

SENSEMAKING: TURF WARS 'R' NOT US

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California Marriage and Family Therapists are out to get social workers; that is, they are out to get them to join their organization. NASW California chapter executive director Janlee Wong, noted in the October *NASW California News* that the (CAMFT) sent a membership solicitation letter to all LCSW's and social work associates in California. He stated, "Needless to say, we were shocked and angry that a non-social work association would attempt to diminish the professional organizations of social work" After emphasizing the differences between social workers and *them*, he noted that some members have considered quitting NASW to join CAMFT. He concludes by saying, "If you identify any social workers planning to Quit NASW for CAFT, please do your best to retain them as members."

Now if I could identify such persons, I would try to retain them, but also tell them to join as many organizations they wanted - the more the merrier.

Having recently read Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, which pointed out how there has been a significant decrease in groups, voting, social action and general participation of people in fulfilling, civic responsibilities, I hesitate to suggest that people *not* join with others. The importance of "social capital" is that the connections and resources that a person and group have are vital to their welfare. Social capital refers to "connections among individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." (Putnam, 2000; 19) "It is the trust, norms and networks that facilitate cooperation for

mutual benefit." (1993; 167)

I was distressed that we social workers would try to deter persons from fulfilling a basic human need of joining with others. As a social group worker, sort of a minority group in social work, I was particularly upset. "The more groups, the better," say I.

Now, I admit that it might not have been very civil of the Family Therapists to try to recruit social workers without first alerting or getting permission from NASW, but on the other hand, they didn't suggest that we leave NASW. Social workers would never do what they did, would we? It only shows how CAMFT really needs us; they don't understand that social capital requires trust and reciprocity, and now we feel they can't be trusted. And as far as reciprocity, well....

There is another important point to consider; NASW and CAMFT hear different voices. When I practice and teach, the voices I hear are William Schwartz, Saul Bernstein, Helen Perlman, and Whitney Young, and they taught me from the voices they heard from their teachers: Bertha Reynolds, Grace Coyle and Jessie Taft; Alton Lynford and Sophonisba Breckinridge. Edith and Grace Abbot learned directly from the voices of Jane Addams and Mary Richman. Countless voices which guide me every day. Sadly perhaps, the Marriage and Family Therapists, a newer profession than ours, do not have these voices in their heads.

Should we get into a turf war? I don't think so, because the voices in my head and my own experience suggests they have some darn good practitioners. They have contributed knowledge and practice which I have used with students. They are not us and

we are not them, but we can help each other. If we really believe that our education prepared us to think contextually, and that we are more into the "whole person" and the "environment," and that they are "narrowly focused," can we prove it? Are there really that many of us involved in social and institutional change? It may be true that we advocate more for the client; I can't say because I don't know what they do, but I do know that in California they have to be licensed and must meet some of the same requirements about human sexuality, ethics, child abuse as we do. They are learning some of the same things we learn and at times by the same teachers. Like it or not, we are linked to them by the California licensing board. How did that happen?

Rather than a turf war, why not some joint meetings at our conference each year or theirs? We may both have something to learn, and we might find common ground to move us both forward. Mr. Janlee Wong, who I believe offers us tremendous leadership and is as committed to the profession as one could be, can be a catalyst for such a synergistic move.

The same NASW October issue also printed a joint NASW and California Society for Clinical Social Work (not all of whom are NASW members) response. Well, I read it and it says what we do, it presents some important facts, points out the dangers, and focuses on protecting the profession and of course the clients. But what happened to a mutual response involving group work and community organization? Why not a unified response, a social work response? Is that what makes CAMFT seem appealing? That it doesn't "bother" with external contextual forces and institutional change and the factors of justice and diversity that social work thinks about and should be working for?

Rather than tell social workers not to quit, what? Remind them of the profession they are in; remind them of why they became

social workers, and of hope they once had to build a just society? Most of all, we might ask them to remember their teachers' voices in their heads, all of them, not just those who taught therapy. If they are not able to do this, or if it makes no difference, then perhaps this is not the profession for them, but they will still help persons in need.

Social work is not about how large we are, but about how capable we are in fulfilling our professional commitment. Working with CAMFT makes sense to me. As Putnam might suggest, it is always more preferable to bowl together than to bowl alone.

References

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