



Crestwood Recovery Resilience Solutions

## **The Peer Employment Learning Center (PELC) in ACTION**

by Dr. Lori Ashcraft

Don't we all have times when new ideas really appeal to us? Especially ones that will produce better outcomes than what we are currently expecting. We talk about the virtues of new and better ways to do things, but alas! Weeks, months, years go by and we haven't put them into action. We just keep doing the same old things even when they don't work very well.

We can sort of understand this. Taking new paths are risky. The terrain is relatively unknown and we wonder if we have the resources to complete the journey. We may need to take detours, change our estimated arrival time, and/or navigate unanticipated breakdowns. As leaders, perhaps the biggest challenge is convincing others to go with us. This often results in kicking and screaming because the followers don't want to change anything either. The prevailing thought may be that it's safer to stay the same, do the same old stuff, not rocking the boat.

Seasoned leaders know that if we stay the same, we will perish. We will soon be out maneuvered by others who are willing to take progressive steps into future opportunities. It won't take long for our "sameness" to be outdated and stale. Change in a necessary process that can be uncomfortable and messy. But staying the same, if we wish to thrive, is not an option.

When we approached Robyn Gross, the Administrator at the San Diego Crestwood campus, about participating in a highly unusual experimental project, I don't remember a moments hesitation on her part. Since this was the first campus in a five-campus pilot project to join forces with the Peer Employment Learning Center (PELC) she would be the pioneer. She'd be going where no other campus had yet gone. Plus this was somewhat of a long shot in the eyes of some who wondered if people on conservatorship could really rise to the occasion of completing eighty hours of peer training, plus one hundred hours of paid internship and be employable. This is the kind of leadership our field is sorely lacking. The aversion to risk has left us stalled way too long in outdated approaches that don't produce opportunities for people to recover.

Today as you listen to Robyn's experience, you'll hear about many of the things listed on that leadership matrix I shared with you a few episodes back. You may want to find it and check the boxes that Robyn's experience illustrates.

Listen closely to what Robyn has to say about graduation. Graduation from the training is a turning point for all concerned. The staff who had been wondering if this was worth the effort can now see the amazing results – people ready to go to work who had been seen as needing conservatorship. WOW! Friends and family members say things like, "I finally have my son or daughter back". The graduates themselves are so proud of their accomplishments and are ready for their next steps. As Robyn says, "Graduation changes everything and everyone." Thank you Robyn for showing us all what is possible, even in setting and circumstances that seem impossible.