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Abstract

The author wrote this article in 1990 after encountering bitter debates in Canada about what constitutes real brokerage. He argues that 'pure brokerage' probably does not (and cannot) exist - pure individualised funding, no vested interests, simple elements which are probably beyond our powers. He cites normalisation, citizen advocacy and individual program planning as comparable examples of other systems which have exploited and misused, but maintains that we can learn a lot from the process of setting up such systems. **Keyword:**
Individualisation

IN PURSUIT OF THE HOLY GRAIL

There are bitter debates in Canada about what constitutes real brokerage. But, David Brandon concluded from his trip, its essential challenge lies in the search, rather than in the arrival.

I pursued brokerage across the Atlantic Ocean in a Boeing 747, high over Greenland, across the Hudson Bay to the earthy, redneck city of the Stampede and the last Winter Olympics Games - Calgary. Later, I caught up with it in the more sophisticated Pacific Rim City of Vancouver. It was like going on a long search for the Holy Grail. The far distant goal is essentially an illusion, a human service mirage. But it is certainly better to travel hopefully than to arrive.

There are bitter and envious debates in Canada about what constitutes real brokerage and what exactly a broker is. (Our kind of national stupidity has no real monopoly - jeux sans frontieres). Greed, envy and jealousy are international poisons. People don't just battle at ice hockey or baseball or cricket: they compete lustily in all areas of life - at who did what, first and why. Who really produced brokerage first and what actually is it in pure form? While the Edmonton Oilers play the Calgary Flames in the Stanley Cup (ice hockey and Calgary won), more subtle but not necessarily less violent battles take place in human services where we rubbish each other with impressive energy but little wisdom and even less love - egotism rules, OK?

'They don't do real brokerage. They've adulterated it. They've dampened the flame. They've sold

out.' These are just Canadian versions of our national sport of finding fault over the normalisation principle. 'They make talk a good service but they don't run one. They

have no idea what it means. They couldn't run a successful fish and chip shop in Bridlington.' I'm as guilty of that kind of destructive talk as anyone, probably more so. What about you?

In Britain we have a strangely complex and destructive relationship with our heroes, heroines and projects of excellence. We build them up, force them on to our pedestals and then hope they'll get giddy and fall. We buy daily comics called 'The Sun' and 'Daily Star' in tens of millions that pull famous people back down to earth. 'DIRTY DEN BONKS MOTHER OF FIFTEEN', 'BISHOP EXPOSES HIMSELF'. It is a shadowy and fundamentally destructive process, both of ourselves and others - a short, direct pathway to eternal cynicism.

We respect and admire companies like the Body Shop, human service projects like Nimrod in South Wales, the services in Clwyd, the residential facilities in Bolton and then wait gleefully for them to run into difficulties or to fall like the Roman Empire. The Decline and Fall of Vanguard!? 'Have you heard the latest...' Mrs Mangel from 'Neighbours' is everywhere.

But, like the Holy Grail, pure brokerage, whatever that might mean, actually doesn't exist anywhere, neither could nor should it. I didn't see one 'whole' example anywhere in my eleven thousand mile trip. I'm not sure I would have known if I tripped over it. Pure individualised funding with the dollars in the hands of the devalued person; backed up by a family/ties and connections, real friendships; serviced by service brokers who have no other vested interests; acting purely in the interests of the person. Those simple elements are probably beyond our powers at present or in the foreseeable future.

People are busily working in essentially destructive mega-systems just like you and I. They are doing the best they can. The question, 'Why isn't your system perfect?' and its thousand futile versions miss the whole point. They float on the immense and often exploitative tide of Western capitalism, a system which expands and conquers by treating people as objects. This magazine is no exception. We have to make the necessary compromises to survive but at the same time to keep some integrity. We all need fig leaves. But as the Chinese used to say, before the recent and tragic events of Tiananmen Square: 'It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness.' I would rather say, - it is better to light many thousands candles whilst cursing the darkness.

The whole point of Holy Grail pilgrimages, whether they are undertaken by King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table or Jason in his quest for the Golden Fleece or by us in our less elevated search for good practice, the reward lies in the

journey itself and anything found is an additional and surprising present. There is no ultimate ending to our journey except death. Homer's Odyssey is more about the long process than the arrival: the struggle along the way and the changes which take place in the travellers rather than the simple and ultimate possession of some mangy piece of sheep's fur.

Underneath the heavy disguise of carelessly used terms like brokerage, individualised funding programmes and support networks, sincere people are struggling to take the whole process of empowerment of people who have been traditionally devalued, a giant step further. They face enormously antagonistic forces. It would be crazy if we wasted valuable time fighting each other, giving pleasure and comfort to the enemy.

Where brokerage is and whether it is being done right is of no great importance. It will be adulterated, exploited and misused just like normalisation, citizen advocacy and individual programme planning. Our Canadian cousins have bequeathed to us a present which is immensely valuable. We need to slowly unpack it first and appreciate its many riches. Such riches lie not in the object itself but in the whole process of unpacking. Like the Odyssey, the wealth lies in what happens to us and the ways in which we confront our tendency to dominate, and to control, rather than to care.

The essential challenge of service brokerage lies in that process rather than in the arrival at a place of power, a place of shining pure service brokerage. The sooner we realise that, the better for everyone.