

Position Paper #4

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A professor once said that “a counselor is someone that is allowed by the client to walk with them on their specific journey - no matter how difficult it may be.” As I reflect about a professional counselor’s identity, I think first of a journey. According to the Webster’s dictionary the word journey means passage from one place to another. When a person embarks on a journey, they have to make several choices to arrive at where they want to go. One of those choices is who will be allowed to go on this journey with you. Oftentimes one begins their journey having different expectations. Everyone wants to have a smooth journey. If someone is choosing to ride a plane to get to where they want to go they do not want to have any turbulence. Turbulence is something that one knows is a possibility but hopes not to encounter in their journey and often comes unexpected.

In life, like beginning a journey, people are going from one stage in their life to another. In their journey they will encounter unique experiences. It is here where they usually choose to have someone with them. When someone walks with someone on their journey, they are given the opportunity to join that person. In the same way a counselor goes on this journey on the client’s terms and wherever they want to go. As mentioned previously it is an opportunity that the counselor is given to walk alongside the client during this difficult time in life. At times experiences will be difficult to hear and find challenging to help the client get through. On a journey there is usually one leading and one encouraging. The professional is the one providing encouragement and the client is the one leading. I believe it is so important to make sure to make it clear to the client the counselor's role as well as the client’s role in this therapeutic relationship. All clients will be coming from different walks of life.

Being clear about what the client expects of the counselor is important so that false expectations can be addressed. Some examples of false expectations that clients may have is that the therapist should always be available. Some clients have an emergency and feel that their emergency is the counselor's emergency. I realize there are moments when things are an emergency, and the counselor should make themselves available. I am referring to clients that everything is an emergency for them. Additionally, clients may feel that the therapist will fix everything for them. Some clients feel that the therapist will do everything for them without them putting in the work.

It is important for the therapist to be clear with the client from day one and let the client know what they can and cannot expect in their sessions, as well as establish firm boundaries with explanation of what is an emergency and what can wait for a later time. Also, a therapist should never assume that a client fully understands the rules that were explained on day one. It is important to repeat all throughout the therapeutic relationship.

Also, it is important for therapists not to have unrealistic expectations towards clients. For example, clients must open about what happened to them fully in one session. It is important to understand that a therapeutic relationship takes time. Another false expectation is that the client will stay.

In the same way the counselor places false expectations on themselves. I am realizing that it is important to understand my limitations as the counselor. My role is to guide my client to where they want to go and not solve their problems. I feel seeing it from this perspective frees me from any expectations that I feel I must solve their problem. I will not have all the

answers and should not be expected to. To be a professional counselor is to provide guidance to a person who may be facing difficult times in their life.

I feel that my faith informs my professional identity in that I want to provide the best help that I can for my client. The Word says everything we do, do it as unto the Lord. The fact that I am a follower of Jesus Christ helps me to carry myself in such a way that will bring glory to him. I feel that I have a great example in the life of Christ. I want to resemble Christ through my profession as best as I can. Christ was compassionate, he was non-judgmental, He restored the dignity of individuals. He advocated for them. Christ did not ignore the needs of others he did something about it.

As a professional it is easy to be judgmental toward my client without fully understanding the full story. I would like to be a non-judgmental person that is willing to hear what the client has to say without casting judgements. In the same way be willing to meet the clients where they are. The way in which I can meet my clients where they are is to understand they may not be ready to discuss a particular situation and be patient with them. Patience is not easy when you want someone to come out of a specific situation. I need to remind myself if God is patient with me, I surely can be patient with my client. As well as restore their dignity. For example, if a prostitute is changing this lifestyle and all they know is being disrespected and spoken to in a demeaning way, I can reassure her she is in a safe space. Remind her she has value even though she was not valued. Lastly, remind her that her past choices do not define who she is today. Jesus in scripture restored Maria's dignity when she went to Simeon's house. "When we focus on the quality of the counseling relationship, we are asking about the extent to

which Christian counselors can reflect the love of the triune God to clients, particularly those clients who are more challenging to love.” (Holeman, 2012)

Reference

Holeman, V. (2012). *Theology for better counseling*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.