



HUMAN DIGNITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Every person has a deep need to be respected as a human being and not to be humiliated. The respect of human beings is a core Jewish, Israeli and universal value. Respecting the human dignity of another person means recognizing his or her human presence and relating to them in a way that enhances their individual being. For example, recognizing their uniqueness as human beings, appreciating something they have accomplished, recognizing their aspirations, sympathizing with their anxieties, and according respect to the group to which they belong, to their beliefs and opinions.

The opposite of dignity is indifference to the presence of another person, or reacting to her or to him in ways that belittle their human dignity and humiliate them. The extreme opposite of respect of human dignity are terrorist attacks and acts of war in which innocent people, regardless of their humanity, lose their lives. Yet we experience countless seemingly banal occurrences of dignity abuse in the course of everyday life. Human dignity and its abuse find daily expression in the lives of our organizations and communities.

For the past ten years, my colleague Avi Shahaf and I have been developing and applying an approach to organizations that enables people to confront issues of human dignity and to bring about a shift in the way organizational life is lived.

The purpose of this communication is to acquaint the reader with our approach to advancing human dignity in organizations. In the first part, we aim to give a sense of what we do and what we can offer. We then present the following appendices:

1. A sampling of some of the research on human dignity
2. Some of the feedback and responses this work has evoked.
3. A list of our clients

I hope this document enables the reader to get a sense of who we are and what human dignity work can offer. I welcome inquiries and will happily respond to requests for clarification.

Yoav Peck



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BACKGROUND

The human dignity project is designed for work with the leaders and staffs of a variety of organizations throughout Israel. We have recently introduced the work into the Missouri Department of Social Services and presented our work at a UNESCO-sponsored conference in Belgrade. The project was conceived by Alouph Hareven, founder of "Sikkuy, the Association for Advancement of Equal Opportunity." We reach out to organizations with the purpose of awakening them to the imperative that the workplace be humane, decent, and compassionate, impacting both on the inner organizational culture and on the quality of the interactions with clients.

What needs are we addressing?

The following situations are taken from our work in the field:

- Government workers fear the public they serve. Irritable citizens overturn tables when frustrated, and security guards are activated several times a day. But the workers cannot see a way to cope, other than to be nasty and defensive.
- Teachers drag themselves to work in schools without motivation, feel abused by their principals, their students, and their students' parents. Helpless and lonely in their grimness, they cannot see a way out of the cycles of frustration.
- Young army officers sense that the time-honored tradition of humiliation of soldiers by superiors has seen its day. They know that the time has come to find new ways of leading and inspiring their soldiers to perform their tasks with awareness and responsibility, but they lack tools for doing this.
- Senior physicians treat hospital patients with disdain and ignore the patients' families. Young medical residents observe their superiors' callous behavior, and suspect that there must be a way to combine technical skill with a caring approach to people, but they have no alternative models.

What these people have in common is that their *human dignity* is being denied, and they in turn are denying the dignity of others. They are caught up in vicious cycles of banal, debilitating abuse, and they have become cynical about the possibility of breaking through the cycles in order to create work environments that encourage dignity, that enhance creativity and resilience.

OUR APPROACH

We engage with managers and staffs of schools, army units, government and municipal agencies, and hospitals, using a systemic approach that draws forth the individual and collective vision of our clients. People yearn deeply for alternatives to the indignities of their daily reality, and human dignity programs offer a sense of possibility and tools for creating these alternatives. In tailored programs, designed to meet the specific needs of each client, we employ a variety of organizational development tools, including one-on-one management consulting, team-building and leadership development, and mapping and re-working the organizational culture.



In our programs:

- Senior management undertakes to set a personal example and to provide leadership that draws their senior staff into committed new behaviors;
- A Steering Committee is empowered to assess the “human dignity measure” of the organization and to plan and oversee an action program for making a tangible difference in the way things are done;
- A “human-dignity measure” is administered before and after the program to enable targeting of trouble-spots and to assess change;
- Every member of the organization participates in a consciousness-raising program that equips them with tools for responding to abuses of dignity in dignified ways, and leads them to take long-term and short-term action to raise the level of dignity in their daily work lives;
- Disparate interest groups confront each other in ways that enable open and respectful communication regarding dignity abuses;
- Organizational structures are established to ensure ongoing commitment to dignity-enhancing change.

A RANGE OF HUMAN DIGNITY PROGRAMS

When we conduct training workshops, we leave a body of leaders committed to and equipped for advancing human dignity in their organizations. Through our work abroad and with international participants in foreign ministry programs, we have learned that human dignity work “translates” well from the Israeli reality to organizations from other cultures.

In working with organizations abroad, we offer the following programs:

- A two to four day training workshop for up to 18 senior managers. People complete this workshop with an *understanding* of the central issues of human dignity in their organizations, are *motivated* to take their learning home and are *equipped* to begin taking action.
We follow-up this workshop through e-mail and phone support.
- A four – six hour introductory workshop in which the essential human dignity concepts are explored and participants experience several of the basic exercises we use in organizational interventions.
- A one-and-a-half hour introductory presentation for organizational leaders which enables preliminary understanding of our principles and approach and offers an opportunity to clarify the nature of our services. The presentation includes a brief experiential “taste” of the work.



APPENDIX 1: THE NEED FOR HUMAN DIGNITY: RESEARCH

Human dignity is abused in our everyday lives, and we participate in this. We tend to develop an “elephant-skin” that protects us from experiencing just how much it bothers us and interferes in our ability to work effectively. Following are some results from two recent studies dealing with this issue:

AGGRAVATING CIRCUMSTANCES: A PUBLIC AGENDA STATUS REPORT ON RUDENESS IN AMERICA

From the minor slights of sales clerks to the worst cases of "road rage," it's clear that Americans are intensely frustrated by the lack of respect they encounter in their daily lives. But what counts as rudeness today?

Do Americans have a shared definition of what is rude and what is someone just doing his own thing? In our latest survey, *Aggravating Circumstances, Public Agenda* takes a detailed look at what Americans are thinking about courtesy, manners, rudeness and respect.

Not only do eight in 10 Americans in our study say a lack of respect and courtesy is a serious problem, but six in 10 say things have worsened in recent years. A surprising 41 percent admit that they're part of the problem and sometimes behave badly themselves. Three-quarters of those surveyed said they've often seen customers treat staff rudely -- while 46 percent also say they've walked out of a store because of the way the staff treated them.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ABUSE OF DIGNITY AND ON-THE-JOB EFFECTIVENESS

On the basis of questionnaires and interviews conducted with some 800 employees in a variety of professions, skilled and unskilled, at different positions in the organizational hierarchy, it was found that:

- The impact of dignity abuse can last up to 10 years
- 50% of subjects lost work time worrying about instigator of dignity abuse
- 25% lost work time avoiding instigator
- 33% reduced commitment – ceased volunteering, reduced tasks to bare required minimum, stopped helping newcomers
- 25% decreased effort & time at work
- 5% stole property from instigator
- 5% stole from organization to “get back”
- 50% contemplated quitting
- 12% quit

Source: *“Assessing and Attacking Workplace Incivility”*
Pearson, Andersson, Porath. “Organizational Dynamics,” 2000. Vol 29, No. 2



APPENDIX 2: FEEDBACK ON HUMAN DIGNITY PROGRAMS PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK FROM FOREIGN MINISTRY WORKSHOP IN HUMAN DIGNITY AND MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Questionnaire results, on a scale of 1 – 5:

1. To what extent was the subject interesting? Average: 4.86 = 97.2%
2. To what extent did you learn things that will help you in your work? Average: 4.5 = 90.0%
3. To what extent are you satisfied with the level of facilitation?
Average: 4.57 = 91.4%
4. To what extent is it important to continue teaching this subject in Foreign Ministry courses?
Average: 5 = 100%

Participants were high-level officials from either the education system or community-development network from countries including India, Nepal, Thailand, Cameroon, Turkey, Kenya, and Poland.

Participant comments:

“It was a very challenging experience.” “I’ve never thought about human dignity in this way, and I’m going to use some of the ideas.” “Human dignity is important for people in the organization. I feel happy and it is very fruitful for me.” “Very interesting! Now I know how to deal with my superiors.” “I want feedback from you every time. I will send emails from my home.” “This subject is very important. I would like to have had more hours for this workshop. I have learned a lot.” “There may be a need to consider giving such courses to top managers.”

FOLLOWING ARE A FEW COMMENTS FROM ADDITIONAL CLIENTS

“This country *needs* human dignity work.”

Remark at the close of a four-day human dignity executive workshop.

Gary Stangler, Former Director of Social Services, State of Missouri.

“The issue of human dignity is a “must” for commanders and for command-teams in our battalions and brigades. It should be introduced into officers’ courses. The workshop provided practical tools for improving daily behavioral norms.”

Colonel D, Infantry Battalion Commander

“After my human dignity training, when I began leading community groups with the use of the tools, I began to see the profundity and impact of the human dignity approach in our work.”

Gal Mei-Bar, Community Social Worker, Tel Aviv

“The uniqueness of the approach is in its long-term process-orientation, and in the understanding that respect and dis-respect encompass the entire system of inter-relations. The consultants are high-level professionals who successfully respond to the complexity of the web of educational institutions with which they work.”

Dalia Goren, National Supervisor of the “Central Subject,” Ministry of Education



APPENDIX 3: ORGANIZATIONAL CLIENTS

AMONG OUR CLIENTS ARE:

- **ISRAELI MINISTRIES OF INTERIOR, EDUCATION, DEFENSE, LABOR AND SOCIAL WELFARE, FOREIGN AFFAIRS**
- **ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES: FIELD UNITS**
- **IDF: HUMAN DIGNITY THINK-TANK INITIATED BY THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF**
- **BANK HAPOALIM: EXECUTIVE TRAINING PROGRAM**
- **HASHMIRA: SECURITY TECHNOLOGIES**
- **50 SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT ISRAEL**
- **EDUCATION MINISTRY HUMAN DIGNITY THINK-TANK**
- **JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE**
- **SOROKA HOSPITAL**
- **MUNICIPALITIES OF JERUSALEM, TIBERIAS, AND BNEI BRAK –
COMMUNITY PROJECTS ON HUMAN DIGNITY**
- **HASHOMER HATS AIR YOUTH MOVEMENT**
- **UNITED KIBBUTZ MOVEMENT**
- **NATIONAL PRISON SERVICE**
- **MISSOURI DEPT. OF SOCIAL SERVICES**
- **SERBIA: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**
- **RUSSIA: JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE**