

A PROPOSAL
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A HUMAN RELATIONS TRAINING PROGRAM
FOR A STAFF
IN A SCHOOL FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED

Submitted By

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This is an education program, a way of working with people that supports their self respect and humanity while encouraging their personal-growth and development. This is a human relations program, one that is developed by specialists knowledgeable in education, intergroup study and human relations as well as in organizational theory and research. For Willowbrook, these are the areas of expertise needed to bear on problems interfering with its delivery system as an institution for the care, protection and training of the mentally retarded.

Such a charge requires the integration of social science methodology with management and administrative system analysis. The quality of relationships producing the service, the quality of the work environment afforded by Willowbrook and the ways improvements can be made are the guidelines for this program.

In personnel terms, it is recognized that the supervisors are white, middle aged, Staten Island residents, by and large, who are middle-class oriented. The attendant force is composed of an overwhelming majority of black, Puerto Rican, young males who appear militantly lower-class and anti-authority (particularly if the supervisor level is matriarchal).

Willowbrook and its 5,000 employees is a microcosm of American society. It is facing the need for continuous education in a rapidly changing age. Here, American citizens are testing their life chances. Help given them in making personal evaluations, and in increasing their options by good work habits, by learning human relations understandings and skills, and by improving the quality of their service, is an institutional imperative. This analysis is a rational, educational approach with the democratic values of society in the balance. Another course in this setting results in management abdicating to the most militant, aggressive, emotional element present in an aggregate of low-income exploited minority workers. It is incumbent on the institution to look at its provisions for self understanding, citizenship experiences, human relations learnings, and

career development on the part of its staff. The educational program presented here validates this challenge.

In the context of a service organization, Willowbrook is plagued with the problems of today. Social problems of ghetto living and suburban thinking come in on the hoof as labor-management problems. Absenteeism, lateness, frictions among employees and between attendants and their supervisors add to the back-breaking work entailed in physical care.

Alienation is felt by those who see themselves in dead-end jobs and those who are convinced that they are being passed over for promotion. They dismiss the fact that they are unable to pass qualifying examinations. These employees are at odds with the personnel office and spread disillusionment among others, accusing superiors of racism, personal favoritism, and referring to others in better positions as battlefield promotions (those who received recognition without the necessary examination scores).

Color is important at Willowbrook, and yet the eye-ball test can be misleading in reading the social landscape; there is antagonism among those whose coping techniques, political strategies and ideologies differ even though their color is the same. But across black-white or brown-white lines, there may be real mistrust and psychological sabotage. White superiors are said to quail at the accusation of prejudice or racism and to contend that grievances have undue leverage if they are aimed by black at white. White supervisors feel inadequate and impotent and afraid of reprisals from their black subordinates. They bemoan and bewail their plight, saying that they are belittled and berated. In their own defense they readily admit that their own promotions were based on good work on the job and not on their sensitivity and skill in human relations.

Willowbrook is a community that needs understanding, empathy and help. An education program that will zero in on handling intergroup conflict and not dissipate energy or time in placing blame would be relevant in bringing about constructive change.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The program proposal advanced here has five features:

- (1) It provides for the development of a leadership corps for the instruction and maintenance of a human relations program.
- (2) It bases its content, procedures, and actions on research data.
- (3) Its methodology is based on humanitarianism--a way of working which will influence positively the social climate of Willowbrook.
- (4) It states performance objectives:
 - ...institutional management
 - ...personal growth and leadership skills
 - ...development of common goals and work standards
 - ...getting the job done--care, protection and training of the mentally retarded.
- (5) It provides for assessment of program effectiveness through product evaluation.

The Development of a Leadership Corps

The supervisors of ward services are prime movers of operations at Willowbrook. Their sentiments toward those under their supervision, their spirit and commitment to their role, and their over-all attitude regarding the worthiness of the institution is critical. It is recognized that these 25-30 supervisors are strategic to the acceptance of an educational program. Their confidence and enlistment will be sought first.

Supervisors will be the first members of the Leadership Corps. They will be asked to identify one of their attendants with whom they could team for teaching purposes. After establishing this couple as an educational pair, they will be asked to choose another person to augment their leadership appeal. Supervisors or attendants will belong to this status group only if they choose; each will be invited to participate. This triad will be the basic inservice education training unit.

In sequence then, supervisors will be the first group to be recognized and to have their importance established. They will be recruited to work closely with the consultant staff in designing the introductory part of the training program which will identify interested attendants. They will be given help in developing the criteria for selecting the attendant each will ask to pair with him. This criteria-building experience will be an opportunity for real human relations and even race relations education with a purpose: the selection of a colleague with whom to do a retraining job. Significant learning experiences will be provided for the pair to help them grow in understanding and mutual appreciation. Together and with help, they will face the task of making a wise choice of the third member of their team.

These triads will be the on-site staff. They will work with consultants in designing the interview schedule questionnaires, survey procedures, or whatever this group can come up with that will meaningfully involve other employees. The

approach to be used is not one of talk-talk, but rather hard data--their own responses will be the basis of talking or reporting to a particular group.

All triads together will be the Leadership Corps. They will be trained in the content, understanding and sensitivities of human relations. They will be taught in such a manner as to become the teachers of other groups.

The Leadership Corps (approximately 75-90 persons) is composed of triads assigned to the task of working with or teaching other groups. Their groups will be known as Self-Help Teams. Here is where the learnings, sensitivities and skills get communicated. The size of these Self-Help Teams will be determined by specific conditions and/or the Leadership Corps. These teams are the target groups of the educational program.

As directors of learning, the triads will learn to jointly plan with their team and to base their approach on finding out what the problems are. If this team establishes a supportive milieu, each participant can be helped to find out who he is, what is important to him, how people react to him and why, what his unique strengths are, and how to use them personally and as a problem solver. The content of the training of these teams will be their problems and the human relations experiences that will help them jettison their stereotypes.

The design has four obvious advantages:

- (1) The triads learn not as the target group but as the trainers of others--the Self Help Team. This is a status assignment.
- (2) The Self-Help Teams are taught by people they know and who do their kind of work rather than by outside experts. This is upgrading and updating from the inside.
- (3) As a Leadership Corps, they will be responsible for the discovery and development of other leaders, thereby increasing their number. Learning and taking initiative in intervening and resolving human relations problems becomes the responsibility of a growing number of able persons.
- (4) As a Leadership Corps, their job is one of continuous education; this group can handle, in ways unique to Willowbrook, problems that may arise from external pressures or internal conditions. This organization maintains and continues the gains and the instruction beyond the involvement of the consultant staff.

The Leadership Corps is the hub of the educational program. They will be the researchers designing the collection of data, interpreting it and giving the feedback to those it concerns. They will be the ones answering the hard-nosed question, "So what?"

This program grows out of the human strengths, logistics and arrangement of the institution. It is not designed at the University and imposed from on high. The expertise from relevant disciplines is utilized through the new learnings of the on-site staff of Willowbrook. They are the carriers, the change agents. They help determine the daily logistics, procedures, methods and pacing of the educational program. This group will be alerted to an array of resources--speakers, consultants, films or film forums, articles, records, tapes, special demonstrations, simulations, case studies, use of response sheets, and the like. They will be presented with different ways of teaming learners for growth and development. Included in their planning will be orientation programs and creative ways of inducting new employees for the continuous education of the entire establishment.

This is a comprehensive educational program. The content and activities are to be determined through involvement of those strategic to the success of the program and through the diagnosis of the current situation made by the Leadership Corps. Although much of the program will be determined by the uniqueness of Willowbrook, the consultant staff will bring the experience of having worked in many different institutions and being schooled in the disciplines of social science theory, educational methodology, policy planning and administration, and particularly in the conflict areas of intergroup and inter-racial tensions.

Data-based Strategy of Change

Here the skills and insights of the Leadership Corps will be used in data collection. The survey made will not be divorced from the day-to-day operations. On the contrary, by interviewing their fellow workers, the Leadership Corps will be doing two things: (1) involving those who can make a difference, and (2) looking at problems of the institution in a systematic way. This approach to research supports the development of the team concept which comes from the Office of the Director and is already part of the operating philosophy of Willowbrook.

Hard data and its interpretation by the Leadership Corps and the consultant staff will be the basis of the educational program. Survey questions to be probed will be designed in consultation with the Leadership Corps. These will include a review of performance and of feelings buffeting such performance, whether they are actual, perceived, or expectations of others across work categories. Pressure points or conflict-prone situations will be discovered and probed.

The stating of questions and the employing of procedures is to be indigenous to Willowbrook. Also, there are many creative approaches available for the collection of data beside the paper and pencil method. In this age of technology, the Leadership Corps will be encouraged to devise provocative ways of obtaining information.

Data collection is the first phase of the comprehensive training and restructuring program being proposed. This necessary first step is to identify personnel resources and promising practices as well as tension and friction areas. This approach is not a one-sided attack on the negative only, but is to be presented in such a way as to encourage an expression of personal investment and commitment to Willowbrook.

Responses to inquiry and the findings coming from interaction in regard to data collection will determine the content and activities of the human relations program. The areas of discussion and further investigation, plus the strategies of change to be explored, will be by-products of this research effort.

This should identify individuals in the different categories of operations who, if engaged sensitively and strategically, could upgrade expectations or standards and influence performance positively.

In summary, data will be handled in such a manner that better human relations will accompany and follow in the wake of its collection. This is an essential part of the data-based strategy of change. The goodwill and confidence built through this approach will foster communication across differences. It is essential to the development of this educational program that all participants are seen as contributors and that no group or category of employment is scapegoated as the villain or the only one in need of growth and improvement. All will be invoked in "speaking for the record" and all will have an opportunity to be called on as "the ones who are making a difference."

The content, procedures and actions of the education program are dependent on this process of data collection. This real mechanism as well as simulated skill development procedures will be part of the training program. But all content, sensitivities, understandings and skill training used in the education program will be directed to the end of utilizing the uniqueness of Willowbrook and bringing about changed behavior in the day-to-day operations of Willowbrook.

A Way of Working

This is not a public relations approach designed to sell a package or a staff of consultants. It is not based on a formal proposal of a job to be done by outsiders and a report to be given as the only evidence of having been on location. To the contrary, a way of working is described.

Rather than lecturing on good human relations and how people should be worked with if they are to be self-respecting individuals, responsible citizens, and committed to the humanitarian goals of the institution, they will be worked with toward these ends. Thus, the design of the program is one of action rather than talk. Every encounter will be a demonstration of building esteem, releasing responsibility, and nurturing humaneness.

Consultant staff personnel will be selected on the basis of personifying these qualities in their own lives and professional relationships. As they work on a one-to-one basis or with large groups, they will demonstrate effective and sensitive human relations. How they handle differences, strive for consensus, extract the positives out of conflict situations and are able to hear others will establish them not only as academic authorities in the area but more importantly, as practitioners in the field. This selection underscores the action philosophy of this program--produce!

The guidelines monitoring the program are:

- (1) It presents problem-solving approaches now
- (2) Its activities are not isolated little human relations exercises, but a way of working
- (3) It has cumulative value that will influence positively the social climate of Willowbrook.

As a consequence, the program will move from:

- (1) diagnosis on a broad and attention-getting scale, to
- (2) data interpretation involving leadership training, to
- (3) Self-Help Teams.

As stated earlier, the supervisors will initiate and maintain this process through the formation of the Leadership Corps. This progression is consistent with the practice of growth and development through significant involvement. Everyone is a participant, an authority on his way of life and his position in the organization. His inputs are the realities which determine a relevant program for the institution. Everyone is a contributing member. By starting with each individual's expertise and realm of knowledge and responsibility, the stage is set for his recognition and admission of the expertise and authority of outside consultants and inside administrators and supervisors. This stance helps him to see himself as a learner. The integrated educational program proposed is built on this philosophy of authority.

In summary, the working philosophy of the program is a belief in the importance of developing indigenous leadership at all levels of the staff, across lines of difference. Through action programs the authority of one's competence may be recognized and appreciated for its contribution to the process, regardless of the status of the possessor of that authority.

Performance Objectives

It is important that the educational problems of human relations be defined commonly by participants if they are to understand this kind of education and its delivery system. Nevertheless, to make more concrete the emerging program that is suggested by the development of a Leadership Corps, the data-based strategy and a particular way of working, performance objectives are stated here. Leadership persons participating in this program will acquire and teach the following behaviors:

In regard to institutional management in the context of good human relationships those selected for leadership positions must:

- (1) Demonstrate an understanding of retardation and what is involved in training beyond the misconceptions and folklore of a layman
- (2) Develop new concepts of organization compatible with the realities of Willowbrook and make even more functional its commitment to good human relations and teamwork in giving service
- (3) Perfect ways to overcome the disfunction of racial tensions, worker insubordination (resentment of authority), and negative institutionalization
- (4) Explore and evaluate new ways of delegating authority and responsibility to foster organizational health
- (5) Place unusual emphasis on accountability and the means to achieve genuine performance in the job that involves physical care
- (6) Make of Willowbrook an institution marked by the ethos of humaneness

In regard to personal growth and leadership skills those selected must:

- (1) Possess and practice the unique human relations understandings and skills essential to working across lines of difference in an institution for the mentally retarded
- (2) Sense Willowbrook's tolerance limits for change or reform within the institution and learn how to personally help in bringing this about with the slightest disequilibrium
- (3) Intervene to interpret external and internal pressures for reform in response to how much change the institution can support
- (4) Temper the pace of change with humaneness and be sensitive to the purpose of the organization--care, protection and training of the mentally retarded

- (5) Accumulate insights and understandings of the different value systems and ways of life contributing to the diversity of Willowbrook, and particularly those from the cultures of the ghetto
- (6) Bring about genuine, productive participatory mechanisms for the handling of grievances and improvements
- (7) Achieve open institutional communication while maintaining institutional integrity and respect for the rights and responsibilities of all those with a stake in the enterprise

In regard to development of common objectives and work standards, those selected as leaders must:

- (1) Know substantively the issues in each arena of goal formation, i.e. for different age groups, socio-economic levels, racial groups, and how these conditions conspire to define a way of life. An example for Willowbrook may be the working mother who is black, who is young but divorced and who spends four hours a day on public transportation to and from work. What are her goals? How can the work situation at Willowbrook help satisfy her needs?
- (2) Understand the process of formation of objectives in the pluralistic professional, service-job and client community of Willowbrook
- (3) Acquire the capacity to engage these disparate communities of interest in goal definitions and work standards that will facilitate the giving of service at Willowbrook
- (4) Deal with the prejudices, biases, tensions and misunderstandings inherent in reconciling personal objectives and standards with the strenuous requirements of the job of working with the mentally retarded

In regard to getting the job done--care, protection and training of the mentally retarded--the leaders must:

- (1) Develop a viable human relations program from diagnosis, through interpretation and dissemination to operations
- (2) Check and perfect a strong institutional follow-through in regard to goals and work standards emphasizing a system of recognition and rewards
- (3) Harmonize perspectives which attendants and professionals hold regarding the tasks to be done
- (4) Balance attention between job standards and the working conditions or means of getting the job done.

- (5) Learn to solicit and use the most competent counsel available about making changes which improve the service delivered
- (6) Develop commonly understood means of accountability including the measureable products of this educational program

Product Evaluation

This educational program proposes changes in intergroup and interracial attitudes through changes in behavior. The aforementioned performance objectives state such desirable changes. Priorities and possible deletions or expansions will be determined by the participants themselves. Significant decisions about the means of measurement--paper/pencil tests, pre-post testing, panel of objective evaluators, computerized data from questionnaires, comparative tally of grievances in the human relations area, or others--will be made by the Leadership Corps.

There is flexibility in this program, and it is designed to be sensitive to the input and needs expressed by the personnel of the institution. An overview of the first phase is reported here. This report speaks to the necessary first steps in building cooperatively a comprehensive program of inservice education in human relations. It is important that this particular program-development process be adequately monitored and recorded. Descriptive data are important if this human relations program is to serve as a model in similar institutions. The design of this program involves a critical assessment and restructuring of traditional preparation programs which have conventionally been at worst a parade of speakers or talks and at best a research study documenting how bad things are and supporting a plea for increased appropriations. Whether this happens or not, a very complete historical record of the process must be maintained in order to analyze conditions contributing to or hindering the program's development.

Is an educational program able to transform the social climate of an institution? There are very few analyses of institutions or their programs in these terms. One of the best is reported in The Life and Death of a Mental Hospital. The experience at Willowbrook should be chronicled, good or bad, success or failure.

Recommendation

This proposal should be given consideration with the present circumstances and needs at Willowbrook as the focal condition. It contains within it educational means of maximizing the humanitarian philosophy of the institution and of making effective use of modern management by objectives.