

Time to Change Hats: The Changing Role of the Disability Services Provider

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As I wake up to face the day, I never know what role I'll play--
There is motivator, counselor, professor and nurse.
I'm supposed to be an expert on anything that hurts.
I'm a mathematical genius, a very wise and frugal spender,
A brilliant conversationalist, a faithful JSU defender.
Now as the Case Manager, I cover every base,
Every kid is passing, and every graduate placed.
I've been a brownie, a cub scout, and an eagle; I've mastered every test.
I've been a den mother, a band mother, a completely worn-out mother,
But I've ranked among the best.
My hair should always look just right, my skirt should never be too tight.
Fashion-wise, curvaceous, and witty; creative, energetic, thrifty and pretty.
I'm a politician--par excellent--wine and dine--quite delightful,
But because I keep expense accounts, I choke on every biteful.
Parents think I'm a saint at meetings, but maybe my IQ is just low.
Would Disabled Student Services really fold without me, and close its doors if I said no?
Let's see--there is my caseload and there is good ole LS 102,
Afternoon sessions, and conference calls at 2:00.
There're committees every Monday, and lunch at Tuesday noon;
Now they want me back at school for the PhD real soon.
I'm an expert comedienne--you can count on me for laughs.
Endorphines you know can save the day.
Jokes are nice, but better still would be a hike in pay!
I do plan to go to summer school and work on that degree,
But that's after all the kids leave home if it's 2023!
I'm a wife, a chauffeur, a mother, a psychologist and a sexy red-hot lover.
I'm a gourmet who really gallops from one job to another.
If I can keep my sanity, I'll do just fine.
But I need to ask one question--
Are all these hats really mine?

This poem portrays the many different roles in which we find ourselves. As parents, spouses, and professionals we have to change our hats frequently to meet the needs of our families. Because there is a crisis in education, we also need to expand our role from the dissemination of information to a much broader perspective. Our society faces many serious problems such as poverty, single parent homes, and alcoholism and its affect on the family. College students today face problems such as the epidemics of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, substance abuse, sexual assault, and unwanted pregnancy which are all related to behavior and relationships. It may not be so much a lack of knowledge in these areas as much as the absence of identity and personal values. Many problems in the classroom seem to be conflicts in interpersonal relationships and group dynamics.

What am I saying? The education professional needs to become more aware and responsive to the psychological and social needs of the student. "We are faced with the arduous task of educating

disillusioned adolescents who have for a variety of reasons become 'homeless' in the sense that they are the living, breathing, symbols of the greatest single tragedy in America in this past generation -- the complete and tragic breakdown of the American family" (McGready, 1991).

There are no cookbook answers or magic cures to "fix" the problem as we approach the 21st century. The conclusion that we draw from this is not one of despair because we can't fix them all, but rather one of hope that we can make a deliberate will choice to make a difference in the life of one. Indifferent people don't make a difference. Are you making a difference?

You are in other peoples' tapestries whether you want to be or not. The question is do you want to be a vibrant color or insignificant thread? We at Disabled Student Services have recognized that the role of once "academic support service provider" has now evolved into "counselor" with a little "c." Through extensive training in Control Theory/Reality Therapy, we as staff members within DSS feel more skilled in a process which empowers students to take more control of their lives. Originally my training was to prepare me with skills to more effectively help my students. We could not afford to hire a counselor, so we decided to get training and become "counselors" ourselves.

The goals I have for today's session are:

- Define and explain the psychological model Control Theory.
- Model the skills involved in Reality Therapy (RT).
- Show how RT is a self-help tool used in growing personally, in coping with adversity, and in gaining more effective control of our own lives.

Control Theory is a psychological model founded by William Glasser (1985) that contends:

all behavior is total

all behavior is internally motivated

all behavior is our best attempt at the time to get our basic (genetically encoded needs met)

All we can do is behave; however, we have choices as to how we behave. Control Theory places responsibility on the individual to take effective control of his/her life.

Control Theory in that tenet alone may be hard for some of us to swallow because we live in a world that says, "It's not my fault." If we admit that we choose our behavior, then we are held accountable for our choices. There are only two choices: victim choices and responsible choices. Life is like a rushing river, and we are in a boat. The white water moves everything down the river -- twigs, boats, people. We can go against the current and move upstream, but that takes action. We have to pick up the paddle called personal responsibility and start rowing. The choice "to go with the flow" is a victim choice and blame is frequently used in order to compensate for the guilt of irresponsible behavior such as poverty, abuse, alcoholism, etc.

There are two kinds of people: balcony and basement people. What are you? What do you want? The first step in becoming the vibrant color that you want to be is to become proactive. All behavior is internally motivated, purposeful, and total, and is, at the time, our best attempt to get our needs met. People choose, machines react.

Become Proactive

What do you want? Recognize that you are the one who decides if you live with a stacked deck or if you deal your own cards. To live proactively means to make decisions based on what is responsible, right and reasonable regardless of how you feel. To live reactively means to make decisions based on how you feel regardless of what is responsible, reasonable and right. Your self-image controls your life.

Our wants drive our cars and we control where we go. We are in the driver's seat of our behavior car. Think of yourselves as a car that is being driven by an engine representing the 5 basic needs. Each of the four wheels represents a different part of our total behavior: acting, feeling, thinking, and physiology. Carry that a bit further in that where we go depends on our wants. We drive, using the steering wheel that represents our wants. However, our wants depend on what kind of fuel we have. Is the fuel quality or just generic?

Ironically, as we speak of cars, it was Henry Ford who said, "Whether you think you can or can't, you're always right." Your mind can only entertain one thought at a time. Fear is the emotional darkroom where negatives are developed. Remember that all behavior is total. Which behavior do you have the most control over?

What Are You Doing?

Now that you have decided that it is up to you to decide which hat to wear, it is time to consider what you are doing. Look at your roles. What are the behaviors associated with each role? What are you doing? Let's say you want to be in your students' balcony or quality world. How do we get there? As educational professionals, as parents, as friends, we cannot control anyone -- we can only influence, and the only way we can influence is to be need-fulfilling. There are two components to Reality Therapy: the counseling environment and the procedures that lead to change. Think for a minute about those who are in your balcony. How did they get there? The key word is involvement. They made an investment into your life. The key to a person's quality world in order to influence is called involvement.

Is What You Are Doing Working?

You know what you want, but are you getting it? In your private lives as well as your professional lives, in our relationships to your students and your clients, are you a strength builder/balcony person or are you a punisher? A buddy? A guilter? A monitor or controller? The question becomes, "Is what you are doing working?" Once we understand and accept the fact that we choose our behavior, we learn that we can choose more effective behavior.

What will you do differently?

If the what you are doing is not working, then changes should be considered. This is the planning stage. Why should our plan for ourselves or our students be simple, attainable, measurable, repetitive,

immediate and consistent? Because many of our students, clients, and friends have what Glasser (1972) calls the failure identity. "A person with a failure identity is one who lacks a concept of himself as a loved and worthwhile individual and will not work for any long-term goals. Long term goals seem foreign to a person just trying to feel comfortable today and tomorrow" (Glasser, 1972). Therefore, it is during the planning stage that we must stage the atmosphere for success by making a plan so simple that the person can experience some measure of success. We must help students see that if they keep doing what they are doing, they will keep getting what they are getting and that is not what they want.

Another cardinal rule is RT is "Don't accept excuses." The only way we can get our scales of wants and needs balanced is to do what is responsible. When scales are out of balance, excuse-making is not a responsible behavior and has no weight on the scales. Reality therapy is a counseling technique that allows the counselor to be a strength-builder who helps clients clarify wants, evaluate present behaviors, and establish plans that lead to change.

Within Disabled Student Services, two of hats I wear are instructor and case manager/counselor. In LS102 I teach problem solving through Control Theory and have developed an approach to assist students using the acronym ACCEPT.

A -- accept that you choose your behavior, and you are responsible for its consequences

C -- clarify your wants

C -- connect your wants to your behaviors

E -- evaluate if your present behavior getting you what you want

P -- prepare a plan for change

T -- try it!

As case manager/counselor, I have the opportunity to apply the skills of Reality Therapy to the counseling environment. To help me remember the process, I use WII-FM.

W -- win through involvement

I -- investigate the quality world (what do you want?)

I -- investigate present behavior (what are you doing?)

F -- facilitate self-evaluation (is it working?)

M -- make a plan for change

Now what have we learned?

1) We have learned that Control Theory is a psychological model that places responsibility on the individual. People are responsible for their behavior -- not society, not heredity, not past history. People can change and live more effective lives. People behave for a purpose: to mold their environment as a sculptor molds clay, to match their own inner pictures of what they want.

2) We have learned about the behavior car. What are the 4 components of behavior? Which part do we have the most control over?

3) We have learned to use questions to help us work through our own behavior as well as those of others.

4) And lastly, we have learned that some of our hats may not be appropriate; and it is up to us to change them. A nurse's hat will not work at a demolition site. It's time to evaluate: if what you're doing is not working -- change hats!

References

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