

Belonging Matters' Podcast

Transcript

Episode 1: Activating Life Giving Vision

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Welcome to Belonging Matters podcast series. Now available on Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, Spotify, and www.belongingmatters.org. You can email Belonging Matters at info@belongingmatters.org. Episode One, 'Activating Life Giving Visions'. Michael Kendrick is an independent international consultant in human resources and community work who resides in Massachusetts. His interests include leadership, service quality, the creation of safeguards for vulnerable persons, social integration, change, innovation, values advocacy, the role of individual persons and small groups in creating solutions, alternate to bureaucracy, personalised approaches to supporting people and reform in the human service field, amongst others. In this podcast, Michael explains how to activate life giving visions.

Hello, I'm Michael Kendrick and I would like to speak on the subject of activating life giving visions. And life's inherent possibilities that are not always appreciated by us as we live. Nonetheless, there is a relationship between what we can envision and what we are likely to attempt in our lives or in the lives of others. And in this way, visions are the mental picture, or pictures we create that enable us to visualise the world in all the new ways. We see these images in our minds as much as we see the material world with our regular eyesight. The American mystic and psychic Edgar Cayce, he of the early 20th century, often used the phrase that 'mind is the builder'. By this he meant that we can use our minds to recreate the world, so the images, attitudes and ideas that have their origin in our imagination. And the mental attitudes and outlooks that we embrace then are magnified and accentuated through our imagination. He was drawing attention to the construct and possibilities that are latent in our minds, that enable us to reformulate our lives in our world should we choose to do so. It is evident that many people with disabilities live in a world of unnecessarily low expectations for their potentials in life. This atmosphere of diminished expectations acts to dilute the quality of their lives by depriving them of important opportunities to experience, grow, develop and flourish. As we can see from the substantial progress of the last half century, these low expectations can be replaced by more positive developmental ones, with commensurate benefits for the people experiencing them, so they're not locked in. What may be less clear is precisely how such a transformation of outlook takes place, and what each of us can do to bring it about. What

follows is a description of the key components of creating fulfilling a life giving vision in regards to a given person. These considerations would hold whether that person is yourself or others that you are concerned about. Now, the benefits embodied in efforts at managing better need to be recognised. It's unlikely that any sustained effort at imagining better will be attempted, if one remains unconvinced the generating practical opportunities in a person's life that had not been there before can be achieved quite regularly. It's compelling to see examples of how others have transformed their lives as well highlight the scope that exists to make it possible for a person to enjoy more of life. However, if one remains doubtful, it's good to name those doubts and misgivings and talk with others about them. Doubt should be listened to and learned from rather than just serve as the reason not to move ahead, often we can learn a great deal from our doubts. If we can affirm that we can make a difference in our own life or that of others, it then becomes possible to act upon this conviction. Now in defining and choosing life giving values we have a challenge for sure. It is our values that will guide us and set our priorities. It's important that values be selected that are actually life giving. By this is meant that values are created or enforced which ensure that people's own, or the lives of others are lived to their fullest potential. If this is not the objective, then it's predictable that we might sell for much less beneficial lives that are actually possible. Having a life giving outlook does not in any way mean that others will always cooperate with such a positive attitude. But it does make it more likely that the person of concern will come much closer to a life that is fulfilling in a way that we might discover could be meaningful for them.

values that are accompanied by decision and commitment are also more likely to flourish than those that stay simply as goals which are never acted upon.

So how might we undertake imagining better? Well, one can initially begin with imagining better by reflecting on the person's current life, and how this contrasts with the lives of others in the community of a similar age. Seeing how the potential in the lives of others have been nurtured and developed will help create a sense of what could someday become equally true for the person that you are concerned with. It's important to not be unduly concerned about the person's disability as this will commonly draw attention, emphasis, on what people cannot do, rather than many things in life they could do and enjoy if they're properly supported to do so. As an enabling vision gradually expands and builds upon the person's strengths, gifts, passions, and life interests, it will become more obvious that one can build the life, actually create a life that suits the person and their capacities to live life fully. Not surprisingly, this will mean an emerging lifestyle for the person that is increasingly life giving rather than life denying. Now, vision isn't something that one needs simply to create one needs to be convinced of the vision. And it's not the case that every inclination that can inspire and trigger engage us will lead to practical outcomes in due course. This is because we normally need to become convinced about the worth of any proposition and this will require that we test and challenge our vision with some regularity. Promising but as yet unproven ideas often emerge in vague underdeveloped, and new symbolic forms. And that is why it is often necessary to carefully evaluate what

ideas have merit and would be worth pursuing what wouldn't. When we are generally persuaded that the vision will be beneficial, then it's time to act on it, giving the consideration of our level of confidence in what this vision seems to promise. So in a sense, vision must be persuasive to the creator of the vision as much as anyone else. Vision however positive it appears, will undoubtedly have the ability to miss lead, sound vision will stand the test of time, but it may take time for that to become clear. In other words, the vision is not something one does once, but one continues to refine the vision, test it, update it, and strengthen it over time. And so also over time we decide upon and affirm the vision. Vision cannot be acted upon and enlivened by practical actions if the holder of the vision remains undecided, because they're, if you like, not doing anything with the vision. At some point, if any meaningful benefit to a person is to eventually be achieved, it must be resolved, that the vision is worthwhile to embrace. In other words, one needs to be persuaded of the vision. This bringing of oneself and others to decision about the vision means that the back and forth of weighing the vision is put aside and a decision is taken to act on the vision. And this is not meant to suggest the vision no longer evolves, but rather that at a time comes where it is decided that action is needed, or the vision and its potential benefits will never be realised. In this kind of decision. There's always some kind of risk. But there's also the possibility of resolution and resolve. Because when your resolved to act on a particular vision, this affirms the vision and it makes it more possible that we can do something from moving it from vision to actual practical ways to achieve the benefits of that vision. So actualising the emerging vision is as important in its own

way as actually creating the vision. And there's much to be learned from trying to live a vision as this wringing of deeper valleys into actualisation is always a contributor to wisdom. In this sense, you know, the practical experience of trying to do this can make us wise to many different things that we wouldn't possibly appreciate if we hadn't immersed ourself in this process. Note that being certain and untroubled by one's vision is also problematic in its own way. And the actual living of vision demands that we have a practice, a way of acting and being. And without practice, then we don't actually refine the vision and make progress with it. So in this sense, like everything else, practice makes perfect. And it's very important to continue to refine and improve upon a vision as you go. And so in meeting needs, which are important in a person's life, then the vision plays the role of helping find ways to address people's needs effectively. A more likely pathway to success is the possibility of building upon what others have already achieved, in order to meet one's needs, or the needs of the person we may have in mind, if what we want is needed is normative for many people, it suggests that lots of people have had their needs met. So doing what they've done often is very helpful in terms of actualizing the vision. In other words, you don't have to break new ground all the time, one just simply borrows from what others have learned. So people with disabilities are not some strange version of humanity requiring their own sort of exotic response. So using what other people use to meet the same need, actually makes an awful lot of sense and simply means adapting it to the specific needs of that particular person with a disability. So in this way, one doesn't have to be entirely a pioneer, one can simply borrow good examples from what

others have achieved. And the principle I would suggest to keep in mind is a principle that - if you want to meet normative needs, then look to normative means for meeting those needs. In other words, how others met that need, will be full of kind of suggestions when you explore it, because one can borrow heavily from what others have learned from their own experience. And this is better than to start with the assumption that all people with disabilities are so different from other people that we couldn't possibly apply what other people have learned or benefit from. And this is a kind of perverse use of the term 'special' that people are so 'special' that things that work with everybody else wouldn't work with them. So in this way, staying close to what it is that other people do to meet their needs, is often not quite failsafe, but it's a very good deal probability that you'll have success. Now, the community itself at large, is a resource in all of this. So it's good to remember that we're not starting from scratch here, where we're in a community that has many resources that we can use. Similarly, it's very unlikely that you can get a life that's good and suitable for a person if they remain isolated from the broader community, because the broader community has a lot of the resources that could be tapped into just as much by people with disabilities as anybody else. So in this sense, you can't create a life apart from community that is better done in community itself. And the possibility of a normal life in communities is always present, because there are many, many pathways in communities to get the things that you need in life.

Now, watching life is quite different from experiencing it firsthand with all of its tribulations and rewards and

complexities. And so, in this sense, being in the effort of trying to build a better life, one begins to see things that actually do work, and things that didn't work as expected. And in this way, we can see it as a process of, you know, building piece by piece. Every element that you learn something from, then is in the treasury of what you've developed. Now, a lot of the pathways to the good life are through other people that other people bring gifts and contributions to the life of a person with disability much as they do for anyone else. And when people are engaged in communities, you know, living our daily life, we may not always appreciate that. But we are constantly benefited by the context and people we know and community, each brings their own benefits and insights and contributions. So, our fellow citizens are constantly enriching our lives, whether they intended to or not, and we benefit from our contact with our fellow citizens and our fellow community members. And so we need to think of being in community as a set of pathways, where one can then benefit from the gifts, qualities, and practical contributions that are unique, and that are unique to particular persons. Now, if we don't look for such people and invite them into our lives, it would be almost like they don't exist, because you're, we've shut ourselves off from them. So the effort in creating a good life is really to see the necessity of having people in a person's life, and finding ways to bring that about. It can be in very small ways, it can be done relatively easily. And one can try many things over the period of years in terms of reaching out to all kinds of different people. And when we look back from a process like that, we have been sharing our lives with others, and others have been sharing our their lives with us. So this is best done in community, you don't

get a good life, by being isolated from other people, but by rather, in finding some way to be in their presence and to collaborate in living. And so as people are generous with us, we can return the favor. And of course, one of the great gifts in life is to be able to return the favor to others. And people with disabilities would equally find that very satisfying to be able to make their contribution. So if you think about it, there's a great advantage about being proactive about life building. Life building isn't the sort of a thing where you sit around and wait for life to happen. You have to take the initiative again and again. And in the process, what this does is make a life come alive in its own way, a person's life, and if this is done intentionally, you don't wait for life to happen, you're constantly in a process of seeing what might be useful to try next. And waiting isn't a very good strategy, because you just expect the whole world to come to your door. And there's many times when it's much better to get used to the habit of reaching out and going where other people are. And people can, you know, surprise us in many ways, we may just assume everyone's sort of preoccupied with their own life, and they wouldn't have time and whatnot. But I think an honest appraisal is that there are many people that when they see what you're trying to achieve, for a person, they will make their own contribution to that. So life building is in that sense of something we do in the company of others. And by, in our own way, inviting others into the process of creating an experience for someone or a benefit for someone. And this can be a simple experience, or it can be an ongoing experience. It can be an episodic experience. There are many ways to do that. But they're all if you like points of good life that people pass through and get some benefit from.

Now, since many people don't always know themselves what they would like in life, it's very important to do what I call a life tasting, which is to take the time to have new experiences and to see whether those agree with you. And it's the same for a person with a disability as anyone else. Not all things agree with them. Some things might agree with them over time, others may not ever interest them. And so this is really an exploratory process of life tasting and learning what appeals and satisfies, and what does not satisfy. And one can learn even from a group of unsatisfied experiences, because there would be elements of those experiences you wouldn't want to repeat. And by being able to reflect on what didn't work for you wasn't really your thing or whatever, or to your liking, it gives you insight in terms of what other experiences you might pursue and how you approach them. But the process of life tasting isn't a process where the outcome is always known. That's why you try things that I call life tasting. And so you can't always be sure that it will be an enjoyable experience or whatever. But you can be sure that from time to time, it will work out for you. And it's true that this process described here is life building. It has its problems and obstacles to overcome, but one shouldn't be overcome from them just because obstacles exist, often the obstacle can be worked around in time. And this can be very helpful to remember as you do come up against discouraging or bewildering or difficult or vexing challenges in trying to get an experience to come right for a person. And, you know, it's not unusual that at times people can feel defeated and overwhelmed, you know, by particular problems. But that usually is not a permanent state. It's simply you know, what everyone has when a certain day doesn't go as planned. So it's

important to stay in it in the process, and to stay positive and constructive. And not to be particularly harsh with yourself or others about things that didn't work out. And because there are no guarantees in the process of living. And so we simply have to absorb a certain amount of setback or difficulty. One of the delights of doing life building, of course, is that things do work well at times. So it's very important to take pleasure in that and to be thankful for the things that did work out. Because this affirms that it is quite possible to do positive things, and to have them turn out well. So it's good for one's outlook to be grateful and regularly appreciate the blessings of what has happened for the good. And it's good for our minds and spirit and health and well being really to be positive in that way. So it is worth cultivating. But as one goes, one learns to change one's thinking and expectations to fit the realities that you encounter. And our expectations and thinking aren't always right, we often make assumptions that turn out not to be as accurate as they could be, or as helpful. So in this sense, if you have a commitment to revising some of our thinking and mental states and expectations, it gives us the advantage of being able to adapt. Because when we lock in our expectations and insist that things only happen in one way, we're actually tying our hands. On the other hand, by regularly giving ourselves permission to simply change your mind, and see such adjustments as advantageous, means it will be much more able to be flexible, adaptive, resourceful, creative, those sorts of things. And it's also possible to not feel as isolated by simply reaching out to other people to include them in what you're trying to do. And we can be strengthened in countless ways by other people. And so trying to do everything ourselves, it's really

not a very sensible strategy when so many other people, first of all, probably do some things better than ourselves. So why not build on their strengths. And also, we then actually cultivate allies, people that are on our side, helping us make progress. This doesn't reduce our self reliance or personal responsibility, but it does give us a way to, to do things we probably couldn't do if we just relied solely on ourself. And in this sense, we do need to cultivate wisdom from learning from our experience, but also some sources of inspiration that have proven beneficial to us. And this can be people or examples, if you've come across something that you might have seen on TV, or a book you read, or a conversation you had. So there are many sources of wisdom. And these can be blended with their own experience, and converted into, if you like, a kind of ongoing guide for us. And you never know what those might be. But, if we do continue to seek inspiration and keep re engaging, and we will make progress, and looking back, it will be more obvious why that worked. But as you're going through it, of course, things aren't so obvious. So, in conclusion, you can't evolve the vision for your life and for the life of others. It's not a settled question about what could be possible for people's lives. Usually, vision can continue to be evolved in ways that are much more beneficial. So we should never conclude that we're somehow at the end point of vision. In our imagine of capacities to build, new opportunities are typically always available to us. If they are not, they are available to others who might take up this task, sort of to help us out. So to relinquish, the possibility of the further evolution of these possibilities is to conclude that life is over. When in reality, there is always hope there's always another day, there's always imagined better, and there's

always some yet important experiences to be sought and to be had. So to just sum up, the real challenge is to continue to be proactive, as best one can and to find the supports that keep you proactive. And that could be people, it could be ideas, it could be many things, but to find the things that enable us to get up from one day to the next and try something new. And of course, we will do something new.

Thank you.

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