

Report on Social Accountability Plank
National Summit of Mental Health Consumers and Survivors
Portland, Oregon
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Facilitator: Andrew Phelps

Issue:

The consumers' and survivors' ("clients' ") movement is gradually transitioning from its habituation to a bitter struggle for empowerment, towards sensitization to issues of respect for a person's way of being. We must pay more and more attention to issues of accountability to client values, to nurturing and maturing the insight that represents the creative side of our involvement with madness.

Action Plan:

1. Incorporate social accountability as a topic in training workshops.
2. Support and strengthen the role of the client values in the client culture.

Issue:

The clients' movement has an endemic difficulty with strained human relations and the problems of personal interaction associated with irrationality. We must work with people who connect with our values, to address trauma directly: we can work for new social relations around madness, towards a society truly free of abuse, discrimination, hypocrisy, and ignorance.

Action Plan:

3. Construct reasonable ways to distinguish controversial activity from "dissing" (disrespectful activity).
4. Educate society about the nature of madness.

Background:

One participant wrote that he was spiritually moved by the concept of "social accountability" for the clients. He said, "We will try to carry this message to consumer/survivors, and try to practice the principles of Social Accountability in all our affairs."

The clients' movement has a tradition of developing its voice by bringing forward the testimony of the individual clients. Since the area of social accountability is just becoming familiar to the clients' movement, it was felt that "many voices" were appropriate here. In this spirit, the background for the Social Accountability Plank is presented in the form of individual testimony by participants in the National Summit sessions on accountability.

Testimony:

A. In my way of seeing things, even with every person's best intentions to be courteous, sensitive and civil, still a higher power created humans as whole people with a basic nature containing many evil impulses along with the good. If our "shadow," or the "darker side of our lives," remains totally undealt with and left in the "repressed unconscious," it will overpower us into responding and acting in ways which can be disastrous. Robert Louis Stevenson, in his novel *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, has one of the most respected people in the community develop a potion to isolate the evil in himself in the hopes of eliminating that part of his being — with the worst possible consequences of murder and his personal death. Part of social accountability demands that, as consumers and survivors on the fringes of society already, we learn how to incorporate in a healthy manner our own evil side effectively; and that, at the

same time, we know how to put on a polite “mask” when necessary, to avoid hurting the honor of someone else who may need that honor more than we do.

B. You should say what you mean and mean what you say. Thus:

(a) You are accountable to self and others to gather all the information possible to make a decision whether or not to volunteer for some task or job.

(b) You are responsible to complete what you say you will do, and “do it.”

(c) You should mean what you say and be accountable for it.

C. I said to my doctor, “I don’t want to be the kind of person whom people don’t want to be around, because then all I would talk about is negativity and what is wrong. I want to be the kind of person people do want to be around, so people will want to be my friend, to have fun, to do fun things with me!” Please, treat me as the real quality person I am.

D. [From an e-mail message.] This is jelling up to be an issue of responsibility and accountability. Remember, in solving one’s accountability one has to be willing to look internally to resolve one’s issues on becoming human.

E. I feel that, with all the forces that are at work to splinter us, we not only need to make an effort to treat one another with respect and kindness, but that we need to cherish one another’s sensitivity and uniqueness, so that we may not only survive, but be as alive and fulfilled as we possibly can.

F. “Bedlam” is a metaphor for the intense and angry interactions alleged to be characteristic of assemblies of mad people. The way clients handle bedlam is the test of the maturity of our movement. Social accountability of clients is not an absolute Thing; it is the product of work. Our task is to get better and better at handling the energies of bedlam in constructive manners.

G. Friendship: We all can think of ourselves as friends, because we are all on the same ship, as mental health “consumers,” or whatever. And any ship travels. We can’t forget the ones that have oars, paddles, no motor, or whatever. Let’s all remember that we are all on the ship of fellowship.

H. I believe we all deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, as full and equal human beings. I want to hold myself responsible and accountable for treating others in this way, and for gently confronting disrespect whenever I encounter it. I know this is an ideal and that I may never reach it perfectly. I have moments when I fall short of how I would really like to be and moments when I am afraid to express myself.

I know this same thing happens for others. I accept that creating a world of mutual respect is a process that will best succeed if I am gentle with myself and others. As the song says, “Let peace begin with me; let this be the moment, now.” I hope this will encourage others to do the same!

I. What touches me about this approach to advocacy (that we call social accountability) was the gentle message to take stock of who we are and where we’ve been, to adopt a shift in critical thinking, to design an ethical path toward building community by the recognition and affirmation of each person’s creativity, skills, and personal power. Our strength is our madness experience coupled with the awareness of the lessons of our awkwardness.

J. You are accountable to be sensitive to the following issues: (1) Don’t interject something when someone is speaking; and (2) When the chairperson or moderator asks you to end your statement as soon as possible, you should oblige them. The issue is not usually one of exclusion and/or the value of your

subject but goes to the matter of moving the agenda, because of time constraints. [A possible (solution) would be to move it to the next agenda.]

K. We feel it is vital, for any national consumer platform which comes from this conference, that codes of conduct for our behavior of interaction between ourselves must incorporate the ideals of inclusion, civility, sensitivity, empathy and, most importantly, mutual respect. These ideals must become our second nature as much as our breathing reflex. It will be essential for the national consumer movement to succeed and move forward that these principles and ideals be adopted into any public document which is accepted and approved by this process. The Twelfth Plank Committee feels we must never leave any consumer behind or not listen and value each consumer's opinions and contribution. We also feel that this body must find ways of implementing these ideals into our movement so that we can become accountable to ourselves and to the movement, and so that we can be true to our cause of helping to improve the lives of consumers throughout our nation.

L. How I deal with an unpleasant person: I try to figure out some way to communicate with that person. A sense of humor. Without a sense of humor I probably wouldn't be here. As I got to know more about myself and my "disease," I began to get out of myself more, understand myself better, talk more. I make up how this person looks in a certain place — maybe ship them off to the moon and put them in a witch's costume or plan an imaginary trip.

M. I have to be accountable to myself first. I have learned that if you expect less than other people, you get less than they do. Expecting more comes from valuing ourselves because we are accountable to ourselves. When there is a general attitude of accountability among the clients, the client culture will become like *many voices speaking in many ways*, and we will be heard more. If we want people to listen when we participate in committees, we must be accountable persons. That insight will be what makes it possible for us to expect meaningful participation.

N. For the segment on social accountability, we are talking about our involvement with each other, but going beyond single involvement to the quality of involvement beyond the ego. This humanistic approach embraces the values of respect and responsibility. These values of social accountability are critically important elements for all the planks in our consumer/survivor platform — if you will, the nails that hold the planks together. In each of these planks, in both the context of those planks and in the processes the groups used to describe their planks, the values of respect and responsibilities identify a sense of ethics for our mutual work. When we look internally and look at what led us to the successes we described, we can see what behaviors and what values guide our work together. From these, it's easy to see the benefits to all parties involved when we relate to each other in this manner. We can remind ourselves to be guided by these values for social accountability. For me personally, I wish for each of us that we live in good health, in safety, in peace, in love.