

Thinking on Things Letter

An indispensable letter that's better than a bagel with lox, onions, capers, cream cheese and an expensive latte. Yup !!!!

Hello Loyal Readers

Hello friends of The Levy Launch. It's December, 2017 and it's time for an installment of this mighty letter to fire off neuronal signals in your mighty cerebral cortex.

I hope you're good these days—optimistic and with lots of meaning and purpose in your life. Remember – you're in charge of your wonderful life and are exercising your self-determination to lead a purposeful life that's providing you with genuine and enduring happiness. If you're one of my students in any of the senior centers, you know how to achieve enduring, genuine happiness. Just keep attending class so we can hook you up to that mighty IV of cultural literacy. Yup – all of my older adult students are so culturally literate and wonderful critical thinkers. I'm so impressed with all of you – and please continue attending class so we can learn together.

I'm not sure everyone knows I've been teaching at Pasadena City College the past couple of years. It's been enjoyable teaching Introductory Psychology and Social Psychology. I am still teaching Biopsychology, Intro. to Psychology and Lifespan/Developmental Psychology at the nonprofit school in Whittier called Southern California University of Health Sciences. Finally – 2018 will make 26 years of teaching for University of Redlands -- and that's what I call job stability. I'm getting my psychic needs met with this gig – and don't ask me what psychic means. It's some unique, fundamental need that's got to be satisfied for me these days. That's it – and I'm not going to disclose what other needs I have that must be met. Thx now.

Good news for Carmelitos

As many of you know, I've been volunteering at a low income housing community operated by the city of Los Angeles called Carmelitos in Long Beach. I no longer volunteer here and spent two and a half years with the residents. One of the projects included inspiring the residents to write. So -- the residents wrote poetry and short stories which culminated in an anthology we published titled: "Journey of Love, Hope and Compassion" You can read about the book on Amazon.

The Founders Report

We're all good at Founders House of Hope. A few residents are working at Founders Hut (the on-site store) and they're working on their recovery program. We purchased a few laptops, bikes and a few other things for residents working hard on achieving their recovery goals.

A week ago I took three new residents to Cerritos College to enroll and begin taking courses in the Spring and Fall of 2018. I'm so impressed with the how motivated these three residents are to earn their degrees after transferring to a four year college. Presently – we've got two residents attending Cerritos College. I just need to brag about our folks in recovery. Finally --- I need to brag about a resident named Cecile Mermelstein who self-published her book of poetry titled "The Ironic Truth" Cecile spent a year writing her poetry and I told her if she could write 80 poems, we'd self-publish her own book of poetry. Well – you know what happened next and we're all so proud of Cecile. You can read about her book of poetry on Amazon.

Here is the synopsis of her book she asked me to write:

In this collection of poetry, the author uses irony to "tickle the mind" and to remind the reader that contradictions in life are inescapable and function as a reminder of how precarious and unpredictable life is. Mystery and the unanticipated events that emerge in our lives are teachable moments and according to the author "fate governs life." For the author, irony represents deliberate contrariness. Reading this poetry will remind the reader of life's twists and turns. The poetic form used in this book of poetry is rhyme, in addition to incorporating mythological characters such as dragons, mermaids, centaurs and unicorns to have the reader dive deep into a world of magical realism. In the end, the reader will truly appreciate how the evocative themes and images expressed in the poetry captures the essential meaning of life.

Where I'm teaching these days:

University of Redlands
Southern California Univ of Health Sciences
Cerritos College
Pasadena City College

Cerritos Senior Center on Monday from 3:00 – 5:00
Norwalk Senior Center on Friday from 9:00 - 11:00 and Thursday from 3:00 – 5:00
La Mirada Activity Center on Friday from 2:00 – 4:00

What Does Compassionate Policing of the Mentally Ill Mean?

By Elijah Levy, Ph.D.



The character traits of a police officer require emotional stability, incorruptibility and being strong of mind and body. In addition, good judgment, social justice, integrity, resourcefulness and the capacity for empathy and compassion are required. Officers are conferred power and entrusted to use it to perform their work, which is invariably dangerous given they are first responders. Unless officers have the capacity to treat individuals with respect and dignity, they may act outside the parameters of the law. In sum, every action of a police officer has implications for every moment of their shift, and in the lives of the public. Finally, police officers are the heroic because their actions achieve moral outcomes.

Who is the mentally ill individual the officer is encountering? It's likely this individual has been traumatized and experienced countless devaluing interactions in his/her life. Being victim to pervasive devaluation and stigmatization psychologically incapacitates the mentally ill individual and causes him/her to abandon hope; and without hope one cannot appreciate the possibility of meaningful living. The mentally ill individual is ultimately disempowered and unable to exercise effective self-determination while homeless and perhaps psychotic. This ultimate vulnerability is analogous to a sort of social death – being victim to the elements due to a diminished capacity to exercise effective decision making. Schizophrenia is a cruel, debilitating thought disorder that attacks one's perceptual systems-- leaving one incapacitated, vulnerable and unable to exercise effective decision making to ensure he/she is safe in the dark, dangerous alleys and underground of our cities.

To enact the concept of compassionate policing of the mentally requires police officers be sufficiently trained to interact with these individuals in respectful and dignified ways that achieve desired outcomes. If unnecessary or unreasonable force is used with an individual perceived to be mentally ill, the potential for injury or more tragic outcomes increases. We know that officers are trained to control and give instructions to their subjects to ensure the safety of the officer and subject. In encounters other than with a mentally ill subject, this procedure will more likely achieve desired outcomes. We also know that the mentally ill are not more prone to violence than anyone in the general population. It is estimated that the mentally ill account for 3-5% of the violence in society. Undoubtedly, a myth is perpetuated that the mentally ill are dangerous and violent. The reality is that the mentally ill are often too disorganized and lack the means and resources to commit crimes. The myth is sustained because some people believe that strange people with unusual mannerisms, delusions and weird ideas revealed by their symptoms are dangerous. In the end – the otherness we perceive in the severely mentally ill become a threat to our safety and as a result, the mentally ill are the most severely stigmatized human beings. The self-esteem and self-concept of the severely mentally ill continuously erode; depriving the individual of dignity, respect and the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to society. Unless officers understand and appreciate how interacting with a mentally ill individual requires a different set of communication skills, the potential for escalating force increases significantly. A psychotic, homeless Schizophrenic may be responding to a voice advising him/her the officer is actually a devil disguised as a police officer, and to not respond to their instructions. In this instance, a sufficiently trained officer should recognize that respecting the mentally ill individual's space, and reassuring him/her that he/she is not a devil could diffuse a potential use of force incident. Unless the officer appreciates that his/her mentally ill subject is terrified of him/her, and that this accounts for their defiant attitude to not sit on the curb and cross their legs, he/she may escalate the encounter which will invariably lead to a use of force. The use of force may leave the subject or officer injured.

Thus, training for officers, who are not mental health professionals, provides a practical guide to increase their knowledge and skills to arrive at desired results when encountering the mentally ill. In an ideal world, training officers on mental illness will reduce stigma, devaluation and will divert the mentally ill from incarceration to appropriate treatment facilities. Based on our experience over the last six years of training we have conducted for law enforcement, officers sincerely wish to honor their code of ethics by showing compassion for the mentally ill and as much as possible, direct them to appropriate services or treatment.

Founders is a Training/Rotation Site for Students

Recently, I negotiated a partnership with Biola University to have their RN students complete a mental health rotation at Founders. We're thankful to have two nursing students come every Wednesday to spend four hours with us as part of their mental health educational requirement. In addition, I will be a preceptor to Physician Assistant students completing their behavioral medicine rotation at Founders beginning in January of 2018. These are students from the school I teach at in Whittier: Southern California University of Health Sciences. The residents truly enjoy meeting these students and supporting their academic program.

Thinking About Work

By Elijah Levy, Ph.D.

Should our work be more to us than just a paycheck? What's wrong if work is just a paycheck to us? Work is an indispensable activity for defining our sense of self. However, work alone does not pull for or engage our total self. It represents one dimension of our multiple identities from which we draw self-esteem. Interestingly, work will influence how others think of you. It is more than just an instrument enabling us to live. The view of work as instrumental is a traditional American view, a consumerist perspective of work which may or may not fulfill our yearning for meaning and purpose in life.

One could define work as an activity performed for economic security and sustenance. In this way, work is conceived as instrumental and a means to an end. In contrast, responding to a calling also represents work—but it is an activity carrying deeper, inherent value for the individual. In this condition of employment, the individual sees clearly how performing their dignified work contributes to enhancing the lives of others or connecting to the larger community. Americans want to work and we have a peculiar curiosity about what each of us does for work. We believe we should work, even if we don't need the money. Our belief that work, in part defines who we are has its origins in Protestantism, and is defined as the Protestant Ethic which asserts that work is virtuous, we have a duty to work and for some, it may represent a calling. The individual who works benefits by gaining self-worth.

Work Alienation

Work alienation is likely to occur when an employee experiences less control over the process and function of their job. Further, their job seems overly routinized and simplistic. One could describe their job as meaningless and feeling isolated. The inability of an employee to connect what he/she does to the successful performance of the organization can result in meaninglessness. Such an employee may also feel isolated and a lack of purpose in their work. Studs Terkel (1974, 557-558) describes the following blue collar worker's expression of his dissatisfying job:

After forty years of workin' at the steel mill, I am just a number. I think I've been a pretty good worker. That job was just right for me. I had a minimum amount of education and a job using a micrometer and just a steel tape and your eyes—that's a job that was just made for me... Bob (his son) worked in the mill a few months during a school vacation. He said, "I don't know how you done it all these years. I could never do it." I said, "I been tellin' you all your life never get into that mill."

Connectedness

For some, work needs to provide deeper meaning so that one understands how their job connects to the big picture; how what they do makes a difference in the lives of others. It can express our deepest yearnings for validation and we want to know that the individual receiving your service appreciates you.

The Search for Meaningful, Sacred Work

Ideally--- what should drive work? Perhaps it needs to be charged by spirit; by something that ultimately deepens and enriches our lives; that allows us to connect the work we do to the larger picture. Our needs for validation and feeling worthwhile can derive from the work we do when others acknowledge that our work (relationships with others) has made a difference in their lives. William James said "I will act as if what I do makes a difference." Remember, you want to make meaningful contributions to the world—and by clarifying the values that drive your life, the more often you'll see a connection to how your work contributes to the satisfaction and pleasure of others. I think sacred work is something you truly value—it's work that pulls for the best in you; something that is intrinsically motivating for you and it's work that is valued for itself. If one feels that his/her work truly pulls for their knowledge, talents and assets; and they are passionate about their work— then he/she can assert that it's real, true work. Passion comes from deep inside of us—it's charged by spirit and it intrinsically drives us to perform at our highest levels. Since childhood, our socialization process taught us we needed to be something; to become something as life unfolded—to become a nurse, plumber, lawyer, teacher, bus driver, firefighter, pilot, mechanic. Also, do you think that we're socialized to "have" rather than "be"? If being informs our actions, and defines our self-concept as a great mother, father, plumber, recruiter, lawyer, student—then we're likely to become self-assured and feel the connection to what we've become and what we are with others; we are a great sibling, plumber, mother to my kids because I operate in my role as a mother exceptionally well—I draw self-esteem from my functioning as a mother in this role. On the flip side--- to "have" suggests we concern ourselves with materialistic consumption where we're likely to define who we are by objects to accessorize our lives.

Again—in moderation this isn't so bad--- but if you're primarily driven by attaining objects of status to show others your success then you'll be working long hours for more money, spend time looking for others to compare yourself to and discover they've got more than you, and you'll likely become what I call the "hungry and dying for attention" individual. Accumulating material status objects does not lead one to be passionate about their work. What's the problem? In our culture money can be used symbolically to define success and for some, it is life-enhancing; in other words, it buys one life—because without money you experience social death (those in poverty).

In summary, we pursue utilitarian objectives (economic) through work and search for ways to express our deeper desires for connecting with the larger social and cultural community. One can assert that all human beings desire to discover how they belong to the larger community of humanity. Clarifying for oneself how he/she belongs—feels connected to community anchors will more clearly validate his contribution to improving conditions for living for all.

Founders House of Hope

Founders House of Hope is a 90 bed, community based residential care program providing psychosocial/psychiatric rehabilitation for consumers living with Schizophrenia and Bipolar Illness.

The services provided by Founders Outreach, a nonprofit center include:

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|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Supported Employment | Social Problem Solving | Self-esteem Building |
| Vocational Rehabilitation | Community Reintegration | Creative Expression |
| Relapse Prevention | Symptom Management | |

The psychosocial rehabilitation groups are skill building and designed to improve our resident's level of functioning and quality of life.

The program goals include improving quality of life, building self-empowerment, self-determination and self-sustenance. Our consumers are often neglected and socially isolated, unable to generate a positive evaluation of themselves. The focus of the program is identifying capabilities and interests, developing vocational skills, consumer strength, instilling optimism and enlarging our consumer's identity from a one-dimensional to multi-dimensional identity and our services are seen as an evolving process.

The services represent reservoirs of hope. All elements of the program contribute to creating a therapeutic milieu and environment of social caring. A unique model of self-empowerment and reinforcement for effective decision making leading to increased life satisfaction is promoted in daily programming.

Skills Based Groups Offered in the Program

- Symptom Management
- Impulse Control
- Community Reintegration
- Social Problem Solving
- Creative Expression
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Relapse Prevention
- Social Skills Training
- Assertion Training
- Hope and Optimism
- Supported employment

Program Objectives

- Maximizing choice, increasing skills and competency and providing unconditional support.
- Focusing on the consumer's aspirations and on the consumer's preferred level of intervention.
- Instilling hope and vision that consumers can grow with and in their community.
- Dedication to consumer empowerment and involvement of consumers in aspects of service delivery.
- A strong commitment to improve the programs at Founders; developing innovative skills based groups that foster desired change
- strong commitment to achieving outcomes.

