

## Consider an Empowerment-Oriented Mental Health System

I do not consider myself “recovered,” but I feel well most days and empowered. Let me describe how the term “recovery” has been helpful at times and unhelpful at other times:

Concepts applied from the rehabilitation field to include mental people have been helpful in creating some needed changes in our treatment, supports, and environments. Identifying societal, personal, and system barriers and facilitators which contribute to wellness are indeed critical. The descriptive word for this process and outcome is “recovery.” In the last dozen or so years much has been written about recovery and the need for recovery-oriented mental health systems.

The Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation of Boston University has provided us with valuable research and materials to foster the recovery model. For example from their "Recovery Workbook" (1994): "Yet its outcome can be the emergence of a new sense of self--more real, more vital, more connected to who we really are, more connected to others--and to a greater sense of meaning and purpose in life . . . . Recovery involves creating a new personal vision for oneself." These words speak to me of self-actualization and empowerment, not “re-coveyry” or “re-anything.” Indeed, in the same workbook, the authors acknowledge that empowerment is a value of a recovery approach.

What mental people need is for themselves and others to understand that we are MORE than we were "before". We look at others like us and ourselves with special, empowered thoughts and feelings, feelings based on rewards earned from striving to win a barthold in the realm of the real. I am able to interact and mutually support other mental people in a special. healthy. empowering way. This special way does not readily lend itself to description, but the kind of sharing and support I can offer goes beyond simply being a recovered person working with other people in recovery.

The words we use are important. I want mental people. providers, the general public, family and friends to say: "Hey Terry, how's the empowerment going?" Not “Hey Terry, how is your effort to recapture past orientation going?”

Most places in the literature where the word "recovery" is used, phrases like social self-determination, empowerment, ability, and the like could be substituted to positive effect. "Recovery" might be best suited to conditions like a respiratory infection, heart attack, broken leg, etc. The on-going journey of living with severe mental illnesses is one of the challenges life lets us work with, but it is a trip of empowerment of self, spirit, thought, and caring about others, not just recovering from a disease or broken body.

I like who I am now and will be. I really don't want to recover to the traits and supposed talents of a former mentally healthier person. I will act, by choice, to create with other mental people empowerment-oriented mental health systems. Won't you join us?

Terry