

The Nature of Responsibility

A One Day Seminar for Prison Staff
Wednesday 10th July 1996,
Global Co-operation House, London

The format for the morning session of the seminar was facilitated small groups. By way of introduction to the topic groups brainstormed the personal qualities to demonstrate responsibility and the type of personality that might support that. Some examples are shared here.

Qualities:

Discrimination; courage; determination; accountability; perseverance; knowledgeable; ability to respond; experienced; integrity; humility; true to aim.

Personality:

Mature; balanced; benevolent; leader; without prejudice; cool, calm and collected.

Some focus questions based around four aspects of responsibility were provided to stimulate discussions. Some of the key discussion points are provided in italics.

Devolving Responsibility:

How do I give responsibility to others?

When we devolve responsibility to others does that mean it is no longer our concern?

- *Attitude is important, both to the individual and to the task. It should not be that I am 'getting rid' of a task to somebody else. See the task as a part of the whole and therefore each task is important, see the individual as part of the team and therefore of value.*
- *Am I giving orders (do this!) with expectation or am I making requests (can you do this?) with flexibility.*
- *The provision of clear instruction and adequate background information will allow 'troubleshooting' to take place at the level of the person entrusted.*

Self:

How do I respond to responsibility whether imposed or offered?

What do I perceive as my primary responsibility?

What personal values enable me to fulfil my responsibilities?

- *An important awareness to hold when responsibility is imposed is that at the time of the directive, I mayn't be able to see the whole picture. With time, I may begin to see it from a wider perspective, when it will become more acceptable. I can question the decision by exploring the motives and thinking but to become reactive means that I myself close down*

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my thinking and I create barriers between myself and the one who is devolving responsibility.

- *My primary responsibilities need to recognize the input of both the clock and the compass. The clock represents commitments, appointments, schedules, deadlines and activities. The compass represents my values, vision, principles, conscience, and purpose.*
- *Delegation will reduce our own workload and allow us to focus on those tasks that specifically require my attention. Delegation is not to create free time but to create quality time.*
- *My input to those responsibilities that I devolve will reduce but I should remain available.*
- *There are three important elements: Correct motivation, clear 3-D communication; and Personal availability. With these elements, then if something goes wrong I can retain my self respect in the knowledge that I have done all that was asked of me. There is a tendency when blame is leveled against someone, to try to reduce the impact or to cover up. If I fulfil these three requirements accurately, then I will be in a position to remain fully supportive to finding a solution.*

Relationships:

How do we fulfil our responsibility of care in an enforced multi-ethnic and multi-religious setting?

To what extent am I responsible for the personal decisions of others?

- *There is the responsibility that comes with the role; to lock up, to escort, to search, and there is the responsibility of my interpersonal relationships: to remain attentive, considerate and respectful.*
- *One needs to maintain a dual-awareness: an awareness of the need to see each person as an individual, with their own background, needs, and cultural and religious considerations balanced with the need to see beyond the surface to a recognition of that which is spiritual within each one; the inherent goodness.*
- *I cannot be held responsible for the decisions of others but I can perhaps take a share of the responsibility for creating context, background, and atmosphere in which another's decisions are made.*
- *The idea of 'self-fulfilling prophecy' would suggest that if I have a limited vision of another person that it will contribute to a limited achievement by that person, while an unlimited, supportive vision will enable the other to grow towards their potential – the Pygmalion Principle.*

Organisation:

In what way am I responsible to contribute to the stability of the prison under the challenge/threat of organisational change?

How do I fulfil my responsibility in helping individuals meet Key Performance Indicators when there is so much organisational change?

- *When an organization is undergoing change then there will be a great deal of uncertainty and individuals maybe protecting their current roles and responsibilities. There are a number of experiences that will be seen and lessons to be learned from which I can contribute to an increased sense of stability within the prison.*

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- *As people will probably feel uncomfortable then ensure that they are properly informed and aware of impending changes before they happen.*
- *People will assume that they have to give up something so by clarifying what there is to gain from the impending change.*
- *New ways of working won't become attractive until the old ways become too uncomfortable. Therefore, make sure that people realise that the old ways are no longer going to work and why.*
- *During a change process, people may feel very isolated even though the change is throughout the organisation and everyone is going through it. Take time to build trust and help people readjust their way of thinking to the new experience.*
- *Because everyone is at different levels of preparedness for change, be sensitive to the underlying feelings of others. Listen to those who are resistant as there are probably good reasons for their response.*
- *Because people can only take so much, involve people early in the change process and let them set their own limits.*
- *Don't try to change people. With the right information and inspiration, they will change themselves.*
- *By working with the consideration that these lessons engender, I create an atmosphere of 'can do' rather than 'Why should I?' This kind of support energises and enables others.*

Participants were invited to write down their main insight, from the discussion, in one sentence. This became the focus for the afternoon session during which time was taken for developing a personal Action Plan.

PARTICIPANTS' PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

I must realise that each person is a unique individual with an intrinsic wish to love and be loved. However the inherent characteristics of ones makeup, the way in which those characteristics are trained and nurtured, and the role models followed, make my responsibilities towards them sometimes difficult to fulfil with the honesty, justice, fairness and patience they deserve.

To develop the ability to respond, in every second of my life, with a sense of peace and purpose for the benefit of the world.

To have an understanding of other people, of life itself, and to use this knowledge and experience to assist with an understanding of one's self.

We have to deal with and accept others. However good our intentions, it's not for us to seek to change them. All we can do is develop our own, inner resources for coping with what or who we perceive to be the problem.

My primary responsibility is to myself, so being an example which others will recognise, value and wish to follow.

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Being in part responsible for the education and development of young inmates, I want to be able to marry my caring views and abilities to the aims of the prison in an effective and objective manner.

Responsibility is the manifestation of my personal commitment to my prescribed duties. In a broader sense, it is the concept of being true to myself.

Our responsibility is to show love to prisoners, helping them to develop self-esteem, which in turn develops in them a sense of responsibility, first to themselves and then to others.

“Think not of the harvest - only the sowing of the proper seeds.” My responsibility is just to be me and deal with things as me.

There must be greater recognition of the positive roles we play and the levels of responsibility we each have in order to fulfil/achieve our goals.

Responsibility is the ability to respond. I should be the embodiment of the abilities to respond, so carrying out my duties successfully and humanly.

I am comfortable with the considerable responsibility for different areas that I hold. I need to address the expectation I have of the performance of those who have higher levels of responsibility, as this leads to considerable frustration for myself.

Value people for themselves and not their behaviour. Be CONSISTENT.

My responsibility is to be able to:

- deliver quality service to the organisation and inmates using personal/professional experience, within the limit of resources available;
- help to decrease re-offending rate among inmates;
- keep prison and education institution as useful organisations in the rehabilitation process.

The evaluation of my personal conflicts within both my personal and working environment and to prioritise my commitments of the responsibilities I have to alleviate such conflicts therefore presenting a better time management of the responsibilities held.

To be responsible is to have a sense of inner values, from which we can prioritise.

Its my responsibility to remember the importance of taking time out to think about my different responsibilities and then prioritising them, on a regular basis. Why am I doing what I'm doing?

There is a need to review the value base of our lives periodically and ask

- 1) how close are our values now to those we thought we had?
- 2) what changed them?
- 3) should they change again?
- 4) how can our values best assist us to achieve the goals in life we set for ourselves?