

Self-reflections on the characteristics of an effective counselor

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



An effective counselor is one who produces positive outcomes in a client or a reduction in adverse symptoms. This essay outlines, that the key characteristics commonly recognized across the literature as being core to counselors achieving effective outcomes with clients are empathy, self-awareness, congruence, acceptance and attentive communication skills. It will also provide a self-reflection on my own characteristics and how these align with the desired Counselor characteristics and identify areas where self-improvement can be made in accordance with currently recognized techniques.

Rogers (1957/2007) often cited paper was seminal in describing the features of a successful therapeutic relationship. Rogers argued empathy was the ability to sense the client's emotions as the therapists own but not get bound up in it. Empathy 'seemed essential' according to Rogers. Reeves extends the empathy skills of a good counselor to include not just understanding where client's feelings are coming from, but actually help them to name the emotions. Current research suggests that mindfulness techniques can enhance empathy in Counseling students. Whilst growing up I did not consider myself to be empathetic, I have since over time and upon self-reflection discovered that I actually possess a strong ability to recognize emotions in others through body language and facial expressions and this combined with my strong motivation to help people is the primary reason I am studying to be a counselor.

Self-awareness is a critical counseling skill due to the need for counselors to work with a diverse range of people. As human beings, all counselors are

subject to a range of cognitive biases which has the potential to harm therapeutic relationship. Therefore it is pertinent for counselors to be able to recognize and challenge these internal biases in order to remain attentive to the needs of the client. In my own life I have challenged my personal biases through developing strong friendships with a diverse people from array of different backgrounds and cultures.

Acceptance from the literature refers to unconditional positive regard of the client and their perspectives as a fellow human being. Rogers admits that this regard is transient and changes during the session between unconditional positive and conditional positive regard. Reeves describes accepting as being an important characteristic for Counselor to have in order for a therapy session to be seen as “ fluid and relational” as opposed to being “ mechanistic”. Others have noted that acceptance has now become embraced as such a core skill that it now forms the basis of several therapeutic methods. From my own perspective, I feel I have frequently challenged and changed my own beliefs, this process has led to my acceptance that there are many different ways of viewing the world that are all valid. In my own life I feel that people have tended to open up to me with personal and private aspects of their lives, I attribute this to my openness and ability to demonstrate this accepting, non-judgmental positive regard.

Congruence is presented as the helper providing accurate feedback to the client of how they are presenting themselves during the session. Rogers also states it genuineness and “ the opposite of presenting a façade”. Reeves expands on this idea to say that the Counselor should share insights on this

perception of the clients' experience during the session. In my own life, I feel that although I have assisted friends and family in an empathetic way, I'm not sure I can say I have done this necessarily in a congruent way and therefore this is a skill I will need to focus on developing as I progress through the course.

Whilst a counselor may be genuine, empathetic and accepting, if the client does not feel adequately understood then therapy may not be well received. Amis lists a number of characteristics such as active listening, attendance, summarizing and paraphrasing which can be summarized as attentive communication skills. This I feel is an area that requires greater development in me, whilst at times I demonstrate these skills, I feel my attendance to conversations is dependent on my stress levels at the time. Course training as suggested will expose me to these skills and therefore should foster these aspects of the therapeutic relationship.

Conclusion

This essay reflects on the core characteristics of an effective counselor.

Whilst there are many different views in the literature commonly cited traits include empathy, self-awareness, acceptance, congruence and attentive communication skills as key to achieving successful therapy outcomes with clients. I have also identified how I perceive my personal qualities currently fit with the model of the ideal therapist and elaborated on a number of areas for continued development.