

# Advanced Techniques for Counseling and Psychotherapy

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## Preface

This book is about the essence of human interactions. Story after story is told throughout this book: stories from tales and myths throughout the world, brief stories, profound stories, lighthearted stories, stories of hope, and real-life clinical stories that reflect picture after picture of what counseling and psychotherapy really look like behind closed doors. Many of the ideas in this book have come from my professional experiences, spending over 11,000 hours clinically counseling individuals, couples, families, and children, and from the thousands of hours I spent clinically supervising and training counselors and therapists. It is my hope that this work will offer something pragmatic and unique that will add to the knowledge of counselors and psychotherapists. During my years as a professional counselor and counselor educator, I have developed what I think are exciting ideas about human interactions and how to help people make changes in their lives, ideas that, until now, have not yet been presented in our field.

What makes this book different from other techniques books is that, in this book, the reader will learn about the *five errors of communication* in counseling and psychotherapy: a concept I have developed and coined. They will learn about the *analytic self* from which they can evaluate extant countertransference; *Yield Theory*, a systematic model of building rapport that has been the foundation of so many close relationships; and the *Four Cs of Parenting*, a concise and pragmatic way to teach others the fundamental skills for parenting and a tool counselors and psychotherapists alike can draw from to help many clients. There are some new terms presented and discussed, such as *ebullition* and *point of projection*; and some older concepts, such as *confirmation bias*, are articulated and defined in new ways. Because this project stems primarily from my own work, I have not directly referenced many books. I have, however, included a more comprehensive bibliography in the Appendix to denote the works that were most influential in shaping this book.

Throughout this work readers will be presented with some original techniques that stem from my clinical experiences. For instance, implementing Plato's *allegory of the cave* as a counseling technique can be an insightful presentation of the counseling journey. With a simple, fun to teach, and practical application, readers will learn how to *be the couch* to change how they argue, and how to teach others to do the same. In this book readers will gain a down-to-earth technique for motivating children with the *Essential Time Management Chart*. Readers will also find some energizing and creative techniques, such as the *Live Video Game*, *Jealousy as an Ugly Flower*, *Puppet World*, and *Past, Present, Future technique*, and they will learn how to give a *Free Pass* to clients to alleviate the pressure of having to remember everything that occurred in therapy. This book is also unique in that I include a description of the fundamental *logical fallacies* people make when attempting to reason, which I have not found elsewhere in counseling literature.

I am aware that people are drawn to brevity in the modern world, so I have attempted to make descriptions of the tales, techniques, and clinical examples as brief as possible. This task became more challenging as the book developed, because this work begins in a very basic way but later moves into some fairly esoteric concepts. Whether the ideas in this book are rudimentary or abstruse, they are all, I believe, practical and readily useful for counselors. This book is titled *Advanced Techniques for Counseling and Psychotherapy*, and whereas I attempted to spell out many terms for the reader, I also worked from the assumption that this book is intended for those who already have a basic grasp of counseling lingo.

This book will likely make more sense when the reader understands the author's background and philosophy. After obtaining an undergraduate degree in psychology, I began my graduate work at California University of Pennsylvania, where I studied under an expert Rogerian therapist, Dr. Bob Brown. Though I integrated the core values of Rogers's approach, at the time, I was hungry to learn more. I simultaneously began to study under Dr. Ed Jacobs at West Virginia University, where I learned his Impact Therapy (a combination of Rational-Emotive Behavioral Therapy, Transactional Analysis, Gestalt, and Adlerian Therapy). During these years I also learned the art of motivational speaking from renowned sports psychologist Dr. Kevin Elko. I moved on from these teachers to learn from the master instructors at Duquesne University, where I pursued a doctorate and began an in-depth study of Analytical Psychology and Constructivism. Today, as an assistant professor at the University of Nevada, I have integrated my education and experi-

ence into my own theoretical approach that I call *Depth Counseling*. Depth Counseling is more than a psychodynamic theory; it is a holistic approach to therapy, the core of which is predicated on helping others discover their true selves. The fundamental difference between Depth Counseling and other psychodynamic theories, however, is its emphasis on taking a balanced approach to working with both conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche.

The “voice” of this book is largely colloquial, and that is not without purpose. Counseling and psychotherapy are dialogical in nature; thus, I attempted to write as I speak so as to engage readers as they in turn will engage clients. The words on the pages to follow can come to life when readers find themselves actively identifying with them and the examples presented. That the writing style in this book is conversational by no means implies that it is casual; to the contrary, everything within is written with intentionality to help readers connect with the material. By using a conversational voice, it is hoped that readers will identify wholly with the experiences offered in the pages to come.

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# Advanced Techniques for Counseling and Psychotherapy

# 1

## Introduction

### **TECHNIQUES OF COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY**

What stonecutter can carve without tools? What artisan can create without an apparatus? No artwork becomes manifest from thought alone; all art is dependent on artists' mastery of their tools and techniques. And so it is with counselors and psychotherapists. The means by which counselors and psychotherapists interact with their clients rest in the techniques they use. If theoretical orientations constitute the canvases of therapy, then techniques, whether rudimentary or advanced, are the brushes that paint counselors' work into something memorable for clients. Counseling *is* an art, and techniques help counselors construct effective communication with clients. Counselors and psychotherapists can draw on techniques to increase their ability not only to be effective with clients, but also to influence how clients view themselves, their world, and how they interact with others.

The essence of counseling and psychotherapy is change, and techniques offer means through which clinicians can elicit change in others. Change is a primordial idea. Over 2,600 years ago, Heraclitus taught that change is in and of itself truth and that it is the only constant. Heraclitus was not alone in his beliefs; his fellow Greeks worshipped change in the form of the sea god Proteus. Proteus never lied, and what he said

to others would forever change them; but Proteus saw people fall apart from his words of truth, so he vowed to do whatever he could to avoid people. To be ever-elusive, Proteus could change form at will, and he would only offer his life-changing messages to those who could capture him. Similar to Proteus, counselors and psychotherapists hold the keys to impactful messages that can forever change others. Unlike Proteus, who changed forms to avoid giving messages to others, however, counselors and psychotherapists draw on different techniques to change the forms in which they deliver messages to clients for the purpose of relating truths in ways that can be heard.

That counseling is an art indicates that the product practitioners produce (i.e., effective communication) can be sharpened with practice. Even the most gifted of counselors refines her talents through the years. Mastery begins with and is perpetuated only through preparation and practice. Prepared counselors are so because they practice their craft with regularity and dedication. To be an artist of advanced therapy, counselors and psychotherapists must learn to utilize the tools and apparatuses that will enable them to convey their communication to clients in effective ways. Perhaps the most proficient of counselor-artists are those who have learned well to be prepared for what to expect.

## **MITHRIDATES**

Not many people in the modern world have a personal food taster—someone to demonstrate that the food they are about to eat is good and not poisonous. Food tasters belong in the folklore of history, such as in the tales of kings who worried about rivals to their thrones. One of the most famous stories of poisoning occurred during the first century in the court of Mithridates, enemy of the Roman Empire. Like many kings before and after him, Mithridates had reason to worry about the safety of his food; potential enemies were everywhere. There were the Romans, of course, his sworn enemies who vied in three wars for control over what is now Turkey, and there were the internal foes, including family members. So, what was a king to do to protect himself? Personal guards and food tasters helped (by tasting his food and drink for poison before he ate or drank), but Mithridates wanted complete invulnerability from attack and immunity from poison. Though complete invulnerability from attack could never be achieved, Mithridates ensured his safety from being poisoned by taking small doses of various poisons and antidotes (now

called mithridatic drugs) to inure himself. Apparently, his diet of poisons did what it was supposed to do: He became immune. Mithridates's immunity was so effective, in fact, that at the end of his very long life, when he tried to commit suicide by poison, he failed and had to have a trusted relative stab him. According to 19th-century poet A. E. Housman, Mithridates was able to live such a long life because he "faced (life) like a wise man would, and trained for ill and not for good."

The theme of Mithridates's story is paramount for counselors and psychotherapists to understand: Be prepared for the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral poisons that disrupt the effectiveness of counseling sessions. The journey with clients through the kingdoms of their undiscovered psyches and the labyrinths of their real or perceived problems does not happen without peril. In the context of counseling sessions, that peril lies in whatever inhibits, disrupts, or poisons communication between counselors or psychotherapists and their clients. Effective communication is the core of the counseling profession; hence, learning to communicate effectively is the center of counselor preparation.

Why is communication the "core"? As you will discover in this book, counselors can enhance their repertoire of techniques by creatively drawing on many branches of knowledge. No counseling occurs in a vacuum: All counselors take a wealth of information and experience into every session with a client. Using that information and experience effectively is not always easy because clients also take information and experience into sessions, and they usually do so in the context of some angst. Within any session or series of sessions a counselor necessarily elicits a clear statement of the problem in the context of the client's background information and experience. The counselor, too, must be clear. *Counseling is dependent, therefore, on clear communication, ideally from client to counselor, but necessarily from counselor to client.* The skills of communicating effectively and eliciting clear communication in counseling sessions require both study and practice. Errors in communication cause breakdowns during sessions and can even discourage clients from seeking further help.

Counselors and psychotherapists would therefore benefit from understanding how to deal well with the everyday errors people make in communication. Practicing how to avoid errors in communication trains counselors, as Mithridates trained, for "ill and not for good." Although language is the primary mechanism for most communication, in face-to-face situations both counselors and clients often communicate in nonverbal ways. Deciphering what others are attempting

to communicate takes skill and practice. Learning to communicate in ways that allow others to genuinely hear what we are attempting to communicate requires mastery of both forms of communication and an ability to avoid common errors often made in communication. Clients frequently approach counselors for support, and it is the task of those counselors to communicate the support that they wish to convey effectively. The techniques in this book are geared toward preparing counselors and psychotherapists to circumvent five common errors made in communication.

## THE FIVE ERRORS OF COMMUNICATION

The ultimate goal for counselors and psychotherapists is to communicate effectively enough to elicit a change in their clients. Barriers exist, however, that inhibit effective communication. The difficulties counselors encounter regarding how effective their communication is can be divided into five categories, or what I call the five errors of communication. The first is the *error of approach*, which happens when counselors are ineffective in their initial contact with clients. The second is the *error of interpretation*, which occurs when counselors fail to accurately understand clients' phenomenological perspectives. The third is the *error of language*, which occurs when counselors fail to circumvent clients' fight or flight responses. The fourth is the *error of judgment*, which takes place when counselors judge rather than assess clients. The fifth error of communication is the *error of omnipotence*, which, as Kell and Mueller (1966) noted, is the inaccurate belief that counselors are responsible for their clients' behaviors.

The first impression clients have of their counselor tends to set the stage for the ensuing relationship. When counselors make the error of approach they inhibit communication in that they tend to stifle clients' willingness to expose their psychological worlds. As evidenced by the tendency people have to compare their interactions with others to the first time they met them, first impressions are important to people. The story "The Great Watermelon Slayer," told in chapter 2 of this book, elucidates the error of approach and provides a model for an effective way to approach others. Chapter 2 also introduces the reader to Yield Theory as a model of building rapport that can be drawn upon both initially and throughout the counseling relationship to sharpen communication. By incorporating the principles of Yield Theory and

adopting the wisdom of the Great Watermelon Slayer, counselors and psychotherapists can avoid the first error of communication.

A primary goal of counselors is to precisely interpret what clients are communicating. Unfortunately, too often confirmation bias and countertransference inhibit counselors from accurately seeing the world from their clients' perspectives. When therapists and counselors fail to correctly interpret what clients are communicating, or when they fail to have accurate empathetic understanding of clients' emotions, they are making the error of interpretation. By utilizing the concept of the analytic self (i.e., ability to self-supervise), therapists are able to identify confirmation biases in themselves and recognize when countertransference is occurring. The more counselors draw on the story of Edshu and similar tales (discussed in chapter 3), the more they are likely to avoid making the error of interpretation.

Because speech plays a significant role in communication, the error of language is perhaps the most fundamental communication error counselors can make. Since a prime goal in counseling is not simply to talk, but to talk so as to be heard, circumventing others' fight or flight responses is an essential part of almost every counseling session. Any elicitation of clients' fight or flight responses constitutes committing an error of language. By recognizing the subtle impact of the language they use, counselors can learn to speak more effectively. Indirect and direct discussions of this error are made throughout this book.

Counselors are hired to assess individuals, situations, and their surroundings; they are not paid to judge others. A significant difference exists between assessment and judgment. Effective assessment in counseling involves evaluating others with unconditional positive regard. Accepting people for who they are has nothing to do with condoning their actions. To genuinely give *unconditional* acceptance to another, or acceptance *without* conditions, is very difficult for many; however, counselors and therapists are subject to the error of judgment when they put any conditions in front of fully accepting their clients. The story "The Giving Tree" in chapter 3 provides an example of accepting someone without conditions. With great and constant practice, counselors can avoid the error of judgment and have their words and presence hold significant weight with their clients.

Finally, counselors hoping to communicate more effectively would do well to avoid making the error of omnipotence. People have a tendency to believe that they are responsible for each other, and in some ways they are (i.e., responsible to step in and act, responsible to provide

care for those who cannot care for themselves, responsible to attempt to help people avoid harm as much as possible, etc.). However, people are not, and cannot be, responsible for the decisions, behaviors, and feelings of others. If counselors, for instance, walk away from a good session deriving their self-worth (“My client is doing so well: I’m such a good counselor”), then they must also walk away from a negative session deriving their worth as well (“My client still refuses to change: I’m a terrible counselor”). A fluctuating response to clients’ progress predicated on how well or poorly they are doing would not only be unprofessional, but unproductive as well.

We are not responsible for the decisions others make; we are not responsible for the behaviors others do; and we are not responsible for how others feel. People have the ability to influence others, but to submit to the concept that people are a direct causation of behavior in others is to imply that free will is not present. As Frankl (1963) pointed out after surviving the Holocaust, even those in the worst of human circumstances were not obligated, even under the threat of death, to act in certain ways; at any point people can choose death over actions contrary to their character and belief, and in their final moments, some do act altruistically whereas others behave more aggressively. When we take on the responsibility for others’ decisions, for their behaviors, or for how they feel, we make the error of omnipotence. The reason this error is one of communication is that those who do not heed it will be much more likely to become enmeshed or fused with others, rather than remain differentiated to the healthy degree necessary for change to occur. For example, if a client is not making changes in her life as quickly as her counselor wants her to, and the counselor takes this personally, it will significantly increase the likelihood that he will begin to be frustrated with his client and push her in ways for which she is not ready.

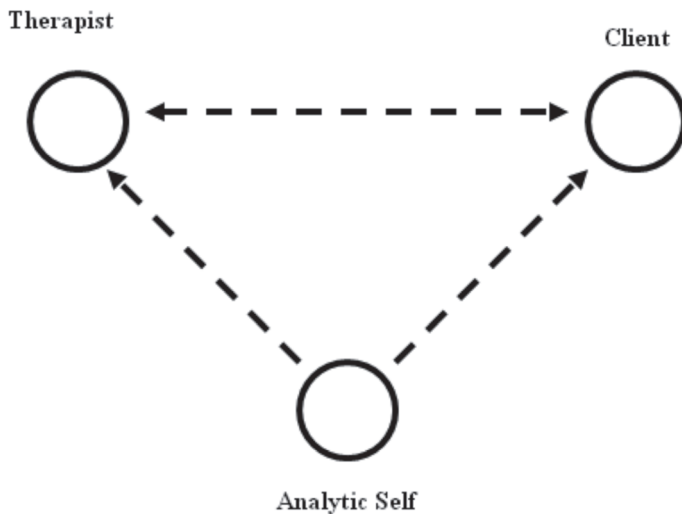
By understanding and avoiding what I have designated as the five errors of communication (error of approach, interpretation, language, judgment, and omnipotence), therapists are better prepared to communicate effectively with their clients. This book is designed to teach advanced techniques for psychotherapy that circumvent the five errors. To be effective in therapy is to communicate as clearly as possible; to do that, therapists must be creative in their approach to clients and find ways to convey information to them that they are prepared to hear. Metaphorically meeting clients where they are is paramount to helping them construct new knowledge. Counselors cannot meet clients where they are or accomplish effective communication styles without an inten-

tional approach to their work, a devoted awareness of themselves, and an awareness of the errors they might make.

## THE ANALYTIC SELF

Rarely is a book about counseling complete without a reference to the inscription above the oracle at Delphi: “Know thyself.” The words apply directly to counselors in that without a keen awareness of who they are, they are likely to countertransfer a variety of thoughts, behaviors, and feelings onto their clients. Whereas early psychoanalysts initially understood countertransference to be limited to familial projections, a broader understanding of the term includes all of therapists’ projections from their past experiences onto their clients in the present. Countertransference is inevitable, so being aware of it is fundamental for effective counseling.

The *analytic self* is a concept that can be used to heighten counselors’ awareness of their countertransference. The analytic self is a psychic



*(Supervisors act as the therapist’s analytic self until the therapist can analyze both herself and the relationship)*

**Figure 1.1** Analytic Self.

term that describes where our capacity for self-awareness lies. I have defined the analytic self as a “psychic” term, meaning that it is of, or relating to, the human psyche, and not as a connotation of telepathy or clairvoyance (see chapter 5). It is important for counselors to develop the ability to metaphorically step outside themselves so that they can look at their psyches from an objective position and observe what feelings clients are attempting to elicit in them. It is as though the counselors can metaphorically get into a third chair and point to the chair in which they are sitting and ask, “What is this person feeling?” (see Figure 1.1). By viewing themselves as though they are outside entities, therapists can learn to not only take things personally, but also to recognize physiological signs that the client may see as well (e.g., eye rolling, face scrunching, raised eyebrows, etc.).