Book Review

Transforming Behaviour: Pro-social Modelling in Practice.
A Handbook for Practitioners and Managers*
Sally Cherry
Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2005

This book’s straightforward and easy-to-follow style reflects the author’s background as a practitioner within probation and as a trainer. It is set out in a structured and logical way and is designed to suit ‘the busy practitioner who may not have time to read it as a whole’ (p. 4). Each chapter can be read independently, but linked together they provide a framework that incorporates many of the different models and theories relevant to probation practice. This review highlights selected chapters that give a flavour of the book’s style and content.

The introduction is comprehensive and defines pro-social modelling as ‘the process by which the worker acts as a good motivating role model in order to bring out the best in people’ (p. 2). Sally Cherry’s motivation in this field of practice is evident from the book’s engaging style, content and structure. From the outset she addresses the fundamental nature of the contact between worker and client and also poses a significant challenge to organisations to model best practice in relation to a pro-social approach: ‘Pro-social modelling is for all staff and involves managers modelling to staff, colleagues modelling to one another, staff modelling to clients and clients being helped to behave pro-socially to one another’ (p. 14). The structure, purpose and chapter overviews within the introduction as well as evidence supporting the model are clearly presented and inspire continued reading.

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Chapter 2 takes on the topic of empathetic relationships and provides examples of what these look like in practice. Cherry refers to the need to develop empathetic relationships without being perceived as colluding with unacceptable behaviour. This requires the ability to balance the relationship within the role and responsibility of a criminal justice agency to assess risk and protect the public. She explains that workers using a pro-social model need to promote pro-social, and discourage anti-social, behaviour and attitudes, and issues a pointed and timely reminder of the need to focus assessments on solutions rather than problems: ‘pro-social practice is optimistic and solution focused’ (p. 37). However, an example used in this chapter ought to be amended. Cherry refers to a possible discussion between a worker and an offender convicted of downloading pornographic pictures of children in which the worker comments, ‘I understand what you are saying and I believe that you would never deliberately hurt a child. However . . . ’ (pp. 24–25). In order to illustrate more clearly the learning in relation to avoiding collusion, while at the same time demonstrating empathy, this should read: I understand what you are saying and that you believe you would never deliberately hurt a child.

Chapter 3 covers, among other issues, the legitimate use of authority and values. Cherry highlights the importance of agency values and how these relate to reinforcement and use of sanctions. Pro-social modelling is described as ‘a positive, reward-driven model’ where ‘staff are encouraged to look out for every opportunity to reward behaviours that we want to encourage’ (p. 48). Sanctions, we are reminded, should be transparent, consistent, just and open to appeal. Cherry goes on to identify and provide a useful list of what could be rewarded and encouraged and links the drive to reward to how team members relate to and work with each other. Applying the same principles of pro-social modelling with clients to working with each other helps to achieve a pro-social environment. This chapter will assist those working within a criminal justice setting to gain a better understanding of how to use authority in legitimate ways.

Chapter 5 deals with motivating unwilling clients. From my experience and knowledge of probation practice, individuals who resist probation intervention and change are not uncommon. Cherry explores motivation in an uncomplicated and practical way, skilfully linking different components from motivational interviewing, cycle of change and the decisional balance model within a pro-social framework. This
framework helps to demonstrate how the model integrates with practice, especially when the author links it to practical examples of helping people change. Cherry’s training background can be detected in her commitment not only to telling what needs to be done but also to showing how to do something by way of example or demonstration. The usefulness of this strategy cannot be overstated when it comes to probation practice. The staged model to help people change offers a fresh look at work-planning with offenders, particularly where many issues linked to offending have been identified and where the offender may feel overwhelmed and unclear of where to begin.

Chapter 8 focuses on how workers respond to individual need and diversity. Its key message is about the need to take stock of diversity and to integrate it within pro-social practice. Simple challenges are presented such as getting the name right of someone who comes from a different cultural or ethnic background. Cherry encourages us to look at the language we use and to pay attention to the ‘micro messages’ or ‘small messages, often unintentional and often unnoticed by the sender, which we constantly send and receive’ (p. 127). She offers practical ways to manage these messages in a positive manner and her emphasis on the importance of taking issues of race, identity, gender, learning styles and literacy into account in our practice is to be welcomed.

Chapter 9 addresses the role of managers in an organisation and the importance of their contribution to the development of pro-social practice in any organisation: ‘The pro-social manager not only equips the team members to work pro-socially but also uses the same principles in their own management practice’ (p. 140). Cherry offers managers very practical activities, strategies and examples of how to develop as a pro-social manager. This is perhaps one of the biggest challenges facing criminal justice agencies and it will be exciting to see how the small seed sown by this book grows in future years. Cherry holds our interest right to the end of the book with the inclusion of a number of exercises that can be used within an organisation to develop pro-social practice.

Transforming Behaviour is suitable for all levels of staff within probation and in particular for those working in residential and hostel settings. It has something to offer criminal justice workers from across the different agencies. I recommend the book to any new probation worker and to students preparing for, or on, placement with a criminal justice agency. It covers most of the essential ingredients to help develop ethically sound and effective practice with offenders and I concur with Dr Chris Trotter’s
statement in the foreword to the book that it ‘makes a real contribution to our knowledge about how to do pro-social practice’ (p. xiii). If there is a pro-social way to write about and present a model on pro-social practice, this is an excellent example.