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**“Plain talk about Counseling Ethics”**

**.....tales from an imperfect counselor**





## *About the seminar*

- 15 minute break @ 3:00 p.m.
- 3 CEUs in ethics
- Evaluation at the end
- Based upon ACA, ACES, and AMHCA ethical principles



## *plain talk outcomes....*

- benefit from “plain talk” about counselors’ imperfections in ethical areas
- understand the implications of ethical imperfections
- identify unproductive responses to ethical weaknesses
- participants identify 1 “imperfection”
- develop confidence in ability to correct ethical errors in counseling roles
- opportunity to review ethical principles



## *pain talk counseling scenario*

Sam and Rebecca, a couple planning marriage, have been your clients for 3 weeks. You have learned that they constantly argue about the “smallest” detail, are both possessive about the relationship, are obsessively jealous, and seem to be apathetic about real change and growth in their relationship. They constantly fail to complete homework assignments or practice the skills they discuss in counseling. In session, they lack focus and motivation and you are uncertain why they continue to attend. Today, as the appointment time approaches, you gaze out of your office window, watching for their car to arrive, and anxiously hope they do not show for their appointment. Not surprisingly, however, they arrive on time and attend the session. The session proceeds with the usual accusations and blaming, this time about Sam’s recent dinner meeting with a former colleague, Alice.



*document a counseling progress note for Sam &  
Rebecca*

Clinical note in record: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## *possible session note documentation*

*“On November 17, Sam & Rebecca were prompt for their couples session. They came into the therapy room with arms folded and solemn expressions on their faces. Today we used the entire counseling hour to focus upon Sam’s recent dinner meeting with Alice, a former colleague. In session, they argued often and were accusatory toward one another which seems to be a usual way of communicating. Not much progress in communicating with “I” messages or practicing compromise as they had promised last session. The session proceeded with Rebecca shouting at Sam and expressing her feelings and accusations about Sam’s insensitivity. Our usual goals continue to be their adherence to good communication skills, sincerity, the use of compromise, and controlling emotions, none of which have been attempted outside counseling to date.”*



## *plain talk outcomes*

documentation you do not see.....

*“In addition to the clinical note, I was growing more and more dispassionate about Sam and Rebecca. I found myself silently hoping they would not show for today’s appointment. I blew it because I expected them to display genuineness in counseling when I was feeling insensitive and apathetic as a counselor. I was preoccupied with my disdain for them and I am sure this resulted in apathy and counseling actions, overt or covert, that impeded the counseling process. Certainly these are paradoxical to the welfare of my clients as priorities.*”



## *about plain talk and imperfections*

*“One of the major ways of learning is through mistakes. They provide clues for further growth. . . . .”* Arnold Lazarus

*“Results! Why, man, I have gotten a lot of results. I know several thousand things that won't work.”* Thomas Edison

*“I want to find people who have had to work hard and who have learned from their failures. Perseverance is no guarantee you'll succeed, but without it, it's almost guaranteed you won't”*

*Steve Case, CEO of American On line*



## *Resistance to self-evaluation*

- Denial
- Personal character flaws
- The halo effect
- Fear of liability
- Resistance to change
- Selective attention (seeing only what you are looking for)
- Paradigm paralysis



## *benefits of assessing ethical mistakes*

mistakes provide contrast (e.g., between ethical and unethical actions)

absolves guilt

mistakes humble us, keep us alert

performance mistakes teach valuable lessons

can be psychologically healthy to own and admit mistakes

encourages a self-development process of introspection and reflection

- confidence that we are capable of overcoming errors in performance



## *seminar concepts*

In the context of the seminar, “plain talk” refers to:

- *Direct, unabashed opinions, to the point, open and unadorned by constraints and pretense.....*

Imperfection refers to:

- *the quality or condition of being less than ideal; a shortcoming; defect; fault; blemish. In counseling, imperfections refer to occasions when the counselor’s actions, decisions, skills are shown to be defective given a necessary and suggested course of action.....*

Tales refer to:

- *truthful stories or narratives about the imperfect counselor’s work, somewhat embellished and always with fictitious names*



*“The Old Storyteller”*



*plain talk*

**Tale 1: What About George?**



*plain talk*

## Tale 2: The Excited supervisor



*plain talk*

**Tale 3: Let me Tell You!**



# Common counseling imperfections

- Believing the destiny of clients to fail
- Theoretical omissions
- Waning energy
- Preoccupation with self (therapist's)
- Wanting sessions to end prematurely
- Proceeding with known doubt
- Rigidity about clinical course
- others



# Unproductive responses to imperfections

- Disowning failure or imperfections
- Repeating imperfections
- Trying harder to make something that hasn't worked work
- Professional insulation and isolation



# Counselor development

- Adopt a “counselor development” motive
- Be open to the existence of imperfections (watch for denial, illusion, blame, selective attention, other defenses)
- Commit to discovery & integration
- Evaluate the outcomes of counseling
  - Self-evaluation
  - Clients’-evaluation & clinical outcomes
  - Peer-evaluation
- Check ethical implications
- Integration of discovery into current & future counseling roles



# counselor development activity

*With a goal of enhancing, strengthening, or overcoming work imperfections in counseling, closely examine any "tales" from your work history. Commit to discovering shortcomings and integrating discoveries into your practices. Complete the following items:*

Counseling imperfection and what is your source of discovery? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How have you deflected ownership? \_\_\_\_\_

Any denial, blame, other defenses? \_\_\_\_\_

What are the counselor's ethical implications? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

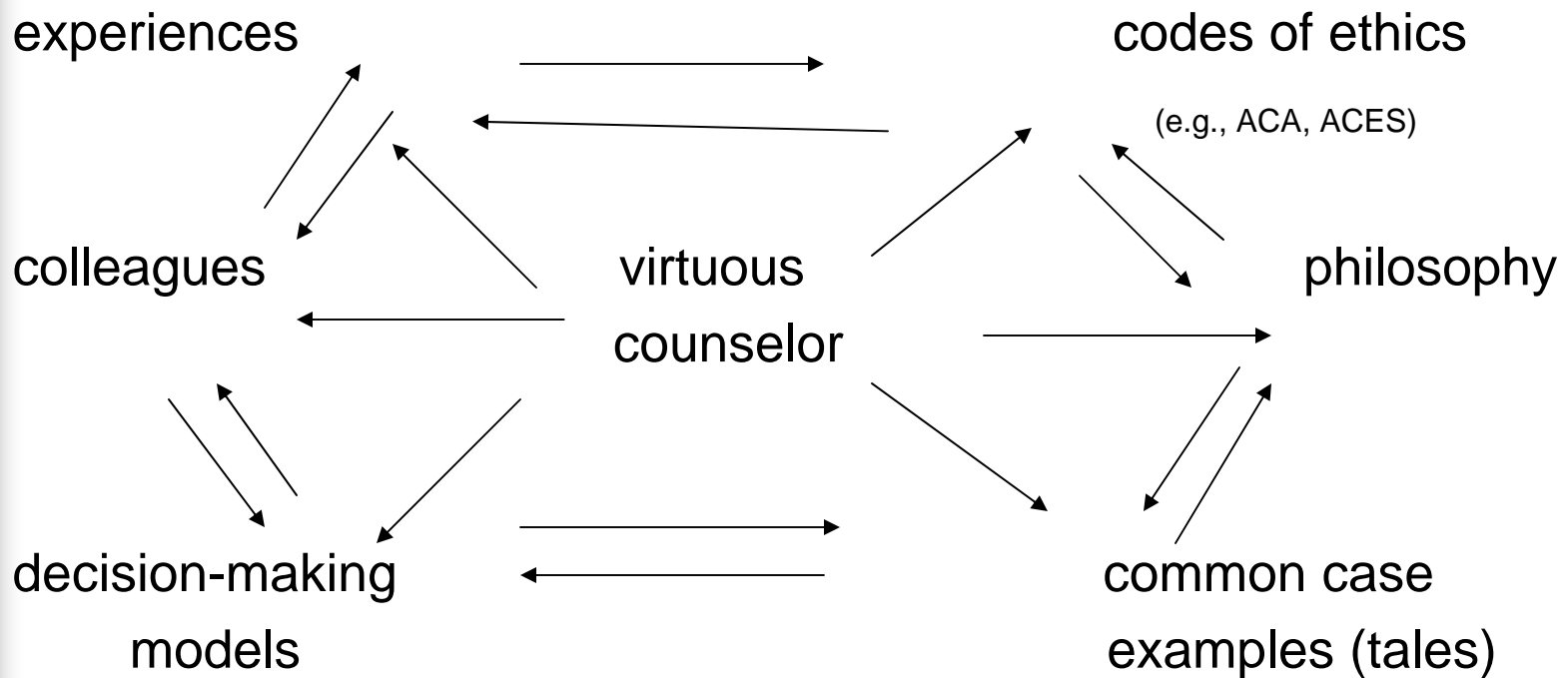
What is your plan to integrate your new discovery into your counseling practices? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How will you know you have been successful in the process? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# *A framework of ethical decision-making*





## *10 strategies that help reduce ethical imperfections in your work setting*

1. Examine the organizational culture in your workplace and observe the “ethical climate”
2. Make ethical codes and literature visible
3. Create an “ethics” officer/committee
4. Publicly commit to being ethical
5. Talk often with others in the work setting
6. Ethical training
7. Assess ethical competencies in employment interview
8. Employees sign a pledge of ethical conduct
9. Keep open lines of communication
10. Sensitive management of employee self-reports