

Respecting the Client

Why is a Rescue Mission different from other organizations that are helping the poor and homeless? One difference is the privilege we have of basic core beliefs that influence our approach to clients. For instance, we know the origin of human beings. We know that God, in His infinite wisdom, decided one day (the 6th day of creation) to add a creation that was special and unique. “Let Us make man in Our own image.” And so it was. Over 6000 years later (we don’t need to waste time debating how much over), we are challenged with how we treat this magnificent creation of the Almighty. When we meet the person coming to our door because he or she, or someone in their life, made a mess of the creation God designed, do we greet this person with more compassionate respect than we are prone to give the fallen robin struggling in our back yard to fly to safety?

When we sit with those individuals and recognize that they are living only partially what God wants in their lives, the only respectful position for God’s wondrous works is to give of ourselves to help them become all that God desires of their lives.

With these two basic tenets, respecting all humans because our Creator God made them, and because He spent Himself to give them an opportunity to live full and honoring lives in Him, we proceed to practice respectful behavior toward each one. To begin with, that looks like respecting their image-bearing attributes even when they are not respecting themselves. Many homeless clients have mislaid their function of healthy choice-making. Respect in working with clients begins by protecting their choice-making responsibility. The more decisions I make for the client, the less choice-making the client exercises. Respect means I will point out options and discuss opportunities.

Respect also means I will point out responsibilities and consequences. As a partner working with the client to help that person achieve goals for which we can both be excited, I do not take over those responsibilities given to the individual by the Creator God.

Respect involves treating others as I desire to be treated. It is not difficult to figure out what feels like respectful behavior from a client. So why should it be hard to figure out what are respectful actions toward the client. Have you tried addressing clients by the title of Mr. or sticking out your hand to give them a handshake when you meet them?

Simple courtesies like being on time, keeping appointments, communication if cancellations are necessary, apology if commitments are not completed, keeping expectations realistic, speaking kind words in a business voice, not demeaning in words, voice, or actions, and recognizing the person’s presence wherever the encounter...all are ways to show respect.



A major issue in respect is the understanding of the perspective of the other person. We have a responsibility to encourage each client to grow in respect of others. If they do not show respect to

others, we cannot assume that they receive our respectful actions as respectful. A wonderful way to encourage a client to grow in respect is to ask what feels respectful to them. This gives the staff person some insight in how to be the healthiest partner with that client as well as talking points in how to encourage personal growth.

Would it surprise you to know that clients feel respect in different ways? I learned this totally by experience. I approached a client who had been telling everyone that I disliked her and I asked her why she thought that? Her answer changed my actions for the following decades. She felt disrespected because I did not speak to her in the hallways when we passed. You see, I was always in a hurry to solve the next problem and walked rapidly with my head to the ground so I did not get distracted or stumble. We might be amazed to find out how easy it is to show respect. I have since found it also useful to ask people if they felt respected by me, "Do you know I respect you?"


In Chapter 33, we discuss best practices for giving instructions. Expecting response and effort from a person without making sure they have the tools to complete the assignment is disrespectful. God never tells me to do something without giving me the necessary resources to do what He asks. To give instruction without knowing that the instruction is understandable, puts the client into an impossible position of being set up for failure. This wastes a lot of time and is intimidating. Such behavior on our part stinks of control issues.

Selling a client short by going for only a quick fix to large problems is also a disrespectful behavior. Getting a job or getting housing may be a bubblegum approach to fixing a badly-leaking pipe...when we can make the resources available to do the plumbing. What clients say they want may just not be all they need. Are we ready and able to try to challenge them to see the bigger picture? Do we, as staff, see the bigger picture?

Doing for a person what they can do for themselves is another demeaning action unless it is a compassionate gift of encouragement and labeled that way. Such over-care is also disrespectful by keeping the client, created in the image of God, dependent on another human being for basic assistance. For instance, making out a goal sheet for a client because it is easier than assisting them to think through needed changes for the future makes a false statement that they cannot think for themselves.

Opportunities to respect the client permeate the entire practice of our calling. Every task includes some of these opportunities. For example, the reason that we insist that intake forms do not ask for more information than we are actually going to use is a matter of respect. Giving realistic requirements for job-hunting or house-searching is a matter of respect. Finding out health needs and making appropriate referrals is a matter of respect.

Respect begins with the inner thinking of the staff person. Listen to yourself about how you refer to clients. Working with a few difficult persons often can cause us to begin thinking negatively about all persons coming for assistance. We cannot afford to engage in such labeling. Seeing the person as God sees them will take us a long way in being able to assist them through respectful encounters.



“Show
proper
respect to
everyone.”

1 Peter 2:17 (NIV)