

REFORM FROM THE INSIDE

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Unaccustomed as I am at public speaking and indeed in preparing a paper with a timeline of around thirty minutes; I decided to take on the challenge that Tony Taylor presented me with. So here I am. I have been asked to talk about my philosophy and experience as a Probation Officer and as a Prison Manager in “inducing change from within the “System”.”

I trust that this paper which I have entitled “Reflections: Working Inside Out” will provide you with some insights into my motivations, or drivers and my associated practice wisdom.

There are always reasons for behaviours and attitudes and I consider that a good starting point is to share with you some personal context in order to provide you with some understanding of the influences that have led to the person that stands before you today.

As with my forty five year career of working with offenders I believe that the person that I am today is the sum product of assorted influences and learnings. As with Pre-Sentence reports provided by a Probation Officer to a Judge on an offender prior to sentencing, there is a need to provide you with an idea of my socialisation/ social history thereby assisting you towards an understanding of who I am and my associated philosophy and belief in working with the challenges of change from an operational practitioner’s perspective.

Born, raised and educated in the South of England and as a member of the baby-boomer generation, I was introduced and responded to a variety of stimuli. By the time I was twelve years of age I had experienced a diverse world of literature incorporating arts and drama. An unusual milieu which involved learning about taking on the rôle, working in rôle and thus experiencing perhaps the beginnings of reflection and empathy?

My growing world view was also underpinned by attending a co-educational Prep. School comprised of all female teachers with the exception of the choirmaster. The female role models at this school, aided and abetted by my avid interest in reading an array of biographies on the Queens Boudicea, Elizabeth Tudor and Victoria, as well as Joan of Arc, Edith Cavell, Nancy Wake, Ann Frank, Emily Pankhurst and Elizabeth Fry. I was also fortunate to have a mother of humanist persuasion who was committed to social justice - actively involving herself in such issues as anti-apartheid and amnesty international. These were some of the ingredients that took me into adolescence.

I completed my school days at a VIth form college with A level GCEs in Nineteenth Century British, Economic and Social History, Social and Economic Geography and English Literature. These subjects saw my understanding and appreciation of the need to be aware of what came before us and where the society that we are a part of fits in the bigger schema of life.

And so it was that at eighteen years of age I appreciated the role of the Welfare State and the Elizabethan Poor Law with its concepts of the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions that had led to the move from rural to urban and the associated issues that arose as a result of this evolution.

I had also been introduced to John Clare¹, sometimes known as the Northamptonshire “peasant” poet whose world was impacted by the Enclosure Movement and who spent his later life as an asylum inmate. To quote the first two stanzas of his poem “I am” – *“I am — yet what I am none cares or knows;*

My friends forsake me like a memory lost:

I am the self-consumer of my woes —

They rise and vanish in oblivious host,

Like shadows in love’s frenzied stifled throes

And yet I am, and live — like vapours tossed

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,

Into the living sea of waking dreams,

Where there is neither sense of life or joys,

But the vast shipwreck of my life’s esteems;

Even the dearest that I loved the best

Are strange — nay, rather, stranger than the rest.”

As James Reeves notes in his introduction to John Clare’s works. “Given Clare’s nature and its social context, the tragedy was probable, if not inevitable^①”. I was later to discover the parallels with John Clare’s poem and the context of imprisonment.

I elected not to take the well-trodden path of school to University and chose a gap year which extended to encompass four years. This period saw me leave home to experience life in the Midlands conurbation of England. I initially worked as a Child Care Assistant with a Children's Department moving to work with the Homeless and Rootless at a night shelter. This work inevitably led to working alongside Probation Officers and, in turn, I then became involved in working as a Probation Officer in the community and later, in situ at a local Prison.

At this time Camus, Gibran, Kafka, Eldridge Cleaver, "Lord of the Flies", "Watership Down" and "Jonathan Livingston Seagull" also inspired me.

The cameos that are a part of this period involved me observing children on an At Risk register, at a specialised playgroup for the under 5s playing a variation of a childhood game of "cops and robbers" (the Police were common denominators in these children's worldview and obviously perceived as the "baddies" in that the children chose to play this game in a 1:15 ratio where all were robbers with only one "put upon" child in the role of the cop); a pregnant sixteen year old entering labour without preparation for the task ahead as well as limited understanding of her body; working with teenagers on the cusp of criminal careers with an innovative court order called Intermediate Treatment as well as working with the concepts of Through Care and After Care with a Probation Service whose stated focus was to "advise, assist and befriend".

Prior to undertaking my social work qualification (a pre-requisite for a Probation Officer, or indeed any work with the statutory helping professions in Britain) I worked as a Probation Officer, in an overcrowded Local Prison which had its genesis in housing Napoleonic Prisoners of War. Based on a quasi military model of control and containment where homophobia, sexism and racism were intrinsic elements in a brutal culture overlaid with implied violence. It came as little surprise to me to learn that this Prison, as well as many others, were eventually a party to the Prison Riots that led to a transformation of the English penal system during the late 1970s.

These pictures consolidated a view that the Jesuit ideal (give me a child until age seven.....); that educational disadvantage is an insidious indictment on the community at large and that there is a positive power and energy in group work with adolescents using a physical activity as a vehicle for intervention. I had also commenced a debate with myself about who is the criminal and who institutionalises who?

Whilst at University I was exposed to an array of theoretical models including Labelling Theory, Stigma and Stereotyping, Anomie and Alienation. I was also introduced to RD Laing, Stanley Cohen, John Bowlby, Emile Durkheim, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, Erik H Erikson, Thomas A Harris and Erving Goffman to name but a few.² This period enabled me to consolidate my value base as well as embrace the conceptual framework of social work.

The social work task has been variously defined. In the broadest sense the role involves contributing to alleviating distress and promoting a healthy

society. With a respect for each individual person at its centre, social work involves the prevention of distress and the improvement of quality of life with a dual functionality of care and control incorporating such diverse elements as the appropriate use of self and social reform.

During 1978 I moved to New Zealand and was immediately struck by some stark contrasts. A country of three million people without some of the difficulties and challenges that I was conversant with such as intergenerational and child poverty, housing and associated accommodation issues, violence and serious substance abuse. There was almost full employment and most parolees easily found employment on release from prison; employers were prepared to employ the differently-abled; there was a sense of community and there was a new language to learn ("NZ English" -the word dole- bludger comes to mind)), as well as an indigenous culture that I needed to appreciate.

Between 1978 and 1986 I was employed by the Justice Department as a Probation Officer and set about learning about the Treaty and issues of Cultural Safety in Social work practice. I was also helped along the way with some reframing by Michael King's "Being Pakeha"³, Paulo Friere's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"⁴, Joan Metge and Patricia Kinloch's "Talking Past Each Other"⁵ and Mark Twain's commentary relating to misunderstandings which goes as follows ;

"The Observer of Peoples has to be a Classifier, a Deducer, a Generalizer, a Psychologizer; and, first and last, a Thinker. He has to be all of these, and when he is at home, observing his own folk, he is often able to prove competency. But history has shown that when he is abroad observing unfamiliar peoples the chances are heavily against him. He is then a naturalist observing a bug, with no more than a naturalist's chance of being able to tell the bug anything new about itself, and no more than a naturalist's chance of being able to teach it any new ways which it will prefer to its own."⁶

It was with these words ringing in my ears as well as my newly acquired understanding of the word "assume" (ass-u-me) provided for me by a local kaumatua that for the next decade I was employed as the Social Worker at Whanganui Prison.

The Prison Service as it was known then appeared unclear as to whether its role was punitive, custodial or rehabilitative. As a sole Social Work Practitioner I was maintained by professional supervision and strove to keep myself and role intact with an awareness of the need to not allow myself to become institutionalised by ensuring appropriate boundaries and associated professional integrity. I modelled first name relationships with Prisoners and was clear about labelling theory and effective communication as well as following the case work principles of individualisation, self-determination and acceptance sometimes in the face of the perverse adversity of Senior Prison Staff.

Decisions about Prisoners were made with scant regard for the facts and on subjective feelings based on the presenting personality and assorted perceived traits relating to prisoner behaviours and attitudes and on ranking Officer's experience.

By the early 90s the "What Works" debate⁷ was at the forefront of penal thinking and I was given the task of engaging prisoners in a shared process of assessment with a view to addressing issues and needs as well as factors in their offending behaviour.

The task of formulating a site in-house staff training module for Case Management fell to me and in delivering this package (with reference to Warden Dennis Luther's "Beliefs about the Treatment of Inmates"⁸ and Dennis A Challeen's "Making It Right"⁹). I found that most staff on the floor were well intentioned and well meaning, however without theoretical models or conceptual frameworks. Indeed, Prison Officers related that their in-service training, based on statute and authority, clearly prescribed that the role of Prison Officer was not to delve into the lives and motivations of their charges despite the fact that Prisoners files contained fulsome pre-sentence report assessments that would have assisted not only with a planned through care approach but also understanding Who?. What? Why?, Where?, Which? and How ? the prisoner, that they had duty of care for, functioned.

By this time I had adopted a strategy of patience, tolerance and forbearance and an understanding of "playing the long-hand". I was also aware that whilst I collaborated and worked alongside the Prisoners Aid Society Fieldworkers and Prison Cultural Advisor and despite Prisoners making gains in the privacy of my office alongside these networks that on return to the wings much that had been gained was lost – I felt a little like Don Quixote – tilting at windmills!

During 1996 a window of opportunity presented itself as the Department of Justice mutated and became the Corrections Department. This change saw the dissolution of promotion on the basis of years served and via the discipline ranks. Feeling somewhat in a career cul-de-sac and with the encouragement of the Superintendent I applied for the position of Unit Manager.

And so it came to pass that during 1997 I presented a double whammy effect on Site. I was the first female manager at Whanganui as well as one with a divergent social work philosophy and associated knowledge base. I was aware of staff who had politely tolerated me as "a voice on the side-lines" having to confront some prejudices and learn to work with me as I was now in their midst.

As a female, grounded in social work ' having spent the preceding twenty six years working with offenders in a statutory role on the "outside" I now found myself "Inside" a unique community. The analogy of the tick bird's reciprocal relationship with the rhinoceros remained, and indeed is with me to this day.

I considered that relationships between staff and prisoners are at the heart of the Prison system and that as with any relationship, it is the foundations of that relationship that are the most critical.

The “blame culture”, a clumsy, negative, threatening management style was still alive. In Transactional Analysis speak “the Critical Parent” and the “Adapted Child”. I was confronted with de-sensitised staff who had considerable difficulty taking praise and sat in front of me poised and waiting for the bad news.

During 1996 Dr John Gordon described Prison as follows :

“Involvement with other people’s problems is inevitably disturbing, and any show of empathy may be used by others in order to deceive for some gain. Consequently staff in all grades commonly maintain an insensitive front and grow to suspect any sign of weakness in prisoner or colleague of being manipulative. Those who live or work in prison for any length of time, whether they be staff or prisoner, became accustomed to being constantly defensive, macho and re-active, and often fail to notice that their discernment becomes blunted and their knowledge and acceptance of ordinary human frailty diminished. Subtleties of meaning are ignored, innuendo misinterpreted and sensitivity brutalised. Cynicism pervades every prison and prohibits both personal and institutional change”¹⁰

Leadership is about teaching and enabling and in the environment that I was confronted with I also bought the “double whammy” referred to earlier to the shop floor. As with others before me, who represented a minority group, I was driven to hit the ground running.

There was a predominant male world view and some staff had issues with a woman in a leadership position. I elected not to become a man- woman or a mother figure and was clear at the outset that I would not ask my staff to do anything that I would not do myself. The management philosophy I chose was involvement - and by so doing attempting to get the best out of my staff as opposed to a relationship based on authority and associated positional power.

I was confronted by the potential toxicity of working on the inside and could see the effects of institutional role blurring involving staff with their needs and motivations being driven more at a personal, than professional level. I was also taken aback by the language and the black humour of staff.

My roots, involving the use of language and communication were somewhat challenged and so I set about small, incremental changes. I encouraged my staff to consider and reflect upon the words that they were using and what it said about them as well as the associated misuse of their authority. Portmanteau words such as “manipulation”, “promiscuity”, “dysfunction”, “sense of self-entitlement” do not explain and explore the behaviours that make up these labels. These words of course lead to stereotypes and in so doing

can lead to even more confusion; as without any definition and time taken to explore what these terms mean they are begging a stereotypical response.¹¹

Viewing the human condition from a vantage point of distance and judgment as opposed to commitment defied the active management principles of engagement and involvement in a change process with clients that had long been a part of me. I was also left with a sense that many Prison Officers values relating to their charges were based on an Old Testament world view.

The tenets that I have striven to hold close to me over the ensuing years have been : commitment to participation and ownership by staff (otherwise known as empowerment); staff leadership involving face to face conversations,, looking into the eyes of staff , attempting to connect with them; the importance of my Team and in a sense, my staff are my customers as it is through them that we can achieve the standards and competency that the Department wants; listening, involving and imparting knowledge; working with my staff as the key to lasting change is employee involvement and buy-in.

To effect change one has to have a belief and mine has always been along the lines of there being an intrinsic good in all humankind .Part of my role in working with offenders has always been to ensure we can make constructive gains (or positive changes) in intervening and challenging to reduce re-offending. An optimistic and hopeful belief that has buoyed me along the way.

I was also aware, from my days in Probation that there is a healthy tension between the social control and social reform models and indeed the social justice model where one recognises that the issues are rooted in the social structure as opposed to the individual pathology of the presenting client psyche.

Last year I spent time working with all our staff on Site in a four hour awareness raising programme that I had put together ,to bring our staff alongside the Department's initiative of reducing re-offending by 25% . In putting this programme together I drew from assorted reference points including Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs¹² and Elizabeth Kubler Ross's Grief Cycle . The flyer that I put together outlining a Corrections Officer role and task was accepted by staff without issue and indeed I received positive emails and comments from a cross-section of staff attendees..

Taking the letters of the title Corrections Officer the flyer outlines the ingredients that make up the role of a Corrections Officer and goes as follows:-

C	Code of Conduct
O	Offenders and their Whanau / Support Networks
R	Role Modelling (Pro Social) / Reflective Practice
R	Right Track / Rolling with Resistance / Motivation
E	Empathy
C	Cultural Safety / Duty of Care
T	Treatment / Programmes
I	Integrated Offender Management (IOM) / Active Management
O	Offender Centric
N	Non Verbal Communication
S	Safe, Secure Humane Containment

O	Observation and Listening Skills
F	Fair – Transparent / Impartial
F	Flexible – Non Judgemental
I	Integrity / Honesty
C	Communication
E	Exerting Influence
R	Re-integration / Reducing Re-Offending

You can now appreciate how far we have travelled as an organisation as this outline of a Corrections Officers role is in some contrast with twenty years ago and attests to the fact that effective change does occur over time and that the incremental approaches are the ones that have the desired effect.

Being involved in “the long haul” many of the changes implemented by the Department of Corrections over the past twenty years have been gratefully received by me and allowed me to pick up the ball and run with them at a local level.

Pruger whose work “The Good Bureaucrat”¹³ outlines the skills required to achieve professional goals in a formal organisation cites three strategic concerns and five tactics.

The three strategic concerns are:

“One important property of a good bureaucrat is staying power.” This means a recognition that things happen slowly in complex organisations but that whatever changes the worker has in mind [s]he cannot implement them if [s]he doesn't stay in and with the organisation.

“The good bureaucrat must somehow maintain [their] vitality of action and independence of thought.” Organisational life tends to suppress vitality of action and independence of thought. We must resist such pressure.

“There is always room for insights and tactics that help the individual preserve and enlarge the discretionary aspect of [their] activity and, by extension, [their] sense of personal responsibility.”

And the five tactics the good bureaucrat will employ are:

Understand legitimate authority and organisational enforcement.” The inescapable degree of generality found in the regulatory policies and codes of organisation allows for considerable autonomy of the individual if [they] just recognise it and use it. The organisation's power to control is less than many realise, but if the limits of legitimate authority are recognised, the individual may expand [their] discretionary limits.

“Conserve energy.” One should not thrash around and feel discouraged and unappreciated because [s]he does not receive in a large organisation the kind of support [s]he receives from [her] friends. Also, master the paper flow of the organisation. This will not only help the client but will also remove from the worker's shoulders the weight of resentment and emotional turmoil one feels as one looks at the uncompleted statistical forms on [their] desk. We should describe what can be changed and work on it rather than spend valuable hours bemoaning what can't be dealt with.

“Acquire a competence needed by the organisation.”

“Don't yield unnecessarily to the requirements of administrative convenience. Keep in mind the difference between that which serves the organisational

mission and that that serves the organisation.” Rules, standards, and directives as to the way things should be done are meant to be means that serve ends. In organisations means tend to become ends, so that a worker may be more concerned about turning in [their] mileage report than with the result of [their] visit to a client. Ends and means should be kept clear.

We should remember that “the good bureaucrat is not necessarily the most beloved one.”

In retrospect, and I trust with a sense of hope and humility, courage and compassion, I have attempted to provide you with an insight into my philosophy (or should I say my soul) and provide you with an overview of my practice philosophy. I have, as you can imagine, rafts of war stories and bruises to show, however have chosen to steer clear of these.

Change is always with us and resilience, perseverance, conviction and belief are part of the constructs. For change to be effective change has to be modelled (with the congruity of walk the walk and talk the talk). In an Institutional culture change takes time to permeate the layers. The change involves painting pictures and on occasions colouring- in, in some detail; demystifying by providing background and context and by taking the fence-sitters with you. Clear process prevents confusion and is critical to change in such an organisation.

As an independent, “free thinker”, who regularly has been misunderstood when playing the devil’s advocate role and by walking my own path (no-one owes me and I owe no other) there have been trials along the way, however in the main working from the “Inside” has been most rewarding.

I have also been privileged to meet and work with a divergent group of staff and offenders and to be privy to their stories along the way.

In conclusion I would like to share with you a letter that I received from a prisoner several years ago:

Kia ora Jan,

You’re a heart breaker, an angel sent to comfort the many who had closed arms, a closed sense of self. Your light will shine wherever you are. It’s your integrity, keep up the great work. I needed to share that you left a Jan imprint on me, and others. With regard to conversations you and I had. That process is literally in gear forward.

The men are very fortunate to have you on side. The time that you sacrificed in the first year here is my blessing; I think I’d be still white knuckling it had you not been that significant person who helped me to differentiate a well from a bridge. Keep your light bright – keep following your heart. Many blessings

It's a new year with many possibilities and outcomes. Study within Arohata has commenced my recovery is doing very well. I'm happy most days and love most things.

Most of all I've come to a permanent place I'd never have even dreamed of Sobriety commitment to sobriety. I've never been abstinent from drugs this long ever. I can see clearly all the destruction and havoc I've accumulated in my life.....

It's all in the past now so no longer does shame or guilt hold me back. I'm as clean as I can be. My memory is much better than it has been and only gets better. The things we spoke of are the goals that I believe are attainable . Currently my correspondence has arrived and it's not as easy as I thought. It's one of those things that 's attainable and I'm okay with that.

In closing I just wanted you to know that I am grateful for opening my mind to all the prejudices that kept me stuck in my own oppression.

I asked after you the other day and no one had seen you. In my heart I know you'd returned to the place that now needs your angel dust sprinkled over the ground. You will always be loved by a kindred spirit.

To know who you are is to stand on your mountain, look down on your river and steer your boat with self esteem. I had this poem given to me in a song which I held in my heart. It was locked there – now I'm on that Maunga / Mountain, I'm looking down on that Awa, and my Waka is there.

Many blessings to you and your loved ones Jan . You truly are Chiefly in your own right. Much love to you.

Naku noa, ra ¹⁴

I believe that this letter amply demonstrates that changes can be made from the Inside and that it is this form of change that we, as an organisation, are all about and indeed the years that I have spent working Inside/out are summed up in three words : Reframing , Reformulating and Reforming.

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata - *It is people, it is people, it is people.*

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