

# Using the Full Value Contract To Build Community

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The full value contract was developed out of the foundations of contracting in transactional analysis and initially started as a “no-discount” policy at the beginning of adventure groups (Simon and Priest, 1993; Simon and Priest, 1997). Project Adventure reframed the “no-discount” approach into the more positive full value contract which accentuates the positive behaviors desired in groups (Schoel, Prouty, and Radcliff, 1988). Since its inception in Project Adventure philosophy the full value contract has evolved and changed depending upon the setting it is used in and the purpose of the group or the program it is used in. Project Adventure uses it as part of their adventure based counseling program (Schoel, Prouty, and Radcliff, 1988), as well as with schools and corporate groups.

Priest and Gass (1997 and 1996) tie the full value contract to social contracting in transactional analysis. They cite Medrick’s work in 1979 as the basis for the full value contract in establishing policies of “no-discount” at the beginning of an adventure experience. The contract focused on members of the group not “discounting” themselves or others. The initial purpose was to decrease fears or anxieties a participant may have, to justify their reasons for being there, to decrease passive participation and to encourage or stimulate participation. Project Adventure popularized Medrick’s initial work on the “no-discount” policy, reframing it to the full value contract to focus on the positive aspects of the group. There are different ways of presenting the full value contract to a group. Priest and Gass outline one way to frame the full value contract and give a specific example of how a facilitator might introduce the concept to a group. They emphasize the importance of watching the group during a presentation of the full value contract to determine if there are reactions or looks of confusion, so that you can clarify any concerns participants may have. It is important to ensure that everyone understands the contract and agrees to the contract. The facilitator may ask each member if they agree or have them sign a written contract.

The concept of the full value contract is used in many types of adventure based programs besides those operated by Project Adventure. The full value contract has been incorporated into adventure based curriculum used initially in physical education classes in various schools. The full value contract has also been incorporated into the entire curriculum of some schools (O’Donnell, 1997). There are several Full Value Contract Schools utilizing the contract as the foundation of its everyday operation.

The full value contract as outlined in Islands of Healing (Schoel, Prouty and Radcliff, 1988) is a groups “first line of defense once it moves into activity” (p.94). The full value contract is a social contract that is both personal and interpersonal. The full value contract is a more positive way of social contracting, it gets at the positive behaviors an individual or group is working towards instead of outlining the negative behaviors that people don’t want to see. The full value contract is accomplished in different ways with different groups. Schoel, Prouty and Radcliff state that the important thing is to maintain the idea (p. 94). The full value contract may be a means to a group truly “jelling”. When a group “jells” “there is a lifting up, things become easier, the goal more attainable” (p. 95). The full value contract helps to form a conceptual framework around how we do the activities. The back bone of the full value contract according to Schoel, Prouty and Radcliff (1988) is:

1. Agreement to work together as a group and to work towards individual and group goals.
2. Agreement to adhere to certain safety and group behavior guidelines.
3. Agreement to give and receive feedback, both positive and negative and to work toward

changing behavior when it is appropriate.

The full value contract is a method towards achieving those true healing and learning experiences in a group. It's a process for getting there.

Rohnke (1989) outlines the full value contract as a tool that can be used by any type of group, corporate groups, school groups, counseling groups. It is simple and has various levels of interpretation. The group or purpose of the group can determine the level of the interpretation. For each group it outlines a protocol or structure for dealing with each other and gives a framework for accomplishing goals during the group's time together. There are three commitments that are part of the full value contract (p. 11):

1. The agreement to work together as a group and to work toward individual and group goals.
2. The agreement to adhere to certain safety and group behavior guidelines.
3. The agreement to give and receive feedback, both positive and negative, and to work toward changing behavior when it is appropriate.

Different parts of the contract can be emphasized with different groups. The full value contract provides a framework for using when debriefing with a group and when goal setting is done the interpretation can be even deeper. Looking at feedback, honest feedback can get at really deep feelings, and the possibility of evaluating one's own behavior and changing it based on other's feedback. The full value contract is a way to help to create a safe environment for participants to do this. They can explore things within the group safely, knowing that the full value contract is in effect. The full value contract provides a means of dealing with issues as they arise.

Project Adventure's Adventure Based Counseling Handbook (Project Adventure, 1991) states that "effective learning occurs in an environment where what is learned can be put into practice and the learner can receive accurate feedback and reinforcement". The full value contract is believed to be an effective means to stimulate learning and to assist group members in achieving their goals. The full value contract asks for four commitments (p.16):

1. Work together to achieve both individual and group goals.
2. Adhere to certain safety and group behavior guidelines.
3. Give and receive honest feedback.
4. Agreement to increase one's own awareness of when we are devaluing ourselves or others and need to make a direct and conscious effort to confront and work toward changing this behavior.

A qualitative case study was conducted at two elementary schools that incorporated Project Adventure philosophy into their entire school curriculum (Dyson, 1996). Both schools used a modified version of the full value contract to stimulate goal setting among students. The revised contract was to "encourage individuals to set personal goals, cooperate, and challenge themselves in a safe and fun learning environment" (p. 92). Central to the program were five Project Adventure concepts. They were: "trust, risk, cooperation, challenge, and problem solving" (p.93). The research focused on the two physical education teachers and their feelings about the adventure education program and its incorporation into the entire school. Both teachers focused on educating the whole child, emotionally, socially, cognitively and physically. The study demonstrated that the adventure education philosophy adopted at these two schools was valuable and powerful in educating the whole child.

Lewenberg School in Boston, Massachusetts was a neglected run down school that parents didn't want to send their children to (O'Donnell, 1997). Starting in 1984, Thomas O'Neill, a new principal to the school, parents and teachers started turning Lewenberg into a compelling and attractive learning environment. Part of what changed at Lewenberg was that the school adopted the full value contract as a school wide philosophy. Students participate in a six week adventure based physical education program where they work as a group, as a team and develop fully valuing communities. The full value contract adopted by Lewenberg was posted in the lobby of the school as you entered, replacing the typical don't do rules seen in many schools. The full value contract read (p. 510):

1. Agree to create and participate in a group that is physically and emotionally safe.
2. Agree to work together to achieve individual and group goals.
3. Agree to give and receive honest feedback. (To listen, to try, to care, to change, to learn).
4. Agree not to devalue or discount yourself or others. *No put-downs.*
5. Agree to express negative thoughts and feelings and to learn and grow as a result.

The school has changed. It has become a positive place to learn and grow, and positive place to work. The article doesn't outline specific statistics just the change in attitude of the community towards the school.

Schoel (1992) discusses how a school becomes a full value school. The full value contract sets up a means of achieving a healthy work environment in addition to a good learning environment. To become a full value school the different populations within the school must be addressed. For staff some of the components are: team building, introduction to the full value contract as a means of operation, skills training in adventure curriculum, skill building in feedback and goal setting and implementation of a long term peer coaching system (p. 15). For students the components of a full value school are: a curricula that is activity based, interdisciplinary and thematic, cooperative teamwork is encouraged and student leadership is truly valued. There also needs to be components for parents. These are: experience days, active participation opportunities, full value training and participation in the school's decision making process. The full value school needs broad support to work. The revised full value contract proposed for use in full value schools involves the following commitments (p.15):

- 1) To the group
- 2) To the safety of the group (physically and emotionally)
- 3) To goal setting, both individual and group
- 4) To giving and receiving feedback, and to changing behavior when appropriate.
- 5) To "let go of" or to "move on from" negative feelings that have come about as a result of interactions.

Project Choices is an adventure based residential treatment program for drug abusing adjudicated youth (Gillis and Simpson, 1993). The adventure program utilizes concepts developed by Project Adventure such as challenge by choice and the full value contract. The full value contract is an adaptation of Gestalt Therapy, Transactional Analysis, and Reality Therapy. The full value contract as outlined by Project Choices asks clients or participants to agree to work together, and to work towards individual and group goals. In addition group members are asked to abide by the safety guidelines outlined by the program and agree to a willingness to give and receive feedback, both positive and constructive. Gillis and Simpson postulate that the literature indicates a need for treatment programs to have three components: "1) to teach positive coping skills; 2) foster peer group that does not value drug abuse but does acknowledge positive sensation seeking activities, and 3) build positive relationship with family". The research conducted looked at behavioral change during the program. None of the research was directly related to the use of the full value contract. The full value contract is mentioned as part of the intervention methodology but its value or significance is not investigated.

Project Adventure developed a 12 bed, 10 month residential treatment program for juvenile sex offenders using an adventure based approach (Simpson and Gillis, 1997). At the core of the program is the full value contract. The contract was operationalized in this setting into behavioral norms: 1) Be Here; 2) Be Safe; 3) Commit to goals; 4) Be Honest and Respectful; 5) Let Go and Move On. These behavioral norms can be specifically defined by a group. One of the ways used to do this is for the group to brainstorm what each component looks like, sounds like, and feels like. When defined in this way the behaviors become very specific. In the residential program the full value contract is also incorporated into the level system. The full value contract is used throughout the treatment and hoped to be a lasting structure within each child's value system once they leave treatment. Analysis of personality inventories done upon admission and subsequently throughout treatment and then post treatment indicated that there were changes in individual's perceptions of themselves. These changes were not necessarily "improved" in the typical sense but often their anger at themselves increased and self esteem decreased. One

interpretation of this data is that as treatment progressed clients perception of themselves became more realistic. When they entered treatment they had very high images of themselves and didn't perceive themselves to have any problems. As treatment progressed these images of themselves changed.

Heindel, Simpson and Gillis (1998) discuss the Legacy residential program for sexual offenders. They further describe the full value contract and how it is operationalized within the program. The full value contract is incorporated into the level system that individuals have to pass through in order to successfully move from one level to another and complete the program. The full value contract is operationalized at each level. Group is a major focus of the Legacy program as well. Any participant or staff can call group for a variety of reasons; information, feelings, confrontation. The group process breaks many of the behavior patterns an individual has learned on the street. The success of the Legacy program is demonstrated by the individuals who have successfully completed the program and have had no incidents of re-offending.

Estes and Tomb (1995) question the use of three models used in adventure programs. The models questioned are: 1) the mountains speak for themselves; 2) Outward Bound Plus; 3) Project Adventure's Adventure Based Counseling; and 4) National Outdoor Leadership School's Direct Skills Teaching. What is questioned is whether in any of these existing models students can become self reliant or whether the methods are too leader directed.

Fullerton (1991) examined cognitive and ethical development of a group experiencing a Project Adventure type challenge program. They utilized a group challenge experience assessment to measure perceptions of the group's effectiveness and personal effectiveness within the group. The instrument was administered once before the adventure experience and twice following the experience to measure the impact of the experience. The most significant finding of the study was that not all people are "improved" by group development exercises. This study isolated people into groups of similarly cognitive levels. The relationship of this study to the full value contract material is that it offers tools to use in measuring a groups perception of group effectiveness and could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the full value contract as a tool towards that effectiveness.

In the literature, the full value contract is discussed as a powerful tool for developing group dynamics. It has been useful in enhancing educational sites, used in therapeutic treatment programs and is reported to be useful in adventure based programs. If this is so, then does it matter how it is implemented or in what format?

A couple of formats for developing the full value contract have already been discussed but there are several others as outlined by Frank (1998). Frank uses the full value contract as a community building tool. She states that "a person's frame of reference dictates how s/he views the world.....a full value contract is a starting point for a group" (workshop handout, 1998). It gives people within a group ground rules to start from.

In order for the full value contract to be effective people need to believe in it and buy into it. To gain 'buy in' the development of the contract should come from the group. Certain elements should be contained within the contract such as physical and emotional safety of all group members but a contract in the words of the participants will be much more useful than one that is given to a group. Part of the goal of adventure programming is empowerment. To give a group the full value contract does not model empowerment or practice it. Many times facilitators may feel they don't have the time to have the group develop the full value contract. Different methods of development take different amounts of time, but the other question would be what the true purpose of the program is. Is it to develop group and interpersonal skills or is it to do a bunch of activities on a ropes course? If it is to develop group and interpersonal skills then taking the time to develop a full value contract is an essential part of the program.

The next consideration in developing the full value contract is when to have the group work on it. The facilitator should certainly frame the day stating the basic concepts of a full value contract such as physical and emotional safety, challenge by choice and working towards individual and group goals. The

group may need to know each other a bit before jumping right into developing the full value contract. Without some knowledge of the other people in the group it is difficult to voice your own needs or wants. Within the sequence it may make sense for the full value contract to occur after the group has spent some time together, getting to know each other's names, playing some games and warm up type activities. The facilitator can take on the role of ensuring the safety of group members during this initial period of group formation.

One method of creating a full value contract called the "being" is outlined. It is a means of "physicallizing" the full value contract and was developed at Boys Harbor in New York City. The process of using the "Being" is:

1. Outline a being or person on paper.
2. Have the group brainstorm positive attributes of what they want the group experience to be like and pick six of those. Write those six inside the lines of the "Being".
3. Have the group brainstorm the being's negative tendencies, identifying possible road blocks to attaining the positive attributes. Write these outside of the "Being".
4. Give the "being" and identity that the group comes up with, a name. The "Being" then becomes part of the group. The group can carry the "Being" around with them and use the "Being" during debriefs or when issues arise. It makes the concept of the full value contract more concrete for participants.

After the group has had some time together, some of the different ways the full value contract can be developed are:

1. **Create a banner:** the facilitator provides long paper and markers and any other materials they have on hand such as pieces of fabric, glitter, ribbons...so the group can create a banner. The group is asked to create a visual representation of how they want the group to function throughout their time together. They can brainstorm positive attributes that they want in their group and work towards agreement on those attributes. The banner can look however the group decides they want it to look.

2. **Build a village** (Frank, 1996): In creating a village the group will use large pieces of newsprint and markers or other materials. The goal is to create a village for the group outlining 10-20 values or ideals the village or group can use to make it work well. These are placed in the middle or inside of the village. Things that may hinder the group from sticking to its values or ideals are placed outside of the village. Each group member creates their own house or dwelling that represents a goal that they are working on and places the house in the village. A large group can be broken up into smaller groups of 5 or 6 to work on a village and then the groups can come back together to present their villages. The villages are then carried with the group throughout their time together and used to reflect upon or remind group members of how they decided to work throughout their time together. The full value contract is helpful when conflict arises or ideals are forgotten.

3. **Hands all Around** (Frank, 1996): In this full value contract the group brainstorms words or phrases that portray how they want to be treated and how they want to treat other people, in order to make the group a safe place for everyone. After brainstorming a huge list the group selects the most important 10 and makes sure everyone is in agreement on the top 10 and understands what they mean. Some words like "cooperation" may need to be more clearly defined. On a large sheet of paper everyone traces their hands around the edge and decorates them however they choose. Inside the circle of hands the words of how the group wants to work are written in. The words are then read aloud and the group decides if they can really live by the ideals outlined. If they agree then everyone signs their hands. If the group has been broken into smaller groups to do this then each small group presents its full value contract to the larger group.

Frank (1998) suggests a “Community Building Sequence” that incorporates the full value contract. Three tools are used in the community building sequence: the full value contract, challenge by choice and goal setting. The sequence is outlined in diagram 1. The sequence builds skills within the group as well as trust as challenge is increased. Leahey (1997) supports the notion of moving slowly with a group and with the sequence. In his arguments for challenge by choice Leahey asserts that as facilitators we do not know what a person needs nor do we know what is challenging to each individual. Based on this he suggests that facilitators move slowly and really empower participants in developing the sequence and the next level of challenge that is right for them.

In using a full value contract with a group it needs to become real and meaningful. It goes beyond just developing it. Some groups may naturally begin using it and others may need the facilitator to bring it into action. The facilitator can raise questions during a debrief of an activity or call a timeout during an activity. Using a mirror (imaginary) to focus the group on what the facilitator is seeing. For example the facilitator can say to the group that they are ‘holding a mirror and what does the group see is going on in the mirror. How does that connect with the full value contract developed by the group?’ The group then focuses on the behaviors that are happening and the decisions they had made earlier about the behaviors they had wanted to see. People have opportunities to give and receive feedback. The usefulness of the full value contract is limited to how the group utilizes it. If the group develops it and then never uses it, the purpose of the full value contract loses its meaning. After developing the full value contract you can specifically do activities and focus on how the contract is working.

The contract will most likely work well in the early part of the group’s development because they are still getting to know one another and everyone is carefully figuring out where they fit in the group. As the group moves from norming to storming the full value contract may be a vital tool to getting through the storm of group development. During the storm individuals within the group are testing limits and boundaries, questioning authority, becoming frustrated, and shutting down. So there may be a great deal of tension and conflict within the group. The full value contract provides a means for dealing with some of that chaos. The facilitator can bring the group back to the contract. It’s good to have it there where you can pull it out and have the group discuss how it’s working or not working and make decisions on what needs to change within the group to move forward. Other strategies such as using “I” statements, brainstorming options may all be used as well.

The full value contract can also be transferred back to the group’s life together and to each individual’s life. Transfer of learning is the key to successful programming. The goal of many adventure education programs is to transfer learning back to the home environment. Its one thing to learn to resolve conflicts in the woods but the real value of the experience is to transfer the skill back to home. The full value contract can operate in a school or workplace or in a family. In Families Creating a Circle of Peace (1996), families work together to develop a pledge of non-violence. The pledge is similar to the full value contract. The book gives families ideas of activities they can do to create a non violent family unit that works with each other. The full value contract can serve a similar function. It can give families or schools or other groups values that they have decided to live by. It provides a framework for the family to use during difficult times or struggles within the family unit. By developing a contract together and everyone buying into the contract it has a much better chance of being effective when it is implemented.

Facilitators can assist groups to see the transfer of the full value contract by helping a group to plan for it. In final debriefs the group can discuss how they can use the concept back at home or work or school. In training teachers the group was asked to develop a full value contract with their classroom. This would be a good area of follow up research and just plain follow up with groups. Is the full value contract working in your home setting? Having a place for people to come back to and follow up on it and gain new insights may assist in the transfer of learning as well.

The full value contract may benefit groups and individuals in their work as a group and then in their home setting. The actual research on the use of the full value contract is very limited if not even

existent. People believe it is important and that is beneficial to groups to use it. There is no research that supports this notion. How it transfer back to the natural or home environment is not documented either. Both may be areas that warrant investigation. A foundation of research is needed. How the full value contract is implemented and when may be vitally important to its value as well.

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