

Being the One

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To the 2006 Graduates, Faculty and Staff, extended family members and friends. Let me begin by saying that it is truly an honour for me to be here this evening to deliver your convocation address. The job of the commenced speaker is a big one. It's not an easy thing to try to inspire, educate and entertain a group of seventy (70) individuals who thought they had earned a long holiday from sitting through lectures. It is also a challenge for me because I hate to drive at the end of a long work day so it took some effort for me to get here tonight. I want to thank my friend and chauffeur for this evening, Matthew. Matthew is a psychology student who is also training for a lifetime of service in the field and it is my hope tonight that you might be an inspiration to him.

Now to the meat of the matter. I would like to lead you on a meditation on the theme that is my title this evening "Being the One". I'll start with a question: Whether you are an early childhood diplomat or a child in youth care graduate, whether you have studied continuing care or as an educational aide; whether you are planning to work in a prison or a public school, a day care, a hospital or the private homes of your clients, what is the greatest tool you have in your work?

"Yourself" Though you have learned to use toys to facilitate learning, medical supplies to aid in healing, hazardous materials, restraint technologies, checklists and formal assessment tools, still and foremost the greatest tool of the human service worker is themselves. It takes a human to work in the human services field. When your clients think back over the time that they have had need of your services, they will not remember the comfort of your work place, or any of the toys, tools or technology that they have seen you use. It is YOU that they will remember. Perhaps the clearest articulation of this fact comes from the literature related to youth resiliency, though it is true of other populations. When young people who have survived and become successful after a lengthy, history of abuse, abandonment from family, incarceration, drug abuse or other pain and dysfunction, when these young people are asked "What made the difference for you?" There was one person in my life who believed in me and was there for me."

The same is true of early childhood education settings. As both a consumer of child care services, a trainer and partner with child care and early childhood services I can tell you that more important than curriculum, schedule, location and even more important than nutritional snacks, the most important element is the presence of genuinely caring individuals who are able to connect with and form positive attachments with the children in their care. I have visited hospices, and hospitals, long term care facilities, and the homestead deathbeds of persons of all ages and universally as I have spoken with clients and their families it is the quality of the people that determines the quality of care.

So if this is a truth, the question tonight for you as you embark on what I hope and pray will be a long and rewarding career in human service . . . the question is "How can you be the one who makes a difference in the lives of the persons you serve?" After a twenty year career in human services, after being an anti-poverty worker, a counsellor for at-risk students, a child protection worker, a race relations coordinator, a human services instructor, a family mediator, forensic clinician, an administrator and collaboration facilitator, after all of this, I would like to suggest to you that there are three things you need to be in order to "Be the One". I offer these things in order:

First you must: BE WELL

There is this rumour out there that people who go into the human services field are themselves deeply wounded individuals. Have you heard that rumour?

The truth of the matter is that if you are human and you live in this planet it is likely that you carry some scars. The difference is that accountants and computer programmers are able to hide their woundedness better than human service workers because their work does not cause them to be mixed up in the pain of others.

If your class is representative of the general population about fifty percent (50%) of you have been victims of sexual assault, men and women in equal proportion! About 20-30% of you suffer from some form of mental illness. About 75% of you have or will experience a family separation or divorce (your parents, yourself or your children). All

of you, sooner or later, will suffer the death of a loved one and in all this you must find balance, peace and wellness if you are going to "Be the One" who makes a difference in the lives of your clients. So be honest with yourself and others about your life. Be open to your supervisors and co-workers. Seek professional help and make good use of the public health care system and any health benefits you may have wherever you may be employed. And do not be ashamed that you are human and suffer from the human condition like everyone else. I don't mind telling you that I have maintained a relationship with the same therapist for the past ten years and keeping well has been one of the cornerstones of my personal and professional success.

Second, you must be LEARN-ED

If you think you have read your last text book, sat in your last classroom, and are now listening to your last lecture, you're so wrong. If the time you have spent at the Institute for Human Services Education has taught you anything, than you know that knowledge in our field is constantly growing. Every year we learn more about the developing brain of children and adolescents. Every year we learn more about how people learn, grow, heal and die. And this constant flux in knowledge requires that every human service worker commit themselves to be life-long, self-directed learners. To this end, I encourage you to stay in touch with your instructors from this institute, participate in as much continuing education you can afford, be active in your respective professional association and always be thinking of the next certificate, the next diploma and the next degree. You must be learn-ed

Third, you must be COURAGEOUS

Courage is the first characteristic of heroism. It is the willingness to respond first to a call for help while others are still trying to decide if the risk associated with action is outweighed by the rewards. Courage steps out of its comfort zone and endures hardship in pursuit of a noble gain. How many of you graduates today had to step out of your comfort zone to go back to school to pursue the dream that you are fulfilling here today? Courage implies discomfort. Courage necessitates sacrifice. Without courage there can be no genuine giving to or serving of others. Without courage, all our work is at best superficial, mandatory ritual and at worst self-serving, ego driven profit seeking behaviour that in the end does more harm than good.

I know that those assembled here today, faculty, staff and students alike are committed to more than that. We are united in our desire to Be The One to those we serve: To our families, to our friends, to other loved ones and to the clients we serve. I charge you to this task and welcome you to this noble vocation. May God bless you!

(I ended the presentation by singing a verse and chorus of the song: "If I can Help Somebody")

If I can help somebody, as I pass along,
If I can cheer somebody, with a word or song,
If I can keep somebody from doin' wrong,
Then my living shall not be in vain.

Chorus:

My living shall not be in vain,

Then my living shall not be in vain

If I can help somebody, as I pass along,

Then my living shall not be in vain.

If I can do my duty, as a good man ought,

If I can bring back beauty, to a world of wrought,

If I can spread love's message, as the Master taught,

Then my living shall not be in vain.

Chorus:

My living shall not be in vain,

Then my living shall not be in vain

If I can help somebody, as I pass along,

Then my living shall not be in vain.)