

From Vision to Reality and Back to Vision: Reflections on Three Decades in Public Social Services Administration

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A social services agency director's vision of the way things should be often collides with the reality of the way things are. As a result, the effective administrator must be prepared to deal with roadblocks—sometimes by pushing or pulling, but most often by going around, under or over. Most directors come to their positions prepared to offer vision and leadership in shaping services to better meet the needs of clients and the larger community. But they soon discover that they operate in an environment of constraints and dilemmas involving government regulations, the political process, and conflicting goals and responsibilities. The path from vision to reality and back to vision requires creativity and flexibility in dealing with an environment that is at once rigid and bureaucratic, and shifting and changing. The successful administrator must be:

- comfortable and confident in “working the system” without compromising basic principles;
- vocal and willing to step out on a limb to advocate on behalf of clients with local, state and national legislators as well as the media;
- flexible in trying out innovative ideas on a small scale or in a less than ideal way to ensure that some forward progress is made; and above all tenacious in holding on to his or her vision.

These lessons learned over the past 30 years emerge out of three major domains of administrative practice:

- organizational-environment relations, including working with county and state governments, the impact of Federal policies, community relations, working with the courts and law enforcement, and working within the constraints of limited resources and rigid regulations;
- organization-staff relations, including working with unions, developing effective ways to train and evaluate staff, and facilitating communication between staff and administration; and

- organization-client relations, such as enhancing client satisfaction and balancing the many and sometimes conflicting client needs and priorities.

The following reflections illustrate the array of factors shaping and being shaped by the administrator's actions on a daily basis.

Organizational-Environment Relations

Organization-environment relations occur at multiple levels—federal, state, county and the local community—and involve a range of constituencies including government regulators, elected officials, community-based organizations, the media and the courts, as just a few examples. Working with these various constituencies involves a delicate balancing act between accommodating their ways of doing business while continuing to promote changes that better serve the needs of clients and the community.

Working Within County Government

Santa Clara county is a charter county. It has a county executive rather than a county administrator. One of the major distinctions of this model of government is that the county executive is the appointing authority for the majority of the department heads. Most of my colleagues in other counties are appointed by their Boards of Supervisors and can truly be said to have a “Tuesday to Tuesday” job — Tuesday because that is when most boards meet in California, and therefore on any Tuesday, with a three to two vote a department head can be ousted. In most of the charter counties,

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the department head is appointed by the county administrator and in effect enjoys a civil service status, which gives a different character to how one goes about managing an organization. I often say I have the best job in the state of California. I work in a very liberal community, I have a very liberal Board of Supervisors and I have an autonomy that is not given to many welfare directors.

My relationship with the Board is through the county executive. That doesn't mean I don't have to deal with the Board directly — I certainly do. But the charter prohibits the Board from any direct involvement in agency administration. Board members can have a great deal of influence on the administration of an organization but as a matter of fact, you have that shield — when they get too close you can remind them about the charter and about the role of administration and the role of the Board and the bridge between the two, which is the county executive. Still, Board members have a staff of aides, and that gives them opportunity and authority to involve themselves in a wide range of activities. Their aides are assigned an area and they concentrate on it just like they do with a legislator in Sacramento. So you're constantly dealing with the Board on that aide level, answering questions and dealing with constituency calls through them.

The State Government

The state is our supervising agency and I define them as being in charge of no—"no," not "k-n-o-w". Their view of their role is control in terms of the regulatory process. They create well over 900 rule changes a year between the Health Department, Food Stamps and AFDC. One of the reasons that it is so difficult to automate welfare in California is that it takes over a half a billion data elements to do it correctly. The rules and regulations for food stamps are not the same as for AFDC or MediCal. So basically what we've got is a regulatory agency that spews out regulations, with very little concept of what the client would want or need or what is best for California.

The second aspect of the state is that they're in the "gottcha" business. Instead of looking at things like whether the client benefited from an intervention, they monitor error rates and review compliance — whether you signed the form before the 30th of the month or whether you got the CA-7 processed and looked at it on time or whether the client returned it before the third working day in the month. In my almost thirty years in social services, I have never been asked for an outcome measure, I have never been audited on an outcome measure, and I have never been

evaluated on an outcome measure. No one has ever asked me whether the client benefited from the services.

The relationship with the state is influenced by the size of the county. The twenty smallest counties tend to see the state as their principal source of authority for everything they do. If you can get the state to say you must do something, you can compel your Board to fund it. And so you transfer the advocacy for your programs from yourself to the "they made me do it" mode. The middle size counties go back and forth. Sometimes they go to the Board and say, "The state is making me do this. You've got to fund it." And sometimes they go to the Board and say, "Despite what the state wants to do, I want to do this." The larger urban and suburban counties are more likely to tell the state how we want to do things most of the time. We have our own governmental relations staff with access to the legislature. Santa Clara County has three governmental relations staff members, one of whom works in Sacramento almost exclusively. Thus, we are able to follow and influence the legislative process with the best interests of the client and the county in mind.

The Impact of Federal Policies

The current welfare reform debate is the fifth federal change agenda I've gone through in my 30 years in public social services. This 1995 welfare reform debate is very different from the past, where we made marginal changes. What's being discussed now is really a fundamental and very profound change in welfare. We've always had the basic entitlement structure and universal eligibility. Now, we are talking about a proposal that eliminates federal entitlements. One thing we have never had to do since 1935 is at the front entrance, say "you, you, you, and you, are eligible—you, you, and you are not, because we ran out of money." This welfare reform platform has the potential to put us into that category.

When we look at it from the local level, all we see is another group of people who are going to be excluded, another set of entitlements that are going to be denied, and another set of restrictions impacting the families in our community. If the state and federal block grant guidelines result in fewer restrictions, we could potentially do some creative things at the local level. But the fact of the matter is that our time will be devoted to figuring out how to finance former entitlements through state-level and local decision making. It is highly doubtful that we will have a chance to invest that block grant money in a front-end delivery system. In the large urban communities, welfare reform is

going to be very, very traumatic and will cause a lot of social disruption. For example, our agency spends \$12 million every day, 365 days a year. We are a significant part of our community. If that were cut in half, it would be significant. I've estimated that we would lose 700-800 workers out of 2400, and I'm not sure how to finance the 1600 that would be left. And all of this is occurring in an environment where our mandate is to move people off the caseload and on to self-sufficiency.

The impact of welfare reform on the local community is going to be most clearly expressed in the child welfare area. There is an estimate that approximately five million children could come into the child welfare system as a result of welfare reform. How in the world are we going to ration our services to children? Are bad bruises okay? Or is bleeding going to be the criteria? When Board members consider such a dilemma, they absolutely have no idea how to deal with it. When you think about such an impact on the local community, it's overwhelming.

I think the welfare system is not successful and we really ought to replace it. My vision of what welfare should be is that we should never let anyone who is unemployed sit for 26 weeks or 52 weeks on unemployment. We should never let people get near a welfare department if they are able to work. We should have a program that steers them into a training and employment system. I would go back to the that old method of basic social services in which you have social workers who serve families in their homes, and they don't have to be a CPS referral in order to get help. Social services should focus on the families that are really unable to succeed in the labor market. I really do believe we entrap able-bodied people in the welfare system when we should be empowering them to go back to work.

Given the fact that welfare reform is upon us, what we are doing at the local level is trying to prepare our boards for a radical change in how they view welfare. I've already talked to my Board about the fact that they might want to think about starting the process of giving the programs back to the state. You can't get away with that because the welfare and institutions code doesn't really allow a Board to do that. But we have to start thinking about a worst case alternative. I have spent time at Board meetings going through a review of the impacts of welfare reform proposals and what Board members could do about it. In a similar manner, I have approached our local business roundtable with the message that they have been advocating welfare reform for a long time and they think it's a system that ought to be eliminated. If so, it is now time to step to the plate and create the jobs in order to employ these folks. But even if we could get

them all minimum wage jobs, it's still going to leave us with a need for a social welfare system.

The Constraints of Resources and Regulations

There are tremendous opportunities for us if we could have a chance to rationally reform welfare. There are all kinds of things you could save money on. For example, I have sixty-five thousand square feet of archival records space that I pay for. We have cases that are three, four and five volumes because the paper builds up so much. We literally have 20-25 worker disability claims a year from staff injuring themselves bending over and picking up case files. It really is Byzantine, and it's a process that just confounds reason. Let's consider computer automation, for example. I can rent a building for \$10 million a year but I can't buy more than \$25,000 worth of computers without having state permission or more than \$200,000 without federal permission. One of the reasons you don't see automation innovation in California is because of those restrictions. I can buy all the cars I want, but I can't move forward with an automation system.

It would be nice to be able to say that most of the time we're motivated by what's the best delivery model for the client. However, that usually comes second or third. What you hope is it doesn't come last. It's difficult to consistently keep the client service focus in mind because everything you do is defined in terms of dollars. And beyond the dollar, everything in government is prescribed — what you do needs to be written down. You've got to find either a legal justification or some kind of regulatory justification for doing what you do. Money, then regulations, then politics, and at the bottom is the client. When you try to do it differently, you can succeed, but it takes an extraordinary amount of effort, and I don't think you could do it if you were in a "Tuesday-to-Tuesday" kind of job.

Let me give you an example. I wanted to implement family resource centers. I didn't have a complete definition of what a family resource center should be, but I believed there must be a mechanism for a big government agency to serve a community in a way that clients have a role in defining the services they need. I knew I didn't have a budget allocation and I didn't necessarily have permission from the Board of Supervisors. There was nothing in the regulations that would define a family resource center, but nothing that would really prohibit me from proceeding. So I happened to have a building located in the Latino side of town that was used for the summer youth employment program, but in the Fall it was vacant. Instead of returning it to the landlord, I decided to continue paying for it. Then I assigned two social

workers to go out there and see what they could make out of this opportunity. I got all kinds of input over the course of the year within Administration to the effect that there was nothing going on out there. “We’ve only seen two clients in a year. Do you know how much money that’s costing?” I got constant feedback about how wasteful this program was. Well, after a year and a half we had a giant open house to establish the Caesar Chavez Family Resource Center, and it is now a model for four other centers we’ve opened. It was basically the community and a couple of social workers with a vision, without any administrative constraints, putting it together. If I had been a “Tuesday-to-Tuesday” director, the chances are I wouldn’t have taken that risk because somebody could have come by and blown the whistle. As it was, I had the freedom to experiment without an elaborate plan, budget or grant proposal. For me, the best way to change the bureaucracy is to use what Tom Peters calls the “skunk works process” of putting creative people together to build something from the bottom up, and not to direct it from the top down. As these projects mature, however, I begin to see bureaucracy creeping back in. I went to a center the other day and there was a government form posted at the front door. These symbols of bureaucracy need to be less obvious in order to create a comfortable environment for clients, but it’s difficult to get staff to change the way they do business.

Community Relationships

Social services agencies must always contend with local community standards and values. Santa Clara County’s Social Services Agency is seen as the “big kid on the block” because of the scope of our programs, the size of our organization and our impact on the community. If we are late with the monthly warrants, it is not necessarily the clients that call, it’s the apartment owners who want to know why the warrants are late, why the client can’t pay on the first of the month.

Because of our scope and size, we are seen as the organization that gets priority consideration, which can contribute to an adversarial relationship with many community organizations. This is sometimes a “knee-jerk” reaction, but sometimes well deserved. We do wield clout and have veto power over many programs such as Healthy Start, which is a school-funded program but requires clearance through the Welfare Department. The same is true for employment training programs under the auspices of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). The forty plus organizations that contract with us have a different relationship than those that do not contract with us. The ones that can’t get money from us often find reasons, some valid and some not, to be

very critical of what we do and how we do it. Those that contract with us tend to be supportive of our organization. They might have disagreements with us, but they typically would not go public with critical comments.

The process of contracting for services in a county can be very political. As a result, we contract with a wide variety of youth organizations, nutrition programs, emergency shelters, drug abuse programs and counseling programs. Of the 42 contracts that we’re administering this year, only about 10% have been initiated by our department to respond to a specific need. For example, Saratoga, one of the richest communities in the nation, with approximately two years of budget reserves, came to the Board of Supervisors and got funding for a senior program at \$16,000 a year. It’s basically a way for the Board member who represents that district to respond to that community. I don’t mean to be cynical but that’s part of life.

Working With the Courts and Law Enforcement

In child welfare, we’ve got a civil procedure within a criminal atmosphere. In Santa Clara County every case has at least three lawyers. Most have four, five or six, and that’s probably true of most other jurisdictions. You’ve got the District Attorney representing the child, the County Counsel representing the Department of Social Services, the Public Defender representing the parent, and a conflicts attorney representing the non-custodial parent or the non-abusing parent. The costs of the system right now in the urban counties are enormous. Santa Clara County spends \$2.5 million dollars per year on legal services, and we’re only the fourth largest in the state. We have eight court officers who each cost \$102,000 a year. We’ve got many hours of wasted social worker time waiting in court.

My objective is to keep cases from getting to the court because once they get there, we’ve essentially lost. I think we’ve gotten this system to the point where there are too many legal checks and balances, too many procedures and court requirements. For example, a social worker recommends placing a child in a foster home in Cupertino and the District Attorney says, “I don’t think that’s a good home for the kid,” and the Public Defender says, “That’s too far for my client to travel.” Meanwhile, the child is sitting in the shelter or temporary foster care. The social worker comes back and says, “Well, I’ve got a home in Mountain View.” The District Attorney says, “That’s too close to the railroad tracks. I’m afraid my kid’s going to run out and get run over.” The Public Defender says, “That’s closer for my client but it’s still not on a bus line.” Children’s lives are hung in the balance but once you get into court the best interests of the child

don't seem to be a factor anymore. In Santa Clara County 75% to 80% of all of the children enter the system directly from a law enforcement intervention without social service involvement. They're coming from drug busts, shoplifting, domestic violence, school-reported neglect, and so on. They are coming into the system from law enforcement, which runs counter to the public's and the grand jury's perception that social workers are running around grabbing children from their homes and taking them away. Because there is minimal social services collaboration with law enforcement, we really aren't doing a triage at the front end to figure out if there isn't something else we could do with a troubled family before they get caught up in the system. Once they are in the system, we're compelled to do an investigation within a 48-hour time line. We are then faced with putting a child in satellite care or shelter care or with a relative and the family is trapped in the process. As we proceed, we become protective and begin to defend our decisions as the right thing to do. We don't question the decision-making in picking up the child in the first place.

I would like to change the way we do intake. I think we have a fundamental problem in not being able to respond to the family when the crisis occurs; we're always there after the fact. I've placed social workers in two or three police departments, and it really works. They go out with the police officer on the complaint. If a call comes in that there is a drug bust, the police ask, "Are there children involved, or are there children in the household" and if there are, they take along my social worker. This is the type of incremental change an administrator can make to improve services to families, but at the same time we need to continue to advocate for broader systems changes.

Organization-Staff Relations

Organization-staff relations, like organization-environment relations, occur at multiple levels. At the most basic level, we in the social work profession are confronted with the issue of professional standards including using the M.S.W. as minimal qualifications for entry level into child protective services. Maintaining this entry level standard helps to elevate the competency of the entire organization. It also leads to the importance of professional development and staff training in order to maintain a level of excellence. Committing organization resources to staff training programs, conference travel, professional association involvement, and the pursuit of continuing education are all part of the equation. Today labor-management relations are a critical component of fostering effective organization-staff relations. This includes educating union shop stewards as well as learning

from them about employee concerns. Formal relations need to be balanced with informal relationships and therefore mentoring has been another essential ingredient in effective organization-staff relations.

Working With Unions

We have a highly unionized work force. We're one of the few counties in California that has case load standards negotiated in a contract, signed by the Board of Supervisors. That means that every time we have a contract negotiation session, we negotiate very specific caseload numbers. This defines our relationship as traditional shop floor concept where the view is that management is trying to take advantage of the workers and the workers constantly need to be alert to being manipulated. We spend a great deal of time negotiating over changes in forms, redefinition of rules or something else that is viewed as more work by the union but not by management.

When I started with the County I was a union activist. We were working in an environment that didn't value welfare or social work, and we had quite a disruptive transition period. We went on a major strike, the second strike of any county welfare department in the state. We wound up with these negotiated caseload standards and it has been that way ever since. Many administrators think that's a burden and of course it can be a burden, but it is also one of the blessings of life, because it allows you to determine your budget very easily. And since it is a contract signed by the Board of Supervisors and not by the administration, the Board can't really say no to a staffing request. If cases go up, you go to the board with your caseload standard. If they want to change the caseload standard, they've got to direct us to negotiate with the union, and we have never had them direct us to go in and negotiate standards up in order to accommodate caseload growth. We've always been able to find the dollars to maintain our caseload standards.

Training and Evaluating Staff

I think training is probably the most important thing we do and I wish there were ways to make it more compulsory than it is. Our social workers are required to take 50 hours of continuing education a year. Whether they do it or not, that's another issue. I was going to try to tie it to compensation, but was not able to get that approved. We've got union rules that will allow anyone to transfer into a job assignment, whether or not they're good at that job or trained at that job. I don't think you can ensure good practice under these circumstances. If we're going to be permitted to be this intrusive in the lives of families, we have to change the

structure of how we go about delivering services. I don't think you can have absolute seniority rights for staff, with limited disciplinary ability. You've got to be able to hold staff accountable for what they do on the job. If we're going to be so involved in the lives of children, we can't have unlimited protections of the sort that a civil servant gets.

In 1975, we had the strike and as part of that strike we eliminated the evaluation of social services employees. You can go to a Santa Clara County Social Services Agency personnel file and you can find nothing in there that describes how an employee has performed on the job. All you know is how long they've been there and whether there have been disciplinary actions. Since 1975 we have had an ongoing battle with grand juries and the Board about whether we should have an evaluation system in the Social Services Agency. The unions, of course, have fought against it. Employees have fought against it. The problem is that there are a great majority of employees who feel demoralized by the fact that they may do a very good job, but someone next to them who is goofing off gets the same pay, the same raises, the same opportunities.

Instituting an evaluation system is going to be a long, involved process. I'd say the weakest part of the organization is first line supervision. We define them as management in terms of their disciplinary and evaluation functions, but they are still part of the union. As a consequence, that whole area of disciplinary action and employee evaluation gets bumped up to the second line manager. The second line manager or program manager doesn't directly observe the performance of the employees and isn't responsible for daily supervision, which results in a weak case for disciplinary action. We take the case anyway, we do termination or we do suspension, and it goes to arbitration. Usually we lose because the facts are not there and we don't have the support of the first line supervisor. Serious offenses can get taken care of. It's the subtle issues that don't get dealt with — the way workers treat clients, their attitude, the feelings of clients toward workers. It isn't an issue of workers not doing their work. If they have 50 cases, they do 50 cases. But they could treat 48 of those clients very badly and it's difficult for the supervisor to either know that or deal with it if the forms are completed and the checks are going out.

The child welfare area is the most disturbing to me, although I'm not dismissing the attitude and behavior of people in income maintenance. I think the main problem in income maintenance is laws and regulations. I'm afraid what we have developed with the regulations, with the monitoring of error rates, with everything else, is an attitude of

"prove to me you're eligible," and I think that's the attitude that most welfare departments in California have for people coming in applying for assistance. But child welfare is the area that concerns me the most. I'm perplexed by the attitude of some of our workers toward the clients. Those are the ones that are so darned hard to get at because everyone says it's their professional style or method, not attitude, that clients dislike. Another big complaint I get is about variance in attitudes on the worker's part. Complaints are in the context of, "Well, the last social worker that I dealt with was different than this social worker," or "I know somebody who did this and their kid wasn't taken away. How come?" And you begin to see a pattern of behaviors. I did some snooping around in Emergency Response about two years ago because there were some problems down there, and I found out that I had a social worker who had worked there for eight years and had never taken a child into custody. I had another worker in that same unit who took 90% of the children that she saw into custody.

I think the best model of evaluation has got to be peer model, and all of us need to be evaluated in that process. The evaluation needs to be not just a check sheet, but an ongoing dialogue in an ongoing development process between the supervisor and staff. This is tricky to implement with professionals because practice skills are practice skills and we define ourselves as artists, not technicians. I also think evaluation needs to be connected with some kind of incentive. I don't know whether it's monetary or not, but there must be some kind of recognition of positive behavior.

As critical as I am, I'm not going to give up on the solutions. But I really do believe that we, as a profession, have a responsibility to start thinking about how we do business. Consistently when you talk with parents that are involved in the system, particularly those middle class parents who find themselves caught up in the system for one reason or another, the first words out of their mouth are on this issue—"I thought social workers were here to help me. Your staff didn't do a thing for me."

Staff-Director Communications

I have an open door policy. Anyone can call me and get an appointment, but I usually schedule those appointments between 4:30 and 5:30 in the evening so I'm giving up a little bit and they're going to have to give up a little bit. An open door policy can potentially undermine middle managers unless they understand what your role is and what you're doing. If it doesn't work, it's largely my responsibility because I need to communicate with the middle manager.

I'll go to the Assistant Director and say, "So and so's coming to see me. There's an issue that has come up from the line and he or she apparently has not been able to get satisfaction." Surprisingly enough, before that appointment, usually those problems are resolved.

Since I grew up at the organization, one of the problems is that everybody knows me, just plain old Dick, you know, that goofball that used to be down in intake. And so staff have felt a level of comfort in coming to me, talking in the elevator, the cafeteria or wherever I am. It's taken about seven years for the mantle of directorship to impact my attitude, and as a result staff attitudes have changed toward me. I have become a distant, unreachable director and they feel that distance. But initially I would get in the elevator and talk to people and they'd tell me about a problem they were having. I think many staff today are intimidated by the management hierarchy in my organization. As a result, it's hard for people to be very candid and forthright. It's very hard to modify an organization to incorporate an open door policy. It's either there and people accept it and are comfortable with it, or it's not.

Organization-Client Relations

Client-centered administration is at the core of organization-client relations. It requires a constant monitoring of client perceptions of the services provided. Periodic client satisfaction surveys represent core approaches to the monitoring process. Helping staff assess survey results and identify new approaches to meeting client needs involves sharing the courage to "face the music" even if the results are painful to absorb. Client-centered administration includes:

- venerating the client as our sole reason for existing as an organization;
- placing clients at the top of the organizational chart and not at the bottom;
- demonstrating a healthy disrespect for the impossible when it comes to trusting clients to identify and address issues which they feel strongly about;
- maintaining an open mind with which to learn about the changing needs of clients and finding new ways to address them, and;
- assisting staff in finding ways to continuously evaluate the impact of services by soliciting client perceptions.

Client Satisfaction

We did a client survey and we found out, interestingly enough, that about 88% to 92% of our clients described their interface with the organization as being positive to very

good. But what we also discovered is that the approval rating went up significantly as the clients moved from intake to continuing eligibility. My interpretation is that we don't necessarily do a better job with the intake, we just teach them how to behave as welfare clients.

In October, we will open a brand new central intake facility in Santa Clara County. We will run extended office hours, from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., and we will probably work on Saturdays. We have also redefined the way the clients are treated at intake. There will be no receptionist, but there will be client service advocates. The facility looks like a credit union where instead of standing in line you go up to a window. It's got a day care center, it's got housing services, job services, and other organizations providing ancillary services.

I think it's very important to sit in on an intake interview at least once a year, and to go sit in the lobby as often as you can. I can't do it with my suit on because I clearly don't belong in the lobby, but once in a while I dress down and sit in the lobby and listen to the discussions and how people feel. I think it's humiliating the way people mispronounce people's names. By golly, if you can't pronounce the name correctly, you shouldn't broadcast it over the loudspeaker. I'm hoping for a different atmosphere in intake. There's a restaurant in Santa Cruz where you place your order at the window and they hand you a pager and when your order is ready, the thing buzzes. So I'm going to do that for eligibility clients. I'm going to give them a pager device, and they can go outside and smoke, they can sit in their car, they can take the children for a walk.

I'm going to try to change the way we interface with the client because I don't think it's good model right now. First of all, there are the forms we have to go through. If you've ever done it, you understand. It's absolutely insulting to everybody. You're asking a couple of nineteen-year-olds how many bonds and stocks they've got and it's demoralizing, humiliating—I don't like the process. So we're starting with changing the physical environment, but we're also looking at the job and the way the eligibility worker looks at the job and beginning to make changes there as well.

The Difficulties of Balancing Client Priorities and Needs

As much as I'd like to say that in child welfare we have a unified practice of evaluating families, it is not a unified practice. We have guidelines and procedures, but quite frankly, when we've got a child in the shelter and that child is Spanish-speaking and we don't have any Spanish-speaking

placements available, we place them wherever we can. The pressure is on the worker is to find a placement designed to meet the management edicts that no children under eight should be in the shelter and they also should all be placed in ethnically and culturally appropriate homes. That is often like a mission impossible and the workers have to make some of these decisions on a very quick basis. Sometimes it's not to the benefit of the child.

In the ideal world, I would do strengths-based family assessments. I would try to find a way to give workers more time than that 48-hour window. I don't think that's enough time in today's society to assess situations and develop interventions. I would try to involve the family in more of the solutions, try to seek out the significant extended family members, involve their church or involve their community supports, do some basic social work instead of the kinds of things we're forced to do now. I wouldn't be averse to temporary care but I would try to find ways to make temporary care different, such as home visitation on the weekends, maybe having the mother come and stay in foster care, do things that are different than the way we do it now. I'm working on starting a program where mentors adopt a family. I would like to investigate the possibility of placing caring persons in the home instead of taking children out of the home.

Reflections on Administrative Practice

One thing I find with many people in my organization is that you'll say to somebody, "Hey, how'd you like to go down to South County and see if you can do something down there?" and the response is, "Well, it's a long commute. Do I get any more money for it?" or "Do I have to do my original job, too?" My advice is to try to look at the opportunities these requests offer. For example, about 20 years ago I was a supervisor of a CPS unit — a prestige job. I got a call on a Friday from the Director saying that Monday morning he wanted me to take over the job of Bureau Chief of Food Stamps. I thought to myself, "I don't want to do Food Stamps. I'm an MSW. I'm the CPS supervisor." I didn't tell him yes or no, but I walked out and I went home and I told my wife, "This is it. I am not going back on Monday. I am not going to supervise their Food Stamp unit." Then over the weekend she talked to me and I talked to me and everybody talked to me and I called a couple of buddies and I called my mentor on Sunday and we had a long talk. Monday morning I walked in and I said, "I'll do it." I went over there and I supervised the unit for a three-month interim period, and it was one of the best experiences I ever

had. When they appointed the permanent replacement I started working in Administration and never looked back. So try not to get too stuck on your ego principles. Don't compromise your career or values but be as flexible as you can in taking advantage of these opportunities.

The other thing to remember is that no one is going to tell you what the keys to success are. No one is going to give you those tools — you have to get them yourself. As an example, in 1974 we were cutting back Title 20, and we had a big staff meeting up in the executive conference room. We were told we were going to have to cut fifty workers out of the budget by the end of the month. We were out of money. Al Swanson (who's now a professor at the School of Social at San Jose State) and I decided this couldn't be real. This didn't make sense that we could be out of money. We asked for a copy of the administrative claim, but they wouldn't give it to us. We broke into the fiscal officer's office on Friday evening, took the administrative claim out of his files, went home, learned how the administrative claim worked, walked in on Monday morning and said we can afford not only not to lay off these people, we can hire about twenty or thirty more. I learned finance that way and wound up becoming the Assistant Director for Administration. I don't recommend breaking into people's offices. It was touch and go, it really was, and if it had come out the other way and the Fiscal Officer had been right, I think we'd have been looking for work. We got written up for it. It was in our personnel files for some time but it was worth the risk.

My final word of advice is to never give up your vision of where you think you ought to be and what your purpose ought to be. This is very difficult in a bureaucracy. It's hard to maintain that perspective. You do redefine what the bottom line is. You're not going support any policy that really hurts the clients or your staff. You draw that line and you say no. But there are a lot of compromises you make in between. For example, there may be an organization you don't want to do business with, but if the Board says fund it, you fund it. But you can and do draw your lines in different areas. Never give up your vision of what you want it to be. And always keep a sense of humor and don't take yourself too seriously. I mean, that's one of the things that most of us get caught up in—we take ourselves so seriously. We think we're so important. We're not. I mean, really, if you wanted to pay somebody to do something, you wouldn't pay them to do what I do.