



My View

THANK YOU JACK OTIS

37 years ago and 8 years before TIP was started, Jack Otis PhD, Dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Texas and a nationally known scholar, wrote an article advocating a program he called "*Systematic Crisis Intervention In Urban Society*". A few years ago he called me and we met. He was amazed that an organization (TIP) was actually able to put his academic ideas into practice. Unfortunately Dr. Otis died in 2010.

At the beginning of his paper Dr. Otis bemoans: "*Social workers and human services personnel are typically not found in the crisis situations that occur every day in the urban communities in the nation.*" He goes on to observe that human care service workers should be on crisis scenes because "*Mobility has greatly reduced the hold of neighborhoods and local communities upon the populace. Parents and children, brothers and sisters frequently live in different communities and states and are unable to offer timely assistance. People often do not know their neighbors or have only the most superficial relations with them.*"

After writing about the need for a systematic crisis intervention program, Dr. Otis proposed a program uncannily similar to TIP. He recommended that a crisis program have the following features...

- Responds 24/7/365.
- Provides assistance with emotional and planning problems.
- Links the individual and his family with community or other resources.
- Provides follow in a week.
- Be operated as a department of city government.

Toward the end of his article, Dr. Otis asks a question I have asked myself hundreds of times over the years "*Why have not the helping professions made themselves available at such obvious times of human crisis occurring in the daily experience of all urban communities?*" He goes on to give the reasons...

- **Institutional Rigidities:** "*Organizations have mandates which focus on only one aspect of social reality. They generally do not look for new tasks.*" In another words, there are no institutions or agencies that look at systematic crisis intervention as their responsibility ("it's not our job!").
- **Lack of Societal Threat:** "*The victims of the small tragedies that occur in the daily life of the city are not perceived as a threat to the social order.*" A police chief recently emphasized this reality when he said to me: "*Wayne, if my department doesn't offer TIP services to citizens, no one will complain. There will be no blow back.*"
- **Lack of Profit Incentive:** "*Providing crisis intervention to victims of small tragedies is inherently a nonprofit making enterprise. The private social service sector can hardly afford to mount and sustain such a program.*"
- **Individual Autonomy and Independence:** "A systematic crisis intervention project smacks of encouraging government to meddle in the private affairs of people."

Given the challenges and barriers to implementing a systematic crisis intervention programs, Dr. Otis recommended that any such program must accomplish the following...

- Obtain political support.
- Obtain police support.
- Obtain the support of local mental health agencies.
- Obtain funding..." the universality of the program...a major strength....enormously complicates the funding as well as the administration and evaluation of the program."
- Training and supporting the providers of the service so as to prevent burnout.

Dr. Otis's paper has affected me in three major ways: 1. It is humbling. Dr. Otis had the idea for a program like TIP 8 years before we did. 2. Dr. Otis's paper affirmed the need for what we do and how we do it. 3. Dr. Otis's paper outlined the significant challenges of establishing and funding systematic crisis intervention programs like TIP. Finally Dr. Otis answers the question many of us ask "*Why is it so darn hard to establish TIP programs!*"

Thank you Dr. Jack Otis!