



→ The Way Ahead Group

beyond obligation

the david royce interview

duncan fraser

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welcome

to the latest of an ongoing series of monthly think-pieces. These have been commissioned to reflect the work, themes and values of The Way Ahead Group with a view to providing insights, questions and reflections which will inform your own work and way of being in the world.



david royce

In this piece, Duncan Fraser managing director of The Way Ahead Group interviewed David Royce, chief executive of CRi which is a national provider of support, treatment and rehabilitation programmes for those whose lives are blighted by substance misuse, crime and lack of opportunity. Cri's services include working with people with substance misuse problems, those who are homeless and living and working on the streets, offenders in prison, those serving community sentences, families and communities affected by crime, substance misuse and anti social behaviour and victims of domestic abuse.



duncan fraser

Their objective is to help individuals to improve their lives and achieve their full potential.

David has attended various Way Ahead Group retreats and has been coached by Duncan.

In a session with Duncan, David was talking about expecting people to go 'beyond obligation' in his organisation and he agreed to explore this further for an article.

What is the basis of your premise for talking about beyond obligation?

In 1998, CRi had 21 employees and incoming resources of £643k to support service delivery. In 2008 CRi has 1000 employees, 250 volunteers and peer mentors and incoming resources of £37m. Something unusual has happened and it can't just be the result of investment in the sector. The culture of CRi embodies the shared aspiration of the majority of people involved who work to make the world a better place.

The majority of people coming to work for CRi seem to share a similar motivation and have actively chosen social care as a means of both earning a living and expressing a vocational sense of self. Of course, this is not always the case and some are working in the field for the sole purpose of earning a living and either way, the obligations placed upon the employee by the working contract are clear enough.

In management terms competence, completion of task, delivery of outcomes, adherence to roles and process is the focus and all employees must meet the requirements and deliver. A manager must be able to find evidence that teams have been 'as good as they needed to be' and the minimum standard for any employee is to be 'good enough'.

Ask a CRi volunteer to explain why it is that they are volunteering and they will give you a concise, two part answer. Firstly, by using their time purposefully they actively seek to do something that changes the world for the better. Secondly, there exists the chance to learn more about themselves from their involvement in the experience.

In CRi the leadership quest is to carry people beyond the limits of contractual obligation and back into the realm of vocation that they may previously have sensed as a volunteer, where they feel that the significance of their daily working life goes beyond the salary earned or status afforded by the job title, and gets back to that fundamental desire to change the world for the better and learn something about themselves on the way.

How do people respond to this challenge?

I remain fascinated by people's responses to this challenge. Almost immediately, many will react and have a reasonable concern for work-life balance. I wonder about the nature of balance. Work life balance must shift also - it cannot be a concept cast in stone, as it is very often taken to be in the real world.

To stand still requires constant minor adjustments of position and muscle tension to keep a balance. To take a step forward requires more. To move through a crowd requires much more.

My colleagues rarely get the chance to stand still. Maintaining a balance is a dynamic process, and cannot simply be structured by an industrial model of working hours, and "industrial" expectations.

There cannot be an impermeable barrier between a career that carries a vocational element, and the private life of the individual. It is the dynamic nature of the relationship between our working and personal worlds that in part determines who

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we are and to determine who we are to become. Going “beyond obligation” will always be a personal choice. It is perfectly possible to earn a decent living and live decently without doing so. However, the danger lies in frustration associated with becoming part of a bureaucratic structure in a bureaucratic organisation - balancing whilst standing still may be frustrating.

For those in my team who do not want to or may be unable to go beyond obligation, I require of them that they retain a keen interest in work whilst they are over on my side of the boundary, and ask that they seek to make a lively contribution toward development of CRi culture that calms my fears about CRi sliding toward bureaucracy.

I do not easily accept the notion that being good enough is enough. I aspired to have an interesting working life. This was often more important than money, status, authority or the next promotion.

So what is your role as leader - how do you meet your own requirement to go ‘beyond obligation?’

The best of leaders will embody that ardent and lively interest that goes beyond obligation, and seek to sustain it in their colleagues so that each may have a working life of rich experience, one that seeps through every aspect of self in a positive manner.

I am struck, perhaps belatedly, by the Jungian concept of the active archetype. It might be a self-fulfilling prophecy but I think I always aspired to be the same person at work as I was at home, balancing the tasks that needed to be completed and the boundaries and disciplines that needed to be constantly tended against the enjoyment, satisfaction and growth that came from seeking to get it right, and moving forward (as opposed to standing still).

An element of good leadership could be the extent to which one is able to encourage those in the team to become their own active archetype? The requirement here is twofold. Firstly does your subordinate colleague know who they are? Secondly, do you know what to do about that?

Seeking always to go beyond obligation does stretch the organisation and everyone in it. The organisation has thrived on this shared aspiration, a desire to be better than we actually need to be. It is a state of mind rather than an act of faith. I want to lead an interesting life, and part of my interest is the idea that others might wish to do the same. I always think we can go further and achieve more individually and collectively. Time and again my colleagues have shown me that this is the case.

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duncan's
reflection

This is a really fascinating, authentic look at the level of commitment, passion and drive David expects as do so many of us in the third and public sectors. Achieving the balance is the real key. I work with so many for whom the balance is skewed towards work and when we are doing such important work, be it saving the planet or working in severe situations then what can the justification be for going home. David is arguing here for the balance, the gestalt of the person to be whole, to be guided by finding the 'right work' in the first place, finding that thing which truly allows your spirit / soul to create flow, where the hours disappear as you merge with the task.

I don't think David is talking about a private sector model of doing all this to maximise profits, although like all senior 3rd sector leaders he manages a very tight financial ship on ever diminishing margins, but rather this sense of when you have found what your life is for that you then do it with joy, exuberance, passion, commitment and care.

I wonder what it is like to work for CRi, what it is like to be his chair, a trustee or someone just starting their employment journey, or even someone for whom CRi is just the salary and their journey is really the songs they write at home or the family they care for on their own. Knowing David I'm certain that his own modelling of going beyond obligation combined with his care and constant checking his own position (movement to reach balance) makes all things possible.

meditation

- 1 find a quiet place
- 2 direct your attention to your breathing
- 3 allow a warm heart and twinkling eyes
- 4 look inward and inquire about balance in your life
- 5 ask yourself what in your life deserves your full self - all of you, the best of you
- 6 see yourself fully being that person in front of you and step into the picture, live it, notice all the tiny adjustments you make to balance
- 7 breathe let it be
- 8 enjoy the moment of calm being fully who you can be, dynamic, in motion and alive