

OYA *In the Loop*

June 29, 2009

"If you come to a fork in the road, take it."

Yogi Berra

Well, I see a fork in the road. Unlike Yogi, I'm not confused about where I'm going. I'm leaving the Oregon Youth Authority to re-enter retirement. And, by the way, I like retirement as much as I like OYA.

And what's in store for the Oregon Youth Authority? You will have a great new director who will guide you down the fork in the road that leads to continuous improvement, a way of managing that will involve employees and partners in a process of building on our successes and learning from our mistakes.

It is impossible to describe to you how much I have valued my time working with you. This has been a *great* experience for me. It has been fun (for the most part), rewarding, and productive. I believe the agency has made remarkable improvements.

To tell you the truth, I had some real hesitation about taking the job as your Interim Director. Only a year ago, the agency was in shock and turmoil following allegations of dishonesty about one of our managers. Labor and management were at odds over many issues. The agency's credibility was questioned by the media, our elected leaders, our partners, and our employees.

After a conversation with Chip Terhune, the Governor's Chief of Staff, and Scott Harra, the Director of the Department of Administrative Services, I agreed to take on this job only if they gave me free reign to make needed changes. They not only agreed; they encouraged me to position the agency for the future. Job one, of course, was to repair agency credibility.

Improvements are made

Have improvements been made? You bet they have. And you all had the starring role in this. Changes were made because you wanted them, you embraced them, and you demanded them. Mostly, I was your cheerleader and encourager. The most important improvements were about openness, transparency, teamwork, and organizational character.

First, together we improved transparency through a rich exchange of information. I sent to you dozens of editions of *In the Loop* and many of you replied with constructive

comments and ideas. About 70 percent of you responded to the first employee survey and those responses gave us lots of information about the work we needed to do together.

Our labor and management meetings became incredibly productive. We have had very honest conversations about the issues we face as an agency and about possible solutions that could address them.

Dozens of you worked and continue to work on teams to put needed processes and improvements into place. The solutions we are putting into action aren't my ideas, they are your ideas. That's why they will work and be sustainable over time.

We began a conversation about personal and organizational character. We developed a management and leadership curriculum that is based on values, principles, and personal character. Although we suspended the training late in this biennium because of budget issues, they will resume soon. This is a critical piece in your growth as a transparent, trustworthy agency.

I have received many, many compliments about your transformational work. There is renewed confidence in the agency. The Governor, other agency managers, legislators, and partners have commented on the positive improvements you have made to the Oregon Youth Authority.

A Regret

Although working with you has been a positive experience for me, I have a regret. I deeply regret that our staff in our facilities, especially in Burns, Tillamook, Grants Pass, Woodburn, and Salem, in our Field Offices, and in our Central Office suffered through ongoing conversations about job losses. I'm very sorry that all of you had to go through all the uncertainty associated with budget balancing during a deep recession. This was a once in a hundred years event, and the threats of lay-offs were devastating to our employees and their families. I'm sorry that all of us had to be part of that.

A visioning process

So what's next? I have been talking with the Governor's advisors, our partners, legislators, labor leaders, and others about a visioning process for the Oregon juvenile justice system. I believe we need to re-visit such questions as: What are our mission and purpose? What will be the needs of the youth we serve in the future? What is our vision for the juvenile justice system in 2015 or 2020? What are the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder in this system? What are the values and principles that will govern our behaviors and relationships?

My belief is that such a conversation should begin this summer and continue through the fall so that the stakeholders can have some agreement about the future of the juvenile justice system before the next legislative session.

Thank you

As I close this communication, I want to thank you so much for accepting me as your Interim Director during the last several months. It has been very, very rewarding. Thank you.

“Vision without action is a daydream; action without a vision is a nightmare.”
Japanese Proverb