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The Quest for Personal Excellence

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Excellence Through Preparation and Practice

My sharings with you this morning are indeed about my personal quest for excellence, and my belief in its role in the success of professional excellence and the counseling profession. I echo the scholarly papers of Dr. Herr and Dr. Sweeney. I agree with the basic concepts and succinct observations therein. I, too, have felt the pressure to accept lackluster academic performances from students, teachers, and counselors as well as a lack of interest in rigorous personal, academic, and/or professional endeavors. Unlike them, however, I decided to take a hiatus from it all - even the part time stuff - and just concentrate on me. Still it didn't work - the world refuses to stop for me to get off even after I resigned as general manager of the universe.

Even while reading a comic strip, Zits, I found illustrated an attitude about personal excellence that seems relevant. Talking to his best buddy, a teenager quips: "My hair is unbelievably OKAY. My clothes are spectacularly NORMAL. And my personality has been described as dynamically ACCEPTABLE! Thank you very much. This is my new motto: "if you can't be naturally outstanding, be aggressively average". And the buddy replies, "on you it works".

In an interview, Marianne Williamson, the author of *The Healing of America* and other books, talks about the power of awareness as "the path of enlightenment whereby all the darkened corners of our lives are made full of light... "I believe that personal excellence is one of the corners where "we need to go inside ourselves, gather our own forces, find our own wisdom. Heal your own personal energy in a situation. Find your own illumination in your own guidance". So many books have been written about everything, telling us what to do. Maybe what to do is not the hot question. Williamson suggests that we ask ourselves other questions: "Am I willing to do it? Am I willing to carve out that space in my life and give it the priority in my day that it would entail? How to pursue personal excellence is not the question. "Am I willing to face my resistances to do and then allow it to happen?" That is the question. I will, however, share a few observations that have been helpful in my personal search for mental and physical wholeness through an examination of personal values and an enlightened view of the role of personal excellence in professional and career achievement.

Professor Sweeney discusses the pursuit of excellence as being more than a Modus Operandi (way of behaving) but a Modus Vivendi (way of living or being). Dr. Herr talks in his paper about "informed personal excellence" resting upon understanding one's strengths, interests, values, and purposes and using that knowledge fully. I would like to focus on Herr's statement on the importance of "making explicit in our CSI stories and metaphors the quest for personal excellence in what we do" by relating

a couple of stories of my own.

In 1998 a student that I met at a CSI chapter initiation asked permission to discuss a very personal decision she was contemplating and one that I had obviously already made. It was also related to personal lifestyle values and professional choices. In February 1999 the same student, now at an advanced level of academic training at another university, asked me to participate in a survey as someone she selected as a “moral exemplar”. (Ask someone at the University of Florida more about the assignment.) The question required some personal evaluation and disclosure on my part, but I accepted for two reasons:

-to clarify and refresh my own personal goals for 1999 which I had half-heartily done the month before,

-to live up to the commitment made in a “letter to God” exercise done 6 months earlier for continued fulfillment and direction.

The January 2000 issue of *Modern Maturity* features an article, “25 Ways to Reinvent Yourself”, and one of the ways cited is to “create a Mission Statement-Your life’s Purpose”.

For about the last 15 years, each January I go through the process of setting personal goals and objectives upon which my plans and schedule for the year are based. Each June/July these goals are evaluated. I have used a system called the Master Mind Principle which is a method of focusing the power of thought for the specific purpose of establishing a direct connection with The Master Mind. Through the Master Mind Principle you combine your own strength with that of a Higher Power and at least one other person. (Remember group dynamics: the combined energies of two or more likeminded persons is much greater than the sum of the individual energies involved.) For the prior three years I had eliminated that one other person, and my process was not working fully. My CSI friend and her moral exemplar exercise reactivated the full force of the principle. I ended up with strong goals geared toward 1) the person I wanted to become, 2) the things I wanted to do, and 3) the things I wanted to have. Values Clarification in action=personal excellence=professional excellence. CSI helps us all to be moral exemplars, seekers of personal excellence.

Story #2: Early in 2000, the Michigan Association for Humanistic Education and Development initiated a series of get-togethers for members called Wandering Sages. A facilitator considers several topics for discussion for the group in various places on specified dates. Several topics for discussion seem appropriate to share here:

1. “Not all who wander are lost”. Keeping your values in your pocket unless someone asks to see them.

2. “Attitudes are the real disability”. Teaching people to reconsider and reframe the baggage, misunderstandings, prejudices, etc. that hold them down.

3. “Here, take my advice; I’m not using it.” Is it true that we give the message we need most to hear? Taking your own advice. Following the path of personal excellence via building powerful bridges to the source level. (Journals, mediation, song, mindfulness, inner life).

Susan Taylor of *Essence Magazine*, writes about “carrying your own head.” “We must use our innate gifts and talents, live our purpose; we must carry our own head.” The basics of personal excellence include:

-Preparation-empowerment for excellence. To be incompetent is to be unethical. -Passion-energy, zest for what we do! -Positive personal values-commensurate with what is sought; morality, spirituality

Excellence is found in the balance between doing the very best I can do, and accepting the fact that there will always be more to accomplish at the end of each day.

James Dillet Freeman reminds us that the world in which we live is alive and growing, and so are we. All the limitations we place on it and ourselves will change and pass away. This is not an evil world, but a potentially toxic one. It is not always a place where excellence is practiced or supported. Do we want a better world, a more supportive environment? Then we must recognize that the turbulent nature of our lives is due to the turbulence in us. And if we believe in the universal law of mind-action, that is thoughts held in mind produce in the outer after its kind, we must change things thought by thought, word by word, and act by act.

Let us remember, however, that we do not have to act alone. We can usually change things faster and better by joining our efforts, our knowledge, our resources, and our goodwill with "likeminded others". Just as families function to protect its members from the toxicity of the outside world, so CSI is our family of excellence: personal, professional, The Profession of Counseling.

In summation, I read to you from L. Brownlow, a small clipping that sums up my quest for personal excellence:

"Living is not a question of whether we shall partially function-that's settled, if we live-but about the full usage of our faculties. The intellect to search deeper for answers. The vision to see farther ahead. The heart to stick it out a little longer. The hands to tire less quickly. The feet to keep on climbing. The ears to hear sweeter melodies. The tongue to speak a kinder language-love. And a spirit to enjoy a superior fellowship-with God. All of this adds up to achievement, which is more than almost-it is! It is you utilized more fully!"

Permission is hereby granted to you to be what you were created to be. There is no waiting period. No application is necessary. BE! This is enough of an assignment to keep you busy forever.

As a bonded community in loving service, CSI can be our enabler in our quest for personal excellence.

In the words of Jean Houston: "These are the times and we are the people."

http://www.csi-net.org/publications/excellence_papers/vriend.html