

Opportunity On the Doorstep: Recovery-Oriented Leadership

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As helping professionals, many of us are using the powerful principles and practices of Recovery to assist others in healing and improving their lives. What if we have missed what is right in front of us—what if Recovery is for us, too? What if leaders worked to intentionally create a culture of Recovery in the organizations they work in?

The Recovery principles of *hope, authority, community engagement, and healing* are tailor made for describing a potent, efficient, and healthy workforce. What organization would not benefit from more hopeful employees? What leader would not like to see employees being responsible and taking consistent action that is finely tuned to the organizations mission? What leader would not be comforted by knowing that employees are out in the community creating welcoming places for the people being served? What leader would not benefit today by tending to the parts of the organization that are not functioning in a healthy way? The following descriptors are designed to get a leader thinking about the opportunities available for using the connections between leadership, recovery, and healthy organizations.

HOPE

Recovery happens in an environment where people believe things can get better—that their life can, once again, be more than the difficulties they are facing. This is hope. Hope is the result of a vision, regardless of whether it is a small or large, of how things would be better if they were to improve. This vision must be more than just an idealized and hazy dream, for it is the basis for the courage the person needs to act. Without hope, a person will remain stuck.

For Recovery-Oriented Leaders:

Leaders, in their words and actions, demonstrate they have hope. More than just hope that the work will get done, a leaders hope is rooted in the belief that they are working towards a noble vision. What do leaders do to keep their own hope alive? How do leaders help others develop and sustain hope? Both begin with the leader describing and blessing a vision that is describable and attainable. It also requires the leader to develop, with other employees, an honest and forthright appraisal of how the organization must change if it is to meet this vision. It demands of the leader a keen awareness of when the vision is too large to sustain hope, and when the vision is too small to be inspiring. Hope thrives in a delicate balance between safety and risk—too far one way or the other and the organization will lose its way. Hopeful leaders foster hopeful staff who then go out and encourage hope in the people they are serving.

AUTHORITY

Recovery requires action because altering our life requires action. Whether it is changing a long-held belief about oneself or another person, or doing something different during the day,

recovery requires a person to take responsibility for their place in the world by claiming both the authority to make decisions and the responsibility for those decisions. Self-pity, the best friend Opportunity On the Doorstep: Recovery-Oriented Leadership, cont'd

of those who want to stay stuck in their life, is the enemy of internal authority and powerful action. When a person has authority over their life, they recognize that their current difficulties do not describe all of who they are and that they have gifts and talents that are needed in the community. Having authority means having access to information, making choices that can heal and bring you more fully into the world, and then acting on those choices.

For Recovery-Oriented Leaders:

More than what a leader says, others watch what a leader does. Who Am I? What is my genuine authority in this organization? These are two essential questions for leaders to answer within themselves and support others in answering within the context of the organizations work. This requires an acknowledgement of both the positional authority—the job tasks assigned—and the genuine wisdom—the gift and talents—the person is bringing to the group. Staff must have meaningful roles—and significant authority within those roles—in order to inspire the same in others. Empowered staff empower people they serve. Leaders are actively asking questions of themselves and others that encourage meaningful roles to be identified and given. How do I use my work as an opportunity to discover and contribute the best of who I am? What parts of who I am conflict with my role in the workplace? Beyond my skills and education, what is the source of my desire to do this work? What is the essence, the most essential gift, I am bringing to the workplace?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We all live within the life of our community, however we define that. The process of recovery often includes either rebuilding or developing connections with other people and places in the community. The essential result of stigma— isolation and feelings of not-belonging— can only be overcome by helping a person find relationships and places to belong outside of mental health and other social service systems. More than simply places to hangout, the person needs people within those places who value his/her presence and actively welcome them. We all need purpose in our lives, and it is within the context of community that we locate the opportunity to give and receive acknowledgement for our contribution.

For Recovery Oriented Leaders:

Recovery Oriented Leaders understand that building relationships is the primary underlying task of all planning and interventions carried out by the organization. Community development compels the leader to expand the strategies of the organization beyond “personal preparation” (focusing solely on service-users skill development and symptom management) toward community preparation (locating and developing welcoming groups). There are several significant challenges within this for the Recovery oriented leader 1) How can leaders expect service-users to assume meaningful roles and overcome stigma and isolation when they themselves are so often isolated?, 2) How does the leader effectively encourage staff to overcome their fear of community work?, and 3) How does the leader locate opportunities to

contribute to the community rather than focusing solely on how the community can serve the organization?

HEALING

The process of recovery is more complicated than “getting back” something that has been lost. It involves the “uncovering” of the person’s story to locate the places which are causing the person to feel suffering of some kind—whether due to feelings of unworthiness, confusion about direction, lack of relationships or community places to belong, loss of hope, or lack of a meaningful life. After the uncovering comes the “recovering” of those hurtful places in the person’s life with new hope based on feelings of authority, meaningful choices, and a vision of a life that is worth going towards. Recovery is about healing—it is about discovering the parts of ourselves that feel incomplete or broken, and committing ourselves to discovering our own path towards wholeness.

For Recovery Oriented Leaders:

For many leaders, using the word “healing” in the same sentence with “organization” causes considerable wariness. What does it mean to heal an organization? The Recovery oriented leader views the organization as a living organism that goes through cycles of illness and health, just like the people the organization is serving. Organizations, and the people in them, can face difficulties from unresolved conflicts, lack of commitment to a shared vision, employees who bring too much of their personal life with them to their work, and a host of other common organizational issues. What parts of your organization are not functioning in a healthy way? What parts of your organization would benefit from being whole once again? The Recovery oriented leader focuses on regular practices that encourage employees to share and release the tremendous weight of the stories of others they are carrying, have opportunities to share their own stories of success and frustration, gather to celebrate success, and uncover and resolve blocks to healthy employee interaction and service delivery methods. This is challenging work for the leader.

MHA The Village and Community Activators, Inc. have developed and provide training that helps leaders integrate and use the principles and practices of Recovery as an organizational development tool. This document emerged as one in a series of definition sheets that make some of the links between Recovery and Leadership.

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More Information?

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