



“The future is already here – it’s just not evenly distributed.” - William Gibson



Research & Education



Planning & Development



Technology & Innovation



Management & Supervision

DEREK S. LANDES

THE ARTIST AND THE SOCIAL WORKER

Life has a funny way of taking us where we least expect it. I started my adult life as a high school dropout living in the storage room of an art gallery. While working for board and leftovers, I stumbled upon a group of teens struggling to stay sober.

Slowly, I spent more and more time coming up with creative interventions to help these kids. This caught the attention of a small non-profit who encouraged me to get my GED, attend a specialized course in counseling, and begin working with youth.

As I worked my way up the ladder, I found myself interested in developing larger solutions and helping more individuals. This led to going to college, majoring psychology & philosophy, and developing new community-wide programs.

By accident, I met a professor from the school of social work who was looking for a community research partner. Together we researched and developed the first interventions for several rural communities. Through working together, I found myself entering grad school, getting my masters, and working as a TA & RA throughout the process. I may no longer be living in a gallery, but I see the development of interventions & programs as an art.

AN EXISTENTIAL APPROACH

The helping professions are in a symbiotic relationship with our ever-changing world. Technology, managerialism, bureaucracy, public policy, and risk management have all shaped our practice. While I appreciate how these forces impact service delivery, they can pose barriers to genuinely embracing the dignity, worth, and self-determination of the individual.

Existentialism focuses on existence as free agents shaping our own experiences through our choices. This philosophy can be found throughout the historical root of our profession, but it faces current threats. Returning to an existential approach shapes services with a focus on helping individuals & communities find purpose, meaning, and freedom in an alienating world.

FREEDOM: A CORE VALUE

I was never a tough kid, but I was always willing to stand between a bully’s punch and their victim. My values have been shaped by a passionate need to stand with those who have been pushed down. Throughout my career and education, I have faced countless heartbreaking experiences of individuals being put down.

I have sat with parents after their child died of an OD. I have worked with rural communities atrophying from a lack of access to health care and resources. I have stood with LGBTQ+ groups as they have been attacked on all sides. As



MLK said, “a threat to freedom anywhere is a threat to freedom everywhere”, and I am proud to dedicate my work to this concept.

CREATIVE STRATEGY

I am a strategic, tactful, and innovative thinker with a creative accent. My education has been spent on sharpening these tools. While painstaking, the results of my education & training have been undeniable. I’ve gained the ability to think through and develop interventions on a significantly larger scale, to map out and operationalize large groups of people, and to evaluate and report the results. My masters taught me how to evolve from helping a single individual to entire communities and organizations.

Specifically, I have excelled in research, macro-social work, and administration courses. I have been able to link my coursework throughout my masters into a cohesive project for a local non-profit. In doing so, I learned to develop a community needs assessment, research & propose interventions, write & submit grant proposals, and craft long-term strategic plans.

To continue with the art metaphor, I began my masters with a creative vision and each course provided me with a different tool to develop my art. Macro-social work has taught me how to understand the canvas, research has provided the color palette, and administration has gifted me with brushes.

MOVING FORWARD

Like the rest of my fellow Americans, I have been greatly impacted by the COVID public health crisis. Over the next few years, I intend to focus my skills on the development and integration of telehealth systems across the rural regions. My goal is to significantly expand my knowledge base, tech skill, and professional network in the process.

I have toyed with the idea of getting my PhD, but I am not yet sure this is the next step for me. Regardless, I still have questions that demand answers. I intend to attach myself partially to academia through teaching as an adjunct, expanding my field experience, and building my professional identity. Through continued education, discussion, and experimentation, I intend to expand my growing skillset. In the meantime, I will continue my reflection on existentialism in social work through the writing of my book and hosting my educational YouTube series.

I have often been asked where I see myself in 10 years. For years I would have given you a detailed and exact outline, but as I said, life has a funny way of taking us where we least expect it. I have abandoned this type of life-planning, and instead, I have resolved to a simple plan. Over the next decade, I plan to take risks. I plan to do things that scare me, explore every opportunity to grow, teach & learn as much as I can, and see where the river takes me. As Joseph Campbell said, “we must be willing to let go of the life we planned as to have the life that is waiting for us.

“The purpose of therapy is to set people free.” -Rollo May



A client-centered existential approach



A commitment to inclusion and diversity



A creative & progressive perspective



A focus on building, development, and originality