



## CHANGING OUR EMPLOYMENT MINDSET

### Raising Our Expectations

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Good afternoon.

I think I should begin by sharing how I found out about Magnolia Clubhouse. I was in a local hospital being treated for my undiagnosed mood-disorder. I was not a "happy person" and I was only at the stupid meeting because if I didn't go I couldn't go home. So these obviously "faking happy" people were trying to tell me about this psycho-social rehabilitation program. Where had I heard that phrase before...hmmm I think it was a cognitive psych class. A tiny little paragraph, it intrigued me. My anger and frustration was two part. One part was for many years I sent families to use the resources I was attempting to use and found them mostly useless. Another part was this place was practically in my back yard! Why had I not known of this place? But at the end of the day it really didn't matter. What mattered was I was sick and tired. Sick and tired of being sick and tired. So, still in disbelief, I figured I would give it a try. Hell what did I have to lose - one doctor had told me I would most likely never work again.

In retrospect it was a really great presentation - one staff and I think three members. It was such a *happy* presentation I had to see if they were as fake as I knew they were. I had a plan, I was going to go and visit but not at 10 when they said it would be a good time. I was going later when they wouldn't be ready and most definitely *not* so happy. So I went in about 1 and they were still *happy*, not in the slightest way upset that I didn't fit the schedule. This was sooo very intriguing. I had to come back! And that was the beginning of my journey.

In the beginning it was very difficult. I was always so tired and sound-sensitive. For those of you who have not had the pleasure of visiting Magnolia we have quite a few hard surfaces, so sound just loves to bounce. But anyways, I wasn't made to feel...like my diagnosis was stamped on my forehead. Or the only thing I could do was sort beads and make crafts.

I was valued! And for my radical clubhouse family members, No I was not paid in cash. I'll get to that later. I was valued for my desire to do, and to try. I would come in all excited, "I made it! Took a shower brushed my teeth and I'm here." No eye rolls or questioning glance like, so what's the big deal. It was more like: I'm so glad you're here! We're working on Advocacy could you?...

I wanted to work but....I was so afraid. What if the doctor was right? What would I do if I needed to go to the hospital? How could I make this happened? I had chosen a staff member to work with - Gwen, and it was as we were working together, giving a tour or something - I can't remember. What I *do* remember is looking at the T.E. board and saying to myself "I think I would like to do that." And Gwen turns and looks at me with this smile and a light twinkling in her eyes. She said, "Oh Donna that's wonderful! And the Hickman and Lowder T.E. will be available soon." I was stunned, what is

she talking about?!? Her voice faded into the background. My ears began buzzing with my old doctors voice "You know you are never going to be able to work again."

But then Gwen's voice came back to the forefront. She talked about how much I was doing at the clubhouse and the similarities that the position required. With my eyes as wide as saucers I just looked and looked like I was listening. Before I could stop her she told other people! Oh, this was getting out of control. Members and staff were all excited! For all the negative self-talk in my head I had twice as much support and encouragement from so many people from the clubhouse. I was starting to believe that I just might be able to do this, because I had so much support that was genuine.

I could do this - I had the whole clubhouse behind, beside me and proceeding in this position. Just between you and me, I might have gotten a little too confident. The law firm went through their regular HR procedures, and that's when it happened again. I was thinking, "I would like a little more responsibility and more pay." But I must have said it aloud, because the HR manager leaned back and looked at me and asked what did I have in mind. Yes, I renegotiated my responsibilities and pay. I loved what I was doing and they loved me. So much they asked me to stay a second term. Once during my time I had a short stay in the hospital and it was like I was out with a cold. Magnolia offered to step in and cover, and when I returned it was like I hadn't missed a beat.

Before the T.E. was over Paula and Gwen were asking me what would I like to do next! I want to work independently! By the time I was done and ready to find independent employment 2008 had just ended and we all remember "the crash", and what that was like. But that was OK I still had clubhouse and that allowed me to do so much. I turned looking for a job into a full-time job, and then dug in deep into advocacy. You see being there was a privilege, there was no dollar figure for what I got from being at Magnolia Clubhouse. Helping me gather the threads, to continue to weave the tapestry of my life was and is priceless. I had applied to so many places it was a total blur. And then one day Bank of America called me! And right from the beginning Paula began educating me about working and receiving benefits. Giving me options about reporting, I remember someone saying, "we're here to help you reach your goal whatever it is."

It began as a part-time position, and yes I did struggle. And yes my Magnolia family continued to cheer me on. Offering to come to my job and meet with my employer. When I finally got my sea legs, I soared ranking number 1 in my department within the whole company! 2013, I saved all my vacation time to go to a 3 week training in St. Louis, had a great time at Independence Center, thanks. When I returned to work less than a week later, there was a major meeting that went something like this. Senior regional President blah blah speaking, "I just want thank you all for you dedication and hard work. This site is one of our company's top producers... It pains me to inform you that effective Oct. 31, this site will close permanently."

Things just got interesting I was thinking, my benefits had stopped a while ago. Oh well, I was looking for a job when I found this one, and I'll have unemployment for a bit, I have options. I went home to Magnolia Clubhouse, and we devised a plan. But I will tell you I had a moment when I saw what my unemployment benefits where, I sat in front of the computer in the business unit and tears just ran down my face. And then I went back at it again searching for employment, it was a struggle. The pressure of not losing my home, my boys are now teen-agers who are growing without permission, and eat like they're training for the Ironman Competition. But my clubhouse family came up right beside me. With unfailing support, helping me maintain a healthy accountability. Yes, it's ok to feel like crap because a job you love ended without warning. Yes, it's ok to want to re-gift your teen-age children. But remember Donnamarie you're here doing something, and it's going to pay off just like before.

Yes, I had done it before. But I was so tired, the whole idea of starting over...I felt like Dorie in Finding Nemo, "just keep swimming, just keep swimming..." The week before I began my Faculty Training at Carriage House, in Fort Wayne In. I got a call from Charles Schwab asking me to schedule a phone interview. So twelve months after the announced release from one company I began with them.

The company, the culture - I loved it, but I loved my family more. I walked in explaining that while I wanted to work for them, my family was a priority. Understand, that Magnolia Clubhouse had become more than just a place to go. Yes the lines had long ago been erased. Family for me was not just the people I resided with, but the people I have been sharing life with these last 7 years. I had commitments that I had made and I would continue to honor. My board work with Magnolia Clubhouse, and my new commitment to Clubhouse International. I was able to flex my time so I would be able to continue to participate on the board. But as time went on I began to notice anxiety creeping into my commute. It was 30-45 minutes in good weather and in the snow... you were just glad to get home. By late fall it was dark when I left to go to work and dark when it was time to go home.

I left the company in early May. I so loved what I did, but the commuting was taking a huge toll on my health. And I came back home. I wasn't ashamed. I was excited for the opportunity. At the end of the day, it wasn't "I wish I had." It was "I'm glad I did." When I let my Magnolia family know, there was no censorship, just a simple question, "What do you want to do now Donnamarie?"

I realized that all my life I have been involved in advocacy. So I'll tell you what I'm doing now. I'm preparing to begin law school next fall, and In the process of applying for the Baer Scholarship. When I graduate, I will have my J.D. And I continue this journey with a confidence that I am not alone, I have my clubhouse family supporting me every step of the way.

Thank you