

CD 702 Working with People
Kelly French
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Counseling Triads Summary

I met in a triad with David and Jessica twice each day during our intensive course. Professor Park taught us listening skills to practice during those sessions. We learned about body language (eye contact, facial expressions), active listening (not thinking about other things or responses while the speaker is speaking), and responses and questions to frame after the speaker has paused (affirming the speaker, reframing what was said, asking for more information, asking about feelings). This lecture elevated my listening skills - in counseling situations and friendships - especially the part about avoiding personal anecdotes.

In our first session, we were nervous, but we each opened up about our life stories. David, Jessica, and I vulnerably shared wounds from childhood and processes of healing. In this session, we kept clear speaker, listener, and observer roles, and we spent a few minutes giving moderately honest feedback at the end. I struggled with wording my questions (when I was the listener) in the first session, but David and Jessica encouraged me.

After the first session, Jessica suggested we nix the role assignments and open the discussion so anyone could ask questions. I had reservations, but I agreed. The result was that two people were asking questions, and instead of a clear focus on listening skills, our sessions transformed into problem solving discussions. David and Jessica seemed to appreciate the new structure, but I hated it. I could not focus on the speaker nor construct

clear questions in response. Jessica asked the speaker rapid-fire questions, so if I felt prompted in a direction, I had to be quick. I felt stressed. I asked on Day 3 to return to the structure; they agreed verbally, but as soon as we started, we returned to group discussion.

Without the structure, my group mates forgot to practice the listening skills. David could not get his mind off the breakthrough he was having about his shadow areas. I loved to see him explore that and become more vulnerable. The problem was that he continued to talk about it while Jessica and I were speaking. He cut me off one time to ask a question, but the question morphed to a series of personal anecdotes. To redirect, I asked if I could finish before he continued; he seemed offended that I cut him off. My grade for David is a B. He learned to speak more clearly as our sessions progressed, and I respect him for opening up. When he was listening, he made eye contact and appropriate facial expressions, and he affirmed well. He consistently got distracted with his stories, though, and asked questions that had more to do with his experience and assumptions than the speaker.

I would give Jessica a D. As a speaker, she was willing to be honest and allowed us to ask difficult questions. As a listener, however, she could not sit still, she rarely made eye contact, and she never waited a beat to ask questions and often did not know what we had shared. Several times I had to give her a quick summary of what David had just been saying because she had missed it - perhaps thinking about what she wanted to say next. When she asked if she was too aggressive, I let her know that I thought she could

slow down with the questions. In retrospect, I wish I would have been more direct and thorough with feedback. When I was listening to David, Jessica cut me off to “reframe” my questions, but her “reframe” did not correspond to my question at all; I think she had something on her mind she wanted to ask David. The worst part was that I had shared in our second session that my boyfriend is breaking up with me, and later when I said that I am not okay, she insensitively asked besides my boyfriend, what could be wrong.

I was disappointed with my group and our experience; the other triads gave rave reviews, but I dreaded time with my triad. Beyond disappointment, I was hurt. I was having a hard time in my personal life, and I did not feel like myself. I was not being who I wanted to be, and my triad did not understand or connect with me.

Through this experience, I learned a few lessons for my life and ministry. One is that not every counselor is a good fit. Another lesson is the deep value of strong listening skills, especially in vulnerable situations. After debriefing with Professor Park, I learned that I need to give more grace to myself; I had been feeling guilty for not being able to be myself and guide our triad sessions better. I was afraid David and Jessica would judge me according to my limited capacity during class, but that is fear and insecurity, not freedom in Christ. Finally, I learned I need to forgive David and Jessica. In replaying some of our conversations, I have become bitter towards them, so I forgive them and release them. The triad was hard, but I am grateful for the life lessons and the new listening skills.