

DOVIA EXCHANGE

THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE COMMUNITY P.O. BOX 2427, SANTA FE, NM 87504

VOLUME V NUMBER 1

February, 1989

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DIRECTORS OF VOLUNTEERS IN AGENCIES

"PROFESSIONAL" IS A SACRED COW?
STRONG SYMBOL?

by Ivan Scheier

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Choose one. In any case, it is a magic word. Concentrated here is every high expectation of vocation, every deepest yearning for status and respect.

"Professional" keys the mission statement of DOVIA-type associations; it is the core of our workshops, the quiet agenda in every meeting. If we are not "professional," we are nothing. It is the label for aspiration, the core of our identity.

Given all the symbolic power packed into the term it is dangerous even to raise questions about the label. But it is time to do so, because I am no longer sure it is doing for us what we need it to do for us.

A first concern is whether we can even communicate effectively about this power-laden concept, so various and distinct are the many meanings of the term. In his excellent lead article in December, 1988, Experiential Education, David Moore has this to say:

"The everyday uses of the word 'professional' confuse our problem. One connotation is evaluative: Calling an occupation a profession confers dignity or status on its members. Another implies a certain level of commitment: 'Professionals,' as opposed to amateurs, practice their art/craft/science full-time, and they are

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