



We may wish democracy on the world, but we draw the line in our own lives and organizations ... Democracy is fine, [we] seem to say; just don't try it on my turf.

- James O'Toole

If We Want To Be Taken Seriously, If We Want To Work As Adults ...

As a keystone for the strategic growth of our agency, all the major partners (i.e., Staff, Board, & Management)¹ have identified their desire to make our work environment more *professional* and more *democratic*. What could we possibly mean by these things?

Professionalism ...

The *Webster's International Dictionary* defines professionalism as:

A calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive preparation including instruction in skills and methods as well as in the scientific, historical, or scholarly principles underlying such skill and methods, maintaining by force of organization or concerted opinion high standards of achievement and conduct, and committing its members to continued study and to a kind of work which has as its prime purpose the rendering of a public service.

There are several aspects of this definition that we should reflect on. First of all, professionalism is not a "job", it is a "calling". The modern, non-religious way of expressing this concept is to say it is a *vocation*. [Literally, "vocation" is from the Latin word *vocare*, meaning "to call".] As a vocation, we are invested in having *careers*, not simply jobs. [Again, "career" comes from the old French word *carriere*, meaning a "road" or "racetrack" – the point being that it is something complete or whole, having a definite direction.] In contrast, a "job" is a time-limited activity. [It is from the Old English word *jobbe* (or *gobbe*), meaning "a piece of work" – specifically contrasted with the idea of continuous labour.] A vocation, then, will be made up of many jobs along the way. Jobs will come and go, but our vocation will endure as long as we are committed to it. Professionalism is defined by this long-term commitment.

Second, professionalism is "specialized knowledge" – i.e., knowledge that is not "common sense". It is arrived at by methods that seek deeper levels of wisdom and insight. It is designed to be more relevant and more effective in solving certain problems (in our case, problems in living experienced by children & youths) than the knowledge people usually have at hand.

Third, professionalism requires "long and intensive preparation". Uh, that would be all those booze-soaked years we spent going to classes in college, listening to teachers, reading textbooks, and doing essays – not to mention the training we got from student placements.

Fourth, professionalism involves such long and intensive preparation not just in the development of our special skills & knowledge, *but also in our understanding of the principles that underpin such skills & knowledge*. Professionalism requires, then, not just that we are expert in *doing & knowing*, but that we are expert in understanding *why* such doing & knowing is important.

Fifth, professionalism requires "high standards of achievement and conduct". We self-consciously express this (and commit ourselves to it) by means of our Code of Conduct.

Sixth, professionalism requires "continued study". In other words, we *as professionals* are committed to *lifelong learning*. [Such learning, we might expect, is not simply experiential. It must also be a regimen of reading, writing, advanced courses, workshops, etc.]

Seventh, professionalism has as its prime purpose the "rendering of a public service" – which is to say that the reason for all our intensive preparation, special skills & knowledge, high standards of conduct, and lifelong learning is to contribute to the public good (to make the world a better place for everyone), not to advance our self-interest or for personal gain.

Finally (and I highlighted and saved this dimension for last for a reason), professionalism is maintained (or enforced) solely through the *self-organization* and *consensual opinions* of professionals themselves! It is, in short, a self-governing association of like-minded individuals accountable for their professionalism only to other professionals. Louis Menand puts this idea a little more clearly:

Professionalization means disciplinary autonomy. A field of study (or any line of work) is a profession when its practitioners are answerable for the content of their work only to fellow practitioners, and not to persons outside the field.

It seems to me that with these 8 criteria we have a pretty good yardstick for measuring both (a) Child & Youth Counselling as a profession and (b) how professional we are as individual practitioners of Child & Youth Counselling. I won't address the former here, but in terms of the latter, we should all ask ourselves the following questions:

1. *Do we see our work as a vocation (i.e., as fulfillment of a career), or as just a job?*
2. *Are we guided by the special knowledge we have gained through our education & study, or by our common sense & gut instincts?*
3. *Did we gain our standing as a professional through formal education and certification, or did we just learn on the job?*
4. *Are we committed to understanding the principles that make our profession unique, or do we just want to follow the habits & techniques we have learned without question?*

¹ Of course, there are other "major" partners in our enterprise – e.g., Clients, Funders, Volunteers, Students, the Union, the Community, etc. By leaving them out of the considerations in this article, I do not mean to diminish their overall importance. However, the concerns outlined here pertain specifically to our shared "work environment" – i.e., the relationships, principles, & values that directly shape the nature and practice of the "work" we have gathered here to do.

5. Do we measure our work and actions against our Code of Conduct, or do we just follow regulations and job descriptions?
6. Are we committed to lifelong learning of our special knowledge through reading & advanced training, or did we shut the formal learning process down when we got our diplomas?
7. Do we get work satisfaction from the difference we make in kids' lives (and in our contribution to public welfare), or are we primarily motivated by self-interest and personal gain?
8. Do we feel accountable to our colleagues – and do we hold them accountable - for professional conduct, or is judgement & evaluation of our colleagues out-of-bounds?

I leave you to measure yourself. [Actually, if I want to be professional, I can't leave you to measure yourself. The best we can do – because it is essential to bringing out the best in ourselves and each other – is to engage in a constant dialogue of measuring each other.]

For some reason, many practitioners of Child & Youth Counselling feel distinctly uncomfortable with some of the above criteria – particularly #8. Personally, I think this discomfort is based on a misunderstanding about what professional accountability & evaluation really are.² To sort out the confusion, it's helpful to make the same distinction in work that Menand implies in the quotation above – that is, the distinction between work **content** and work **outcome**. What can this possibly mean?

In brief, work **outcome** is what changes in the world because of our professional activity. This can be summarized as:

- ◆ **Results** – for CYCs, this generally means changes in our clients' behaviors, relationships, or levels of functioning.
- ◆ **Compliance with Regulations** – i.e., whether we have followed the policies & procedures specified by the law and

by our employer. We typically refer to this type of outcome as "work performance".

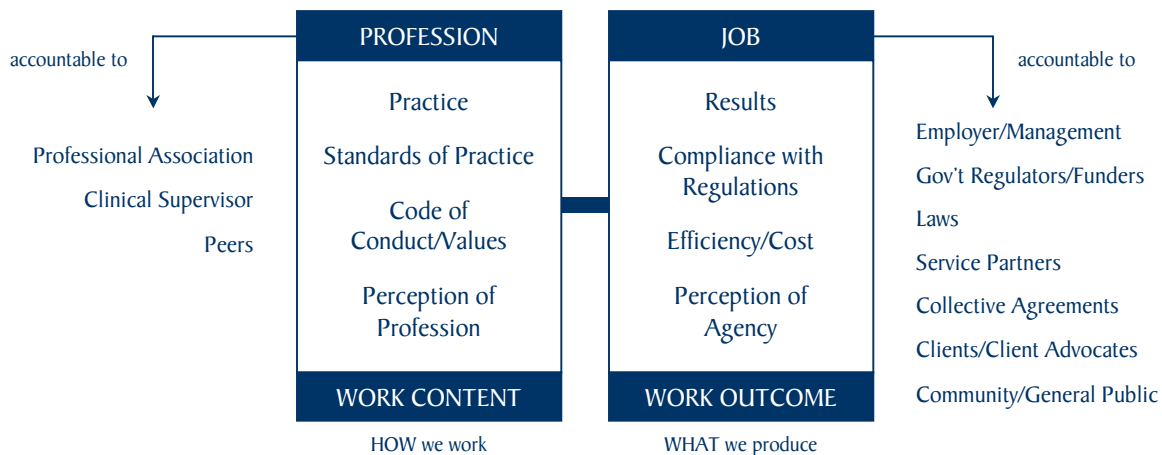
- ◆ **Efficiency/Cost** – i.e., measures of our activity that place an external value on their effectiveness.
- ◆ **Perception of the Agency** – our behavior creates an impression of what kind of place we work for; in short, our behavior is a public representation of our place of work.

Menand is **not** saying that *as professionals* we are responsible for holding each other to account for any of these things. In fact, like any profession, we are actually accountable to **external** (i.e., "external" to our shared profession) sources for all of these. These external sources holding us to account include: our employer, agency management, government regulations, laws, collective agreements, funders, service partners, clients, client advocates, the community, the general public, etc., etc. [See Diagram 1] We can refer to these external obligations as our **Job Accountability**,

In contrast to Job Accountability, however, we also have **Professional Accountability** – that is, we are accountable to our profession and to our professional colleagues for the **content** of our work – in other words, *for the way we work*. This accountability is what Menand is talking about, and it can be summarized as:

- ◆ **Practice** – for CYCs, this means our techniques, special knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, etc.
- ◆ **Standards of Practice** – the knowledge & research by which we evaluate & improve our practices.
- ◆ **Code of Conduct/Values** - i.e., the expressed and agreed-upon ethical behavior that all CYCs commit to.
- ◆ **Perception of the Profession** - our behavior creates an impression of what kind of professionals we are; in short, our behavior is a public representation of our profession, not just our individuality.

Diagram 1: Professional Accountability Versus Job Accountability



² When asked to give peer feedback & evaluation to colleagues, I've often heard CYCs object with: "It's not my job to evaluate my peers!" That's true, it is indeed **not** your **job** to evaluate the "work performance" of peers – but it **is** your **professional responsibility** to evaluate their professional conduct & practice. The sad reality is that we will not be taken seriously as professionals until we start living up to this responsibility (and the other ones cited above).

Professionally, we are accountable to certain **internal** sources (i.e., "internal" to our shared profession) for all of these things. The internal sources holding us to account include: (a) our professional associations (i.e., local, provincial, & national groups, as well as the educational institutions that provide certification); (b) our Clinical

Supervisors (i.e., advanced practitioners that provide guidance, direction, & mentoring); and (c) our peers.

It is fairly easy to understand why this clear separation between Job Accountability and Professional Accountability has not been practiced by a lot of CYCs or by a lot of agencies that employ them. The reason has to do with a general Myth of Professionalism. This Myth goes something like: *The outcome of work (i.e., whether a job produces a successful and effective result) depends upon the degree of professionalism of the person doing it (i.e., the more professional the person, the more successful and effective she will be).*³ On the basis of this Myth, employers didn't have to worry about measuring the results of work. If they wanted their services to be successful & effective, all they had to do was hire certified professionals – the certification was kind of a guarantee of good outcomes. Naturally, the professions (including CYC) bought into this Myth: it was a way of justifying themselves.

As a result, Work Outcome got mixed up with Work Content – and people quickly lost sight of the distinction between Professional Accountability and Job Accountability. In fact, from both sides (i.e., the professional and the employer) everything began to look like Job Accountability. Consequently, things like “supervision”, “evaluation”, “feedback”, “performance appraisal”, etc., got hopelessly muddled in the minds of most people in our field.

However, about 15 years ago, funders began to realize that both research and practical experience were giving the lie to this Myth of Professionalism.⁴ It is simply not true that hiring professionals is a guarantee that the job will get done properly and with the best possible outcome. In particular, it is not true that the more qualified a professional is, the better job she will do. Funders and employers began to see that the only way to ensure that their services were truly effective was to measure their outcomes – and to hold employees accountable for effective outcomes, not consistent process.⁵

Of course, there is a downside and an upside to this funding development. On the downside, we *as professionals* must find ways to rise to the challenge that our qualifications & experience do not guarantee results. We need to research and adopt the kinds of skills and knowledge that do promote effectiveness – rather than resting on the laurels of our certification. On the upside, however, the strong distinction between Job Accountability (i.e., accountability for effective outcomes) and Professional Accountability (i.e., accountability for quality performance) has allowed our professional practice and professional responsibilities to become much clearer. In effect, we have regained the space where we can relate to each other as professionals – not just “employees”. It is now up to us to make good use of this space.

It's not surprising, then, that as the space of professionalism in our field re-emerges, we begin to feel the pressure to live up to the

obligations of being a profession (i.e., those eight things identified above). As uncomfortable as it is for many of us, we will especially feel the pressure to be self-disciplining and to hold ourselves *and our colleagues* to account for our professionalism. If we can't or won't rise to this obligation, then we have no right to call ourselves professionals. I can think of no one better to quote on this matter than Michelle Gahwiler:

*As professionals, we need to stand together and deal with the workers who are reflecting poorly on the field. We need to find ways to promote understanding in these CYCs and, if not help them to change their maladaptive behaviors (as we are so good at doing) There is a grave lack of recognition in our field and it is clear that we need to continue to make progress to be recognized [as professionals] The future of our profession relies on the workers who do a good job, role-modelling and offering feedback for the workers who do not. It requires that the supervisors from the colleges catch these issues before they become lifelong working concerns, and that co-workers stop them before they start teaching their “skills and theories” to new staff We need to challenge one another to be the best we can be and make a positive difference to the field.*⁶

Notice how Gahwiler assumes responsibility for the development of professionalism *as a professional?* Notice how the responsibility isn't shifted to any external source?

Democracy ...

Because professionalism is based on knowledge not power, disciplinary autonomy not external control, ethics not regulation, public service not self-interest, and personal accountability not systemic hierarchy, it inevitably drags democracy in its wake.

Whenever there is PROFESSIONALISM, you will also find the demand that people be:

- ◆ autonomous (i.e., trusted to make sound, professional judgements);
- ◆ respected as equals (i.e., treated as “engaged hearts” – people – not as “hired hands”);
- ◆ protected by rights & fair procedures;
- ◆ involved (i.e., to have a meaningful say in the goals, values, and procedures of the business – and a meaningful say in who they work with and how the work gets done);
- ◆ given credit for and trusted to put ethical duty before self-interest.

What, then, do we mean by democracy in the workplace? Well, let me cut to the chase and define it as: *the process of changing a Work Environment from a “corporation” (or “company”) – i.e., a piece of property that owns our work – to a “community” of invested professionals, shaping our future, responsible for our own destiny, committed to fair & equitable procedures for everyone, and dedicated to continuous improvement.*

³ This Myth is the basis for the research hypothesis discussed in the *What Works [Who Works]* article – see *Talking Incoherently VI, #1*, p. 12.

⁴ This realization by funders that professionalism isn't all it's cracked up to be is part of a general trend of anti-professionalism rooted in the “countercultural” movement of the 1970s. After World War II, professionalism promised to cure all social ills (e.g., racism, poverty, mental illness, crime, etc.). However, almost all of these ills remain with us – and many are worse, despite the best efforts of professionals. As a result, funders (such as governments and United Way agencies) lost confidence in professionalism. For a compelling outline of the anti-professionalism position, see: John McKnight, *The Careless Society* (1995).

⁵ In management lingo, this split between effectiveness and process became defined as Outcome Evaluation versus Quality Control.

⁶ Un-professionalism in Child and Youth Care: “What Were They Thinking?”, *CYC Chronicle* [OACYC, date unknown].

Of course, the pressure for democracy in the workplace comes from more than just professionalism. Indeed, both of these are the legacy of larger historical forces. One way of understanding these historical forces is to look at the shift in conditions, values, and attitudes of the past three or four generations [as per Diagram 2].

It's fairly easy to see that the nature and conditions of work have changed dramatically over the past 50 years or so. Mostly this has been in response to massive changes in the way we live. The *economic conditions* of the post-WWII era are completely different from our world today. So is the *technology*, the way kids are *educated*, and the kinds of *family life*.

These things have acted on each other, and together they have acted on how we *work*. They have utterly changed the expectations and the limitations that once characterized work. Briefly, the historical forces affecting how we view work can be characterized as follows:

- ◆ Globalization, restructuring, and cutbacks in our economy have introduced permanent instability into our jobs. While we live in a world with greater resources and consumer goods than any time in history, we are less secure than ever about our income and our future (whether we will be able to afford to educate our kids or retire). This makes work a huge source of anxiety – and the only way we can control this anxiety is to make our skills & knowledge a source of security (rather than our job) – this is why *professionalization* (and its emphasis on continuous development) is so important.
- ◆ Rapidly changing technology makes jobs outdated faster than ever. While this creates new possibilities for solving our problems, it is also another source of anxiety – and we respond by trying to stay ahead of the changes – i.e., making professional development and innovation a priority.
- ◆ In the 1950s, only about 25% of people finished High School (let alone entered College). Today, more than 90% do, and more than three quarters of these go on to post-secondary education of some kind. As a result, we are far better educated. We have far higher expectations about what we want from our lives and from our jobs. We engage the world differently: *we now use our minds to make a living, more so than our bodies*.
- ◆ Finally, we live in a wide variety of family styles – the two-parent, stay-at-home mother model has been reduced to a virtual rarity. Child-rearing has become both (a) more respectful, less harsh, and permissive (so people today are less respectful and deferential to authority & hierarchy); and (b) less intensive because we have less time (we rely on child care, television, and latchkey situations).

What impact do these things have on the demands we make from work? Well, amongst other things:

- ◆ **Balance & Synergy** / Increasingly, Work is expected to be just one part of a balance with Home, Health, & Leisure – therefore, work must be flexible – it must honor & support family obligations as much as possible, rather than create worry & anxiety by opposing or interfering with them. Work must take

on qualities that balance a life and not pretend that it is more important than anything else. And because every balance and life situation is different, people expect Work to recognize and support them as *individuals* with unique needs and goals.

- ◆ **Expectation of Partnership** / Increasingly, we want to be treated as adults – i.e., to have less authoritarian, less hierarchical work relations. People want *involvement* – in fact, they want *ownership*. They expect to be part of the decisions that affect what they do, where they are going, and who they work with (and for). As adults, people want to be trusted with responsibility and to be allowed to make adult judgements, rather than being told what to do in every little detail.

- ◆ **Work As Noble Cause** / Increasingly, we want to make a positive and meaningful difference in our world. Contrary to what people think about the ME generation or the entitled, self-centered NET babies, the reality is that people have become more and more committed to the social world and the improvement of society for everyone – we are committed to more diversity, more inclusion, and more tolerance than ever.

- ◆ **Personal Growth & Development** / Increasingly, we are committed to life-long learning (because skill development is really the only source of security in a rapidly changing economy/technology) – and be stimulating & challenging (because education makes life more about mental development than physical development – and at the heart of mental work is the desire not to be bored, to have fun, and to play – these are the sources of innovation & creativity that make big changes in the world possible). Also: with hierarchy dead, there is no room for traditional advancement. All “growth” has become internal.

- ◆ **Community At Work** / Increasingly, we expect work to be a supportive environment that promotes the interaction of people – one that, in effect, replaces many of the functions performed by the old “neighbourhoods”. We are not talking about “camaraderie” here (although that applies to a small degree); rather we are talking about a sense of “WE” – rather than a mechanical collection of people performing “jobs” or “tasks” or “roles”, robots wound up and mindlessly going about their business. People want to be seen not just as adults (with all the creativity, intelligence, anxiety, and idiosyncrasy that that word means), they also want to be seen as part of a social whole, a group – and, as such, they want all the rights, responsibilities, and *protections* (i.e., fair practices and procedures that protect their individuality from the group) needed to be part of a group.

Could such things be desired in our little workplace? Are these the currents & tides we ply and resist? Are they whirlpools beckoning us to our destruction, or horizons guiding us to new shores?

- Terry Henry

Diagram 2: Generational Divides & Values

