

THE PUNJI TRAP

Did you know that we are at war?

And that we are warriors? Everyone of us.

The enemies present themselves in many ways: street violence, poverty, domestic violence, fear, loneliness, mental illness, sexual abuse and entitlement.

We are the good guys. The Marines, the fighting elite.

There are two paradoxical phenomenon of war; friendly fire, and avoidable fire.

Military history has countless examples of friendly fire. Where casualties are caused, not from the hands of the enemy but because of our own poor communication and competition. This is when the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.

During Desert Storm, the Allied Forces had many countries on its side. We had the United States, Britain, France, Kuwait, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and others all talking on Japanese radios all on different frequencies. We couldn't communicate with people on our own side! A pilot has no information of allied forces in his sector, he sees something moving in the sand - he fires- only to find out via CNN that it was a good guy.

How many staff members has your agency lost to friendly fire? How many clients?

Avoidable fire is from the hands of the enemy, but because of miscommunication, non-communication, and inter service rivalry, vital information is not shared. As a result- the good guys die.

At the beginning of the invasion of Panama, Navy Seals parachuting from the sky were shot by snipers before they hit the water because the Army did not share vital intelligence with the Navy.(1) During the invasion of Granada, a rescue operation was delayed-- people were shot--because a Marine Corps colonel did not want Army personnel in his helicopters.(2)

In the war against domestic violence and sexual abuse there are an abundance of agencies, countless warriors fighting the battles; Probation, Parole, Police and Sheriffs Departments, States Attorney, DCFS, Clergy, victim therapists, and offender therapists all speaking at times, on different frequencies, having different agendas, sometimes competing for the same resources or protecting their turf. How is your inter-agency communication? your interagency communication?

How do we get on the same frequency?

I suggest we get on the same frequency by putting victim safety first. If the decisions we make have victim safety as the number one priority we will have much less friendly and avoidable fire. If victim safety is sacrificed at the price of policy adherence or competition for funding we will have more casualties.

In 1963, long before Colin Powell was a General, in the very early days of Vietnam, the young Captain Powell stepped on a punji trap. The sharpened bamboo sticks in a hole filled with manure pierced through his boot and into his foot. He was out of commission. To make himself useful he got a desk job in an intelligence division. It was there that he saw the US Army spending countless dollars gathering reams of meaningless data, with useless conclusions. Adding my own paraphrase, It was then when he must have said to himself "this is going to be a long war. We are one of the most powerful nations in the

world; we have the ships, the big guns, aircraft carriers, million dollar aircraft. We've got computers, data..., reams of data, We've got military intelligence !!

And a little person in black pajamas and flip flop sandals can take an American Officer out of commission with a sharpened bamboo stick soaked in manure.” (3)

Why, you ask, are you telling me this in a letter to people working in the field of domestic violence and sexual abuse?

We cannot fight a unconventional war by conventional means.

Those of you who work with offenders know that 50% of what you learned in counseling school goes out the window. Using only traditional counseling methods will not work.

We must listen to the people who have fought the battles before us. We must be creative and flexible and change our tactics when we can see what we are doing is not working.

We must not get hung up on body counts. The clients will find the weak links and the loopholes in the system. To fight effectively we must present a united front. We must share resources. We must communicate.

I have a confession to make.

When I was in the corrections field I was so proud of that badge. That beautiful Texas star still makes my heart flutter.

I also worked hard for my Masters Degree and for my Professional License.

But we all need to be careful.

We have our guns - big ones and little ones. We have our badges.

We have Letters beside our name. PhD, MFCC, MA, MS, BA, BS, RN, LCSW, LCPC.

We have training certificates, awards and letters of appreciation that can cover walls...

THEY ARE OUT THERE

SHARPENING THEIR BAMBOO STICKS

We're going to step in the trap.

If we don't work together, if we don't communicate, if we don't learn from the lessons from the people who have fought the battles before us.

1- Rogue Warrior, Richard Marcinko

2- It Doesn't Take A Hero, Norman Schwarzkopf

3- My American Journey, Colin Powell