
Leadership in Child Welfare

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The importance of leadership

- Public policy literature
- Discussions of child welfare reform

It's become obvious that organizations managed through regulatory frameworks don't work well without strong leadership.

When organizations ignore or minimize the importance of staff beliefs and values, there are likely to be implementation problems.

At best, implementation is likely to be lackadaisical; at worst, staff will undermine or sabotage the policy or program.

One characteristic of leaders is
the ability to motivate others,
and to inspire confidence.

How do leaders acquire influence?

- Truth telling
- Passion
- Idealism
- Opportunities for Action

**Truth-telling
wakes people up.**

Truth-telling up and down
the chain of command is a
barometer of the health of an
organization.

Passion is the raw energy of leadership; without passion, difficult obstacles cannot be overcome.

Idealism purifies passion;
passion without idealism is
likely to be destructive.

Leaders act;
and good leaders
motivate others to act.

An organization which depends on the charisma of a single individual is extremely vulnerable.

Effective leadership
motivates others
to take initiative.

Freeing up energy/space for initiative is a major child welfare challenge; child welfare managers are sometimes ambivalent about whether they want staff to take initiative.

Creativity
is a source of free energy.

Where is initiative essential and invaluable?

- Community collaboration
- Unit and office cohesion

Is there a recipe for
successful community
collaboration?

One goal of effective leadership should be to mobilize everyone in the organization on behalf of the agency mission; to this end, it is helpful, but not always essential, to have the support of top management.

Self empowerment can occur
without management support
as long as managers don't
punish initiative and
creativity.

A second goal of effective leadership should be to create a culture of learning and professional development.

Why is it difficult to grow
learning organizations in the
rocky soil of regulatory
frameworks?

Learning organizations make
a consistent effort to become
better at achieving their
mission.

Learning organizations encourage professional development

- Link to education & training
- Importance of professional self-identification
- Leaders encourage the development of subordinate leaders
- Importance, once again, of truth-telling

A third goal of effective leaders is
to increase the ratio of rewards to
punishments.

False flattery is like
a devalued coinage.

To summarize:

- Mobilize staff & community initiative and creativity on behalf of agency mission, that is child safety, permanency, well being.
- Create and nurture a learning organization and professional development of staff.
- Maximize rewards but also draw the line; some behavior will not be tolerated.

Positive Leadership (General Edward Meyer)

(From Odysseus in America by Jonathan Shay)

- Make it safe to tell the truth.
- Support subordinate leader's professional growth.
- Trust them and work hard to assure success.
- Assign missions without prescribing the means to accomplish them.
- Build competence to assess situations and take initiative to develop adaptive solutions.
- Mentor rather than intimidate subordinate leaders.

Positive Leadership (General Edward Meyer)

- Require subordinate leaders to study their profession.
- Take responsibility for setting mission priorities, not assigning every task as “highest priority”.
- Listen to feedback on budget and resources; support realistic time management.
- Support self-maintenance, rather than defeat it.

“The leadership culture that both protects troops from psychological injury and makes them militarily effective is well understood: It is the constellation of leadership culture described above.”

~ Odysseus in America by Jonathan Shay

“The core reason for truth telling is the maintenance of trust, both up and down the chain of command.”

~ Odysseus in America by Jonathan Shay

“Leadership truthfulness at all levels means eliminating perverse incentives to look good at the expense of being good.”

~ Odysseus in America by Jonathan Shay

“To trust a leader, the troops need to feel that the leader is his or her ‘own person’.”

~ Odysseus in America by Jonathan Shay

Spirited self-respect, critical obedience (not blind obedience), truth-telling, and integrity have direct emotional impact. They are the source of the power to command.

~ Odysseus in America by Jonathan Shay

“Use power in accordance with ‘what’s right’. Nothing destroys trust in the chain of command so quickly as a leader’s exploitation of institutional power to coerce a private gain from subordinates, be it sexual, financial, or careerist.”

~ Odysseus in America by Jonathan Shay

“Everyone watches the trustworthiness of those who wield power above them; and this ‘fish bowl factor’ is far-reaching.”

~ Odysseus in America by Jonathan Shay

The Social Gradient in Health

(From Michael Marmot's The Status Syndrome)

- “Wherever we are in the social hierarchy, our health is likely to be better than those below us and worse than those above us.”
- “Autonomy – how much control you have over your life – and the opportunities you have for full social engagement and participation are crucial for health, well being, and longevity.”
- “Degrees of control and participation underlie the status syndrome.”

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- The Whitehall studies found a relationship between experiences of justice at work and the incidence of heart disease.
 - In this study, justice was defined as supervisors considering employee viewpoints, sharing information regarding decision-making, and treating individuals fairly, and in a truthful manner.

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- The rate of heart disease was 30% lower for men who perceived a high level of justice at work vs. men who perceived an intermediate or low level of justice.
 - Job strain, i.e., high work demands and low job control is a major health risk for employees.
 - Effort - rewards imbalance is another major source of stress.

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- A high level of perceived justice was associated with lower job strain and a more favorable match between efforts and rewards.

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- Autonomy and social participation are so important for health that their lack leads to a deterioration in health.
 - This is a perspective that should inform the functioning of organizations and social work practice with vulnerable groups.

Developments in Child Welfare

- Child welfare systems are evolving towards an expanding concern with child well being.
- Child well being includes education, mental health, social development, preparation for adulthood, and placement stability.

Developments in Child Welfare

- Out-of-home care should be a therapeutic experience, not an experience during which children are further harmed physically or emotionally.

Developments in Child Welfare

- The demand for evidence-based mental health services will lead to a demand for evidence-based child welfare practice and evidence-based organizational practice.
- Evidence-based practice standards can be – and should be – applied to child welfare practice. Are policies and programs evidence-based?

Developments in Child Welfare

- Do child welfare organizations function in a way that facilitates the achievement of agency goals?
- The pendulum in child welfare values is swinging back to a renewed concern with engagement, family support, and strengths-based practice.

Developments in Child Welfare

- A second generation of family support models are being developed; and differential response systems are changing the investigative paradigm.
- Reinvestment strategies are necessary for successful reform.

Developments in Child Welfare

- Child welfare systems have yet to confront chronic neglect; Washington is about to become a cutting-edge state.
- Coaching is being added to training programs; training programs are being required to prove that they work.

Developments in Child Welfare

- CD, MH, and DV liaisons are being added to child welfare agencies.
- Housing services are being added to some urban programs.
- Caseloads are being reduced.
- States are beginning to think about the care, feeding, and development of the workforce.