A TIME TO SPEAK ...

A TIME TO SPEAK (cont. from pg. 1) is not to be mistaken for a goal setting activity, as the focus here is on the means rather than the ends or outcome, not to say that the two are not related and will have impact upon the other. The strategy could include making staff personnel aware of the time to go through a value identification and value prioritization process. After generating a value statement it is important to allow sufficient time for discussion of implications and determine level of staff commitment.

Last year I went through this process with a staff of about 20 people. The activity and discussion session took about 4 to 5 hours of staff time and resulted in a list of 12 essential or important values of the agency. These values were then printed and distributed to all staff as well as other agencies and personnel on campus. It also seemed important that our clientele should know these priorities. For example, one value statement made appropriate campus and community to provide an environment promoting an emphasis on growth of ourselves and clients. To do this, one staff pointed out. we must be willing to recognize the strengths of clients and not reinforce the illness model which tends to emphasize what is wrong with them.

To act on values once identified involves some willingness to take risks. As an agency we espoused a desire to actively seek ways to support human rights and intervene in a positive environment for human dignity. As a counseling service it is fairly easy to do this on an individual level, but less typical for such a group to take public stands. Two examples come to mind. One involved issuing a statement of concern about the behavior of a fraternity that was creating an environment that directly led to a date rape situation. It seemed important to share our concern that this behavior not be tolerated and that sanctions be made through appropriate campus authorities. Similarly, an off-campus drinking establishment received complaints of discrimination and harassment against certain student minority groups. While off-campus and supposedly out of our domain, it still was deemed important to directly support the complaining students and to exert pressure on the offending private ownership to change their ways. One student affairs staff intervention resulted in a commitment by the employees of the establishment to go through an employee workshop on cross-cultural relationships.

Our list of values included a wide range of function areas from the way we act with each other (discuss openly our differences and disagreements) to the manner of response to the needs of constituents (actually assess client needs and alter service to make timely responses). Without further elaboration on the detail of the value statements suffice it to say that these value documents could easily have served as a "conscience" for the agency by constantly reminding us to review activity in regards to our original priorities and preferences. Of course, we may choose to modify these in the future.

In summary, the time is right, and may even be imperative to create a more ethical climate on campus. The present situation on most campuses portrays a sense of anomie, a lack of purpose or commitment to move toward higher levels of civilization in this increasingly complex world, as there are many symptoms of narrow and self-centered interests. Perhaps, this phenomenon is in stark contrast to the recent ferment on the university campuses in China where the students are provoking an outward statement toward change. But where does one start? How do we create a campus environment with a higher level of conscience or even begin to move to a perspective that values the diversity of world view? Paradoxically, it begins within oneself, moves to the neighborhood, creates a region of integrity, and spreads eventually to the globe. I am reminded of the life of Ghandi who started in personal meditation and simple service and even at his height of influence was communicator through the direct contact and example with those around him. An important first step may be for each of us in student affairs to intentionally examine the values behind the way we act and live as individuals, but also through our collective responses as units and divisions on our own campus.

References:


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