

Belonging Matters' Podcast

Transcript

Episode 4: 'Life Tasting' and People's Development Potential

Dr Michael Kendrick

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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 Four, "'Life Tasting' and People's Development Potential." Michael Kendrick is an independent international consultant in human services and community work who resides in Massachusetts. His interests have included 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, alternatives to bureaucracy, personalised approaches to supporting people and reform in the human service field, amongst others. In this podcast,

Michael highlights the importance of life tasting and developmental potential.

So the best way to think about this is to think about it as an ongoing process that can be stimulated or it can be neglected. And it can't be assumed that people actually know what they want to do all the time as to what would be life satisfying. But it is possible to help create some pathways for people to develop some sense of what in life interests them, and what they want to do about it. And this is a complicated personal process. Because if you don't have the opportunities to taste something in life, you don't realise the things that you're missing, or you would like to have in your life. And if you don't have the means to pursue them, even if you do recognise them, that would also be a limit for people. So the challenges are a bit complicated at that level. But people do explore life throughout the period of their life, and do find many things, when they taste them, if you like, if when they experienced them, that turned out to be something that's satisfying, interesting, even life changing in some cases. And so just asking people, what you would like may not be the best way to get at this because people don't know what they don't have, or I should say what they haven't experienced. So in this way, sometimes giving people experiences and opportunities gives them a chance to develop a taste for X or Y in their life that they didn't realise would be interesting for them. So in this sense, the life tasting is the immersion of people into new experiences, such that they can begin to evaluate whether this experience is something they do or do not enjoy. Now, should the experience of life tasting be

interesting and engaging, it gives that person a new possibility in life, to pursue if you like, it creates new pathways for them to organise their life and enjoy it. Now, if it wasn't to their liking, it also gives them the advantage of knowing something that they really aren't interested in, doesn't light their fire isn't, you know, satisfying. So why waste your life on something that really isn't to your liking. So in this way, this is how people sort out what they're going to focus on or not focus on, depending on its impact on them. And now many people may have had very little experience with life. And this would be very common for people with disabilities, because they are simply not given as many opportunities as other people. So it's not that they don't have the capacity to enjoy many things. But they've not had the means to enjoy other things. So creating those pathways is necessary. And that requires that people become more proactive about exploring the uncharted potential in people's life, almost doing it consciously or self consciously, so that people can spread their wings and grow and develop and reach their potentials. And of course, you can make up for lost time at any point in life. So even if a person's had a very deprived life, it would be wrong to assume that their life couldn't be restored in many ways. In this sense, you can reverse neglect of people's life potentials. Now, it's not easy, particularly when people are well on in their life, but it's still possible.

Now, one key factor in all this is if you can make new experiences well supported for people, then there's less risk there's less difficulty, less distress because people have the support they need and don't feel overwhelmed by newness or differentness and have energy, then not to defend themselves from their anxieties, but really to set their anxieties aside and

just pursue something that is to their liking. Now, if you think about it, in a very brief sense, just around the corner in many people's lives, there are opportunities waiting to be discovered. And if you make that assumption, you start noticing those opportunities, if you don't make that assumption, then you're not going to notice them and you're not going to pursue them. So a lot of the reason why people don't reach their potentials is no one, apparently, around them for a period of time is helping them realise what those experiences and potentials could be. And people can rise almost from the ashes in the sense of having been in a very deprived and neglected life. And so it's important to assume developmental potential is being there, even if you can't see it, in a, you know, in the person at the time. I often refer to this, in my own mind as undiscovered hidden potentials that may eventually surprise both themselves and the people they might know best, and affected the individual which shouldn't surprise us either. Because they get quite used to whatever life they've been living and if it's been a deprived life, they quickly, you know, their expectations are not very high at that point. And so you can't expect people to take the initiative consequently all the time and creating new opportunities for themselves. So having others that help them do that is extremely helpful, because it will make it more likely that people will find some new pathways that interest them. So it is good to safeguard people in new experiences, to not make them overwhelmed by them or something of that sort or to get their anxieties up too much or to make them feel threatened or whatever. So it's very good to have people around the person who are supportive, as sensitive, thoughtful, and considerate of the person. And of course, people will relax when they've had

new experiences for a while, it's no longer new. It's something they've found their comfort level with. So in this way, even if people initially are uncomfortable with something, you may not necessarily be that they stay uncomfortable. After a time when discomfort kind of fades, they may be quite ready to go further with many experiences. There's a great quote from Pierre Carnet which said, "We never taste a perfect joy. Our happy successes are mixed with sadness." And that's a good thing to be mindful of is that you don't get up every day and have a perfect day. So the perfect is in there with all the imperfect things, things that are sad or difficult or trying. So in this way, the expectation shouldn't be that somehow we banished all of the things that do detract from our happiness I can have on a given day, but rather that we keep cultivating new things that bring us some contentment, life satisfaction. And this is really the whole benefit really of life tasting, as you taste you discover that it is to your liking. It tastes good and it is and could become part of your next phase in life because it's newly discovered and is exciting.

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