**The Power of With**

**By Ken Collins**

**The other day, I was in the community paying a bill when the manager of the business asked me for clarification on something I always say to him when talking about my work.**

**He asked what I meant when I say; “people I work with”?**

**He said I always say “with” instead of “for” when I talk about where I work and asked if the people I talk about are co-workers or what.**

**I explained the term “with” comes from conclusions I have made about how much our society is influenced by a “power over” way of thinking.**

**This top down decision-making process influences how we interact with each other and contribute to decisions we make every day. I also think this power over mentality is so ingrained into our society that we don’t even notice how destructive it is to a democratic society and the public good.**

**“Power over” influences everything we do (unless we work in a self-managed business, consumer or worker cooperative).**

**We have grown up with this and don’t know any different – it’s in our churches, schools, corporations, media broadcasts, athletics, workplaces, clinics, hospitals, local/state/federal governments, everything and everywhere.**

**As we talked, I realized that much of this understanding has come from my community organizing and working with people with disabilities.**

**In this realm, to be an effective advocate and/or care provider I have had to re-examine what works and what doesn’t.**

**Sometimes our vocabulary creates obstacles we must overcome.**

**Our words can cut like a knife.**

**Our words can build trust or tear it down.**

**Our words create hope or division.**

**In this light, I have come to the conclusion that one of the primary obstacles to finding balance and harmony is the “power over” structure many of us incorporate into our daily lives.**

**This power over hierarchy sets us up to fail because we have to look outside ourselves to get the answers that often times come from within.**

**It’s intuition, the inner voice, the gut feeling that has been compromised by having someone else or something else tell us what to do, when to do it and how to live.**

**Here are a few examples:**

**Power over – is a clique**

**Power with – is a team**

**Power over - the decision-making is a top down hierarchy.**

**Power with - the decision-making is linear and across the board.**

**Power over – divides and conquers.**

**Power with – nurtures and heals.**

**Power over - divides people and makes them compete.**

**Power with - empowers people and connects them to each other.**

**Power over - separates people and isolates them.**

**Power with - includes people and values their being.**

**Power over - exploits and takes advantage.**

**Power with - builds trust and fosters hope.**

**Power over - respect is given.**

**Power with - respect is earned.**

**Power over - is totalitarian.**

**Power with - is democratic.**

**Power over - doesn’t take responsibility and passes the buck and blames it on others.**

**Power with - is reciprocal and takes responsibility for ones actions.**

**Power over - manipulates truth.**

**Power with - is truth.**

**Power over - fosters control of the work place and society.**

**Power with – fosters leadership within the work place and communication within society.**

**Power over – tells people what to do.**

**Power with – asks people what they want.**

**Power over – takes peoples choice away after making mistakes.**

**Power with – gives people a chance to learn from their mistakes.**

**Power over – tells people what to say.**

**Power with – listens, hears and cares what people have to say.**

**Power over – controls people through deceit and intimidation.**

**Power with – sets people free through openness and honesty.**

**Power over – relies on false promises and innuendo.**

**Power with – relies on truth and the power within.**

**We are all in this world together and together we can work out many of today’s problems by becoming less selfish and more open to new ways of thinking and living.**

**If you think it won’t work – there’s a good chance it never will.**

**But if you are willing to give it a try – that’s a start.**

**The power of with begins with you and nobody else.**