

Our Continuing Quest: The Search for Excellence

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If there is a holy grail in human services it is this: How does an organization make the best use of all of its resources (human, material, financial and public), however limited they might be, to provide the best services to the communities it serves? Family Services of Western Pennsylvania believes that if it is to continue the success of its long history, it must continue to search for the answer to that question. This article is meant to report on that quest.

In 1982 Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman published *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*. In their book, the authors studied companies recognized for their excellence. As a result, they were able to identify a number of basic principles that were common to all. Perhaps the most important was a well-defined set of **values**. They wrote, "Let us suppose that we were asked for one all-purpose bit of advice . . . one truth that we were able to distill from the excellent companies . . . We might be tempted to reply, "Figure out your value system."

Companies known for their excellence have well-defined sets of values shared by all staff, regardless of position or level. Organizational values guide the process of working toward a mission and a vision. They serve as principles that help us focus choices among personal, professional, and political actions. Values serve as guiding principles in the life of a person, company, group or organization.

For the past year a workgroup representing all parts of FSWP participated in a facilitated consensus building workgroup charged with identifying treatment values in which they believed.

When searching for excellence in service, consumers ought to look for signs of well-defined values. A person seeking human services ought to be able to study a service provider's values to determine if they are a "good fit." The values ought to suggest the kind of services *that the consumer is seeking*. As a case in point, the following value statements developed by the workgroup at FSWP suggest what can be expected by a potential consumer who seeks services in one of our offices:

Empowering consumers. *We believe in the capacity of consumers to take responsibility for identifying goals, and managing change. We respect their abilities, instill hope, recognize and build on strengths, and focus on and affirm accomplishment.*

Honoring consumers' stories. *We treat each person as a unique individual with his or her own strengths. We value consumer input during the treatment process, and listen to learn each person's unique story.*

Partnering with consumers. *We are committed to partnering with consumers, family members, other systems, providers, professionals, community resources,*

and individuals to create a common culture that supports consumer-driven change. We facilitate the development of natural support systems and community awareness that support consumers' goals.

Respecting stages of change. *We respect consumers' readiness and their time frame to change. We set consumer-sized goals and expect setbacks as part of the process of change. Regardless of who consumers are (individuals, families, schools, communities, corporations) the change process focuses on the steps of engagement in the process, readiness for change, choosing goals, achieving goals, and maintaining goals.*

Supporting consumer problem solving. *We respect consumers' choices and facilitate their problem solving through looking at options, understanding and accepting the benefits and consequences of change, and identifying steps to achieving goals.*

Facilitating Change. *We encourage and motivate consumers to take responsibility for achieving the goals they select. We communicate openly and honestly, validate and affirm their efforts, and celebrate victories. We educate and teach skills. We are tolerant and patient. We bring humor to our consumers. We are committed to support, support, and support again our consumers' efforts to change.*

The leadership of FSWP easily could have defined a set of support and treatment values for the staff. However, the purpose of this quest was to identify the values that staff and leadership already believed in and to clarify these shared values in order that we might use them to guide our professional activities. It was agreed that this shared endeavor would be much more fruitful.

At the same time, we recognize that values clarification is a continuing process – and that much more work needs to be done. FSWP needs feedback from consumers as to whether these values reflect the kinds of services they want and will benefit from. This feedback will help us insure that our values remain alive and part of our continuing work.

Many factors contribute to quality services. How strongly the people in an organization believe in and faithfully carry out their shared values may have the largest impact on the question of whether we successfully carry out our stated mission, that of “*fostering the capacities and skills in families and individuals to direct their own lives and create a productive, caring community.*”