THE EXPANDING ROLE OF THE COUNSELLOR:
FITTING MEANS TO ENDS

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Abstract

This article is intended to stimulate debate on 1) the political implications of the counselling act; 2) the various and expanding roles and services that may be appropriate to the counselling profession in contemporary North America; 3) and some salient concerns of those attempting to forge new settings for the delivery of those services.

Résumé

Le présent article a pour but de susciter la discussion sur les questions suivantes: 1) les implications politiques reliées au counselling; 2) la variété de l'accroissement des rôles et des services qui peuvent relever de cette profession à l'heure actuelle en Amérique du Nord; 3) les préoccupations dominantes de ceux qui tentent de mettre en place de nouveaux cadres pour dispenser ces services.

Every profession is constantly undergoing changes for a number of reasons. First, the needs of the society which a profession has been established to meet are in continual flux. Second, the science that underlies a profession, as well as the training modalities for equipping the trainee (and recycling the veteran) with the skills needed to practice their profession, are evolving and, it is hoped, improving. Third, the service delivery systems which bring clientele and professionals into a productive interaction with one another are periodically in need of restructuring and adaptation.

This article has as its objective to continue the debate, which never ceases, on the character of those dynamics. What indeed are the needs of the society which can be most appropriately met by counsellors? Are there new needs emerging, or even old needs to which we should be redirected? And if so, in which specific populations? Secondly, how can the resources of this professional be more effectively mobilized to provide a return on investments which in these times of straitened finances, both public and private, are more closely scrutinized.

Before touching on these questions, it may be useful to speak of counselling, as a discipline, because our concept of it determines, to a large extent, the purposes it can serve. Rather than formally defining it, it may be more useful to list some of the components most frequently cited by North American authors and practitioners. First, it is most obviously an intervention process within the context of a helping relationship. This process, however conceived, evolves between a trained professional and one or more clients, normally meeting together. The disciplinary base on which this is built is psychology, or more broadly, the behavioral sciences (Bordin, 1955; Brammer, 1968). Increasingly, it is seen as an educational process (Brammer & Shostrom, 1960; Danish, 1974; Guerney, Stollak, & Guerney, 1970) in which the counsellor facilitates the learning of skills, often of an interpersonal nature, considered by both the counsellor and client(s) to be necessary for dealing with problems in living. Its further objectives are to help the client to understand himself better and to understand the demand requirements of his environment (Wolberg, 1954) in order to assess viable alternatives, define role-problems (A.P.A., 1961) and finally make realistic life choices and decisions (Erpicum, 1974; Tyler, 1961) which will affect him as well as his immediate environment. The element of psychotherapy is not intrinsic to the process (Tyler, 1969), although it frequently may form part of it because of some impairment of the client's ability to make decisions and to implement them in his milieu (Erpicum, 1974).

This formulation may not please any single reader, at least in its entirety. It nevertheless may serve as a tentative frame of reference for examining, not only the objectives of counselling, but also, the training programs that are in continual need of being redesigned to equip counsellors with the skills that fit well with the tasks that society needs them to perform.

The Politics of Counselling

The counselling profession offers an array of services to the society in which it is practised. The question it must constantly be asking itself is what congruence is there between the counselling needs of society and the services being offered (A.P.A., 1973). There is a high probability that it will be of little use to continue with traditional service programs and impossible to design new ones if we are confused about the profession's population targets and their special needs. At this point, then, we would suggest that the primary task of any profession is to maintain an ongoing program of field research, service delivery evaluation, and program development that ensure that the full range of clients in the community are being served in *their* needs. Painful as it is to say it, professions do not exist for their own sake, nor for the financial or social benefit of their members, but to enhance the quality of life of the community in which they work. With reference to this, Warnath (1974) observed not long ago that ". . . an increasing number of laymen view traditional counsellors with the suspicion that they are status-oriented middle-class types more concerned with preserving the system which supports their jobs than with the welfare of the target populations" (p. 74). They, and other professionals as well, are seen as gravitating toward the lucrative "market", the prestigious work setting.

A number of other reputable commentators have argued along this line (A.P.A., 1973; Carkhuff, 1972; Ivey, 1973). Nevertheless, it may be argued that it is an exaggeration to say that it has been predominantly affluent and otherwise privileged educational and social sectors of society that have garnered the lion's share of the profession's service. Exaggeration or not, a continual reordering of priorities would seem to be necessitated by the continually changing needs of society. A sensitive social responsivity on the part of a profession leads it to constantly monitor itself and redirect its energies to arenas where they are patently needed.

There are far-reaching political ramifications to these statements, but that's because there is a political dynamic intrinsic to the practice of any profession. Little that we do in a public forum, or even with the public at large in a private forum, does not have a political dimension. It has been observed that "every counselling contact is a political act" (Warnath, 1974). This appears to be so, first, by virtue of the fact that serving one segment of the community to the neglect of others has inevitable political consequences, independent of the problematic consideration of whether our counselling interventions are even constructive to begin with (Bergin & Garfield, 1971). More profoundly, the intervention process in a counselling relationship inevitably influences the client along the dimensions of (1) adapting himself to the status quo and (2) altering his social environments. The consequence is political no matter where the intervention falls along those continua.

Even where the counsellor turns to the needs of an ethnic or cultural minority, he is not always mindful that he is first of all in the service of the person. His task is not the homogenization of the society, no matter how this might simplify the organization, operation, and control of the society by the bureaucrat, the merchant, the professional "psychologist", or the city planner. The task is, most fundamentally, to give the individual more control over his own life to the extent that it is consistent with and remains within the scope of the personal and ethical objectives of both counsellor and client.

Service Delivery and Needs: An Interaction

In spite of our mounting anxieties about the modern world, it hurtles unrelentingly in the direction of an engulfing technologism and urbanism, the terrors of which have been well described by Jacques Ellul (1967). All this has placed tremendous adjustive strains on everyone and in particular on the city dweller, whose life is also touched, shaped and stressed by the pressures of crowding and the frenetic sounds of the world at work and at play. Out of this matrix are emerging legions of troubled persons who are making the counselling function more necessary than ever (Tyler, 1962). But by itself, the counselling profession seems to be increasingly inadequate to the task.

It would seem, first, that the counsellor can no longer indulge his penchant for working alone, not because the freedom of the professional isolate is not a facilitative condition of work, but simply because he cannot have the breadth of science, information, and skills necessary to meet the array of demands that this traditional clientele places on him. Their problems-in-living are shot through with technical, legal, economic, and psychological difficulties that reach beyond the skills and knowledge of any one counsellor. The origins and the solutions of psychological distress are as complex as the societies in which we live.

To meet this challenge there has been a good deal of laudable experimentation on this continent to create inter-disciplinary team approaches to the treatment of mental health problems in individuals, families and institutions. Efforts have been made to allow the distressed quick access to counsellors, psychometrists, physicians, psychiatrists, social workers, career information specialists, criminologists, and lawyers who, to a greater or lesser extent, are working in the same location. These service delivery systems, moreover, have facilitated

the interprofessional collaboration which is becoming increasingly necessary and have permitted more creative and adaptive use of existing community resources.

However, the interfaces which have been created by bringing these diverse professionals together into one team have generated several problems which have defied solution to date. First, those who have been trained in the medical professions often make psychotherapeutic and rehabilitative interventions which appear to counsellors to be inefficient, if not worse. Shostrom (1973) has declared that "the medical model has little to do with what happens in daily psychotherapy or counselling" (p. 37). We could say the same of their medical interventions. And yet not infrequently one finds physicians pre-empting a professional domain in which they have not been trained. On the other hand, those who have been trained to deal with human behavioral dysfunctions in educational treatment modalities have a tendency to perceive all problems-in-living as distortions in learned behavior. Not infrequently they overlook the organicity which may underlie these problems.

Another problem involves the subtle and vexing question of authority and status on one of these teams. Not uncommonly when one has established a comprehensive and integrated service program one gets not so much the creative confrontation one had been led to expect (Fabun, 1967) but the imposition of a pecking-order. This reflects less an intrinsic rationale for the division of labor and decision-making than popular mythologies about the social value of the professions that are involved.

Another problem is not unrelated to the above. Professions have not sufficiently defined their "exclusive acts" and their specific objectives. These should have been more clearly demarcated long ago, not only to eliminate fractious territorial disputes and interdisciplinary rivalries that are an absolute waste of energy but to dispel the confusing redundancy that exists in their training programs.

Also it is useful to note that professional titles themselves are a source of befuddlement to the lay consumer and need to be rationalized. We suggest that in the public consciousness the term "psychology" is loaded with so much surplus, irrelevant meaning that we should ban its use from the professional domain, it and most of its cognates, and reserve them solely for academicians and researchers. In the public mind the terms are fraught with occult and quasi-maqical connotations which, we suspect, not all practitioners have been eager to dispel. It would mitigate the superstition and exaggerated expectations with which rank and file clients approach professionals for help if their titles

evoked, at least vaguely, operational definitions of their respective professions. Such terms as career information officer, school guidance counsellor, job placement counsellor, career counsellor, rehabilitation counsellor or specialist, marital and/or family counsellor, social worker, behavior counsellor, intrapersonal therapist might help to demystify the psychological professions for their clientele and generate a more constructive cognitive set, once they had been popularized.

Some Specific Goals

It is easy to be carried away when one is brain-storming around the issue of social needs and target populations. The counsellor conceives of himself as the human relations specialist, the "psychological" developmentalist, the human-problem solver par excellence, to whom nothing that is human is alien. It doesn't seem to be unrealistic to say, however, that the goals of counselling are as complex and as changing as society itself, indeed as complex as the individual members of society. It was in that perspective that Leona Tyler (1972) described counselling as the protean profession, applying psychlogical skills to every domain of human need and (adapting service delivery programs) to changing areas of human distress.

We need, for example, more specialists in the area of drug abuse to work in community mental health centres, residential therapeutic communities, and rehabilitative centers. With the fragmentation of the extended family, the aged are isolated or segregated and increasingly need the counsellor in an advocacy role as well as a counselling one. With the lowering of retirement age, a large segment of the North American population needs pre-retirement counselling to cope with the traumatizing impact of being occupationally shelved prematurely. With increasing cross-cultural contacts in our contemporary world, one should ask what sanitizing or constructive role the professional counsellor can play in the international domain, for instance, as a consultant to diplomatic legations, to multicultural peace corps or brigades, to business organizations or educational groups. As the traditional family undergoes radical transformation and stress, more counsellors with a developmental psychology background will be needed to educate parents in contructive patterns of childrearing. As the cities become increasingly pathogenic, giving many indications in North America of degrading into "behavioral sinks" (Calhoun, 1962; Loo, 1973), counsellors with a background in proxemics and environmental psychology could, in collaboration with the social worker, serve the crowded, befouled, over-stimulated, and stressed city dweller, again in an

advocacy as well as a counsellor role, bringing consulting, organizational, and training skills to bear on urban problems.

No need to go further on this tack. The possibilities for responsible and constructive initiatives for the counselling profession are as numerous and varied as the areas of human distress induced by the dislocations and disruptions of society. The more problematical issues, however, seem to be not which target populations, nor even which social structures, are appropriate objects of concern but which models of service delivery will be most effective in a complex world.

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