**Service Brokerage – Power to the Pedlars**

By Ken Davis

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This article is about **Service Brokerage**

Service Brokerage was one of the ideas people had in the 1980s about how to give disabled people more choice in the support they receive.

The kind of support we’re talking about includes personal assistance, equipment services, and things like day-centres or employment services.

According to this idea, disabled people have more control over their lives when support is bought for them as individuals, instead of local councils or health services buying the same support for every disabled person in a city, town, or county.

People who supported service brokerage had particular ideas about how buying services for individual people should be done.

The said there were three kinds of thing that needed to happen for a disabled person to buy services which suited them.

First, someone would have to be a **broker** for them

A broker is someone who buys things on someone else’s behalf.

So if you book a package holiday, your travel agent is your broker and they buy your plane tickets and hotel for you.

In service brokerage, the broker buys support services for the disabled person.

Second, the disabled person’s friends and family, social worker, and any carers become something called a **Joshua Committee**.

A Joshua Committee is a group of people who tell a disabled person what kind of support could be bought for them, and advise them on what might be most helpful.

It’s called a Joshua Committee because of the Book of Joshua in the Bible.

In the Book of Joshua, the heroes break down some massive walls to help them win a battle.

According to people who support service brokerage, the Joshua Committees will help break down the ‘walls’ that stop disabled people having control over their lives.

Third, there needs to be **individual funding**

Individual Funding is where councils and health services say that each individual can spend a certain amount on support services, rather than the money being spent on things any disabled person can use.

The service brokerage idea originally came from Canada, and it was used to buy support for children with learning difficulties.

In the late 1980s, some companies in Britain started to try and sell service brokerage to local councils.

There are a lot of things about service brokerage that make Ken Davis worried.

He says he can’t speak for people with learning difficulties, and he’d like to hear their thoughts about it.

For physically impaired people, he thinks the idea of service brokerage stinks.

He gives two reasons for being dead against service brokerage.

**First**, he doesn’t it will work.

This means that it won’t give disabled people any more control over their lives than they have right now.

**Second**, he thinks that the people who support service brokerage in Britain aren’t really interested in giving disabled people more control over their lives in the first place.

He reckons that these people are really interested in making a name for themselves.

If disabled people try to help them get service brokerage, it might actually make disabled people’s lives worse.

Let’s first look at why Ken Davis thinks that service brokerage won’t make disabled people’s lives better.

People who support service brokerage think that the problem for disabled people is that the wrong service is bought for them instead of the right one.

Ken Davis thinks that this gets things backwards.

He says that the problem isn’t that councils buy bad services and not good ones.

The problem is that the services on offer are nearly all bad.

He says that the best service brokerage can do is let disabled people choose between bad types of support.

He says that this isn’t a real choice for disabled people.

For disabled people to have real choice and control over their support, they must control what kinds of support services get produced.

Service brokerage isn’t interested in that, it’s just interested in which services get bought for which disabled people.

Now, let’s look at why Ken Davis thinks the people who support service brokerage aren’t interested in disabled people having more control over their support.

One reason is that believing that service brokerage will work means you have to believe some other things that clearly aren’t true.

For service brokerage to work, disabled people would have to be able to buy the kinds of service they need, like non-disabled people can if they have the money.

Companies make all kinds of things for all kinds of non-disabled people.

If a company isn’t doesn’t provide something non-disabled people need, they can vote in an election for a government that will make it for them instead.

This just isn’t true for disabled people.

Because disabled people have been kept poor, very few companies make all the things they might need.

Disabled people have also found that political parties and governments don’t listen to them about what they need, so they can’t get things this way either.

So it’s much harder for disabled people to get these things – even if they are given the money.

Ken Davis thinks this is obvious, and he can’t really believe that the people who argue for service brokerage haven’t realised it.

The other big reason is that people who support service brokerage have avoided working with disabled people on their plans.

They have even said some untrue things about disabled people’s organisations.

The people who support service brokerage talk about a lot of the same things as disabled people do.

People who support service brokerage say that they want disabled people to be empowered, and that disabled people should have more control over their lives.

This is exactly what disabled people’s organisations have been saying for years.

But the people who want service brokerage haven’t bothered to ask disabled people’s organisations what they think about their ideas.

Sometimes they say disabled people’s organisations are a waste of time, and that’s why they won’t work with them.

Sometimes they say that disabled people’s organisations are a great idea, and try to make other people believe they are working with them.

Ken Davis thinks that this makes them untrustworthy.

**If** people really want to help disabled people have more choice about how they are helped, they will find out what disabled people say they want.

They will also find out what disabled people are doing now to change things, and they will try to help them.

The people behind service brokerage haven’t done either of these things.

So what do these people really want when they talk about service brokerage?

Ken Davis thinks what they are really about is **protectionism**.

Protectionism is when someone does something to protect what they have, rather than to help anyone else.

He points out that most of the people pushing service brokerage in Britain are former social workers, university researchers, or people who’ve had good jobs in charities.

These are just the kind of people that have made decisions about what kind of support disabled people can get.

Ken Davis points out that disabled people have raised lots of things they are unhappy with in the support they get.

Disabled people have demanded that they have more control over the help they get, and that non-disabled people have less of a say over their lives.

If disabled people get what they want, non-disabled people like social workers and charity bosses will lose a lot of their power.

Ken Davis says that the people who support service brokerage have found a clever way out of this problem.

These people **say** that they agree with disabled people about what is wrong with their support.

But what they actually **do** keeps most things the same.

This way, it will look to disabled people like they are being listened to, when they really aren’t.

People like doctors, social workers, and charity bosses can keep all the power they have if service brokerage happens.

The people who push service brokerage will become more powerful, because they had such a good idea.

But disabled people will stay powerless.

Ken Davis says that this makes service brokerage an attack on the disabled people’s movement (DPM).

The DPM says that disabled people have a bad deal, and that the only way to get a better deal is by getting together and doing things for ourselves.

This involves making their own types of support, designed and run by disabled people.

Service brokerage agrees that disabled people have a bad deal, but says the only way to solve it is to let non-disabled people buy different support services for them.

They use the same kind of language as disabled people, but they want the opposite thing.

The DPM says we should run things for ourselves in the way we want them.

Service brokerage says we should just pay someone else to do things for us.

The DPM says we should come together in groups and make decisions together about what we want and how we’ll do it.

Service brokerage says that we can only make decisions about what is good for disabled individuals, and that non-disabled people should be part of those decisions.

Ken Davis says that the service brokerage people are being **slippery**

This means that they want disabled people to believe that they’re on disabled people’s side, but that they really are doing something very different.

Ken Davis warns other disabled people not to be fooled by this.