

Making Hard Choices: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Brief Assistance

Objective -

We will examine:

- our thoughts about what effective advocacy looks like, and
- how to make sure we align our limited resources with those values.

How does change happen?

- Individual:

- Information and Referral
- Technical Assistance in Self Advocacy
- Individual investigation of Abuse and Neglect
- Attend a treatment or education meeting
- Call system administrators to stop individual bad acts
- Representation at a fair hearing
- Individual lawsuit (regardless of precedential value)

- Systemic:

- Educating policy makers
- Rights Trainings
- Monitoring visits
- Traditional and social communication advocacy
- Video advocacy
- Group investigations of abuse and neglect
- Meet system administrators to address pervasive bad acts
- Amicus Briefs
- Systemic lawsuits (precedent setting/group/class/P&A standing)

For whom should change happen?

- Everyone impacted?
- People who contact us about how they are impacted?
- People we see who are impacted?
- People most impacted?

Active Yes and Active No

Making intentional decisions in delivering services allows you to align your actions with your values.

Make active decisions about:

What services you and will not provide

When you will and will not provide them

To whom you will and will not provide them

'Intake' Models

- Model 1: Intake staff is solely administrative.
- Model 2: Intake staff provide fact sheets and referrals.
- Model 3: Intake advocates use active listening skills to communicate with the caller and, after consulting an attorney, provide specific, individually tailored information to empower self advocacy.
- Model 4: same as 3 but intake staff are attorneys.
- Model 5: same as 4 but some very short term, very limited representation is added to self advocacy assistance.
- Model 6 and beyond: Models tend to evolve with time; what does the future hold? What should we call 'intake'?

Administrative Intake Departments

- Will you help me?
- Binary: Yes or No.
- Non-advocacy function of Intake.
- A 'no' (outside our priorities) can feel like rejection.
- Learned helplessness of trauma survivors.
- Intake staff are bearers of bad news only—rarely good news.
- Affects morale of Intake staff.

Administrative and Referral Intake Departments

- Will you help me?
- Binary: Yes or No.
- 'No' comes with a 'No-but...'
- Non-advocacy function of Intake.
- A 'no' gets the client a referral to another agency and a fact sheet, if helpful may be more likely to return.
- Intake staff feel better about their role, as they provide useful information.

Intake Advocacy Departments

- Active listening.
- Specific advice.
- System navigation.
- Self-Help help.
- Answers to fact-specific questions.
- Ghost writing something.
- Interpreting/sending a copy of a statute or regulation.
- Third party intervention and bridging communication gaps.
- Direct help.
- The buck stops here. Come back whenever you need to.

Intake Advocacy Departments

- Will you help me?
- Non-Binary: Yes, though the amount of direct assistance may vary.
- Advocacy function of Intake.
- Clients feel heard and are more likely to return.
- Intake staff help client achieve real world results the P&A can celebrate.
- Affects morale of Intake staff.
- Less grievances for agency.

Advocacy: What is it?

- From Latin ‘Vocare’: To call or give voice to.
- “My object in living is to unite my avocation and my vocation” — Robert Frost.
- An advocate is an empath able to evoke and provoke connectedness with the client.
- Clients are calling the P&A because they need help giving voice to their concerns, finding the right legal vocabulary to vocalize and communicate to third parties.
- Clients can tell when you are listening like an advocate, and are frequently irrevocably thankful for being heard.

Advocacy Intake Departments

- Everyone at the P&A is an advocate.
- P&A values pervade the entire agency.
- Staff has more appreciation for each other's work.
- Clients are appreciative to the entire agency for empathetic habits.

Example 1: Confused caller

Client calls and says they have some sort of Social Security hearing tomorrow and they don't know what to do. It might have something to do with an overpayment.

Example 1: Confused Caller

- Active Listening
- Specific Advice
- System Navigation
- Self-Help help
- Answers to fact specific questions
- Ghostwriting
- Interpreting law/sending statute
- Third party intervention
- Direct help

Example 2: Non-return of security deposit

Client calls and says that it's been 2 months and they never got their security deposit back.

Example 2: Non-return of security deposit

- Active listening
- Specific advice
- System navigation
- Self-help help
- Answers to fact specific questions
- Ghostwriting
- Interpreting law/sending statute
- Third party intervention
- Direct help

Example 3: Non-communicative attorney

Client with TBI is seeking assistance because she got a settlement in a case that she had against a drunk driver, her attorney has the money is not releasing it to the client.

Example 3: Non-communicative attorney

- Active listening
- Specific advice
- System navigation
- Self-help help
- Answers to fact specific questions
- Ghostwriting
- Interpreting law/sending statute
- Third party intervention
- Direct help

Example 4: Bedbugs!

Visiting nurse services have been discontinued for over 2 months due to a bedbug infestation at the client's apartment.

Example 4: Bedbugs

- Active listening
- Specific advice
- System navigation
- Self-help help
- Answers to fact specific questions
- Ghostwriting
- Interpreting law/sending statute
- Third party intervention
- Direct help

Example 5: So am I fired or what?

Client with a TBI was suspended without pay by his employer, a car dealership, after having an accident while parking one of their cars. After the month had passed, he had tried reaching out to restore contact with his employer. They told him they'd call him when they were ready. Client wants to know what he should do.

Example 5: Am I fired or what?

- Active listening
- Specific advice
- System navigation
- Self-help help
- Answers to fact specific questions
- Ghostwriting
- Interpreting law/sending statute
- Third party intervention
- Direct help