

“Lessons learned - Learned thoughts - Thoughtless Rants”

In only two years plus four months as a Prevention Education Specialist, I have learned some really interesting lessons, fought a few interesting fights and heard many interesting statements from quite a few interesting individuals regarding sexual assault, domestic violence and the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of victim services. This brief discourse is by no means a comprehensive and exhaustive source of information. Instead, this is a basic and incomplete deluge of ideas, anecdotes and painful instances that may or may not be understood and appreciated by the audience. Either way, thanks for reading it. Realistically, honestly and frankly, the only people that may want to print it are ‘newbies’ to the field of violence prevention. It’s neither the Bible nor Webster’s masterpiece, but it was kind of fun to write.

Section 1: The Beginning

Few things strike terror into the hearts of social service workers as quickly and solemnly as the words: contract renewal, funding cuts, request for proposal, congress, senate, ADHS (I kid), executive director, executive assistant, special assistant, program manager, supervisor, governor, president, mayor, council, victim, survivor, advocate, God, disclosure, policy & procedures, ‘just a quick email reminder,’ the word *due* in big bold black letters, suggestions, reprimand, formal verbal warning, formal written warning, fyi, mandatory reporter, teamwork, improvisation, self-starter, ‘curriculum review’ (which really means that your curriculum is two years outdated and makes people laugh and point or vice versa¹), Bush, Kerry, Nader, Clinton, Christian, Muslim, Atheist, Agnostic, Buddhist, Hindi, Krishna, Aboriginal, American, African, Republican, Democrat,

Independent, Green Party, Moderate, Conservative, Liberal, Undecided, Lobbyist, Random Thoughtless Uneducated Pig of a Human Being that is having WAY TOO MUCH FUN Brainstorming a Pointless List of Words for His Web Submission. The point being this – any of the aforementioned words could and may ruin a decent conversation at any time or may engage a fascinating conversation occasionally with someone as interesting and personality-loaded as you are – just not in the social service realm. Lesson and rule number one, leave your personal morals, feelings, obligations and dogma at home. People don't *need* any of those things; they need our help and our effort. Politics in themselves don't help a survivor of sexual assault. Politicians function in an atmosphere of incredible balance and interest to yours truly. They must and I say again *must* look out for our best interests and simultaneously make us oh so happy. Then again, they'd also like to get re-elected. What a paradox. However, personal philosophies aside, our number one goal must be to help people. Whether we do victim advocacy, intervention work, prevention work, education work, paperwork, website work, evaluation, investigation and abstraction (thanks Karen B!), or any other kind of work, we need to build a focus and a vision on people. It is not (and I mean **NOT**) the money that keeps me going (believe it or not); it is people. My increasing credit card debt notwithstanding, every time a kid comes to me and tells me that I was the 'fun part' of the workshop they attended or how much they enjoyed and respected what I said, my focus is realigned and my goals become clear. This is about people. My friend DJ at Pima High School that actually grew his hair out a little bit and started experimenting with his mom's styling products because he liked my fauxhawk² - keeps me going. My friend David that recognized me standing in line for *Ocean's Twelve* and came over to tell me he had fun in my workshop - keeps me going with enthusiasm. My friends from last month's Juvenile Probation workshop that

wanted to know about my choices and experiences as well as why I made a life choice to abstain from drunkenness and drugs – keep my priorities in order and my focus on sharing myself and my time with people in need. The challenges in between are nothing more than sand paper, taking off the rough edges and teaching me humility. I can say with a clear conscience that when I leave my job, it won't be because something offers me more financially or less in the stress department, it will be because I'm ready to tackle a new challenge in life knowing that I conquered this one. I set some goals for myself when I started working at the Safe House. I've completed most of them and only have a few to go until I feel satisfied. I know that I will leave this place as a content being.

Section 2: Lighten Up

All political correctness and levity aside, lighten up a little bit when it comes to doing your work. So many days pass by feeling like a scene from the film *Office Space*³. People are so ready to judge and condemn that they have forgotten how to love and encourage. I know this is too simple and inarticulate to resonate with everyone but for crying out loud, take your shoes off every once in a while! Don't get stuck in a box of rules when it comes to doing your job. Use different methods, visual aids, examples, anecdotes and whatever to make your point clear and meaningful. Bottom line - just make it yours! After two-plus years I'm finally beginning to find my voice in my job. I've always tried very hard to let *me* shine through in my workshops and projects but now I'm finding my voice for all that I do. Take some time to find your voice too. A few people in the RPEP circle that have been doing this work for a while have inspired me very much. Individuals such as Tom Reardon, a guy that knows what he's talking about and keeps working to refine the information, inspire me to do the

work even if I run the risk of getting burnt out in the process. Jen Rauhouse, with her inexhaustible energy and enthusiasm as well as a passionate desire to get the positive information out there, inspires me to not get stuck looking at the glass from a half-empty point of view. It's easy to take the scare tactic route and tell groups that 'one in four *will be* raped in their lifetime' or that 'the numbers' (Hensell's least favorite thing) show this and that about rape and blah, blah, blah. However, to do your own research and add it to the good practices and information that are already available, thereby creating an original and thought-provoking approach, is a slightly more time consuming but fulfilling way of conveying the message. Let's just do our best, give our best and see what kind of good results can come from people that care about others and want to make a positive difference.

Section 3: Burt Bacharach for \$500

I'm currently working on a poster; it reads as follows, "Everything I needed to know about life, I learned from Burt Bacharach." I am confident that the words *what the world needs now, is love, sweet love* are quite true and terribly overlooked in modern society. I, too, am very guilty of being so lazy and impatient that I just want to move on with things and not get all bogged down in the details - you know - the monotony of it all. All the back biting and backstabbing really needs to stop. I'm not talking about things happening in the RPEP group of contractors, we all seem to cohabitate peacefully and painlessly. I am talking about all the stuff that goes on within our agencies on occasion, e.g. power struggles, gossip, thievery, and general dissent. How on earth do we demonstrate functionality and wholeness to help others heal whilst we tear apart each other? As soon as we all can grasp onto the concept that we're working together and the best

way to make that happen is loving each other and watching each other's backs, we will see the most positive and progressive progress toward our goals.

Section 4: The End

I believe that the very, very most important thing to learn about this work is that none of us can keep running at 90 mph on empty and keep it at that pace forever. Aside from taking your shoes off to lighten up, you really should take them off occasionally to catch your breath and relax. The turnover rate in the social service field is staggering. People that have been doing this awhile have seen numerous enthusiastic people come and go through these jobs as quickly as some people wear out a pair of plastic Payless loafers. One of my nice little 'de-stressors' is an unknown exercise during my Juvenile Probation workshops. I, along with my co-facilitator, listen to each and every question asked by the workshop participants and at the end of the workshop we pick the worst question of the day. Believe you me, we have been asked some *really* poor questions! Of course, we don't share this exercise with the participants as this would be politically incorrect and morally just wrong to the point of perhaps being a venial sin. Yes, I was raised Catholic. No, I never made it to being an Altar boy. Enough said. The bottom line is to give it your best and when it's time to kick back, KICK BACK!

My friend Kathy is totally enveloped (almost to the point of insanity) by her job. She facilitates three youth council groups, overseeing each and every one of their activities and projects. She facilitates a community action group for adults in her hometown. Kathy also facilitates our Graham County monthly networking meeting. Kathy also, on occasion, must present a workshop or two to agencies/schools that request them. Kathy

also has a mother whose health has been ailing of late. Kathy also has a single daughter that works full-time while going through nursing school, simultaneously trying to successfully raise a little boy. Kathy also has a son that is a senior in high school and participates in every sport imaginable while also occasionally causing those fun 'teen problems' for the entire family. Kathy is the most burned-out individual I have ever met in my life. Somehow, Kathy remains optimistic and joyful; however, talking with Kathy is like listening to a chipmunk peaking on four pounds of crank and nicotine. Oh yeah, and did I include that she just quit smoking last year? And when she crashes, she really crashes. Kathy is an awesome lady and she's passionate about what she does. However, Kathy has absolutely no time for her – the needed time to center herself, time to focus and de-stress. Don't make the same mistake. We need each and every one of you in this circle. Each member of the RPEP team makes a substantial contribution and burnout is too easily avoidable if we can only take a little time to focus. Not all of us can give and give and give without receiving anything, ever. My best wishes and blessings go out to each of you in the New Year. I hope this year we can meet our numbers and goals and, at the same time, do our jobs with joy and enthusiasm.