

TIE THAT BINDS

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ATTITUDE IS THE REAL DISABILITY

WHERE WE'VE BEEN

It is closing in on my 20th anniversary of doing this job. We have had many names for what we are doing. In June of 1998 I wrote about **Organizational Change**. At this time the focus was on organizations changing the type of services they were providing for people with disabilities. The focus was closing the workshops and

AIM Center	SRVS
ACT	Waves
ARC of Broward County	Manatee ARC of FL
CP Center	Hernando ARC of FL
Emory Valley	Bradley Cleveland
Orange Grove	Buffalo River
TRC in Gallatin	Dev Center of Dickson
Michael Dunn Center	Center for Independence in FL

getting people in the community. The network of providers in this group were:

ACT and the CP Center closed their workshops by the time I came on board.

There were annual conferences featuring Ernie Panscofar, Katherine Carol, Joe Marrone and Daniel Steere.

This movement morphed into **Systems Change** in the early 2000s.

CDC of Martin, Greene Valley Developmental Center, Pace Setters and McNairy Developmental Center participated in this strategy. At this time Employment First started creeping into our vocabulary.

This emphasis was on having more funding for those activities that featured community integration. Jack Reed (from DIDD), Regena Burrow (from TN-DRS) and myself, along with our counterparts were talking to providers about people needing a normalized life. And, that meant different things to different people.

This era was highlighted by the Annual ACES conferences. National speakers were brought in to speak to the 400 to 500 people who attended these conferences in Nashville, Chattanooga, Knoxville and Gatlinburg. Speakers included David Mank, Teresa Grossi, Paul Wehman, Howard Greene, Katherine Inge, Michael Callahan, David Hammis, Katherine Carol, Richard Luecking and Cary Griffin.

While this was going on, in 2003, we started talking about Employment First. This was TN-DRS, DIDD and UT-CLEE. We were gathering information about how many people with disabilities were being funded to go to work. We were guestimating about 15%. We set a goal to move that to 25%. Thanks to providers providing bulky reports we saw that number top out in 2008 at 27%.

Employment First Initiatives are the catalyst for change. There was a shift in focus from how services were delivered by the organizations or systems and the emphasis was put on the best outcome for the individual. In the other re-structuring the emphasis was not on the person receiving the benefits. The focus was on the people delivering the services.

WHERE ARE WE GOING

There are the cynics who say we are going nowhere. But when you look around, the strategy is making entities work together. Entities cannot be responsible for a part of someone's life, when they reach a certain age, the person and their records disappear. Everyone needs to have all the pertinent information to move smoothly through the transitions of life.

GOATS AND KUDZU

The last couple times the employment specialists in East TN met there was discussion about many people wanting to work with animals. When we brainstormed ideas about positions that worked with animals we seemed to come up with the same 4 go to positions..... animal shelter, a vets office, a farm and a pet store. Then, we made it a little harder and asked for others. This time the responses were the zoo, state or national parks, therapeutic riding centers and a pet sitter.

Before the session ended, there was a homework assignment. Email me some job related to animals that caught your attention when you were driving home. Goats and kudzu. In East TN, there are some steep hillsides that are overgrown because lawnmowers cannot maneuver the hillside. Someone has brought goats to the hillside and staked the goats. The goats eat the kudzu in crop circles and arcs. Someone in your employment program should get some goats.

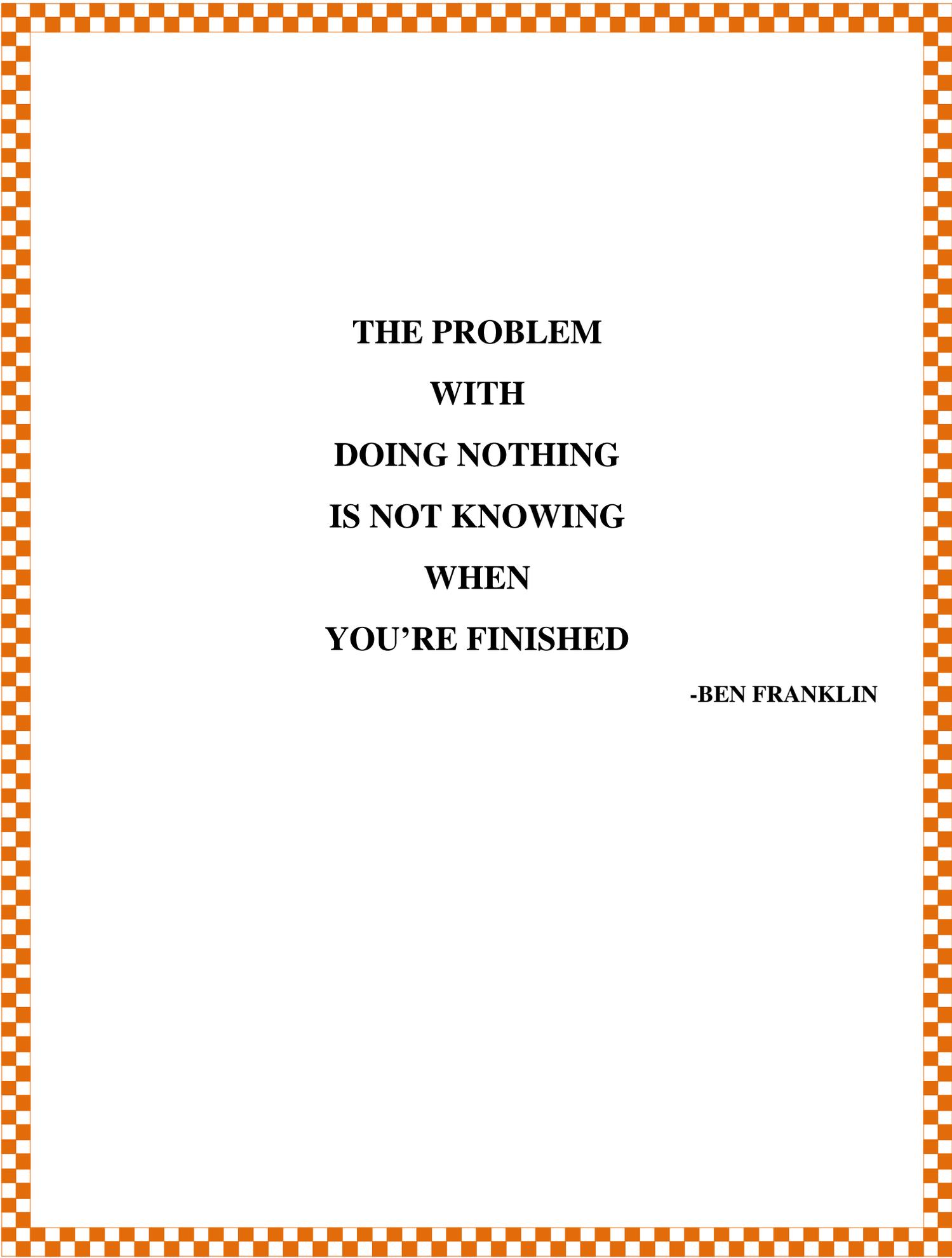
Another person realized that honey bees are disappearing. It is profitable to have a swarm of bees to pollinate fields. Someone in an employment program in East TN, is doing that.

Finally, the gourmet dog treats. I first heard of this from my colleagues in Montana. There are now 2 people in East TN, making gourmet dog treats, in the kitchens of their homes. Dog treats are not regulated by FDA regulations.

This entire exercise is to expand your traditional response to finding people jobs. We are comfortable with certain things and tend to use those responses over and over. Do something different.

Contact

Mike Sass
520 West Summit Hill Dr.
Knoxville, TN 37902
865-594-6756 (office)
Fax: 865-594-6535
Email: mikesass@utk.edu
Website: www.clee.utk.edu



**THE PROBLEM
WITH
DOING NOTHING
IS NOT KNOWING
WHEN
YOU'RE FINISHED**

-BEN FRANKLIN