

This much I know about Social Work.....

The following are 25 pieces of Social Work **practice wisdom** which I wish a colleague had told me about when I first qualified as a Social Worker 25 years ago this year!

1. Don't fall for the exclusive myth that somehow Social Work is defined by "where you practice and who you are employed by"...it is not. Social Work is defined by **'what you do and how well you do it'**.
2. Make Social Work Values your 'friend'...in times of changing professional and political landscapes, **Social Work Values will help you navigate new waters** and in the process keep you sane.
3. Learn what key Social Work concepts actually mean; such as what is **'harm'**, **'significant harm'**, **'thresholds'**, etc.
4. Learn the Social Work fundamentals of differentiating between a child and adult **'in need of support'** and a child and adult **'in need of protection'**.
5. Be kind on yourself....and accept the fact however hard you try you will have days when you won't always live up to your own standards, your clients do not expect perfection and remember **you can always start again tomorrow**.
6. Remember that although laws, policy and procedures are important...they alone do not support and / or protect vulnerable children and adults. It is your **commitment and courage** in applying these laws, policies and procedure which support and / or protect vulnerable children and adults.
7. Accept the fact that you will never have seen it all, heard it or know it all; good Social Workers are genuinely **committed to life-long learning**.
8. Whatever your career path, try to **avoid losing your direct practice skills**. If you do, you run the risk of diminishing your peer credibility and professional authority. Remember most medics, lawyers and educationalists continue to practice directly in one way or another until they retire and their professions are the stronger for it.
9. Be **generous with your clients**, not least in terms of your time you give them to tell their story.
10. **Nurture and support your colleagues**, even the dizzy ones! Social Workers who nurture and support each other, are much more likely to nurture and support their clients.
11. Be mindful of the power and **importance of using language sensitively** to reflect a changing world.
12. **Treat every client with the utmost respect and courtesy**. You are there to serve them not vice versa; always remember that you may have been a client once or you may be a client in the future.
13. Accept the fact that probably the **best social work** you will ever do will go unnoticed by your colleagues and unrecorded by your managers. That you know it was your best has to be good enough.

14. When things aren't going as planned and you start blaming your colleagues start with looking at yourself first; as Ghandi says; '**be the change you want to see**'.
15. Recognise diversity and when appropriate celebrate it, but **do not become defined by what makes you different**. Despite our differences, we all have much more in common than separates us.
16. Do not tolerate any form of **bullying or intimidation** in the workplace. Deal with it positively but firmly.
17. **Never underestimate the power and opportunities you have** every day to positively affect someone else's life for the better.
18. Remember that whether you are a social worker, manager, judge or allied professional, ultimately **we are all on the same side** and should respect and help each other in supporting and protecting vulnerable people.
19. **Be wary of applying for jobs which sound very impressive**, they rarely have a lasting positive affect on the lives of others.
20. Praise and **celebrate the achievements** of your colleagues.
21. Don't forget Einstein's maxim; insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. **Find the balance between persevering and changing your perspective and approach**...it often yields surprisingly good results.
22. If you don't understand something...**do you own thinking first**...and then ask for help, you will learn much quicker that way.
23. Look outwards by **using your professional voice** to bring about positive change for others by being active in at least one professional and / or collective body.
24. **Work life balance is a necessity not a luxury**. Learn how to turn off your phone, shut down your computer and enjoy a social life.
25. Be proud of being a social worker. It's a great job; not least as every day you will have opportunities (however small) to make a real positive difference to **your own life** and the **lives of others**.

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