May, 2013

Dear Friends of ACT,

I rarely have an original thought. Really, most of what I write or talk about is the result of something I’ve heard, seen, or learned someplace.

And so it is with this month’s letter.

The other day I had the opportunity to listen to Tim Miles speak at a Lunch and Learn sponsored by the Columbia Chamber of Commerce. I really enjoyed it... Tim spoke of life lessons in a presentation titled “For All Your Special Needs”. He pointed out correctly that these could also be used as business lessons. After hearing them, I agree.

As an award winning communications professional, Tim thought that he knew a lot about the communications business until he had a son with autism. This started him on a journey that taught him that pretty much everything he ever knew about communication was wrong.

Tim shared the nine blessings he received from a beautiful boy who looks at the world a little differently:

Change. You can’t expect someone else to change his or her behavior until you are first ready to change your own.

Celebrate differently. Choose what matters in life. Tim showed a video of the recent Dove campaign regarding sketches, illustrating that you are more beautiful than you think. Check out www.dove.com/realbeautysketches.

Clear vs. clever. Clever only wins on game shows. A person on the autism spectrum thinks literally. Use concrete language.

Over stimulated. We have way too much to do and too much time to do it. We must decompress, unplug, as we are becoming increasingly distracted.

Listen actively. Just because it’s easier to be on our phone doesn’t mean we should.

Come together. Be an active participant. Get engaged. When you move to a new community volunteer at a not-for-profit organization.

Black holes. This was advice from Tim’s son, who said that black holes are like door knobs. “Do not get sucked up in black holes.”

What is Normal? Instead of teaching what to think, we should teach how to think.

Commitment. Talent used to impress Tim, now its commitment.

As I mentioned at the outset, these are Tim’s words, not mine. Tim thought he had this communication thing all figured out until his son was diagnosed with autism. Then the game plan changed. His experiences helped him evaluate and re-evaluate what he currently knew.

The point is simply that the above lessons are really instructions that we can all apply to our business and personal lives. Give ‘em a try. And don’t get sucked into black holes!

(By the way, if you’d like more of Tim’s words check out www.thedailyblur.com.)

Until next month,

Mark Hassemer
Executive Director, ACT
An important aspect of ACT Behavior Development Services is to provide individuals we serve with opportunities to learn and refine the skills needed to foster positive interactions in their community. One new way ACT has worked to accomplish this mission is through our new Social Development Group.

The goal of the program is to bring individuals together who have a desire to learn to be more comfortable, confident, and successful at interacting with others at home, at work, and in the community. The curriculum for the Social Development Group was developed by Tara Shade, who drew upon her experiences as a Behavior Consultant to bring together a variety of social skill models that have proven successful. Skills taught in class combine several evidenced-base teaching strategies as well as components of Social Thinking® developed by Michelle Garcia Winner, which views social skills as dynamic and situational, rather than something that can be taught or memorized. This approach helps participants learn the skills and strategies that are necessary for social situations across all settings.

“Knowing the rules or actions required to perform a skill is very different from initiating these skills with others,” Tara says. “It is difficult for a lot of individuals that we serve to generalize skills they learn in all settings. Social Development Group provides individuals an opportunity to learn, perform, and practice skills while receiving positive feedback and encouragement.”

This past March, six individuals graduated from Social Development Group after meeting twice per week for six weeks. These successful participants learned to identify the tools that are needed to interact with others, how to have meaningful and successful conversations, how to make and keep friendships, how to better understand what others are thinking and how to best respond in social situations based on what the other person (or group) is doing, saying, or thinking. They also learned strategies on how to understand what others may be thinking or feeling based on body language and facial expressions.

“Being comfortable and confident while interacting with others is extremely difficult for most of the individuals we serve every day at ACT,” Tara says. “When you have not mastered skills you need to successfully approach others, have a conversation, maintain a conversation, and be able to determine what the other person is thinking, it is difficult to maintain friendships, employment, and any relationship.”

ACT has plans to offer Social Development Group to all of the individuals we serve as a service beginning in May.
The ACT Community Living Program is dedicated to providing assistance to individuals in order to pursue daily activities that lead towards growth and overall happiness. For many, participating in the Special Olympics is a fulfilling activity that provides not only a great deal of fun and exercise, but also teaches discipline, teamwork, and the spirit of friendly competition. Luke Abshier, Program Supervisor for Community Living, has been supporting individuals participating in the Special Olympics for a year and a half. “For the individuals I support, the Special Olympics really gives them something special to look forward to,” Luke says. “It gives them something to be proud of, especially their medals.”

Jodie H. is one individual who has had great success participating in the Special Olympics, something she has been doing since she was 5 years old.

“I love Special Olympics,” Jodie says, “because it helps out people and it’s fun!”

She is a true multi-sport athlete, earning medals in several events including track and field, softball, and basketball. Her first sport, though, was bowling, which she considers her favorite and the one in which she excels at the most. She has a large bin full of gold medals.
medals from bowling, but by far her most treasured ones are from Nationals in July of 2010 where she earned singles gold, team gold, and silver in doubles. She’ll be competing in bowling again at the state tournament in June, which will be in Columbia this year.

For the individuals we serve, participating in the Special Olympics is not all about medals and glory. “For the individuals I’ve worked with,” Luke says, “the game is not all about winning. They play hard and have fun, and if they come up short it’s not the end of the world.”

For Tricia Mumma, Program Manager for Community Living, these words couldn’t be more true for Jodie. “When I asked about her favorite thing about being a part of the Special Olympics, her answer was not her huge collection of medals, but rather the enjoyment she gets from keeping active and the opportunity to interact with lots of new and different people.”

This year, Jodie is continuing to take on all sorts of different sports. She is currently in practices for two spring sports, swimming and volleyball, and will be signing up for two summer sports that she has never tried before, bocce ball and golf. She is very much looking forward to the challenge, and pretty soon may need a bigger box for her medals.

“Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. The fearful are caught as often as the bold.”

— Helen Keller
Arts and Crafts Just One of Many Activities Offered by ACT

The ACT Community Integration Program seeks to provide individuals we serve with a multitude of activities that foster positive interactions in areas such as communication, recreation, self-help, personal health and hygiene, and community participation. Every day, up to 36 different activity choices are offered, both in-house and in the community, such as volunteering for Meals on Wheels, swimming at the YMCA in Jefferson City (a popular choice), or exploring the parks and trails when the weather is nice.

One activity that many individuals seem to particularly enjoy is Arts and Crafts. One afternoon every week, 4-5 individuals choose to attend the adapted Arts and Crafts program offered by Columbia Parks and Recreation where they receive instruction on painting ceramics. Michelle Bell, Program Manager for Community Integration, says that individuals get a kick out of independently choosing something to paint.

“Individuals who participate in the Arts and Crafts program get a real sense of accomplishment and pride from the activity,” Michelle says. “You can see it on their faces when they bring their projects to show to staff. Not only are the individuals we serve proud of their artwork, but the experience itself is also therapeutic and relaxing.”

Michelle adds that while the Arts and Crafts activity is a favorite among some regulars who try to go as often as they can, everyone we serve is encouraged to experience Arts and Crafts at least once, to see if they like it. The activity is very fulfilling, even for those who may not consider themselves artistic. In addition, this activity choice provides a great opportunity for individuals that ACT supports to enjoy participating in a city program offered to all members of the community.
Career Services Attends Professional Development Conference

The ACT Career Services team has the dual task of working with the individuals we serve to achieve their employment goals, while also assisting local businesses to meet their recruitment and retention needs. To do this successfully, the Career Services team must strike a balance between serving the needs of individuals while keeping the goals and aspirations of local businesses in mind.

To help improve and develop new strategies to accomplish this task, the ACT Career Services team recently attended a Professional Development conference in Jefferson City hosted by the Association for People Supporting Employment First, an organization that focuses on improving and expanding integrated employment opportunities, services, and outcomes for persons experiencing disabilities.

“People with disabilities are a hugely untapped workforce,” says John Savage, Director of Employment Services for ACT who attended the conference. “About 1 in 5 people have a disability of

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some kind, but 81% are unemployed despite being qualified. One of our goals is to help businesses become aware of this.”

The featured speaker of the conference was James Emmett, a nationally known consultant who helps businesses to develop diversity initiatives aimed at employing individuals with disabilities. Mr. Emmett has worked with companies such as Walgreens, Best Buy, and other large corporations to develop diversity policies and processes. During the conference, he spoke at length about the ways we work with businesses to focus on their employment needs, but the team did come home with new insight and strategies, such as ways to work with businesses to figure out their true needs and how to assist local chains of large corporations to achieve their diversity goals.

“The main takeaways of the conference won’t bring about any earth shaking change,” John says, “but we certainly received great guidance and great ideas on how to improve what we have already been doing here at ACT.”

ACT is seeking positive and enthusiastic employees to provide assistance and instruction to individuals with disabilities. If you are interested in a career supporting individuals with disabilities, join us and help make a difference in someone’s life. You must be willing to embrace challenges and accept great rewards. We invite you to consider ACT when seeking employment and/or work experience in the human services field.

ACT is an equal opportunity employer.

Visit actservices.org/jobs to view a list of job opportunities.

“Just because a man lacks the use of his eyes doesn’t mean he lacks vision.”
— Stevie Wonder
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