

I Hope You Can Help Me Out: The Done Lowell Case Study

Don Lowell is a mental hygiene therapy aide in a psychiatric center. He has been in his present position for 13 years, having worked his way up from the bottom. He thoroughly enjoys his job, but he missed being chosen for a promotion twice in the last two years. He was one of the top three on the list but was not able to get the promotions he wanted. He has been working very hard to make himself known in the right circles and has volunteered to serve on various county and private committees, boards, and task forces over the past few years.

Don also works three nights a week and weekends at the Rosewood Home, a well-known, highly rated nursing facility. Don serves as one of the two part-time activity coordinators. With his oldest daughter about to enter college, he can certainly use the money. He also enjoys the work and gets to meet a number of people in the community. He's been thinking for some time now that at some point in the future he would like to return to school and complete his undergraduate degree, which he began years ago. Right now, however, he enjoys working with the patients and feels the added experience will help him in the future.

Last week Don received a phone call from Frank Calvin, the chief of service in his division at the psychiatric center. Frank's 79-year-old mother is in the hospital recovering from a broken hip. Frank has applied to the Rosewood Home primarily because of its reputation in the area of physical therapy and rehabilitation. The home, however, has a very long waiting list (from three to six months) and Frank understands that unless his mother receives physical therapy immediately upon release from the hospital, her chances of returning to her former mobility level are quite low. Moreover, Frank's sense of the situation, after meeting with the home's intake social worker, was that his mother was not going to be given priority consideration.

Frank discussed his situation with Sarah Anderson, his assistant. She reminded him that Don was still working as a part-time activity director at the Rosewood Home. Frank remembered Don's name from some paperwork that came across his desk. Frank called Don to see if there was any way around normal procedures and asked if Don could help.

During the conversation, Frank mentioned that if Don were able to assist him with this, he (Frank) would try to help him when he could. In addition, Frank said that he would put a note in Don's file mentioning the cooperation he had received from Don in placing his mother in the appropriate health facility. "I just don't know where to turn with this problem," said Frank, "and I really hope you can help me."

Don told Frank that he would see what he could do. He told Frank that he didn't know all that much about the admissions process and really didn't have that kind of "pull" at the facility but that he would give it his best shot.

Don made some informal inquiries around the home concerning the admissions procedures (of which he indeed knew very little). He found out that the director of the intake department, Sheila Hogan, was someone he knew slightly because he had worked with her on a couple of committees. He remembered her as being very focused and knowledgeable and someone who

usually played everything by the book. However, he had found her to be accommodating when necessary.

He also remembered an item in the Rosewood newsletter stating that the intake department was severely short staffed and was looking for volunteers or other staff coverage. Don had some ideas that he thought would work very well at providing coverage at no additional cost to the home. He decided to arrange a meeting.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Write brief answers to the questions that follow.

1. Review the sources of influence and power described in this section. What sources of power and influence tactics does Don have available to him?
2. If you were Don, what action would you take? Would you decide not to try to influence the admission process? If not, why? Would you decide to help only by clarifying the mother's need for admission? Would you decide to do everything within your power to get the mother admitted?
3. Using the concepts and skills presented in the Learning activity, describe the possible consequences of how you would handle this situation. What do you think would happen?
4. What strategy and techniques is Frank using on Don?
5. What options or strategies should Don use with Frank?
6. What should Don's next steps be?
7. Have you ever encountered a similar situation? What strategies, if any, did you use? What steps did you take? Did these steps increase your power base? How do you know?