

*Phrases that Pay: A Celebration of their Roots*

In each issue of Collaborative Adventures, we have featured a PHRASE THAT PAYS (PTP). This time, we thought you might like to know more about their origin and why we think PTP are a valuable learning tool. For accuracy, we went right to the originator of the concept, Brent Matthews, former Dawn Project Director, who currently heads the ACES Project. Brent was looking for "one-liners associated with a colorful graphic slide that would serve as a memorable way to anchor in the listener's mind the core learning of the actual training experience." It is important to note that some of the individual PTPs were created or first used by pioneers in the wraparound field like John VanDenBerg, Karl Dennis, Pat Miles, and Mary Grealish. Some are newer and were created by Brent and/or Knute Rotto, CEO of Choices, and the source of others is uncertain. Brent's idea was to put them all together and use them for training related to systems of care, strength based practice and being a change agent. Brent reports that he first used the PTP, "Change Agents Change First" when he was in graduate school in Oregon in 1985.

If you have seen the PowerPoint show by Brent, he often starts with the EMOTIONS slide that he uses to discuss "your theory of change". He often ends with the PTP "Change Agents Change First". Brent passionately believes that strength based practice depends on the practitioner to be the instrument of change. The practitioner must be flexible and open to learning from those they serve. Thus the importance of the PTP, "LISTEN, LISTEN, AND THEN LISTEN".

Strength based practice is an advanced clinical skill and the primary tool used is a strength based discovery. To be most effective with a strength based discovery, practitioners must be ready to see the world and the people served in a new way. Practitioners must describe the people they serve with the new language of strengths that enhances both the client's and practitioner's hope and capacity for change.

To bring this message home Brent uses what he calls the great metaphor of the 21st century: the Magic Eye slide seen here. Very simply, the Magic Eye teaches us that if you look at it just as you do everything else, what you see is a mess of colors and lines. Using that same view of the families we serve, we see this "mess" and find ourselves using words like chaotic, confused, disorganized, dysfunctional, or enmeshed to describe them.

The Magic Eye teaches us that if we shift OUR focus and work to view the "mess" differently, what emerges is an incredible 3-D picture with great depth. When we can accurately see what is in the picture, our language changes to describe it. We will no longer be seeing a "mess", but instead an incredible group of people with hearts, souls, minds, skills, abilities, relationships, a genuine interest in making their lives better and a desire to give back to the world and to live their dreams.

Just as it is for us, it is the same for the children and families we serve. We all want to be viewed in the best possible light. To best discover who the people we serve truly are leads us to one final PTP, "What are the STRENGTHS, the STRENGTHS & the STRENGTHS!"

Thank you to Brent Matthews (ACES Project Director) for his work on this article, for sharing his passion for change and for continuing to be "a fearless leader, hope inspirer, and infuser of courage and confidence".