

Counselor Career Interview with Dr. Stephen Kong

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The counselor whom I interviewed is Dr. Stephen Kong, a former pastor and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist who runs his own private counseling practice since 2019 in Queens, New York. He has been licensed as a LMFT in both New York and New Jersey for more than ten years (since 2010) but did not start full-time counseling until recently because he previously was called to serve as a full-time minister at a local Chinese church in Queens. His specialty of counseling is marriage and family issues.

Dr. Kong's counseling office is a rented unit in a business building located on a busy street in downtown Flushing. He works mainly from his home office now since most of his clients choose to receive counseling through telehealth. His clients and he enjoy the benefits of having counseling session with technology, such as safety, the ease of not having to travel, and the comfort of being at home. For those who prefer to meet him in person, an office that is easy to access is necessary. Some clients who deal with domestic violence issue often are not able to conduct their session at home and do not have the means to go to areas without public transportations. In his office, the main furniture is a comfortable sofa which faces his desk for clients to situate themselves nicely to have good conversations with him.

Dr. Kong was called to serve God at his young adulthood and has been a pastor since his early twenties. He has been serving God over three decades now. While ministering at church, he perceived a great need for counseling of the congregation, especially in the areas of marriage and family related issues. Therefore, he started pursuing a Marriage and Family therapy degree in a seminary, hoping that the training would be bible based and can be accepted by most Christian church denominations. He spent several years as a part-time student to finish his Marriage and Family therapist training alongside performing his minister responsibilities.

The guiding theory Dr. Kong uses in working with clients is the family systems theory established by McGoldrick and Carter in 1999. McGoldrick and Carter suggested that families are influenced by both horizontal stressors (events that occur across time for everyone, such as war, economic downturn, or such death of a family member, etc.) and vertical stressors (familial behavioral patterns and communication styles that run through generations, such as poverty, anger, or addictions). (Erford, 2017) According to Dr. Kong, this theory helps him see the intertwining factors in the client's family system that cause complications and issues to emerge in a client's life. Moreover, this theory also provides a pathway to work with clients to find answers and identify possible solutions for their desired outcomes.

During counseling sessions, it is quite common to see that clients are deeply absorbed by their emotions and could not stop talking about what they have gone through and how they feel. Dr. Kong found that it is helpful to help the client "pause" and process what he or she has just said with him, instead of going on with running memories without stop. "Pausing" is a technique that Dr. Kong considers essential and important in his therapeutic work. Secondly, bonding with the clients is also necessary with Dr. Kong in his counseling work. Dr. Kong stated that establishing appropriate bonding makes clients more open and comfortable to talk about their deep feelings and concerns, which in turn makes the counseling sessions proceed much more smoothly than it does with a distant or resistant client. When asked about how he establishes bonding with clients, it seemed to be a natural and easy task for him – he replied "it is not hard, just start a conversation with something they like or are interested in."

As for the multicultural/gender issues, Dr. Kong indicated that it is important to understand the general context and to respect the client's cultural background because it could be a very sensitive area to the client and may very well be the center of the issues the client is

dealing with. Dr. Kong stated that as a counselor, he does see a wide range of cultural variations in the clientele, and we need to be prepared and equipped for multicultural and gender issues for the clients we serve.

Dr. Kong is a happy counselor who appreciates this profession greatly because of the significant improvement and benefits it makes in people's life. He thinks that there is a great and increasing demand for counseling, maybe even greater than the demand for medical physicians. He is very optimistic about the future develop of the counseling profession. Currently he does not see many issues or concerns for the profession. He enjoys his work as a counselor and believes that he is an advocate for the profession. He encouraged me as a counselor-in-training that this is a very meaningful career and that he looks forward to my joining the workforce as his colleague. He also warned that we must have the heart to help people, or we could be easily worn out by the problems and stresses presented in front of us.

What Dr. Kong likes the most about his work is that he can help wounded people heal and be restored from brokenness and their "a-ha" moments when the clients find answers for important life questions during counseling.

Regarding his professional training, Dr. Kong perceived that the best part was that the training enables him to relate to different people and helps him to connect with his clients. The least prepared area for him in his program was sexuality. Although he took three courses on this topic, he still feels that he doesn't know enough and needs to equip himself more. Sex/sexuality is an integral part of marriage and there are many underlying issues that need more knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

His advice to me as a beginning counselor-in-training is first that we must be genuinely interested in helping people; secondly, it is important to choose a specialization in the counseling

profession to have a focus and develop expertise. Dr. Kong indicated that if we have a specialization, not only that we could help our clients better, but we could build up our own expertise of treatment and become fruitful and grow professionally.

Overall, Dr. Kong is very positive about the counseling profession and feels satisfied and fulfilled in the counselor role. From this interview, I feel more assured that this is a profession that is not only meaningful and making a difference, but it is also marketable and professionally prospering. I also learned that it would be helpful to start thinking about specialty areas that I might want to pursue in the future, so that not only I can help the clients but could also make contributions to the growth and development of the field.

Reference

Erford, B. T. (2017). *An advanced lifespan odyssey for counseling professionals*. Cengage Learning.