

Presentation to the LDI 11-18-08

## Memories and impressions of NEHCLI

The structure of the 3 weeks of training lend to a personal development and growth process that is uniquely planned and subtly brought about through the lectures, assignments and programming of this course.

During the first week the candidates for the training begin the program assigned to a workgroup of strangers. (This is the time to answer the question who am I, how I fit into the group and the larger complexity of the VA system.) This was a time of self. The training was centered on self awareness, personal skills, talents and using those to enhance outcomes for the teams assigned, which could change every day. The teams were a way of meeting individuals, finding personal worth in that team, changing teams and meeting again. At the end of the first week it was a relief to be headed home and the accomplishments were to know who some of the participants were and completing the personal action plan. A question of where all this information would eventually lead loomed as the unknown and the starting point for the next week. (While in Atlanta a favorite time for me was at the end of the day when I could sit at the caribou coffee shop on the patio, in shorts and tee shirt drinking café mocha in 70 degree sunshine in February.)

During the second week the group was more isolated (7 miles outside of Burlington) and began the process of developing a greater sense of camaraderie and community. The location was a more intimate Inn in the country and the participants were reliant on the planning team and each other for entertainment, transportation and companionship. During this session the training began to focus on negotiation, alliances and network building. The days were long, week went quickly, this was a time of engagement and by the end of the week the participants wanted to be sure to say “until we meet again” before leaving. Now friendships and networking has begun and ties needed to be strengthened before the departure. Each evening was an experience of dining, working together and telling the story. An entire session was dedicated to telling a story and learning to laugh. Learning to laugh is a big part of telling the story and understanding others’ stories.

The third and final week held in the nations capital developed the personal strengths of the participants as needed in the role of a VA leader. The focus was no longer about self or friends but function and abilities to represent the profession and the institution when needed and if necessary under stressful situations. The trainings brought to the surface of the trainees’ consciousness the strengths possessed by each and how best to use them when confronting uncomfortable situations. Each person had to experience the process of live interviews, on the spot media interrogation and statement preparation and presentation. Part of the learning is being videoed, seeing the video and fielding comments on the performance. All this plus reviewing the whole process as recorded and critiqued by the other participants. In the end everyone came across with both the feeling of accomplishment and realization that the training process had done a good job of preparation to reach this goal, the goal of being a leader in the VA.

Upon return to the work sites a sense of relief of work completed, achievement, accomplishment and armed with new or better tools to carry out the work assigned was reflected in productivity and expressions of gratitude from the trainees. As communication networks developed, personal resources/consultants were expanded and new skills employed. The full appreciation of this learning process became apparent.