



Faith Works!

An Innovative Approach to Workforce Development

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The ImageWorks' Vision: Humanizing Human Services

Workforce Development demands that we walk several tightropes all at the same time.

Humanizing Human Services – the core of ImageWorks Consulting Firm, LLC's Workforce Development vision – demands we *dance ballet* on those tightropes!

I use the tightrope image to help you imagine and feel the vertigo that comes with seeking to serve men and women – and our society – by helping them to find sustainable employment and/or a satisfying career.

Let me first capture what it's like to walk the 'big picture' tightrope:

As we work in the field, we must walk the tightrope of federal, state and local laws, rules and regulations. We can easily lose our balance in the crosswinds of the expectations, customs and attitudes of lawmakers, policy analysts, rule-makers, organizational leadership, and staff.

We can lose our balance with the change of a political administration, with the firing of a general manager, after a new staff person's interpretation of a policy or a rule.

Then we have to walk the tightrope between us and the 'Candidates' we serve.

When working with Candidates, we must walk the tightrope of their experiences, attitudes, and person-

al capacities. We can easily lose our balance in the crosswinds of their unique (but often predictable) responses to social circumstances, the 9-5-needs of an entry-level job, their big, but currently unattainable, dreams, and the demands we place upon them.

And then for some Candidates, whose potential shines, whose dedication promises solid outcomes, we have to help them maintain balance against the powerful undertow of dysfunctional family and community histories – indeed even the histories of our country itself.

For us at ImageWorks Consulting Firm, LLC, we're walking an even more intimate tightrope.

In our work, we're feeling the crosswinds – if not blowback – between the very conceptions at the root of our work and the work of the field itself. Maintaining balance on this tightrope, in my opinion, provides us with the most robust opportunities for the transformative work that will benefit society in far-reaching ways and that will enrich opportunities for us all.

What do I mean by the conceptions at the root of our work?

First, let's start with the folks we serve.

They are not 'clients' but human beings, neighbors, deserving the support of Workforce Development funds and services. Of course, we can see that they are human beings! But do we see them as deserving human beings? Valuable human beings? Human beings worthy of renewed opportunities after the mistakes or challenges in their lives?

Too often, when we say ‘clients’ we reduce our neighbors to bloodless statistics. I understand the need for administrative systems that accurately track ‘clients.’ I understand that when working with ‘populations’ in transition – from prison, from poverty, from downsizing – public agencies must accurately manage data associated with those ‘populations.’

But after we track folks on our servers, we must get beyond data to humanized human services!

We must create an atmosphere in which ‘clients’ and ‘populations’ become fellow citizens for whom it’s our pleasure to offer effective service.

They cannot in any way shape or form sense that our systems, our personalities, our temperaments, view them as lazy failures or criminals with no hope of redemption, or stubborn workers who don’t have the abilities or attitudes necessary to manage our chang-

“ ***It’s our J-O-B to help folks find work that can help them live their lives with dignity.*** ”

ing economy – from manufacturing to services, from analogue to digital, for example.

We have to imagine walking in their shoes. Indeed, haven’t we at some point in our lives needed services from our church? Our neighbors? Our government?

And frankly, no matter the economic or political climate, we can treat Candidates with respect. We can be dynamically courteous and patient with Candidates, no matter who’s in the White House, the Governor’s Mansion, or City Hall.

We must infuse our work with enthusiasm. With creativity. With imagination. With a willingness to roll with the dynamic difficulties embedded in this work. We may have to follow the laws, but we don’t have to follow formulas and scripts when we serve the unique needs of the man or woman with whom we are engaged.

Think about it!

WE HAVE A JOB when we’re communicating with folks facing their worst-case scenarios.

WE HAVE A WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT JOB, for goodness sake!

It’s our J-O-B to help folks find work that can help them live their lives with dignity.

And we’re only ON THE JOB when we are effectively, successfully, developing the human being, and helping them to identify, refine, and strengthen their capacities to think, plan, discern, prioritize and otherwise gain mastery of their lives.

What body language are we displaying during our conversations with Candidates? What is our tone of voice? Are we making eye contact? Is our language affirming? Or is it wishing we could complete this exchange as quickly as we can!

Can we honestly say we’re embodying encouragement, possibilities, hopefulness?

And what about our larger office environments?

Is our office a welcoming space? What subsonic message is our receptionist communicating? In what colors are the walls painted? Are the seats comfortable? Is there enough light in the room? Can a Candidate grab a cup of water, or tea, or coffee? Does the place feel like a prison or some other place of incarceration?

Your answers will let me know if you’re humanizing human services!

Also, let’s not get intimidated by the idea of transformation, which I admit rings in our ears like a HUGE idea. I get it. Transforming Workforce Development sounds even more daunting. I do understand.

But what’s HUGE from the outside, is actually the application of a series of simple, strategically mapped, approaches and processes – especially if we ask ourselves: What’s best for the person we’re serving?

As I’ve revealed in the pages of Faith Works, I’ve sat on either side of the Workforce Development equation. As service provider. As Candidate. I’ve spent hours in prayer. I’ve observed the full scope of Workforce Development practices.

Building on powerful experiences, I now understand my prime mission to be the change I’m advocating.

Going forward, ImageWorks Consulting Firm, LLC

will synthesize the best practices of our field into summaries and outlines and lesson plans to enrich our principles, processes and service to human services leadership, staff and, of course, to Candidates – our neighbors in transition.

ImageWorks Consulting Firm, LLC will convene conferences and other public engagement programs to allow for fruitful conversation and professional exchanges. We will live-stream interviews with thought leaders. We will produce on-line workshops and webinars to build our capacities.

With these and other programs and events, we will build a bedrock of fundamentals and principles that anchor the most humane approaches to fulfilling our human service missions.

We can learn from each other in order to refine all that we do with one goal in mind: effective and efficient engagements that affirm the humanity and value of all Candidates and apply our expertise on behalf of their Workforce Development needs.

I will ensure that ImageWorks Consulting Firm, LLC walks the talk of humanizing human services. Our reputation will ring clear as a bell. Our Candidates, our fellow Workforce Development professionals, will view us as the standard, as the source for a bracing, creative vision that blends the practical with the inspirational.

And here let me make sure you know how much I respect – and learn from – my many fellow professionals in the field of Workforce Development. I do not want them to think my vision for our field is simply hateration or indiscriminate criticism.

In fact, I am absolutely clear, and I know for sure, that many human service professionals are already providing humane service to Candidates. And all of them believe they are working according to the demands of the law and policies governing our work.

I am thrilled that for years I have collaborated effectively with more amazing Workforce Development professionals than I can count! In Miami, as I began my career, and in the DMV, I have executed contracts with them, sat on policy boards with many of them, discussed the pros and cons of our field with many of them.

No doubt, in my experience, I have been a witness to the deep sense of service that very much motivates and drives the men and women who have chosen to

work in the field of Workforce Development.

Yet, I am equally confident that my colleagues share my belief that our field, like so many closed systems, has come to a crossroads, an era that calls for a jolt of inspiration to keep us from resting on our laurels, or getting stuck in patterns, or other practices that are more rut than groove.

I am sure that my colleagues can feel that the times in which we currently live call for us to focus new creative attention to all levels of our operations. During these times, we must snap to attention, trace and address the powerful impacts of rising income unequal-

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ity, homelessness, transitions of men and women returning from prison and court supervision, the needs of mature Candidates. We must inject ourselves and our work with new urgency, more dynamic strategies, more supple analyses.

I am driven beyond criticism – of individuals, of a given law or policy, of a given agency – to crafting and executing a vision.

My vision rests on a profound sense of connection to the men and women who need us as savvy collaborators, if not friends; who need us as imaginative professionals, if not missionaries; who need us as persistent advocates, if not mentors.

This is my calling.

I am inspired.

I am changed.

The Power to be the Best: The Courage to be You

Excerpt of speech by Carla Harris to
Baltimore County Department of Human Resources staff graduation, 2017

For the past 20 years I've been in business, the peaks have been very high and the valleys have been very low...and such is life.

So today, as you move into another milestone, I want to congratulate you. Each step you take to better your future can be easy or hard, but sometimes they are steps you must take. Taking classes is not required to keep your job, but the desire to improve yourself is required if you want to move to the next level.

Just like you, I knew I wanted to be the best. Be the best in business. Be the best in the community I served. And be the best personally...for me. I've discovered that being the best sometimes takes courage. It's easy to give our all, but as we move up the ladder of success, we have to remember the courage it takes to remain true to ourselves. To not bend to the whims of others. It takes courage to fail. Courage to maintain integrity. It takes courage to succeed without selling your soul to the devil.

As you continue to grow in your career, I want to share with you six lessons I've learned over the years.

1. **You are not your best motivator.** We all have 2 voices in our heads – the good and the bad ...sort of the angel and the devil sitting on your shoulder. Depending on many factors, the bad voice can shout a little louder than the good one. Surround yourself with others who have your best interest at heart and who can see in you what you cannot see in yourself.

Strong, successful businesses have a board of directors, a group of people who remain objective about where the company is going. You need that. **Create a board of directors for yourself.** It doesn't have to be a large board, but it does have to be a strong board. A group of people you trust and whose opinion is grounded in what's best for you. These are the people who will mentor you, cheer you on, and call you on the carpet when needed. Choose people who are honest, kind and inspired to see you be the best you can be.

2. **Don't view yourself through the lens of others.** Rest assured, there will be others who want to bring you down... slow your progress...distract you. Don't let them. See yourself through the lens of faith and your ability to conquer the world. See yourself through the lens of your strength and desire to be the best you can be.

Letting others define who you are robs you of the power you have within. During my divorce, my ex-husband said to the judge... "it's just a little company I helped my wife start..." I thought about those words on the day I read an article about my company in the Miami Herald newspaper...

Times will get tough.
Decisions need to be made.
And, sometimes, you may have to fire some folks in your life.

3. **How you do anything is how you do everything.** I coach long-term unemployed job seekers as part of our Workforce Development program and many of them say they "won't act this way when they get on the job..." And my response is al-

ways, "yes, you will!" **Who you are is who you are.** No matter where you are. Think about that. Whether at work, home or with friends, who you are is who you are. So, if you give it your best at home, you will give it your best at work. And contrary, if mediocrity is acceptable in one area of your life, it will be acceptable in all areas of your life.

4. **It takes courage to be you.** As teenagers, it's very hard not to buckle to peer pressure. As we grow into mature, emotionally intelligent adults, we learn to stand our ground, be true to our convictions and to maintain integrity in all we do. As you climb the ladder of success, be courageous in your opinion. Have the gumption to speak out against what's wrong. Live by the standards you have set for yourself.

5. **Relationships begin with giving.** Networking is key to any successful career. Many people attend networking events and want to develop working relationships – all for the wrong reasons.

To get something.

Relationships begin with providing a genuine interest in others. One of my mentors once told me that you must first give to get. Share an article that's of interest. Ask about their career...their family...their likes. Begin developing a professional friendship and the business will come. People do business with people they like.

6. **Falling doesn't mean failing.** First, we crawl, then we walk, then we run. Falling is a part of life. Get up! And get up again! There are many who have fallen...

Bill Gates – Dropped out of college

Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team

Oprah Winfrey was fired from her first news anchor job at age 22.

Beyonce, in her first girl group, lost on national TV.

The list goes on...The failure is not in falling, but is in not getting up.

Be a **LION**...even on those days when you really want to be a kitty.

Be a **SOLDIER**...even if you are on the only one on the front line.

And finally, be **KIND**. Because kindness is the oil that will take the friction out of life.

Congratulations on your endeavors, I know you have many more to come. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your celebration. God bless each of you.

Read more online at www.isyourimageworking.com