common human trait we see the possibility that our behaviour is quite different from our stated values. In contrast, when we behave without this lack, we see that individuals and organizations pay a great deal of scrupulous attention to acting in a manner coherent with their stated values, and quickly redress any lapses. For instance, many agencies claim to solely organize their priorities according to the needs of service users, yet they routinely ignore such people in regards to almost all the important decisions affecting service design.

- **Values Conceit And Exaggeration Of Virtue Versus Humility**

This tendency is one in which the person or group is either much too oblivious of their shortcomings in terms of lived virtue, or who are much too full of themselves in terms of their actual accomplishments of exemplary behaviour. Not uncommonly, these persons or groups will be undeservedly arrogant and righteous, as well as being incapable of seeing themselves truthfully. On the other hand, those who are virtuous in this dimension are much more likely to see themselves and their organization in genuinely modest ways, and to be persuaded that they still have along way to go. This is in contrast to those who believe that they have already “arrived” and ought to be admired and emulated for this. One does not have to go to many human service conferences in order to find examples of people and organizations that overstate their good works. On the other hand, it is always refreshing to hear people accurately describe the reality of their shortcomings.

- **Pretence And Posturing Versus “Trueness” To Values**

This failing refers to the kind of insincerity that underlies people and organizations that merely give lip service to values that they know will be readily well received by the naïve, but which they have little intention of embracing. Often this shows itself as being politically correct, “saying all the right things”, seducing people with various symbolic gestures of values solidarity, but doing very little by way of authentic adoption of values. In contrast, people and organizations who are behaving virtuously would be offended by such clear-cut posturing and sham. Such persons and organizations would be quick to distance themselves from empty slogans and symbols, and seek out instances of compelling authenticity. It is common these days for many individuals and organizations to profess their values in the most polished of forms of display, yet oversee conditions of life for the service users affected that do not measure up to these values. Not uncommonly, due to the relative unconsciousness of the persons proclaiming these values, the recognition of this inherent contradiction may elude them. Persons and organizations with greater “trueness” to their values would be much more prone to see themselves critically.

- **Shallow Commitment To Values Versus Preparedness To Pay the Price**

It is one thing to be seen to embrace a value, and another to sacrifice oneself for its realization, and to bear the cost involved. When values get too tough to stay firmly resolved to, people and groups often become quite expedient, and choose the path of least resistance. Honourable people, whose characters we admire, stand in contrast, because they tend to not only espouse values, but organize their lives to uphold them. Such constancy and consistency is rarely without cost or sacrifice, and the adherent recognizes that this must be borne. When people and groups flee from the costs of upholding their values, it is hard to imagine that their integrity can be sustained. For instance, the common uncritical and even obsequious acquiescence of agencies to the demands their funding sources, may belie a deeper failure to risk alienating powerful people, even when the funding requirements contradict the agency's stated values.

- **Words Without Deeds Versus More Emphasis On Deeds Than Words**

As has been recognized again and again in today's world, people are quickly dissatisfied by instances where people or organizations "talk the talk", but do not "walk the walk". In its own way, a refusal to be pinned down on everyday behaviour is a failure to demonstrate an authentic commitment to a value, whilst still claiming credit for honouring it. Naturally, people would see this behaviour as being empty of authenticity. This is in contrast to people and organizations that place proportionately more emphasis on their deeds and, in particular, those deeds that uphold their values claims. In contrast, the example of people and organizations that rarely intentionally betray a promise to service users reveals an actual "lived" acuity of ethical responsibility upholding of many relevant values.

- **Values Avoidance Versus Values Engagement**

This failing occurs when the person or group seeks to evade any discussion of values, and may even engage in the denial that values matter. Naturally, they may also believe that they are "value neutral", "value free", "above values" or simply refuse to believe that values and value judgments are at all relevant to them. In another words, one can never get into values trouble if one can derail values as a legitimate consideration. This can be compared with the instance where the person or organization seeks values accountability, and is willing to engage any questions or concerns that may be present as to their integrity concerning values. They believe that values are a legitimate test of their conduct and recognize that there are values and standards that may differ from their own, and are willing to engage all values challenges on their merits. Often the avoidance of values is achieved by a relentless shifting of discussion to technical matters, financing or politics. It is not that values are not being transacted it is just that their examination for what they are is suppressed or even concealed.

- **Lack Of Courage About Claiming Values Versus A Willingness To Be Defined i.e. Values Courage**

It has already been noted that people or organizations may be risk averse when it comes to bearing the cost. A related but somewhat different failing is the failure of the

person or group to assert its values at a time when matters of great consequence are in play. They may continue to uphold their values in private, but still be unwilling to be on the record, and to take a values stand when this is needed. This may well be the easier route at the time, though the party may not technically acted contrary to their espoused values. In contrast, where a higher standard of integrity is present, it can be expected that such an opting out would be eschewed in favour of a willingness to take a stand if the matter warrants an unambiguous clarity. It is always observed that at times when it is most important that people stand and be counted, many will find the prospect to be intolerable.

### **Values Authenticity In A Service World That Asserts That It “Already Has The Right Values”**

It is very evident to any observer of the modern bureaucratic scene in human services that we live in a time when it has become almost “de riguer” for agencies to conspicuously display and pronounce upon their alleged values. We are awash in proclamations of values and principles, mission statements, codes of belief and conduct, and constantly updated slogans, buzzwords and the like. This relatively recent phenomena of the prominent announcement of apparently normative values excellence, is not limited simply to official agency propaganda; it is unremittingly a part of the speechmaking of all manner of professionals, managers and bureaucrats. It is often true that the speakers do authentically hold and defend such values as they may claim. Nonetheless, the seeming boasting about values would strike people of another generation as being quite unconvincing as well as vulgar.

Not uncommonly, we are subjected to sweeping claims that “we are all here for the (sole) same reason” i.e. to do “good” relative to whomever the organization or system ostensibly serves. All of these proclamations seem intended to reassure us that all of our values criteria have been met by their behaviour.

The listener is asked to believe that these (always positive) values are omnipresent in the organization and serve as the core of all-important decisions. Often as is not, these values are portrayed as coupled to the good hearts and intentions of the many fine people who are associated with the organization. This is not to say that there are not some occasional gestures made to the effect that the organization still has a ways to go. Nevertheless, the general impression one might get is of a wholesome collection of people who are mostly struggling to do the right thing. In some instances, usually at larger conferences in various fields, similar claims are made for the field as a whole...or at least the people in the room.

It is natural to wonder what really lies beneath this surface level of symbolic and verbal posturing, since it is transparently impossible that such triumphs of values coherency and virtue could at all be a fair description of hosts of individuals, organizations or the field itself. An obvious speculation would have to be that such promiscuously overt “piety claiming” must serve another function that is harder to publicly and explicitly acknowledge. In other words, that it is a kind of ritualised

behaviour that serves to strengthen other interests. After all, there may be advantages to seeing oneself as a “centre of excellence”. As preposterous as this assertion may be at the rational level, it may well be quite a reassuring sentiment at a psychic level.

Clearly one of the possibly “un-acknowledgeable” interests these “self-bestowals of virtue” could greatly assist is the legitimising of the industry or exponent itself. This would seem to mean that such efforts are a way to cloak the organization with respectability, and to put to rest the anxiety that anything might be amiss. Thus, the attribution of these values to itself are an attempt to equate the organization’s character to well established moral, or at least civil standards. In other words, the public pretence that the whole enterprise is wholesome, greatly helps reduce the likelihood that the inevitable unseemly aspects of human service practices are actually seen and comprehended. When they do periodically emerge as scandal, it may be all that more important to refurbish the spoiled respectability than to repair the problem substantively.

In doing this, the individual or organization is undoubtedly being reasonably astute, as such comforting blandishments can be quite effective in associating the organization with powerfully evocative images that resonate with the deepest longings of many people for a good or better world. The constant portraying of formal services as invariably “helping people” tends to keep at a distance the rather more disturbing truth that services can just as likely be quite unhelpful or even harmful.

Nevertheless, one has to wonder why we now have a service system that needs to go to such conspicuous lengths in order to shore up its credibility. Surely, if all is well as described, such behaviour would be extreme. Is not such conspicuous self-congratulation and moral posturing in reality a tacit admission of the presence of just these same lacks that the rhetoric tries to counter? Is it not a tacit acknowledgement that at least some of the “real” values of these systems dare not be spoken or admitted? To paraphrase Shakespeare, “methinks they protest too much”.

If such a supposition is correct, then it raises the spectre that human services are not always quite what we long for them to be, and may actually be on occasion something far less virtuous and efficacious than we wish to countenance or even discuss. It is not unusual for agencies in their annual reports to describe their year’s progress in largely flattering terms, even when the year was unambiguously beset by scandal, mismanagement and other disasters. Apparently, at least at the psychic/mythological level, the services can do no harm even when they have actually been harmful. This suggests that something is operative in the psyche of the service world that makes us prefer even transparently false mythology and fables to the actual reality of what transpires. Surely, there is something in this defence that is premised on a premonition of the actual vulnerability of services to the fullest range of common human failings.

It would appear that formal services need to attend not only to the service duties we assign them, but also to the obligation to protect our psychic needs to believe that we are good, and that we are doing good. After all, who wants to hear that services, and by definition our communities, could possibly be, on occasion, catastrophically malignant,

perverse and unjust. Few of us want to be reminded that our prejudices, vested interests, self-deceptions and pretensions are what they really are. It is better it seems to not take these up, as they lead to very uncomfortable insights and obligations. Better to frame things in such a way that we can all be on the winning team, at least at the psychically reassuring level.

It would seem that what is underneath this is not as simple a matter as rhetoric being used only to legitimise the industry and insulate it from criticism. Rather, what is being revealed in the ostentatious display of values boasting is a deep un-admitted insecurity that what we call “community”, “service to others” and “care of the vulnerable” is not quite what we know it ought to be. If we were as sure of ourselves as the “values triumph” vocabulary seems to superficially suggest, then we would have no need to shore up our efforts with reassuring mantras of progress and virtue.

## **Examples Of The Kinds Of Deeply Difficult Values Challenges Embedded In Most Fields Of Modern Human Services**

### **Examples Of Some Preferred Myths Of The Service World**

It is common that often the most perplexing and difficult questions, from a values perspective, arise from the very nature of human services and how they now operate. Were such services to operate as we might wish them to, then many values issues would not arise. However, such an easy road is rarely available. Services are societal in their mandates and role, and thus are a mirror of what is going on in our broader culture. Services are certainly not an insulated realm in which only matters of service to others is allowed to dominate the agenda. Quite to the contrary, services are subject to all sorts of forces that constantly compete for pre-eminence. What follows are just a few examples of common myths about services and their practices that challenge our values and complicate our judgements. They reveal the actual ambiguity of services at a moral and practice level.

- **Services Are Solely Consumer Driven**

Though our rhetoric is replete with assertions that the sole reason for the existence of a given service is meeting the needs of its clientele, the truth is rather different. Services actually function to meet the needs of all sorts of parties that are most certainly not service users. In fact, the needs of other parties may well take priority over their needs and this fact is rarely acknowledged on any official level, yet most people would concede that this is a factual description what actually drives services. These “other parties” are not the least bit mysterious, and can include funders, professional groups, unions, boards of various kinds, particular lobby groups, regulators, bureaucracies and bureaucrats of various kinds, industrial and trade interests, consultants, academics, advocates and so on. Many of these parties do indeed want what is best for service users,

but this fact alone cannot be taken as evidence that needs other than those of service users are not at work in shaping services.

- **Services Are Undertaken With Nobility And Altruism**

While most human service workers are regularly confronted by people who suggest that they must be very special and dedicated people to undertake such work as an ongoing matter, the reality is much different. There are a plethora of motives and wants at work in those involved in the human services that could hardly be depicted as solely saintly or self-sacrificing. On the contrary, the modern human services have their share of venal, petty, distorting and less admirable motives and agendas. These are rarely the final word on services, as there are also noble sentiments and behaviour at work. Nevertheless, it would be quite misleading to presume such a flattering self-description is a complete depiction of the true character of services. It is not that services cannot be noble, uplifting and inspiring. They most certainly can. Rather, such features ought not be assumed to be normative. Moreover, too ready claims of nobility and altruism ought to be greeted with a measure of scepticism.

- **People's Lives Are (Always) Improved Due To Their Contact With Services**

It is often presumed from the word "service" that services are always an advantage to those who utilize them. Rarely, is the word "disservice" highlighted in the descriptions of service. Nevertheless, a more factual portrayal of services would have to include not only that many services have considerable deficiencies, but also that many services may be at times be harmful and injurious. In fact, scandals are a constant presence in services, even in settings that were once seen as entirely virtuous and credible. Those who would suggest that any service is immune to such hazards would be in a very precarious position, given the many precedents to the contrary. Saying this in no way diminishes that services can be beneficial, it simply asserts that it is not as automatic an assumption as our rhetoric seems to imply. A more probable, and thus likely to be realistic self-portrayal of service organizations, is one in which they admit to both strengths and weaknesses.

- **No One Other Than Clients Benefits From Services**

It is one of our preferred illusions that services exist only to benefit clients and that no other group or interest would ever benefit from the way the service operates. In asserting this the claim is made that there are no other interests operative in any definitive way, and perhaps more importantly, that these interests would never be more important than those of the client. Such a claim ought never be made as it goes against both social and economic realism. Nevertheless, since its authority arises not from the facts of the matter, but rather from our most sincere wishes, it has the power to obliterate good sense. Hence, one would automatically give greater credence to spokespeople who clearly acknowledge the presence, potency and even priority of other interests. Such other

interests are normally not without a measure of validity and merit. What is critical is that these are not given inappropriate priority.

- **We All (And Always) Do The Right Thing**

It would be very unlikely that any given human being, quite apart from an organization could be expected to be so perfect and virtuous that they would never do anything that was harmful. Even when harm does take place there would certainly be a tendency to explain it away as being anomalous, unintended and exceptional as these characterization sit much better with our preferred view of ourselves. However, given the actual track record of services, it would be more realistic to portray services and the people associated with them, in a more humanly balanced way, given that harm does occur that is patterned rather than anomalous, that is done with intent and occurs more routinely than we often admit. This is not meant to suggest that these conditions are all that exists. Rather, it means that these conditions with enough regularity that we should be wise enough to be doubtful when claims are made to the contrary. Otherwise, we would need to embrace the view that it is only within service environments that the human condition is suspended thereby making human services an unheard of zone of moral triumph unheard of in the history of humanity. Quite a claim indeed!

### **Unconscious And Conscious Societal Mandates And Their Embodiment In Service Design And Practices**

As has already been indicated earlier, human services reflect the wishes, needs and concerns of all sorts of interests in society. In pointing this out, it is important to see that the “will” of services may not be quite as “consumer centred” as our words often suggest. In most cases, services reflect a fusion of needs and interests of which only some are unmistakably those of service recipients. This can be seen in highlighting just some of the negative realities that services must contend with. For instance;

- Residential placement of people into care may be driven less by the needs of those placed, and more by the needs of those who want them placed
- Service models may more reflect the preferences of those who supply them than the needs of those who use them
- Consumer “choice” may well come down to selecting from what is on offer, more than what the consumer might actually want or need

- Services may exist simply to effect the removal from society of people that communities do not want or like
- Services may have their greatest benefit in the employment, careers and incomes they create and sustain
- Services may help conceal people from society whom the society is uncomfortable being with or having to relate to
- Services may act as a means by which problems of social justice get converted into seemingly clinical questions of welfare, medicine or bureaucratic form
- Poverty and racism may be hidden and entrenched by how services function

Such an incomplete portrayal of services does not capture the true overall moral ambiguity at work, as it does not include the more positive societal mandates that are also at work in services and that compete with the rather darker and less easily acknowledged mandates. These would include any number of aspirations such as;

- The relief of distress
- The protection of the innocent
- The assistance of the dependent
- The development of the disadvantaged
- The correcting of inequities
- The dispensation of justice
- Etc

Nevertheless, modern human services and the people that must seek to make them beholden to our most precious of values, quite clearly have their work cut out for them. In reality, these are questions for all of us to struggle with. This is even more the case to the extent to which we believe that the fate of our fellow human beings is our concern. Thus, we find ourselves very much needing to both define the values that are at stake and weigh whether we do in fact uphold these. Were the matter less ambiguous then perhaps this task would be easier. However, given the constantly shifting character of the world of services, we must continually return to the same relentless and grounding questions of values that provide us with our moorings. Each person and each life affected by services stands as a test of what we really value when “push comes to shove”.

## **The Characteristics Of Modern Services And The Need For Values Strategies That Can Meet Their Challenges**

Our current values language and habits are obviously not the humble self-effacing personal and largely private behaviours advocated in past times, wherein it was urged that the left hand ought not to know what the right hand was doing when it came to acts of mercy, charity and service. That ethic has passed from prominence, and in its place has rapidly come an era where service has now become substantially dislodged from its original moorings as a commandment from the Divine as to the care and keeping of the body and souls of our brothers and sisters.

In its place has come a public, secular, professionalized, hierarchically managed, bureaucratized, industrialised, commercialised, regulated and technocratic “system” of services of a kind that apparently has never before existed or been managed successfully at any point in known human history. This unprecedented cultural configuration had neither been anticipated or planned for, and has arisen so fast that most of its features and challenges have found us largely unprepared and unready. It is not surprising that we unconsciously intuit a measure of collective uncertainty as to how to now proceed with this new reality, and that we remain deeply unconvinced of success in serving others through such an unprecedented social instrument as the modern human service system.

Our ambivalence and insecurity about services both drives us to the authority of potentially transcendent values, and yet restrains us when we try to imagine how these might apply in a secular, pluralistic and deeply sceptical public life. It is no wonder that so many expressions of values are so wishful, and yet so uncommittal at the same time. The very ardency with which we insist that our values are in good order, is belied in the ongoing scepticism, wariness and frank disbelief so many people privately and publicly have about the truth of official claims of services being value driven.

What should not be lost sight of in all of this vacillation about values is that the majority of people are not at all in any doubt that we need strong and positive values, more than ever, to guide and constrain how we behave in the context of these modern human service systems. Underneath all of the apparent confusion, complaint and uncertainty about values, is often a genuine hunger for there to be a guiding ethos for services that genuinely corresponds to a betterment in the lives of people served, as well as a measure of recognition and appreciation for the people who would help make this possible.

It is only reasonable that this longing be seen as a plea for values authenticity and integrity in how services actually behave, and a rejection of the many ways in which values are debased in their use to cover up the inevitable failings of formal services. It also constitutes a kind of psychic recognition that we have not yet mastered what it takes to have positive values actually prevail in shaping the true personality of modern formal services and service systems. Nevertheless, it is a tribute to the spirit of our times that, even in our seemingly jaded era, we still are at work trying to make human behaviour and

social institutions worthy of our enduring sense that human beings have both great good and potential, and should not be left to languish in conditions that oppress them. Yet, paradoxically, when we ask our services to make this potential real we all too often find that we are lacking.

### **The Practical Possibility Of Values Authenticity And Integrity In An Imperfect Service System**

Much of the disenchantment with formal services, as well as the intensity of assertions that our values and behaviour are, or ought to be, in good order, is undoubtedly a function of various forms of utopian idealism that would insist on a perfection in human and societal conduct that could never be realized with anything short of saintly figures en masse. Such an assemblage of near perfect human beings is not imminent in any case, and so thought must be given to what human beings are and have been capable of by way of integrity throughout most of our history. In this sense, a kind of enduring standard of commonly achieved integrity that existed prior to the present era, and thus might provide a basis for historical continuity and realism about human nature.

It also requires that it be accepted as a “given” that people have demonstrated integrity and virtue in prior instances where they have had to contend “fallen” social institutions. In other words, that it be recognized that personal integrity may well be achievable even in organizations that are deeply flawed. This is not meant to suggest that organizations cannot still strive to be coherent with their values, and achieve a measure of success in the task. Rather, it is meant to place the integrity of specific persons as being more fundamental and foundational in what organizations can eventually achieve. In this regard it is important to recognize that;

- People and organizations are always mutable to some degree, and can be made, under favourable conditions subject to a measure of intentional change guided by positive values
- A degree of personal integrity is not unheard of, and can be enlisted in making organizations and services better
- Where virtue exists in one person it provides hope and examples to others, especially for the sincere seeker of virtue
- The discernment, adoption and faithful embrace of positive values can be deliberately encouraged and supported
- Moral action and leadership may arise at any time to confront conditions that oppress and degrade human beings and liberate them to their potential

What these points illustrate is that there is always present a degree of potential for people and services to move in the direction of positive values and a measure of integrity in doing so. This does not mean that such an undertaking is either easy or likely. Such

leadership and commitment cannot be expected to be available just because it is needed. Rather, we are dependent, as we always have been throughout history, on people who are willing to ask what is right and good, and to seek ways to pursue the directions this may illuminate. However, should these sorts of people apply themselves to the task of making services faithful to positive values, then much can be accomplished by way of the more virtuous and beneficial hopes we have for the lives of people.