
what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

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Hello, Everyone:

We've had a great week with beautiful weather, and we can tell that the hot, humid weather of summer is just around the corner.

It's time to do all that stuff around the house that we have to do once a year – air conditioning maintenance, new straw in the flowerbeds (and straining your muscles from getting up and down), going through the clothes you don't wear anymore, getting the annual termite inspection done... Things we can't put off too long or we'll be sorry when closets are overstuffed, termites eat through the walls and the air conditioning unit goes down in August. So, it's time to get busy, everybody.

This week I want to address something that is a serious topic and has a great deal of impact on the quality of life in our organization. The issue I want to talk about is the "code of silence." Occasionally in my official position certain things come across my desk that trigger the thought that our culture may not be living up to all the qualities stated in our guiding principles. And, something triggered my thinking this week to open a discussion on something I consider insidious to any culture – the code of silence. Now, I want to say up front that we are not the only organization that has this problem in its culture. We know it exists in some medical and legal cultures. And the most notorious code of silence association in recent news is with the New Orleans police department.

One of the things we should all be striving for is to participate in being an active part of a healthy organization. Nothing is more detrimental to our meeting the mission than formation of corrupted relationships. This may be between supervisors and staff, staff and youth, and youth and youth. These corrupted relationships develop when moral and ethical violations occur and nobody addresses them, when basically a person turns their head or consciously ignores, or proactively and consciously participates in maintaining harmful secrets. Such behavior runs counter to our mission.

I'm not suggesting that we have an organization of "tattletales" or that we create a culture of "snitching." No one respects a tattletale and no one respects a snitch who intends to use the information for his or her own selfish gain. What I am talking about is everybody – youth, staff and supervisors - being honest and responsible and finding the right way, and the right place and the right time, to deal with blatant actions that are just plain wrong.

For every major problem that exists in our agency, there is somebody who knows that the wrongdoing is occurring. When it finally comes to light through some egregious incident, there will always be those people on the periphery who will say "I knew this was going on and I knew they'd get caught sooner or later." The corrupted relationship - the wink and nod, the turning of the head, allowing another person to do something against better judgment, or policy, or the law - is just **unacceptable**.

I know in some cases as an employee you may witness someone doing something they shouldn't do, and you assume that the supervisor or the leaders know about it and implicitly agree with it. Please don't make that assumption. If you point something out to a supervisor and nothing happens, remember that person also has a supervisor. That is the chain of command.

This will not be the last time you will hear me talk about this. It's healthy to bring up the subject in our work groups and supervisors' meetings. You are in charge of the quality of life in your office, your work groups and your facilities. What would you prefer, a corrupt environment or one where everyone is a member of a team of people all working together and playing by the same rules? My hope is that we will get this right as a staff, and then we can expect the same from our youth. Please think about this.

All that said, my thanks to you all for the good work you do daily in every office and facility, to meet the mission. And thanks to the majority of our staff who are working toward a healthy work environment - free of corrupt relationships.

Sincerely,

"Doc" *Dr. Mary Livers* P.S. – next week brings **National Administrative Professionals Day on Wednesday. Please be especially nice to the people who work so hard every day to make your job easier and who keep us all on track.**

Mary L. Livers, MSW, PH.D, Deputy Secretary