

CHALKVILLE YOUTH
TRAINING CENTER
CHALKVILLE, ALABAMA
U.S.A.

THERAPY FOR JUVENILES

by

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ATTACHMENT

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It usually happens that the staff of an institution are treated separately from the residents. Staff are a prerogative of professional supervisors who manage them and, in the case where I work, juvenile delinquents are the concern of those members of the agency staff who are treatment-oriented; the social workers, counsellors, teachers. With this approach of separation, the juvenile or the client gets immediate attention while the staff often falls out of focus.

You might ask "Is it vice versa?" "Does the institution exist for the convenience of staff?" Now my problem, as the Superintendent of the Chalkville campus, is that I feel that some balance is long overdue in our approach to each other. For us in the field of corrections, I feel there is apparently a need for a new outlook. Perhaps, just perhaps, the notion of staff and client are not separate topics. Perhaps staff and clients are really one and the same thing. At least, they are similar in more respects than they are different. At the very least, they are both entitled to consideration as human beings with different roles to play in the functioning of a social system which provides employment for one and rehabilitation for the other.

Another way of stating the implication which I sense may exist in this dilemma, is to ask the question "Does the fact of adjudication, and the behaviour which preceded it, really make a person fundamentally different?" Is the juvenile delinquent or the convict different from another who happens to have exhibited different behaviour and was thus selected for employment at a correctional institution? Are there really two sets of creatures? We, the staff, and they, them versus us. One species, them, migrating from some different planet who are hostile and aggressive and the other, us, coming from this marvellous Earth where peace always reigns supreme along with our acceptable socialisation so ingrained as to be immutable? Are staff and the juveniles that I work with so different that the things which influenced development in the one never affected the development of the other?

More personally, am I, Eileen Slack, in some fundamental way different from Susan G or Edward T or any of the other 70 or so teenagers over whom I happen to be placed in local parentis by some court judge in some remote area of Alabama? Or is it just conceivable that the employed staff, our clients, these young men and women, the teen's families, my family, my husband and his family, are all similar human beings, differing from each other quantitatively, in certain unimportant dimensions, but still equal in regard to our human rights, our fundamental pursuits, our feelings inside, the validity of our aspirations and our needs - needs for affection and for conscience - confidence-building experiences. Let's not forget that we all have a need, perhaps even a rage for an unjust social system whose inequities are often magnified in the microcosm of a prison or a reformatory.

Thus, my sympathies lie with the philosophy of fundamental sameness between staff and residents, rather than with the notion of difference. Not only do I believe in the fundamental sameness of staff and the juveniles with whom I work, but I intend to have this really permeate the entire program at Chalkville. In other words, I find myself working very hard to try to achieve an attitude in the institution that although individuals may play different roles, the role is not the person. That person can change social roles. This change of roles is what I mean by rehabilitation of the client. Indeed, I find myself working quite hard to try to prevent the so-called development of a two-close society in which the young people in out care are viewed as "them" and the staff are seen as "us" and never the twain shall swithh.

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For example, at the Chalkville campus, I am attempting to achieve the same ratio of racial, minority group, and sexual ratio in the staff as found in the students. I believe it is absolutely vital to proper staff and juvenile development that minority groups be properly represented on staff. This is especially true in a correctional institution because the staff must be able to personify potential future options for the residents. Identification is the key here. The teenager must be able to identify with the staff and vice versa - no immutable difference, no unreachable gap, no "us" versus "them". There should be nothing that says to the resident "You can never do as I do, or You can never realise the same joys or experiences or responsibilities as I. You can never be what I am."

That goes for being a Superintendent also. I believe we must work to create a world in which the rehabilitated former inmate has as much or greater chance of some day becoming a Superintendent as anyone else. That option must not be closed to the residents. How tragic it is to place teenage youth into the socially deprived world of a correctional institution, there to be exposed to adult staff members whom they are encouraged and even forced to admire and to identify with, only to have it sooner or later proved to them that they can never make it the way the admired counsellor or teacher has made it. They are given the ingrained idea that there is some fundamental difference between "us" and "them". That no matter how hard the resident tries, she or he will never get the college or masters degree, never join that middle class, never become a professional or a para-professional or think about it, never even become a volunteer or be allowed to help rehabilitate other people.

Yet there exists this breach between the residents and the staff. Residents are one thing; they have different needs, usually for discipline, whereas staff, the professionals, are another species entirely, needing scholarship and fellowship and continuing education. Sometimes you get the idea that the one can never become the other. Students can never become staff, no matter how hard they try. And, of course, heaven forbid, staff never commit crimes. Staff never become adjudicated. Staff never become clients. Or do they? Of course, they do. Correctional workers are just as susceptible to breaching the law as other people. It's just not talked about, that's all.

But I want to talk about it. I want to mention these two unmentionable points.

(1) Staff can become clients of a correctional institution and so they must be encouraged not to engage in behaviours which tend to violate the law. (2) Clients can become staff of a correctional institution and so they must be encouraged to engage in behaviours which enable them to exercise that option.

Let me stretch out the two points. Firstly, staff can become clients. I consider one of the most important duties of a Superintendent or any other responsible official, in the correctional system, is to help assist staff with training and by examples, to avoid breaking the law. For instance, several of our institutions across the United States have been investigated in depth recently by State Attorney Generals on allegations of nepotism, stealing, and a half-dozen other scandals. These institutions emerged from the investigations smelling badly, reeking with reports about poor management, social injustice, brutality, child neglect, physical abuse.

Often the Superintendent or warden was forced to resign under threat of dismissal. It has been an ugly scene.

My point is that we are all (from the President of the United States of America down to the most underpaid of institutional help) possible candidates for adjudication. This fact should not be hidden from the client or from the resident, but should be brought out into the open in corrections work. Crime is not the prerogative of the lower class or of immigrants or of minorities. Crimes are often committed by institutional employees, especially if they are improperly supervised, or if they do not belong to the social groups which help them reinforce their anti-criminal values. Staff members must watch their steps, especially staff who are prone to transgress the law in regards to violating the civil rights of clients. More and more staff are being caught and punished for this. It is becoming a kind of legal

occupational hazard of our business. So I would stress that in these times, one of the most important curriculum for staff (as well as clients) is to try to stay out of trouble with the law.

The second point is that clients can become staff. To deny it is to deny that true rehabilitation is possible. If we believe that rehabilitation is possible and a delinquent can become an ex-delinquent, why can't the ex-delinquent become a staff member? There is not an inmate in a correctional institution anywhere in the country whose mind this question has not crossed. The better the institution, the more likely the inmate is to consider this option.

In fact, I would like to propose the following statement. Whenever an institution or an institutionalised youngster gets the idea that he or she could never become a staff member of that institution, he or she ceases to be receptive to any help provided. Now it is very important to notice that I did not imply that all adjudicated people want to become correctional workers when they grow up. I don't even want to imply that many do among the youths with whom I work. What I meant is that in order for a young adult to be able to receive help from the staff of an institution, the option of becoming a staff member must not be closed to him or to her. They must feel that they could be staff if they worked hard enough, stayed in school, negotiated with anthropologists.

The theory on which I operate is called Triad Theory.¹ It is based on the philosophy of fundamental sameness. Triad theory is very simple in principle. A triad in music is a chord of three notes whereas a dyad is a chord of two notes. Triad theory simply states that in rehabilitation work, two-part harmony is not quite rich enough; three-part harmony is needed.

Much of the time, we try to do treatment within the context of the two-role social situation. There are the treaters and the treated. An example of the two-role situations or dyads are teacher-student, counsellor-counsee, doctor-patient, worker-client. In each of these dyads, there is a group of people who need help - they have the problem, and another group of people - the doctors, teachers, social workers, who do not have a problem. Slack's Triad Theory states that such dyads do not produce rehabilitation. Instead, rehabilitation is produced in three-role social situations, called Triads.

In Triad, one group has the problem, another group used to have the problem but now does not, they have solved the problem, and a third group never had the problem. The way Slack's theory works is to accomplish staff development and juvenile development by bringing together clients, staff and rehabilitated clients in a group. It is the rehabilitated client who is usually the missing third of the Triad chord, especially in an institution. And yet, without ex-clients, without the presence of individuals who can personify the solution to the problem, without individuals who can bridge the gap between the staff and client, the client-staff dyad will remain static and ineffective.

With the Triad there are three social roles. Role 1, the delinquent, the person with the problem. Role 2, the ex-delinquent, the person who used to have the problem but now does not. Role 3, the non-delinquent, the people who have never had this problem - staff, volunteers, parents, friends, people from the business community. All three roles must be strengthened.

You be in to strengthen them by first seeing which role is the weakest. At our campus, the weakest role is Role 2, the ex-delinquent. When I went to Chalkville three years ago, it was literally considered a miracle to be talking to an ex-delinquent student. But a miracle is not a social role. I had to increase the numbers of ex-delinquents and give recognition to them and to those who were further along the path of rehabilitation. My staff and I set up a pre-release cottage on the campus to strengthen the role of rehabilitation on the campus.

1. Triad Theory and Therapy were developed by Charles Slack, and reported in Psychology Today, 1975.