

Cooperative Notes

A publication of Cooperative Care
Wautoma, Wisconsin

Cooperative Care is a worker owned cooperative of direct care givers who provide home care and personal care to people who are elderly or disabled in order that they may stay in their homes.

Cooperative Care's mission is to provide values-based quality services and to provide good jobs to direct care workers that offer meaningful work, fair pay, and benefits.

Cooperative Care

Workers with values caring for you in your home.

The Possibilities of Relationships

Think of the best times of your life; think of the times when you were happy, feeling secure and feeling good about yourself. If you consider the elements of your life during those good times, you'll no doubt realize that they were when you had good relationships with other people. There may have been other circumstances, too, but the over-riding common element across those good times will probably be positive relationships with others.

Relationships with others are critical to our state of being. Have a fight with your spouse? Lousy day ahead. Struggling with your boss at work? The job just isn't any

of mind. Think of your drive into work. Did road rage overcome your pleasant outlook that began the day? Did the unfriendly clerk at the gas station put you in a negative frame of mind?

Scientists are learning more and more about how relationships influence the natural world, with humans being a part of that world. Researchers in quantum physics - what they call "the new science" - tell us that relationships are key to making all sorts of things happen. Human behavioral scientists apply this to us humans at work, in our families and also in our relationships to animals, plants and the earth. The kinds of relationships we build, nurture, and seek out have huge effects on us and all that is around us.

Let's start with a basic idea about relationships. Remember the old adage, you get what you give? Well, it's true and probably many of you will attest to that. Think about it from both the "giver" and the "receiver" viewpoint.

When you have been on the receiving end of a nasty interchange, what did you give back? Did it make you want to spend more time with the person? Would you choose to be with someone who treats you badly?

Now think of the times you treated someone less than nicely. Did he or she seek you out as their friend? Did he or she do you favors? Most likely, the type of behavior you receive influences the reaction you have to the person and vice versa. So, you get what you give and give what you get.

Relationships are like that in care giving, too. Whether it is with co-workers, supervisors, people you manage, or with users of your services, relationships make all the difference in the world to quality care. They are interactive, interconnected, and interdependent. A user gets treated badly and business suffers. A boss disrespects care givers and care givers feel no loyalty or reason to do well for the company. Poor relationships breed more poor relationships.

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fun anymore. Even short, seemingly insignificant relationships can affect our state

What do good relationships look like?

It's not that healthy, positive relationships don't have ups and downs. All relationships do. But the strong, vital relationships make it through the bumps without doing lasting harm and retaining respect of the inherent worth of the people involved.

Healthy relationships don't even mean that the people stay together forever. Sometimes a person just doesn't have the skills to be a good care giver or a user just can't relate within the available resources of a service provider. But if the relationships are built on respect and kindness, the separation maintains and reflects those values.

Positive relationships reflect calm and peace. People don't over react to events, nor do they leap to judgment. The best is believed about people.

Forgiveness is woven into positive relationships. Mistakes are made, errors are corrected, and then people go on harboring no grudges.

People are welcoming to others. They are happy to see each other and show it. They ask each other how things are going. They say they are happy to see each other. It's not just another day or another shift to get through. It's another chance to share time with someone we respect and who adds to our lives.

"It is no longer enough to simply say that relationships are important. As former American Red Cross President Elizabeth Dole put it, 'When the river is rising and it's 2:00 a.m., that's not the time to start a relationship.' If you don't have the web or fabric of good, trusting relationships you can't suddenly pick up the phone and say, 'I need you.'"

Margaret Wheatley, author of Leadership and the New Science

Small celebrations are a part of the fabric of the relationship. People cheer for each other. A new car, a longed-for vacation, a restful night—all are cause for quiet celebration between people.

You are the greatest influence on how someone sees another person. If you are intent on building relationships, you talk about endearing qualities of others. You are gentle in your assessment of a person's flaws. You remind yourself and others of the inherent worth of each person and how we are all the same.



When you enter a culture of positive relationships, people look at each other intensely and kindly. They listen, they ask others' advice, they smile at each other, they laugh, they are open. It's a place where you want to stay.

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But all this doesn't mean you can't interrupt this cycle. People are successful changing their interactions and thoughts, but it takes hard work, thoughtfulness, and the willingness to change. Ah, but the change that come about can be breath taking. Managers who truly act on the often vocalized statement that caregivers are the backbone of the company. Managers who ask caregivers for advice, who invite them to the planning table, who budgets for continuing education for caregivers and who makes it clear that he or she loves to interact with caregivers. Caregivers who offer ideas on how to make work better. Caregivers who are gentle and kind to users and who want to do what is right and best for them.

The possibilities of relationships are endless. Trust, forgiveness, kindness, equity, love. Think of where relationships built on these rich and robust values could lead.

What motivates you?

I remember being a new supervisor and shaping my behavior around protecting my ego. At meetings I wanted to make sure that I looked smart and in control. With employees who reported to me, I wanted them to see me as always right and having answers to every question. That meant I interrupted people at meetings, pooh-poohed others' ideas, and generally strutted my stuff whenever I could. What an awful way to build relationships that are trusting and caring. And what a terrible way to stay focused on the client. Instead of asking myself, "What is best for the person?" I operated from what is best for me?

All of us are motivated by various beliefs and thought patterns. We may believe everyone is out to make us look foolish or to harm us. If we think that, then we act in ways that reflect this belief. We might attack them or go into hiding ourselves. If we believe that people we are caring for are out to make our day miserable, for instance, then we see them as the enemy and treat them as such. But, on the other hand, if we believe that everyone has inherent worth, that some people have challenges and difficulties that prevent them from being always loving and kind, and that our purpose is to see them as the important, worthy people they are, reflecting kindness and caring onto them, then we act in another way.

A very common belief is that everyone owes us something and that we need something that they aren't giving us. We need confirmation of our worth from our supervisors. We need attention from our spouse. We need our kids to be good. We need our co-workers to like us. And on and on. Whenever we see someone not giving us what we need, we are setting them up to be the bad guy. The truth is that we have everything we need inside of us. As adults, our affirmations shouldn't have to come from outside of ourselves. We need to build internal affirmations by living our lives fully and in ways that reflect our deepest held values, those values that make life worth living for us. If we can identify those values that connect us to others and make our lives meaningful and act in ways that reflect these values in our daily lives, then we are our own persons, responsible for our own feelings and actions, and then others become our partners, not our enemies in life.

So what motivates you? What are the beliefs that trigger your behavior and form your relationships? Do you have a core set of values that you fall back on to shape your life? This is like a company's mission or vision statement. Individuals need this, too. Management guru Stephen Covey calls it a personal mission statement. It is more basic than your job goals or your life objectives because these are what influence HOW you achieve your goals. These are the means of reaching your ends and they make the end rewarding or bittersweet. After all, you may buy the sports car you always dreamed of having, but if you got it by lying and cheating, will you be happy with it for long?

Take time out to ask yourself why you do the things you do. Then consider if your reasons are those that reflect your values and ideals. If not, join the crowd because it's not easy to be true to your most closely-held values. But it is easy to start, little by little, to move towards living your values.

The first step is opening yourself to consideration of your motives. The second step is to clearly identify the values you want to live by. The third step is to take some risk and change your thinking and behavior to more closely reflect your values. And the last step is to keep at it. It is freeing and opens the door to honest, caring relationships with others.



Changing your relationships

We've all heard it said that life is a journey. So it is with trying to make positive change in your life and that means trying to make positive change in your relationships. It's a journey of many days and many miles, but one that will enrich and one that can be made easier by remembering author Anne LaMott's bird-by-bird theory. That theory comes from her little brother who, on the day before a huge school assignment was due on North American birds, went weeping to their father for help. The father, wise as many are, calmly told his panic-stricken offspring that it wasn't overwhelming at all if he would sit



down and just do it bird by bird. Any project or change that seems huge and undoable is really not that way at all. We just have to do it bird by bird.

You can lay out a blueprint for cherishing relationships. It starts with being thoughtful about who you are, identifying what the purposes are of your actions and reactions, practicing seeing others as equals with inherent worth, and little by little restructuring your view of the world and people around you.

One of the most important things we can do to change is to talk about the values we want to build our relationships upon. Have you ever had a conversation about what love looks like? Do

you ever talk about forgiveness? Having conversations about these deeply meaningful, but often avoided dimensions of our lives can be the beginning of positive change. It's very difficult to talk about these values. The degree of difficulty reflects the disconnect we have with our deepest emotions and needs. Starting a conversation is like opening a door to the bright sun and fresh air, letting it penetrate the dark and dank regions of fear and loneliness.

Once we start thinking about our relationships and our role in making them positive or negative factors in our lives, and as we start conversations about values that affect relationships, then we need to practice this change in our daily lives. It is only with persistent practice that long-term deep and lasting change can occur. We humans often need reminders to keep us on track. Here are some suggestions to help you create your positive change.

Create a personal mission statement as suggested by management teacher Stephen Covey. Write it down and post it. Above all, revisit it often, even daily.

Start conversations about relationships and values. Use the words love, forgiveness, humility, and so forth in your conversations.

Keep your mouth closed and listen more. Ask people what they think, how they'd do something, how they feel and then listen.

Find ways to center and refocus. You may read devotional or affirming literature. Maybe you can learn meditation. Perhaps walking in nature brings you back to your center. Find something that helps you breathe easily and slow your mind and practice it every day.

Be thoughtful. Stop before you react. Think about why you are about to take action.

Believe. Believe that all people have inherent worth. Believe that we are all connected. Believe that joy comes from being joyful and happiness comes from seeing all there is to be happy for.

Most of all, enjoy the journey of forming positive relationships.

Strong, healthy relationships lower risk

Businesses and managers are always looking for ways to lower risk. Building relationships based on clear, positive values will bring about changes that lower risk of lawsuit, work injuries, harassment, disgruntled employees, and more. Human and healthcare services talk about values often, but you'd be wrong to think that talk necessarily leads to living those values.

Mission and vision statements of human and healthcare businesses are rife with values language that makes them sound warm and caring. They are welcoming, dignity-enhancing, compassionate, and more. Ask any of the employees, including management, how these adjectives play out in daily action and they no doubt would be hard pressed to tell you.

Managers would be wise to discuss these values often and in depth because how they are reflected in employee behavior and in the relationships between people can be a significant element in lowering risk besides

“Many experts believe that an even larger number of malpractice suits could be avoided if physicians listened more attentively to patients, and if the physician patient relationship was based on mutual trust and open communication.”

Yale New Haven Medical Center

providing for better care for users of the services.

Values-based, positive relationships directly relate to employees feeling informed, listened to, empowered, or, on the flip side, used, ignored, or belittled. If a manager and employee have an equitable relationship, then the employee is open to giving and taking

suggestions, cooperating and pitching in.

Inequitable relationships-ones that have an imbalance of power on one person-give birth to distrust, feelings of not being appreciated, lack of loyalty, and even acting out against those in power. How many of us have lost our drive to do well on a job when our supervisor made it clear that he or she showed through his or her actions that the employee was not as “good” or important as management?

There are many values that play into positive relationships in the workplace. Relationships that are based on honesty means that people admit their mistakes instead of hiding them. Honesty means we look at motivations and change those may harm others, especially users. If we are honest, we take responsibility for our role in a problem and in the solution.

People who practice humility listen to others, refrain from bragging or taking glee in others’ misfortunes. They ask for advice and keep learning from others. Humility means you don’t rest on your laurels, but continue to look for ways to improve. People who are humble do what is right, not what makes them look good.

Refraining from judging is another important variable in relationships that can lower risk. If employees know they will be listened to and not judged, they will disclose concerns and come to management for advice or assistance. But the supervisor who sees

Plaintiffs’ lawyers report that 70 percent of malpractice claims are brought because of physician-patient communication problems or as a result of the physician’s attitude.
Minnesota Medical Association

the employee as stupid or just plain trouble, will get what he or she gives...employees who separate themselves from the company and managers, and who would not go out of their way to bring up concerns or offer suggestions.

Think about the workplace and what would lower risk. Employees who follow rules, who help each other, who offer suggestions, who report problems, who take action on their own, who don’t want to harm the employer, want to help on a team....these employees are out there; almost all people want to be happy on their jobs and feel good about what they do. But too often they aren’t given the chance to become the employees they want to be in trusting, equitable relationships with their managers.

Turning work relationships upside down

We are pretty rigid when it comes to our relationships at work. Most jobs have hierarchies of authority. That's the top to bottom model of management. Everyone has their place and their role and there is little encouragement to step out of the defined places people hold. This makes for rigidity and stifles creativity. And it sure doesn't nurture relationships that are trusting, sharing, and equitable.

There are different ways to structure work environments that change relationships in positive ways and make for more productive decision making. Author and organizational behavior scientist Margaret Wheatley uses the metaphor of an ocean to describe an equitable and cutting edge work model. Everyone is a part of the ocean -- users, staff, managers, owners. At the crest of the waves are the people who need to be leading at any given time. Sometimes it's the users of the services who need to be leading, telling us all how our supports should be given. Other times, it's the direct care workers who should be on the crest of the wave, directing us on how to support them and how to give the best care. We are all equals as we swim and float in the ocean and we allow, in fact help, the person who needs to lead us to reach the crest of the wave as necessary.

Another business model that turns work relationships upside down is the worker-owned cooperative. An example of this is Cooperative Care, located in Waushara County Wisconsin. Over 70 direct care workers own the home and personal care cooperative. They elect a board of directors, all direct care workers and members, who then hire an executive director to run the business. The executive director reports to the direct care givers on the board. The direct care givers set policy, make long range plans, and oversee the financial health of the operation. At the

end of the year, profit belongs to the members according to their hours worked in that year. Direct care givers make decisions that are best for members, the long range health of the cooperative, and for users of the services.

There are many models that will change the linear, top down management approach to business, but the model won't make a difference if relationships don't change. If the executive director in a cooperative still tries to control and grab the power, nothing will be different. If a manager in the "ocean" uses her paddle to knock caregivers off the crest of the wave, it will be business as usual.

Thinking independently is the most valuable characteristic we can nurture at work. Don't make people live within preconceived notions about how things should be done. The second most important thing is to encourage conversation about meaningful issues. Open doors and minds so that everyone is welcome to express ideas and talk about what really matters at work. Build relationships built on trust, respect, honesty and humility and you will be surprised how good it feels to turn the workplace upside down.

Love does belong in the workplace

Sometimes those of us in human or healthcare services make no sense. We talk about caring and kindness and nurture and support and then we tell people they can't become attached to clients. The only thing we need to do to help people understand a "right" way to interact with others is to describe a healthy versus unhealthy relationship. Unhealthy relationships do things like consume all your time, make you feel

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Love in the workplace cont'

guilty, interfere with other aspects of your life, prevent you from feeling good about yourself, limit contact with others, cross into intimate roles rather than friend or caregiver roles, may divulge inappropriate personal information, cause you to harm others or ignore others' welfare and generally do not feel good.

Healthy relationships do have a sense of attachment and connection and there is a wish to do what is best for the other person. And that, you see, is love.

Many people would say that the workplace is no place for love. That couldn't be farther from the truth. After all, most of us spend more time on our jobs than we do with our families. Jobs are often stressful and take us away from the support of our friends and families. Where would love be more needed than in the workplace?

There are many definitions of love. Some say that love is a strong, positive regard or affection while others say that it is taking pleasure from the happiness of others.

Most all definitions agree that love is about putting someone else before ourselves. Isn't that what would make for good care giving? Isn't that what would make for good managers? Isn't that what users of our services and their families would ask for? Isn't that what we ask from politicians who make policy decisions?

In reality, good relationships boil down to loving relationships. Cheering for others when something good happens to them. Supporting them when they are down. Respecting them. Forgiving them so you can go on with important work and build trust and care into the relationship.

We need love in our workplaces, in our families, in our communities, and in our government. It's a four letter word, but not one that we want to erase or discourage. In fact, we should say it more often and act on it all the time.

The care in care giving

Direct care workers know more about caring than the vast majority of Americans. Their work lifts us all up above the commercialism, materialism and consumerism of our culture. Yet often care givers are caught in systems that don't allow them to really care about the people they assist. In order to keep the care in care giving, jobs need to be shaped in ways that allow care to occur and care givers need the support necessary to learn, practice, and develop caring relationship behaviors.

One of the greatest barriers to truly supportive, loving relationships in human and health care services is the philosophy and resulting behavior of control. Too many times, our services and interactions with users are designed to control the person. The reason behind this may be convenience, need for power, fear of loss of control, inability to think outside the box, or a host of other motivations. This way of interacting is especially prevalent in disability services. We've set what we believe is a vision of normalcy that is, in our opinion, what is best for the person, and then we march him, push him, align him, and squeeze him into this pattern of behavior.

Knowing what we know about the effects of relationships, we should have our entire focus on building positive relationships with users, seeing them as inherently wonderful people, finding their endearing qualities, and listening to what they are trying to tell us. Remember, positive, equitable relationships produce trust, disclosure, and cooperation among other things. Negative relationships produce distrust, anger, fear, and a host of other qualities that make for acting out, withdrawal, and aggression.

How relationships are shaped creates the culture of the environment. Every relationship is important. The work environment must one that reflects the caring, respectful, kind, honest interactions we want between caregiver and user. Let care givers be care givers. Don't make them be paid attendants.

Care givers provide the most meaningful service in our communities. It behooves us all to recognize this, honor it, model positive relationships building, treat them as the important people they are, and provide environments that allow quiet, caring, equitable relationships to thrive.



Above all,
have fun

We say it both ways. Life is too long to be miserable. Life is too short to be miserable. No matter which you believe it's true. Life should be fun. Work should be fun. If it's not joyful the vast majority of the time, we're doing something wrong.

According to the Helpguide for Healthy Aging at www.helpguide.org, *"the sound of roaring laughter is far more contagious than any cough, sniffle, or sneeze. Humor and laughter can cause a domino effect of joy and amusement, as well as set off a number of positive physical effects. A good hearty laugh can help:*

- *reduce stress,*
- *lower blood pressure,*
- *elevate mood,*
- *boost immune system ,*
- *improve brain functioning,*
- *protect the heart,*



- *connect you to others,*
- *foster instant relaxation, and make you feel good."*

People who laugh together share good times and good times lend themselves to feeling good about yourself and about life. That includes at work! Laughter lets us see how really unimportant most problems are. Laughing at ourselves releases us from being perfect. What a burden that can be! We should encourage fun and laughter. Remember, if it stops being fun, something is wrong. Life is too good to not have fun.

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