Five Golden Rules

In delivery of Social Services

Outline of my introductory lecture to employees of Hale Na`au Pono, the Wai`anae Coast Community Mental Health Center, a community based not-for profit provider of behavioral health services in Wai`anae, Hawai`i. Pōkā Laenui, former Executive Director

1. He who has the gold rules.

It is generally a “he” who makes the rules and who holds on to the $$$gold$$$. Therefore, in order to stay within the field of practice, we must stay within the rules. This is not to say that there can be no variations. The rules, when understood, can allow for a wide berth of discretion, but before moving too far from those standards, we must all understand the rules and study the extent to which we may veer from the accepted practice.

If you practice in the area of mental health treatment or alcohol and drug recovery, there are strict rules of confidentiality, not only within the State requirements but as well the Federal requirements. Those rules must be adhered to strictly. Violations of such standards could mean criminal prosecution, loss of accreditation or license, and loss of contract to provide such services.

Other rules besides government requirements may also require strict adherence. The State office which provides professional license may have certain standards for a particular profession, or the national accrediting organization for which one works may have standards which require that no action which violate its standards are permitted. Understand the rules, including those of the organization you work for and follow them.

1. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Who are you? What are your backgrounds, your social-economic status, your religious beliefs? What are your expectations, your dreams, your values? What kind of a family do you come from, you have now, and you hope for? What of the institution, organization or group you work for or associate with? Are the things that you hope for yourself those same things that others would hope for themselves? You are unique. So are your clients.

1. Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.

Others are not you. Just as you are unique, so are others, whose desires may not be as yours. You may be a teacher, the other a student, you a counselor, the other a client, you from one educational, economic, religious, political, social, cultural, language and a thousand other backgrounds and the other from a multitude of others backgrounds and experiences. An effective service provider must have the ability to appreciate the fact that he is not the client and must be sensitive to the difference in the “other.” This does not mean your service to the client is to be based on whatever the client wants! You are still a significant part of assisting in the recovery, teaching or healing of the client. But be sensitive to the client, allow appropriate participation of the client in the plan of recovery and every aspect of his/her recovery. Make room for the uniqueness of the client within reasonable limits as set forth by golden rule #1.

1. Help others do for themselves.

Empowerment. That is the primary purpose of service. Aim to work yourself out of employment. If you can successfully accomplish that with every client, you’re on the right track. You’ll be the one sought after and never be without a job.

1. Transcend the differences between self and others.

We are all human beings, entitled to the same respect, the same rights, the same claim to a part of this grand humanity. While our conditions and circumstances may differ, or we have different titles, are rich or poor, etc. we are all human beings, on the same line of creation as every other human being. In fact, we are part of the same family of all creations, just a few cells, genes, or ancestral accidents/variations different from all other existence. Be respectful of one another and of everything.

In treatment planning, we form a team which may include a psychiatrist, nurse, social worker, psychologist, case manager, other significant players to a client’s recovery, and must include the client. As a result, there may be numerous people forming a treatment team, depending on the particular need of the client and his/her circumstance. Each member of the treatment team has a unique role to play on the team, have unique contributions to make and should be treated with dignity. At times, the janitor who has been invited to attend a team may have contributions much more significant because he knows exactly where the client will go to after he receives his medication and monthly stipend, and where he will pick up his street drugs, and who he will associate with. The Psychiatrist, as head of the team, may be clueless as to that information, but must sign the treatment plan and his signature allows the team to be reimbursed for the services which the plan will call for. Every member plays a significant role on a team and must be accorded the same regard.