# Important to and for – Transcript

Purpose of doing this work is to help people get better lives. It's to begin to think about what constitutes a better life for a person and help people move towards that life.

All of the work that we do whether it's person-centered thinking, person-centered planning, developing one-page descriptions, looking at profiles, all has the same intent. Helping people get a life where they have control, where the person has their own self-defined quality of life, and all of it is rooted in this concept of what's important to versus what's important for.

When we say something is important to a person we mean it's something that helps them with comfort, with happiness, with being content, with being fulfilled, with being satisfied, all of that is packaged and encompassed in important to. When we say something is important for a person we're saying it's an issue of health and safety or it's about being a valued member of the community. And that latter part being a valued member of the community can include things like how are you regarded by others, how do other people look at you, how do people attend to you, so if I was taking somebody on a job interview, if I went to pick somebody up in the morning and they had a great white shirt on it just looked really good except it had a big spaghetti stain, I would stop and say let's see if we can find a clean shirt because we want you to be a valued member of the community. If we start thinking about and looking at what's important to people and how it relates to what's important for people then we see that they are connected. That no one does anything that's important for them willingly unless there's a piece of it that's important to them. I think this is really illustrated with Sheila's story.

Sheila is somebody who has intellectual disabilities and is supported by an agency. And that agency was challenged because Sheila was gaining weight and she kept gaining weight and despite diets, despite restricting access to food, despite all the things they could do, she kept gaining weight until finally she started to develop congestive heart failure because she was so heavy. And they were stuck. They were trying to figure out what do we do, how can we look at this and we came forward and said you know there's actually two ways to lose weight one is eat less, the others move more and you've tried eating less, how about moving more? So they said okay and their first effort was to get an exercycle and put it in the basement and say Sheila please ride. And Sheila's response to that was it's remarkably boring and they said well we'll stay with you and encourage you and that worked a bit but not really well. So they said what if we get a TV set and we put a TV set in the basement in front of the exercycle and then say well if you want to watch your favorite shows, you need to pedal. Well that made Sheila angry. That didn't work and Sheila became more resistant to exercise.

So one of the women who lived there, one of the women who worked there said well you know I belong to a gym, it's the gym just for women, it's called curves, what if Sheila comes to the gym with me? What if Sheila then exercises with me and she doesn't have to feel self-conscious about how she looks and she can just relax and exercise. And that worked significantly better than the exercycle but not well enough. And one of the fellows who worked there said well you know I belong to a gym and it’s co-ed, what if I take Sheila with me? Why don't we see how this works. And Sheila went to the gym with him and she walked in the door of the gym and she saw the men lifting weights and she was transfixed and she said hunks. And she wanted to just stand and watch and the fellow who was with her said oh Sheila I'm sorry there's a rule here. If you really want to go ahead and watch the men who are lifting weights, you also have to exercise because the rule is you can only stare at other people when you yourself are exercising and Sheila said that's a very odd rule, that's a very strange rule, are you sure that's a rule here? And the fella said yes that's the way everybody operates here and she said oh well okay but how's work for me? And he said follow me. Took her to a Treadmill, got her on the treadmill set it at 1 mile an hour big mirror in front of the treadmill where she could watch the fellows lifting weight and the new problem was getting her off because she was happily just standing there and watching the fellows who were lifting weights and she was happy to do it day after day. And after she had done it for a couple of weeks she became qualified as what they call a gym rat. Somebody who hangs out at the gym a lot and the other people who go to the gym don't really care that much about how you look, or how your muscle definition, what they care about what makes you valued in the gym is the fact that you're there and that you're working on things. So she started to become acquainted with the fellows who are lifting weights and she lost 70 pounds. And that's the challenge finding something that's important to, that's a hook for important for.

But anytime you're looking at important to, you're also looking at trade-offs within what's important to a person. What's important to a person is dynamic is changing and they're always trade-offs. Routinely I ask people think about what was important to you just before you had children, and just after you had children. How did it change? Our challenge is to document it, our challenges to first though, discover it. To first learn what's important to people. In many cases we're planning with people, we're doing work with people who cannot tell us in their own words what's important to them because of disability they might not be able to communicate in such a direct way, but they do communicate and they have communicated to others. So part of what you have to do is say who should contribute, who should I learn from, and the best way to do that is to start with the relationship map. To start with looking at who's in a person's life, where you put the name of the person in the center and then it's how close the person feels to individuals. So if you look at the family section, you might have somebody in the family who's remarkably close to you from the standpoint of how close you feel but you might feel closer to an uncle than to a brother. So you're really talking about emotional distance. You also need to make sure that you're sorting people who are paid from people who are not paid, and some of the people who are paid also have a close relationship and the temptation is to put them in the friends column. But if you have a paid relationship and you're close to the person then your name goes next to that circle with the person's name. People who are friends, or people who have a relationship that's not paid. That gives you some idea of who you should talk to but not necessarily who you should listen to and there are some simple questions that helps you sort who to talk to versus who to listen to.

And the first question that you ask is if you are planning with somebody named Helen, what do you like the most about Helen? What do you like about Helen, and give people a bit of time because they're not used to being asked that question. But after they've answered that, ask what do you admire? And once you really have thought about what you've asked them what they like and admire, once they've answered those questions think about the answers. Do the answers actually say that I have a personal relationship with the person or just a work relationship. I did training around how to develop plans in San Diego some years back and I was talking with a woman who was working with a fellow named Tony. Tony is this amazingly energetic person who just kind of bounds into a room but he really doesn't communicate with words so he is somebody that you really need to ask those people who are rounding. And when I asked this woman who had worked with him for seven years and who worked with him for 40 hours a week, what do you like the most about Tony? She said oh, that's a hard question. You know what I really like about him is he's no trouble in the bath and when I said well what do you admire about him? She said oh, he helps with dressing. And I said oh dear to myself but there's one more question which sometimes works which is when's the last time you had fun together? When is the last time you had fun together and when I asked the same woman about Tony, when's the last time you had fun together she said well I'm not paid to have fun with Tony. I'm paid to help Tony have fun and I just thought oh my. One of my personal definitions of hell would be to be dependent on someone else and have that person not care about you, not care about you as a person, but to just think of you as part of a job.

By contrast the young woman who worked with him during the day in a day service she when asked that same question what do you like the Most, what do you admire the most she said oh, you know how on Monday morning sometimes you really had too much fun on the weekend and you're kind of dragging when you come into work, you're really struggling, you're thinking where am I going to get the energy to get through the day she said whenever you feel like that you just go hang with Tony because he has this amazing energy, he just fills you with that energy.

And so you really have to be persistent in asking like, admire, and fun and listen for that personal connection, listen for that personal relationship because those are the people who are going to know what's important to the person and the answers that they give you are also going to help you as you build a description. They're also going to help you say how should we introduce this person because people are typically introduced with paper. So if we begin to look at how do we learn what's important to a person, then we're looking at a series of questions that really amount to if your professional assessments but if you think about how you really do it their conversations. They’re ways to talk with people, they’re questions to spark a conversation, there are ways to just kind of discover to learn by having a set of questions in your mind but following the conversation wherever it goes.