

ON BECOMING A FAILURE AS A SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

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Abstract

In light of the plethora of articles on "how to become more effective in" covering a variety of professions and areas of competency, the authors of "On Becoming a Failure as a School Counselor" have taken a more cynical approach by identifying the negative or undesirable traits to be avoided by helping professionals. The obvious assumption is that in satire form the message can be conveyed in a lighter, more humorous context while the serious intent remains implicit. This is the third in a series of similar publications by the authors, the first two being: "10 Easy Ways to Become an Incompetent Teacher" in *Educational Perspective*, 1973; and "Be a Loser as a Parent" in *Academic Therapy*, 1975.

Résumé

Vu le grand nombre d'articles discutant "comment devenir plus compétent à . . ." et touchant une variété de professions et de sphères de compétences, les auteurs de "On Becoming a Failure as a School Counselor" ont choisi une voie plus cynique par l'identification de qualités négatives ou peu désirables à être évitées par les conseillers. La supposition, évidemment, c'est que le message peut être transmis dans un contexte plus léger et humoristique s'il prend une forme satirique tout en conservant l'intention sérieuse implicite. Cet article est le troisième dans une série de publications semblables des auteurs, les deux premières étant: "10 Easy Ways to Become an Incompetent Teacher", dans *Educational Perspectives*, 1973; et "Be a Loser as a Parent" dans *Academic Therapy*, 1975.

Essential ingredients for success in school counselling have been described in formulas, prescriptions and specifications in recent guidance and counselling literature. A seemingly infinite number of techniques, skills, performance objectives and other sets of behaviors have been advocated as requisites for counsellor competence. The task of reducing these competencies to a reasonable number would be extremely difficult in light of the vast differences of philosophies among their supporters.

This paper offers an alternative approach to identifying the qualities of a successful counsellor. The assumption is that a majority of professionals could agree on *undesirable* behaviors or *ineffective* techniques. That is, almost anyone can tell us what constitutes a poor counsellor, while few can agree on what makes a good counsellor.

A further justification for the paper is the fact that we all learn from our own mistakes and misjudgments as well as those of others. The following satirical advice points out some of the areas of failure and incompetence in school counselling. Two notes of caution! The article was obviously conceived in a spirit of humor, and any resemblance to specific techniques of the reader are purely coincidental.

1. *Be condescending when conferring with teachers*; remember you are a highly trained

specialist, whereas teachers are merely general classroom technicians and must be reminded occasionally of their subordinate roles. After all, we don't want them to lose their respect for you and this will keep it intact! Teachers, as a rule, suffer from that well-known disorder, "Specific Earning Disability," characterized chiefly by symptoms of physical and cerebral overload and acute monetary deficiency. Or, in the pedantic description of teachers, they are "overworked and underpaid."

2. *Use impressive terminology and clinical jargon* (such as some of the words being tossed around in this article); this will help to obfuscate critical issues for which you may be held personally accountable. Never resort to semantics that teachers, parents and colleagues could easily comprehend since that might detract from your charismatic image as an omniscient intellectual. Besides, it cost you a lot in time, effort, and money to learn these big words and you want others to appreciate your success. Disregard the admonitions of jealous colleagues who misjudge your oral productivity for anal profligacy.

3. *Never admit to having made a misjudgment or a mistake* about a pupil (especially to a teacher). Insist that your diagnoses, value judgments, and decisions be accepted without reservation. After all, how could such a highly

trained person be wrong? Make no accommodations for, or concessions to, the opinions or judgments of others (unless, of course, these happen to be congruent with your own). Remember, the infallibility of counsellors must be perpetuated lest the profession suffer a traumatic loss of status. Besides, it is well known that teachers typically internalize the "Sacrificial Lambitis" syndrome quite readily. As a result, they are quite willing to graciously accept the blame whenever things go wrong with a pupil, even in the rare instances where you may have been directly responsible for part of the problem.

4. *Don't be overly concerned about professional accountability.* If you are ever approached by school administrators or an evaluation team regarding your accountability, summarily dismiss the issue using the argument that the concept of "accountability" is a relatively new and unverified hypothetical construct which will eventually go out of vogue as have other fads in education. Your use of impressive terminology such as "hypothetical construct" is usually sufficient to restrain the investigator from further pursuit of the question. Besides, there are few individuals who know your field as well as you so how can anyone even know how to conduct an assessment of your effectiveness.

5. *Keep relationships with students strictly impersonal* by avoiding any discussion about personal or emotional problems. Remain aloof with those who seek counselling in the form of crisis intervention or need advice related to emotional hang-ups. Several techniques can be used to avoid personal confrontation with students in order to keep the counselling session on a superficial, impersonal level:

- a) *Hide behind your test batteries* — a student can't usually reveal personal problems while you're giving him a Binet or a Kuder. It keeps the conversation purely mechanical and cognitive.
- b) *Look busy* by leafing through impressive files and weighty folders; this will be an immediate tip-off to the client coming in to "spill his guts" that you are heavily committed to your paper work and there is just no time for frivolous personal concerns. If he should catch you not "looking busy," be sure all the chairs in your office are covered with folders,

books, papers, etc. This will usually discourage any visits longer than thirty seconds and will allow you to get back to the more important test-scoring and other crucial paper work.

- c) *Get out his folder* and discuss his academic record — there is always something worth discussing that will suppress his urge to reveal some nasty old emotional hang-up that is burdening him.

6. *Never answer a question directly.* Always be non-committal even elusive and answer every question with a question of your own. If you use this approach, students will quickly recognize their inadequacies in solving their own problems and will realize how much they have been trying to "lean" on you for help.

7. *Emphasize a student's test scores* especially if he's below average in achievement or ability. Students need to recognize exactly where they stand and how they perform on these infallible instruments.

8. *Spend most of your time counting credits* accumulated and computing the grade averages of your students. This is necessary to determine graduation and athletic eligibility and honor society membership. If most of your time is still not occupied, you should devote the rest of it to such things as budgets, schedules and room assignments.

9. *Concentrate only on the college bound youngsters.* After all, this group represents the future of North America and the others really have relatively few career goals to choose from anyway.

10. *Don't ever side with any student who may be "different"* or belong to a minority, especially if many of his views prove to be unpopular with the majority of other students and/or staff. Such an association might remove some of your charisma and besides a student should conform to group norms and the general standards of a democracy.

If you follow the above suggestions you will probably be left with the somewhat pretensions but rewarding perception that the people you "serve" are but naive seedlings, and that the knowledge you impart to them is a "fertilizer" which nurtures their growth. Ultimately, you will have succeeded in becoming a failure as a school counsellor.