

## Psychiatric Rehabilitation and the Science of Possibilities

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### Editorial

My mentor, Robert Carkhuff (see e. g., Carkhuff, 1969; Carkhuff & Berenson, 2000) has taught me that the science we need to study is the science of possibilities, not the science of probabilities that has dominated our field. The traditional science of probabilities is concerned with describing, predicting, and controlling, and the research questions posed reflect this orientation. For example, the science of probabilities asks, what are the characteristics that best describe people with schizophrenia? What are the chances that people with schizophrenia can live asymptotically? Can scores on a psychological test predict that people with mental illnesses will work? In this science of probabilities we describe limited bits of knowledge with respect to how the data deviate from some norm or standard. In our experimental designs we hope to contain extraneous variance so that probability answers can be given to questions such as those above. While there is nothing inherently wrong with pursuing answers to questions generated by the science of probabilities, this traditional type of probabilities science seems to de-emphasize our world's capacity for change and growth.

In the science of possibilities (Carkhuff & Berenson, 2000) our assumption is that the world is a changing, evolving place, and that our research focus is on marshalling all the possible variance we can, not artificially controlling it. The changeability and variability of our environment is viewed as a natural source of variance creation rather than something we try to control experimentally. Research questions posed from a science of possibilities do not attempt to investigate what people can do, but must begin by asking "what do people want to do?" We investigate the possible variables that help people achieve what they want from their lives. For example, the science of possibilities asks, what have people chosen to do to obtain competitive work and effectively remove themselves from the Social Security roles? How can physical health care be improved so that people with severe mental illnesses get the care they want and need? What contributes to people's desire and capacity to live independently? The research goal itself becomes one of expanding possibilities.

The science of probabilities has given us the foundation from which to enter the science of possibilities. Probabilities science studied interventions under carefully controlled conditions, and developed circumscribed pieces of knowledge. The new science of possibilities is most relevant in this new era of recovery from severe mental illnesses. Possibilities science will direct us to look for interventions (principles and processes) that are so powerful that they demonstrate an impact under all natural conditions and are based, not on the researchers' needs to describe, control, and predict behavior, but on the wants of people with psychiatric disabilities to lead a fulfilling life.

### References

Carkhuff, R. R. (1969). *Helping and human relations. Volumes 1 & 2*. New York , NY : Holt Rinehart & Winston.

Carkhuff, R. R. & Berenson, B. G. (2000). *The new science of possibilities. Volumes 1 & 2.* Amherst , MA : Possibilities Publishing.