

What Makes Counseling Different From Other Human Services?

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My sense is that the answer to the question "what is unique about counseling" will include equal parts respect for counseling theory, personality theory and technique. NOTE: I explored this opinion in my essay, The Tripartite Model of Counseling see <http://www.robertchapman.net/essays/model.pdf>. I also suspect that the phrases "evidence based" and "empirically sound" will need to appear as well.

The truth be told, I do not believe that those that have been trained as counselors and therapists only do effective counseling. I believe these people are expert at the technique and we can probably not address questions related to operationally defining counseling by cataloguing what the job description of any professional counselor or psychotherapist outlines as this does not capture the essence of what counseling is, although it may present an adequate representation of what professional counselors do. So just how do we differentiate counseling from what any effective professional in the "human service industry" does?

Although this will not answer the question-although it may be grist for the discussion mill-I suspect that what makes a good, i.e., "effective," professional counselor is similar to what makes, in my opinion, a good teacher. The best teachers I have had in high school, as an undergrad, or in grad school-have all had one thing in common; they did not so much teach "things" as much as they motivated me to want to learn more about them. I believe that affecting change is near the top of the list of what counselors do, that is addressing something that exists, but does not exist as well as it can be, the objective being to make it better. I realize coaches

and mentors and physicians do this too, but what remains special to professional counseling, although not unique, is the deliberate intention of the practitioner to help motivate individuals to want to do what the professional counselor recognizes the client needs to do, i.e., help clients discover the way to Oz without feeling like they had to be shown the yellow-brick road. In short, to help clients discover the resolution of the dilemma that has precluded personal growth.

I believe effective counselors have realized that there is a hidden phrase that follows the old adage so popular in our Western culture, "you can lead a horse to water, but not make it drink." Too many teachers and managers and directors and "authoritarians" are invested in trying to help by "making the horses drink" because "that is what they need to do" in order to mature and grow. Effective professional counselors, however, have realized that such an effort is often futile. We counselors have opted to approach the issue of helping, i.e., counseling, from a different vantage point. We are more focused on client resolution of dilemma than on simply solving problems. To return to the old adage, we work so as to "make clients thirsty" and therefore more likely to decide to drink. My grandfather used to say, "Never teach a pig to sing. It frustrates the teacher and annoys the pig." Professional counselors have recognized that change is an inside job but by providing individuals with a "new set of lenses" through which to view their reality, they can often identify wondrous vistas that make change the desired objective of "the client." Like the patient who can see after the surgeon removes the cataracts from the eyes, one's sense of reality shifts as the result on the new perspective presented by this awakening. As a mentor once taught me, "the trick in counseling is helping clients discover that what you think needs to be done is their own idea."

Again, I have thought about this question of "what is counseling" and how does it differ from other helping services for much of my

professional career and I have yet to answer it, at least not operationally. Like the inveterate detective says to the rookie that asks, "What are we looking for," as they search the crime scene..."you will know it when you see it," clients know good counseling when they experience it and peers recognize it when they observe it.

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