

Five-Star Quality Defined

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This is a follow-up to the article that we wrote on Five-Star Quality to help provide further definition. In the Five-Star Quality model there are several key elements that must be clearly understood in order to accurately describe the degree of quality that exists.

At the same time, it is not our intent to come up with a chart that details percentages, logarithms, or can be scientifically proven. There are many ways to accomplish the different levels of quality. It is not possible or necessary to describe every way that these things can be done. It is far more important that we have a clear understanding of what the outcomes are for each level.

We hope to provide some information that will help the reader to be able identify the level of quality by the outcomes evident. Thus, this is a system that is not about “paper compliance” or abstract policies and procedures, but rather something that we will be able to define it by what we see when we see it.

As can be seen by looking at the accompanying chart, the first and greatest distinction is about what is above or below the line. This is the key line of demarcation that needs to be described and evaluated. As is clear one, two, and three-star quality are below the line. Four and five-star quality are above the line. The distinction and below and above the line is the most important one.

We also find it is often the least understood distinction. In particular, we find that human service agencies continue to ask (or even assert) that people can have four or five-star experiences **within** their programs. The Five-Star Quality model does not support that framework of thought. This is not a model of quality where the agency tallies up enough “experiences” to qualify as having a certain level.

In addition, we find that they often mistake what is actually at most a three-star experience with what they perceive to be four or five-star experience. It is this point that we would like to make as clear as we can now.

As long as the person’s experience is contained within the “Disability Bubble” (meaning a program that is operated by the agency for people who have disabilities) it can **never** be above three-star quality. Another key element of this evaluation process is to determine whose name is found on the marquee of the operation, even if it is in a generic community setting. If the program, business, letterhead or marquee (sign) has the name of the human service/disability agency at the top, it can **never** be more than three-star quality.

Having said that, we want to emphasize that three-star quality is very good – it is the best of what traditional service systems have available. In comparison to much of what we see is currently in operation after 58 years of community services – within the Disability Bubble (only) three-star quality could be considered great quality(within the Disability Bubble).

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Most typical accreditation services would consider this level of service to be worthy of their highest evaluation. Three-star quality means that an agency has the least crossed the point of no longer seeing that that all supports for people with disabilities need to be self-contained – meaning that they understand that not all services and supports must be provided within the walls of the agency, by agency employees or volunteers. Most importantly, it means that the agency helps people enrolled in their services to not just “be in the community” but to help them be truly participating members of their community.

This frankly contrasts with most two-star quality situations we see that are still incredibly prevalent in human service agencies today. Any type of sheltered employment, group home, or other operation they can be distinguished as self-contained, is clearly two-star quality. These operations may meet all of the licensure requirements, have great health and safety records, hold multiple accreditations, and have community outings on a regular basis, but they are still only a two-star program in The Five-Star Quality Model.

Some human service agencies are increasingly upset and disappointed that we consider them below the line, despite what they believe are their many efforts and innovations. They desperately seek (rightly so) to have their efforts acknowledged – and for someone to recognize the risks that they have taken (often with little to no funding support). They believe that they must be doing four or five-star quality work because it is so much different than that which they used to do and because the lives of the people they work with have improved (at least from their perspective).

Further, we have had people point out to us their awards, accreditations, positive publicity or other accolades that have been received. We’ve even been in some situations where the agency has pointed out partnerships with communities and with generic community services that believe that this must certainly be evidence of four or five-star quality.

Unfortunately we beg to differ. While efforts like those above are valuable and should be a part of the lives of people who have disabilities, the truth of the march to five-star quality is that a service/support agency can only be above the line if it is not only community-based but community *led*. This means that a non-disability, generic community organization, business, or group of citizens must be at the forefront and the human service agency is the support for the community’s efforts.

The biggest hurdle, which unfortunately human service disability agencies can never overcome - on their own - is that the name on the marquee, the ownership, or the leadership must come from a non-disability focused organization. The name on the marquee now must be a community identified and a community owned venture.

The implications for disability human service organizations are obviously huge. It means that their name goes from the top of the letterhead (or marquee) to the bottom. It means now that the tagline is likely to read “with the generous support of

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XYZ Human Services” ... This means that the disability agency now becomes invisible support to the community effort rather than its primary mover.

Thus, the agency becomes a support for building community competency – so that the community can help people who have disabilities become functioning citizens – with the least amount of specialized support from the human services agency as is possible.

This mindset obviously requires a significant transformation of the organization if they embrace this clear redefinition of success. Success is no longer measured by the number of employees, the size of the budget, the number of programs that it operates, awards, accreditation, or how well it is known in the community.

Quite to the contrary, the organization moves to the background and the community and the people who receive support move to the foreground. The new identification for this person who receives support is now as an employee, member of the (non-disability) community organization or team-member of the event or a full citizen participant of the community opportunity rather than being identified as a “client” of the disability agency.

Far less important, is whether or not the agency is four or five-star quality. These concepts will continue to develop as the agencies and their communities continue to develop. This can be debated, discussed, and resolved as we move forward.

For the immediate future, four-star quality is defined as when the organization begins a project, such as a supported employment project within a factory but then turns it over to the management of the factory and provides support to the various departments of the factory so that they are able to meet the needs of the individual employees who have disabilities.

Another example could be the dance that was always sponsored by the disability organization and that others in the community were invited to attend. To reach four- star status, the agency turns over the dance planning and execution to the local Elks Club and the agency’s name now is only identified as “with support from”, as is the local radio station that promoted it, the grocery store that provided food and decorations at cost, etc. The agency’s role is to be invisible support as trainers, consultants, greeters, clean-up staff, etc. but not as “obvious staff”.

An example of how one agency demonstrated Five-Star Quality may help here.

The adult services division of Sor County Board of MR/DD was spun off to become a free standing non-profit organization – First Consideration, Inc. (FCI). Initially FCI only served people who had developmental disabilities but they were doing so in a public venue that was not identified as specific to people who had disabilities – as the County Board owned and operated workshop had been. (one-star becoming two-star)

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FCI began providing supported employment services for a small group of individuals who had disabilities at local businesses. (three-star)

FCI worked with one of the employers, Daem, Inc., to take over the job-coaching duties for people employed at the employer's place of business with the promise of being immediately available if needed. FCI worked with HR, employee assistance programs, and the co-workers of the individuals who had disabilities at Daem until they felt confident managing the situation. (four-star)

FCI eventually spun-off their supported employment services into another non-profit – Work Placement Services (WPS), which operated out of a storefront business in the downtown area. WPS was actively involved in helping people who needed work – people who did and didn't have obvious disabilities. WPS did not advertise themselves as being for people who had disabilities but rather as a community resource.

When Daem downsized their local operations, WPS got the contract to assist those employees who had been laid-off from Daem. Some of the people who did not have obvious disabilities were trained how to be job coaches to assist people who did have disabilities to get and maintain successful community employment – meeting a need of both local businesses (who needed good employees) and FCI who needed to have individuals with disabilities be successful in community employment.

Further, Daem was pleased that at least some of their former employees had found employment locally (and that Daem's outplacement and unemployment costs had been effectively managed). (five-star)

To use the dance example to cover all of the categories:

One-Star: A dance for people with disabilities that is sponsored by the human services/disability organization held at the sheltered workshop. (The person is **absent** from the community).

Two-Star: A dance for people with disabilities held at the local YMCA that is sponsored by the human services/disability organization. People with disabilities are "the audience" even though some people who do not have disabilities may attend. (The person is "**in**" the community)

Three-Star: A dance for the general community is held at the local YMCA sponsored by the human services/disability organization in partnership with the YMCA and other organizations. People with disabilities from that agency and possibly others are in attendance. (The person is a **participant** with the community)

Four-Star: A dance for the community held at the local YMCA and sponsored by the YMCA and other community groups and the human services/disability organization provides "invisible" (not publicly recognized) supports to the

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YMCA and the rest of the community to enable people with disabilities to fully participate as anyone else would. People with disabilities from throughout the community are clearly welcomed and may or may not have paid supporters assisting them. (The person is a **member** of their community).

Five-Star: A dance for the community held at the local YMCA and sponsored by the YMCA and other community groups. People with disabilities from throughout the community are clearly welcomed and may or may not have paid supporters assisting them.

The human services/disability organization is not obviously a part of the dance planning, coordination, etc., but rather acts as consultants and trainers to the sponsoring organizations to help them have the capacity to support people with disabilities fully to participate as anyone else would. The human services/disability agency personnel are “invisible” but remain “on-call” for the sponsoring organizations. (The person is “**of**” their community – meaning the community has the ability to meet any immediate needs of the individuals who have disabilities).

In closing, what must become increasingly clear is the difference between one-three-star quality and everything above the line. This is the this is line of demarcation that for some will either be raising the bar to new heights as an exciting prospect, or a bridge too far, whose cost is too great to the organizational identity and any of the implications that follow.

If indeed it is a bridge too far, our only hope is that we can be honest enough to discuss the reasons and the rationales for the decision with the hope that we can find solutions. We hope that the discussion does not turn to “the community is not ready” or “we’d never be able to raise any more money” or “that’s just not realistic”.

We know that for some it will be a bridge too far. For others it is a chance to move from clienthood to citizenship. We believe that people with disabilities deserve five-star quality and to be “of” their community.

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