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Counselling Skills

Managing People Problems at Work

Eric Garner

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Counselling Skills: Managing People Problems at Work
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Preface

Introduction to Counselling Skills

In the last few years, counselling has become something of a growth industry. It seems that no major life event, whether joyous or traumatic, can take place without being accompanied by an offer of counselling. This growth has extended to the workplace. Here effective managers have adopted the very best of counselling skills and adapted them to improve face-to-face communications with their staff. The result is not strictly counselling in the professional sense but a way of managing people that we can call "the counselling approach".

When it comes to handling difficult people problems that affect the health, productivity, and well-being of employees, past models of telling people what to do, followed by discipline and ultimately punishments such as dismissal, are no longer acceptable. Using a professional approach, with the use of known skills that work, and which treat people with dignity, respect, and valuing, is the only course that can succeed. This is the promise and reward that comes from learning the skills of the Counselling Approach.

Profile of Author Eric Garner

Eric Garner is an experienced management trainer with a knack for bringing the best out of individuals and teams. Eric founded ManageTrainLearn in 1995 as a corporate training company in the UK specialising in the 20 skills that people need for professional and personal success today. Since 2002, as part of KSA Training Ltd, ManageTrainLearn has been a major player in the e-learning market. Eric has a simple mission: to turn ManageTrainLearn into the best company in the world for producing and delivering quality online management products.

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1 The Counselling Approach

One of the key roles that managers play is to help their staff deal with problems that get in the way of them working at full effectiveness. These may be work-based problems, home-based problems, or life-change problems. When the manager uses "the counselling approach", he or she stands the best chance of helping their staff resolve these problems, not by finding answers for them, but by skillfully steering them towards their own answers. Here are some of the key aspects of "the counselling approach".

1.1 What "the Counselling Approach" Is

There are many different definitions for "counselling", but the one that sums up the role that managers at work play is that "counselling is a way to identify, recognise and overcome the blocks to self-awareness, wholeness, and spontaneity." In short, this means that managers have a responsibility to spot when things are troubling their staff, to recognise their responsibility in doing something about it, and to then help the employee back to full effectiveness.

1.2 Problems at Work

Problems at work are not just problems that arise at work, but problems that arise at home and affect people's work. This can run the whole gamut of life problems, from sickness and health, attendance and absence, to working performance and team-playing.

1.3 People Maintenance

There are 5 alternatives to the counselling approach, none of which are as effective as counselling. These are:

a) ignoring the issue in the hope that it will go away
Some managers do not feel comfortable handling people problems and choose to ignore them. Although they may recognise that an employee operates at below par because of a personal problem, they convince themselves that it has nothing to do with them.

b) telling people to "grow up" and sort themselves out
The "telling" approach to people management is still practised by many managers who believe in the traditional way of dealing with people problems. This approach to managing others is based on a military model and makes the following assumptions:

· people are basically lazy, feckless and unable to work things out for themselves
· people do not have enough self-control to discipline themselves and therefore need others to keep them in line
· people have problems because they are weak, ineffectual and lack moral fibre
· people do not know how to deal with their problems either in or out of work, but management do.

c) giving advice based on what you think
When confronted by people problems, many managers opt for the advising, or Agony Aunt, approach. This is the approach used on personal advice pages of magazines. The Agony Aunt approach can have a number of

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benefits. When the manager genuinely knows what is best for the employee, he or she can give useful advice about what the employee should do. The manager may also offer alternatives that the employee hadn't thought of. The Agony Aunt approach also has some serious drawbacks. It assumes that the manager has the answers to the employee's problem which may not be the case. It assumes that the employee can't work things out for themselves. The Agony Aunt approach has the flavour of "tea and sympathy"; its answers are invariably along the lines of: "Now this is what you should do, love."

d) manipulating people to do what you want
When a manager manipulates others, he or she undertakes to help them but leads them to an outcome that has already been decided. In a manipulative helping relationship, the manager resolves every problem with people in the same way, eg by sending them to a counsellor. This is the way that the manager has decided is the answer to every problem. It re-confirms his or her power and fools both the employee and the manager that they know what is best.

e) discipline and punishment
The discipline and punishment response is the knee-jerk response where the employee's problems affect performance. In such cases, managers are rarely interested in causes and solutions only at dealing with the effects.

1.4 Workplace Problems

Unlike the 5 alternatives above, the counselling approach acknowledges 3 principles about people and their workplace problems:

a) having problems that affect us mentally, emotionally, and psychologically is a normal part of life. It is not something to be ashamed of or to pretend doesn't exist.
b) when employees have problems that get in the way of their work, the organisation has a problem.
c) the responsibility for doing something about it rests with the employee's manager.

1.5 The Manager as Helper

Until a few years ago, it would have been unusual to see the manager's role towards his or her employees as one of "helping". In the past, helping others would have been a specialist role, or indeed no role. Employees would have been expected to sort out their problems themselves. The role of helper may not come easily to all managers. It requires skills, dispositions, and a level of self-awareness. But it is a role that can be learnt and mastered.

1.6 Emotional Intelligence

The role of the helping manager coincides with the increased importance of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in the workplace. EQ means understanding the part that feelings and emotions play at work and in eliciting optimum performance. EQ is increasingly becoming a key attribute of switched-on managers.

1.7 The Principles of the Counselling Approach

The affect that personal problems can have in the workplace is enormous. They can get in the way of individuals working at their best, diverting the organisation from what it should be doing, and can potentially fracture teams and lose valuable people. The counselling approach, together with the skills of EQ, is one of the most effective ways of resolving this.

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The counselling approach to people problems has five key principles. These are:

1. when people at work have a problem the organisation also has a problem
2. the counselling approach is the best way to get to the root of a difficult problem concerning people
3. the nature of the problem and its solution are best approached through discussion
4. the problem's solution is ultimately the employee's solution
5. the manager is there to help the process and his or her role is that of facilitator.

"All people at work may need some form of counselling at some time in their working lives." (IPD statement on Counselling at Work)

The manager who does not possess the skills and intelligence to help employees with personal problems puts themselves at a huge disadvantage today. The counselling approach has become a "must-have" skill for modern managers.

1.8 Key Points

1. In the workplace, the counselling technique is used to help others manage their own decisions.
2. People problems may arise as a result of workplace issues or may be brought into the workplace from outside.
3. According to surveys, nearly half of all employees rate their managers as poor communicators.
4. Ignoring people problems on the grounds that they are nothing to do with work may make the problems worse.
5. Telling people how to sort their problems out assumes that they are weak and incapable of working things out for themselves.
6. The counselling approach to people problems makes use of the principles, skills and assumptions of counselling proper.

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2 Awareness, Acceptance, and Growth

There are two cycles that are open to people who find themselves with problems at work or at home. The first cycle is the Ignorance, Blockage, Inaction cycle. People remain in ignorance of the issues that are causing them (or others) problems. Ignorance means they block out the need for resolution and so nothing happens. The problem remains and may become worse.

The alternative cycle is the Awareness, Acceptance, Change cycle. This is the opposite of the previous cycle. People come to realise they need help and ask others to guide them through to a solution that deals with the problem and opens up new possibilities.

Here is how the Awareness, Acceptance, Change cycle can be managed.

2.1 Discuss the Issues

The route to Awareness always involves discussion of the issues that are causing a problem. If you manage people, this will be some form of counselling or helping interview. Arrange to sit down with the employee with the problem and talk through what the problem is. Don't just restrict yourself to the facts. Discuss people's feelings as well as these are key to whether people are motivated to change. For example, let us say that one of your employees is a young male who has started to arrive late to work every Friday. In your chat, ask your employee to talk about the change, why it has happened, and what problems this is causing. Aim to get to the root of the problem by listening and careful questions.

2.2 Opening Up Awareness with the Johari Window

Often people don't recognise that they have a problem. This occurs when people get stuck on the Ignorance, Blockage, Inaction cycle. They don't accept that there is an issue and so don't see the need for change.

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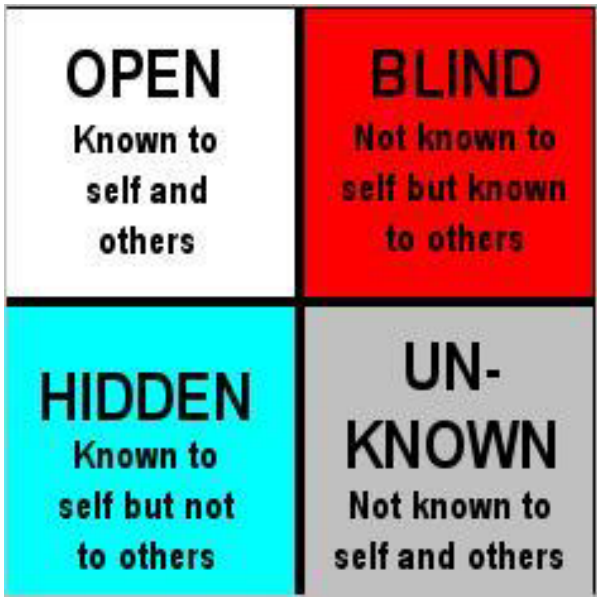
One model that helps you understand the unawareness that people can have is the Johari Window. This is a model created by Jo Luft and Harry Ingham that describes four kinds of awareness that we all have. These are the awareness windows:

a) the open window. These are things that we know about ourselves and others know about us.
The Open Pane on the Johari Window is that part of ourselves that we knowingly reveal to others. It consists of all those known facts about ourselves, such as our personal life histories, and also how we openly feel about ourselves and others. People with large Open Panes are likely to be relaxed and outgoing with nothing to fear from what others say to them. They are learners of life. In any relationship where your Open Pane is large, you are likely to be honest with others, revealing not just your strengths but also your weaknesses. Most successful relationships progress by a gradual opening up of the Open Pane on both sides. The counselling process itself can be viewed as a process of opening up the client's Open Pane with the person being willing to discuss their problems openly and honestly.



b) the mask window. These are the things that we know about but keep secret from others.
The Mask, or Facade, Pane on the Johari Window consists of all those things that you know about yourself but which you keep hidden from others. These consist of thoughts, feelings and needs that you fear revealing because of the effect they may have on your relationship with others. A mask is, of course, essential in all social relationships. We do not tell others everything we think or feel particularly where this might be hurtful or damaging to people we care about. In honest and trusting relationships, however, we are able to let down the mask and increase the Open Pane. In counselling, people with a large Mask Pane may pretend to be someone different from who they really are. They may stay quiet, doing more listening than talking, more watching than doing.

c) the blind spot window. These are the thing that others know about us but for some reason we still cannot see.

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The Blind Pane on the Johari Window consists of all the things about ourselves that others see but we don't. For example, in a relationship with another person, you might think you are charming and pleasant but they may be put off by what they see as falseness and artificiality. In a counselling situation, people with large Blind Panes often resist feedback for fear that it will damage their own carefully-constructed self-image. The wonderful person they thought they were has feet of clay! Such people often use defensive tactics such as irrational thinking, excessive talking and half-listening to protect their blind spots. Counselling someone with a large Blind Pane is likely to lead at some point to a confronting or challenging situation when the counsellor may have to point out exactly how the person comes across to others.

d) the unaware window. These are the things that we don't know about ourselves and nor do others.
People who have a low level of interpersonal contact are often portrayed as having large Unknown Panes. They make themselves immune to what others say about them, being unaffected by anything others say. They make difficult if not impossible counselling subjects, although they may need it most. They are likely to find personal change difficult because of their lack of self-awareness.

When people get stuck with their problems, they are often in the unaware window or the blind spot window. Bringing it to their attention takes them out of both windows and towards the open window.

2.3 Refusing to Budge

People who refuse to accept that they have a problem often use what are called "interruptions" to persuade themselves that there is no problem. For example, say a manager repeatedly avoids attendance on a training course. They might use the following justifications:

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a) "it's a waste of time": this is known as an "interjection", a belief we create to suit our inaction
b) "the trainer's no good": this is known as a "projection", a belief we project onto others as an excuse for not doing anything
c) "I'm not good enough to attend": this is known as a "retroflection", where we put the blame for inaction on ourselves
d) "I'm too busy": this is known as a "deflection", where we create an excuse for not changing.

All these are excuses to avoid doing something that we should do. They are our own justifications for inaction and often have no basis in fact or common sense.

2.4 Giving People Feedback

If you have people who are stuck and unaware, one solution is to give them feedback to show them how their behaviour affects others. For the young employee who comes to work late on Friday, this may mean showing them how others have to cover for them, how work is delayed, and how others feel about taking on his work as well as their own. By opening their eyes and showing how others see them, you are aiming to move the issue fully into the employee's Johari Window open window.

2.5 Jewels in their Crown

Many managers find it hard to focus on the good points of some of their team. The view of people as resource, rather than growing and changing human beings, means that the job of management has invariably been to measure, assess and evaluate people. In some cases where people don't "measure up", this has meant non-acceptance.

Acceptance of others means discovering what is worthy in them. It means discovering the jewels in their crown. It is:

- a warm regard for people as persons of unconditional self-worth
- valuing people no matter what their condition, behaviour, thoughts or feelings
- respect and liking for people as separate, unique persons
- regard for the attitudes of the moment, whether positive or negative
- an attitude of non-judgment towards others.

2.6 Jewels in our Crown

One of the principal ways in which the counsellor encourages their clients to accept themselves, warts and all, is to model that they, as counsellor, accept themselves, warts and all. In acceptance, the counsellor leads by example; he or she can see the jewels in their own crown.

When we accept ourselves, we acknowledge both good and bad in ourselves: our physical shape and appearance; our strengths and weaknesses; our successes and failures; our talents and our failings.

"If a person constantly criticises themselves and runs themselves down, then it is difficult for that person not to be critical and emotionally punishing to other people. Put in another way, we need to see the jewel in ourselves before we can see it in other people." (Ray Woolfe)

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2.7 Acceptance

Once people are aware that there is a problem that needs addressing, they can move rapidly into the stage of Acceptance. Acceptance implies not just acceptance of the problem and the affect it has on others; it also means accepting responsibility to do something about it. In the workplace situation, this means exploring solutions with someone who can steer you back to meeting the aims and standards of the organisation.

The Awareness, Acceptance, Change cycle underlies any counselling intervention you make. It is the process of a successful counselling interview or a series of chats with people about their problems. It is the route to getting people back to where they should be.

2.8 Key Points

1. An awareness of what happened and what is happening now is often the first step in helping people who have problems.
2. Becoming self-aware can help us move forward and change if we see it as something to learn from.
3. Every relationship we have can be described in terms of its levels of openness and awareness.
4. People with large blind spots often don't want to know about themselves from others.
5. People who put up large facades don't want others to know too much about them.
6. People who are open about themselves and willing to listen to others' views about them are likely to be more amenable to counselling.

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3 Personal Growth

Just like growth in the plant world, personal growth in people requires the presence of certain conditions which encourage and feed development. In plants, the conditions are external: warmth, moisture, food. In humans, they are internal.

Erik Erikson was a Danish psychologist who developed a model, called Lifespan Psychology, which described the 8 conditions needed for lifetime growth. Not only are these conditions needed throughout our lives; they are also needed at stages of our life when we need to overcome problems that keep us stuck.

Here are the 8 conditions.

3.1 Trust

The first condition for personal growth is the first condition for survival as a new-born baby: trust. In truth, we have no option at this age but to trust in others, since we cannot do anything for ourselves. In the same way, all personal growth starts with a belief that this will be a process that will be valuable for us and others.

3.2 Bind and Bond

The following story illustrates "trust".

A little girl and her father were crossing a bridge.

The father was scared so he asked his little daughter, "Sweetheart, please hold my hand so that you don't fall into the river.
"The little girl said, "No, Dad. You hold my hand."
"What's the difference?" asked the puzzled father.
"There's a big difference," replied the little girl." If I hold your hand and something happens to me, the chances are that I may let your hand go. But if you hold my hand, I know for sure that no matter what happens, you will never let my hand go."

In any relationship, the essence of trust is not in its bind, but in its bond. The same relationship exists when you perform the role of counsellor to someone who needs your help.

3.3 Autonomy

Around the age of 2 or 3, we start to set off on our own to explore the world around us. We literally start to stand on our own two feet. This is a time of experimentation, mistake-making and the forbearance of others. The same happens in the early stages of personal development when it is more usual to find things going wrong than going right.

3.4 Giving Calhoun the Ball

The following story illustrates "autonomy", doing your own thing.

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There once was an important football game between two teams. One team was much smaller than the other. Their chief asset was Calhoun, the fastest back on the field.

Before the game started, the small team's coach told his quarterback to make sure Calhoun got the ball. The game started but the small team were overwhelmed. Four more times the coach screamed at his quarterback to give the ball to Calhoun but Calhoun never got the ball. The game was lost.

In the dressing room the furious coach confronted his quarterback: "I told you five times to give the ball to Calhoun and now we've lost the game." The quarterback stood tall and told the coach, "Five times I called the play to give the ball to Calhoun. The problem was that Calhoun did not want the ball."

3.5 Initiative

Initiative is the third condition in Erik Erikson's conditions for personal growth. The word "initiative" comes from "initiate" meaning to start something new. This is what we are constantly doing around the age of 4 or 5. Everything fascinates us. Nothing is barred. Work and play are the same. Curiosity drives all. The same is true of this stage of personal growth, when if something goes wrong, we simply dust ourselves down, pick ourselves up and try something else.

3.6 Digging a Trench

The following story illustrates "initiative".

One day an elderly couple who had retired to the countryside noticed a young man on the heath carrying a spade and a small case. The next day, the man appeared again and the following day too. On the next day, becoming suspicious, the couple decided to go up on the heath to see what he was doing. When they got there, they discovered a long trench in the ground.

Just then the young man appeared. Seeing their surprise, he explained, "I'm digging a trench. Well, actually I'm learning how to dig a good trench, because the job I'm being interviewed for later today says that experience is essential. So I'm getting the experience. And the case - it's got my lunch in it."

The next day there was a knock at the old couple's door. It was the young man. "I got the job," he said. The old woman smiled and said, "We knew you would."

3.7 Industry

In personal growth, industry means applying ourselves to learning the skills to manage new situations.

From the ages of 6 to 11, our learning is greater than at any other time in our lives. We simply burst with new interests, new hobbies and new adventures. It's a purposelessly busy time. In personal growth, we reach a similar stage when we believe that we can do anything in the whole wide world.

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3.8 Kicking to its Feet

The following story illustrates "industry", persistence and stickability.

In his book, "A View from the Zoo", Gary Richmond gives an example of the importance of working at something until you get it right.

He describes how a newborn giraffe learns its first lesson. Its mother positions herself over the calf and gives it a strong kick to make it stand. She then repeats it again and again. Even when the baby calf grows tired of being kicked to its feet, the mother kicks it again to stimulate its efforts. Finally, the calf stands for the first time on its wobbly legs. Then the mother giraffe kicks it off its feet again. Why? She wants it to remember how it got up.

In the wild, lions, hyenas, and wild hunting dogs all enjoy young giraffes. Being able to get up as quickly as possible is a way to stay with the herd, where there is safety. In working persistently to teach her offspring to stand, the mother giraffe is teaching it survival.

3.9 Identity

In our teenage years from 12 to 18, we become obsessed with the questions of identity: Who am I? What do I look like? Where do I fit in? To get the answers, we test, rebel and experiment, and join groups of others with the same identity as ourselves. The same questions arise in personal growth work where old images of who we are need to be replaced with new ones.

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Inés Aréizaga Esteva (Spain), 25 years old
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3.10 The Sting of a Scorpion

The following story illustrates "identity"; why, when we know who we are, we need to stay true to our nature, regardless of the outcomes.

There was a man in India who saw a scorpion drowning in some water. He decided to save it by stretching out his finger, but the scorpion stung him. The man still tried to get the scorpion out of the water, but the scorpion stung him again.

A man nearby told him to stop saving the scorpion that kept stinging him. But the other man said: "It is the nature of the scorpion to sting. It is my nature to love. Why should I give up my nature to love just because it is the nature of the scorpion to sting?"

3.11 Intimacy

From our late teen years onwards, we take our first major steps alone in the world. To succeed at this stage, we need to develop new relationships where we can be truly ourselves. This requires intimate contact with others. The opposite of Intimacy is Isolation where we live at arms' length from the world, shut away on our own. Intimacy is the 6th condition of personal growth.

3.12 I Knew You'd Come

The following story illustrates "intimacy".

The story is told of a soldier who saw his life-long friend fall in battle in No Man's Land. The soldier asked his lieutenant if he might go and bring his comrade back. "You can go," said the lieutenant, "but I think your friend is dead and you may be shot."

The lieutenant's words didn't matter, and the soldier went anyway. Under fire, he managed to reach his friend and bring him back to their trench. As the two of them tumbled in together, the officer checked them both and said, "I told you it wouldn't be worth it. Your friend is dead, and you are badly wounded."

"It was worth it, though, sir," the soldier said. "When I got to him, he was still alive, and I heard him say, 'Jim, I knew you'd come.'"

3.13 Generativity

Generativity means the power to generate and produce things for the good of others. Our mature years, from 35 to 60, are the years when we can produce what we believe we have been gifted to produce. We let our talents flower. This is also the penultimate stage in personal growth. We are able to bring something wonderful to others that wouldn't have happened without the changes in us.

3.14 The Acorn Planter

The following story illustrates "generativity", giving something back.

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While travelling in the French Alps in the 1930's, a young man came upon a rocky valley where he saw an old man with a sack of acorns and a length of iron pipe.

The old man was planting acorns in the ground. When the traveller asked him why he was wasting his time in the barren valley, the old man said, "My wife and son have died and I want to do something useful before I die too. I've planted over 100,000 acorns. Perhaps only a tenth of them will grow."

25 years later the now-not-as-young traveller returned to the same desolate area. What he saw amazed him. The land was covered with a beautiful forest two miles wide and five miles long. Birds were singing, animals were playing, and wild flowers perfumed the air. The traveller stood there recalling the desolation that he saw before. Now a beautiful oak forest stood there, all because someone wanted to give something back.

3.15 Integrity

Integrity is the last stage in personal growth. Integrity is the key quality of people over 60 who have grown fully and healthily. Their work is complete and rounded. It can be a true golden age. The opposite of Integrity is Despair, the feeling of hopelessness, when instead of a wonderful sense of completion, we have nothing to look back on but wasted opportunities and nothing to look forward to but death.

3.16 The New Emperor

The following story illustrates "integrity".

An ageing emperor in the East decided on a novel way to choose his successor. He called the city's youths to his palace. Handing out some special seeds, he told them, "Go and plant these seeds. In a year's time, I will judge your plants and choose the new emperor."

One boy named Ling took his pot home and planted the seed. Every day he watered it but nothing grew. Even though his friends at school were talking about their growing plants, Ling only had an empty pot.

When the day came to return to the palace, Ling went with a frightened heart. The emperor appeared. All the other youths had magnificent plants. When the emperor saw Ling's plant, he summoned him to the front and announced to the crowd, "Behold your new emperor! He has courage and integrity for all the seeds I gave you were boiled and useless. He was the only one not to cheat. He will be a wise ruler over you all."

3.17 Counselling & Growth

The conditions which Erik Erikson describes in his Lifespan Psychology can promote personal growth in a client in a counselling situation. To do this, the counsellor can...

1. build trust by showing trust
2. make it clear to the client that it is his or her process not theirs
3. encourage the client to explore meanings and options

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4. instil confidence in them that they are capable of working things out
5. suggest that they let go of old identities that no longer fit with who they are
6. seek ways to bring them closer to others
7. focus on what the client can offer others
8. seek ways to restore wholeness and resourceful health.

Erikson's theory offers us so many clues to how to live our lives. If we are surrounded by people who have our well-being in mind and know how to guide us, these conditions will happen spontaneously and we will truly be able to grow and become everything we can be.

3.18 Key Points

1. The conditions of growth help us grow psychologically at key stages of our lives; they are also present when we grow as individuals.
2. Trust that things will work out is the first stage and foundation of growth.
3. Autonomy means being allowed to explore and make mistakes without being directed by others.
4. Initiative and industry are the healthy features of childhood growth when we throw ourselves into new adventures.
5. Identity is the result of teenage growth, the process of discovering the role we want to play in life.
6. Intimacy is the characteristic of growth of the early adult years when we seek healthy relationships with others.

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4 Dispositions of Counselling

If you manage others, you'll almost certainly need to act at some stage in a counselling role. This could be in a professional capacity, such as in giving help on career moves or in a more direct way, such as on personal matters. The following dispositions will ensure that any counselling intervention you make will result in professional and effective outcomes.

4.1 Warmth

Warmth is the ability to positively relate to others. Any counselling relationship that hopes to help others won't get off the ground unless there is warmth present from the start. A cold hostile attitude on your part will simply close people down. Instead, drop your critical judgments and believe that what you are engaged in is of value to you, the other person, and the organization you both work for.

4.2 Empathy

If there is one disposition that ensures a successful helping relationship, it's empathy. Carl Rogers described empathy as "entering the private perceptual world of another person and being completely at home in it." In other words, you as the counselling manager need to get on their wavelength and know what they're going through. You then need to let the other person know that you understand what they're going through which requires the ability to put into words what you believe their mental and emotional state to be. Once you can do that, you open the door to solutions and can both walk through it.

Empathy is similar to, but distinctly different from, sympathy, as their etymologies show:

- pathos = Greek for "feeling"
- empathos = "pathos" meaning "feeling" and "em" meaning "in" ie "feeling in..."
- sympathos = "pathos" meaning "feeling" and "sym" meaning "with" ie "feeling with..."

A man fell into a large hole.
An uncaring person walked past, looked down and told the man how silly he was to find himself in the hole.
A sympathetic person walked past, and feeling sorry, jumped in the hole with him.
An empathetic person walked past, saw both the hole-dwellers and, having ascertained that neither wanted to be in the hole, fetched a ladder and helped them out.

4.3 Specificity

A counselling relationship is a helping relationship. It is not about discussing why things happened which is always speculative and personal, but what and how things happened, which is factual. One word that describes this approach is specificity, in other words, the need to stick to specifics. So, if one of your team comes to you with a problem, avoid "Why?" questions such as "Why did it happen?" and concentrate on "What?" questions such as "What are your options?"

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4.4 Genuineness

When you take on the responsibility of helping other people with their problems, you owe it to them to be genuine. Entering a counselling relationship and feigning interest is not just misleading, it is downright dishonest. When you are genuine, you are honest, open, truthful, trusting, and understanding. You are fully yourself with your own limits and faults. In being genuine, you are able to model behaviours that encourage the same thing in others.

4.5 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a key requirement in a manager who counsels others. You should not undertake counselling if you have an urge to share private information with others either for personal gain or to impress. Of course, there may be information that crops up during a counselling session that needs to be passed on. Matters that affect others, that perhaps breach a contract of employment, that break the law or could do others harm may all have to be reported. You should, however, never breach confidentiality of feelings. To make sure you don't find yourself in a difficult position, you should agree the limits of confidentiality at the start of a counselling relationship and re-visit the agreement at any point during the discussions.

Some counsellors distinguish three types of secrets...

- the private secret, which if revealed would cause the person harm
- the pledged secret which when shared is expected to remain confidential
- the entrusted secret which either implicitly or explicitly is understood to remain unrevealed.

4.6 Professional Distance

There is a certain point in the helping process when you have enough emotional involvement to understand others. Any more and you are too involved, any less and you are not involved enough. This point can only be experienced through remaining sensitive to the client's situation. It is the point of professional distance. This point allows you to understand others but also to remain distant enough to offer objective insight, suggestions and support.

4.7 The Touch of Integrity

The TOUCH of integrity is a mnemonic which stands for the five ingredients that help you to "act as one". They are:

- T for Trust. An employee needs to trust you fully and will do so only if your past record shows you are trustworthy
- O for Openness. The counsellor models openness to the client by not seeking to control the client, not listing "do's and don'ts", not hiding their own thoughts and feelings
- U for Understanding. Understanding means being prepared to listen even when the subject may not be of interest but accepting the value of it to the other person
- C for Confidentiality.
- H for Honesty.

Just as there must be integrity between counsellor and client, so there should be integrity between the counsellor and the organisation which employs them both.

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4.8 Self-Renewal

Being involved with other people's problems can be both mentally and physically draining. It can lead to burn-out which, although temporary, will make you unable to help people further. Some kind of self-renewal is therefore essential for people who regularly counsel others. Self-renewal can be any activity that brings you back from a feeling of tiredness and inadequacy to a feeling of being able to care and help again. For some, this can be a good long walk in the countryside; for others having someone else to talk to.

When people at work have problems, so does the organization. Helping them through these problems to resourceful solutions is more and more the role of managers and team leaders. Develop these 7 dispositions and you'll be able to practise this role with confidence and success.

4.9 Key Points

1. Warmth towards others results when we believe that their basic intentions are good.
2. Empathy allows us to see the world through another person's frame of reference.
3. Being specific in counselling means dealing with how things are, not why things are.
4. Counsellors need to be themselves and accept themselves in order to encourage others to do the same.
5. The ability to respect confidentiality is a prime requirement in managers who counsel others.
6. Showing understanding means listening to others because the issue is of importance to them even if it is not to us.

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5 The Counselling Interview

A counselling interview, which can also be called a "meeting" or "discussion", is any face-to-face exchange in which you play the role of helper to facilitate solutions that block another person's progress at work.

There are a number of important steps to work through to achieve success in a counselling interview. These are...

5.1 Aims

At one level, the aim of a counselling interview is to give an employee the chance to discuss a problem that is bothering them or you. At another, deeper level, the aim is to help the employee discover what they must do to overcome their own blocks to progress. It is thus a process to bring them to awareness, acceptance and change.

5.2 Preparation

Unlike other kinds of interview, it isn't always easy to prepare for a counselling interview. That's because you won't have all the facts in front of you when you start. You can, however, prepare yourself mentally, prepare the environment physically, and prepare the employee.

John makes preparations for his counselling session with Angela. He...

1. makes out a checklist of what he needs to do
2. fixes a time, date and location where they won't be disturbed
3. clears the interview with her immediate supervisor

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4. notifies Angela in good time
5. finds out as much as he can about the problem
6. reads through Angela's records
7. thinks through his own feelings and thoughts
8. checks to see if there's an organisational angle such as a policy or constraint
9. gets a view from Personnel
10. arranges the room, furniture and coffee
11. ensures there will be no, absolutely no, interruptions
12. gets himself into the right frame of mind.

5.3 Environment

Your chief aim in a counselling interview is to get the employee to open up. Your principal role is to listen; theirs is to talk. One pre-condition of getting your employees to talk to you, often about very sensitive issues, is that they must feel safe. Do this by creating space and time and by getting them to see you, not as a prosecutor or persecutor, but as a friend and helper.

To create a climate of safety in a counselling session...

1. don't force people to undergo counselling under threat
2. bring people into the process from the very start. Let them have a say in the agenda and order of discussion. Plan to increase their level of ownership. The counsellor's power increases the more power he or she gives away.
3. check back frequently to see how the client feels
4. make the process familiar: talk their language, using their experiences, at their pace
5. push back the comfort zone slowly
6. do everything you can to raise people's self-esteem. This enables them to have their own inner resources to handle threats.
7. remember that psychological risks such as the fear of showing a side that they don't usually show may hold greater fears for some people than physical risk.

5.4 Role

You will play a number of roles in a counselling interview but the main one is to guide your employee to take on responsibility for unravelling his or her problem and taking steps to move forward. You are there to stand back and guide, suggest and see. You are not there to put them down, tut-tut, or pry. You are there to create new possibilities for them.

The counsellor...

- is neither critical nor insulting
- doesn't insist on helping when it is not needed
- doesn't sympathize or wallow in their self-pity
- doesn't indulge in theories

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- doesn't put people down
- doesn't make light of other people's problems, talk too soon, too often or too long
- doesn't fight their battles for them
- doesn't ignore what matters to them.

5.5 Stages

All successful interviews go through stages. In a counselling interview, there are 5 classic stages. If you follow these stages, without feeling you have to follow them religiously, you'll have a structure which will keep you firmly on track. The 5 stages are:

a) contracting, where you outline what you plan to do
b) exploring, where you open up the employee to discuss the issues
c) challenging, where you close the employee down to focus on the issue at hand
d) solutions, where you work with the employee to find ways forward
e) conclusions, where you sum up and plan ahead.

5.6 Process

The reason why these 5 stages work is that they are the best way for allowing the discussion to develop. They allow for a journey from problems to solutions; from facts to feelings; from you being in control to them being in control; and from lack of awareness to full realisation of what needs to happen next.

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The move from general to personal territory in a counselling interview can be detected in the progress through 4 main themes.

1. At the beginning of the interview there is a predominance of clichés. "How are things?" ; "On the whole..." Clichés allow people to feel their way in to the interview.
2. The next stage is to discuss facts. This is a move away from vague generalities to precise reporting.
3. Facts give way to opinions when people comment personally on the facts. "What do you think about that?"
4. The last stage of this progression is to bring in people's feelings - "How do you feel about that?" - which completes the move to highly personalised territory.

The move in a counselling interview from a wide-ranging exploration of the terrain to the isolation of the main issues is like a filtering funnel with layers of sieves:

- in the exploration stage, there is an opening up of the issues, signalled by phrases such as: "Tell me what happened"; "Where would you like to start?".
- in the challenging stage, there is a period of testing and probing. "How does this make you feel?"; "So neither of you can get on?"
- in the solution stage, there is a closing down of the ways forward. "What can you do now?"; "What route would you like to take?"

Facts are sieved to determine the relevant ones. Issues are sieved to find the important ones. Options are sieved to find the best one.

5.7 Follow Up

Just as all interviews need some pre-interview preparation, so all interviews need a post-interview follow up. That's because it is rare for people who have had problems to simply go away and sort them out all by themselves. How much more work you have to do in further meetings depends on the difficulties of the agreed plan. Sometimes, you will only need an informal check-up in a few days time. In other cases, you may need to meet formally several more times. Either way, you should always do something to show continued support and interest.

It's probably true to say that the success of counselling depends almost wholly on the face-to-face meeting between you and your employee. Get this right and your chances of success are almost guaranteed.

5.8 Key Points

1. Before agreeing to conduct a counselling session, you need to consider whether you are the right person to run it.
2. The best setting for a counselling session is one in which the person has time and space and won't be interrupted.
3. You need to create a safe climate in counselling if people are to explore personal issues.
4. The manager's role in counselling is to help and facilitate, not control and direct.
5. A counselling session moves from clichés to facts to opinions to feelings.
6. The progress of a counselling session is towards isolating what the real issues are.

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6 The Art of Listening

We all think that listening is natural and something we all do well. But real listening, - listening that is profound, focused, and empathic, - is rare. For those who perform the modern manager roles of communicating, people managing, and counselling, it is an essential skill.

Here are the key features of the art of listening.

6.1 Stop, Look and Listen

Skilled listening is total listening. It means stopping what else you are doing and giving yourself over, lock, stock and barrel, to someone else. When you are a total listener, your whole demeanour needs to say to the other person, "for the next few minutes, I want to focus on you, hear what you are saying, and understand you."

6.2 Take Yourself Out of Things

The biggest block to fully listening to someone else is what is going on in your own mind. If you hear yourself analysing what the other person is saying, thinking about it and planning your response, then you've stopped listening. You've simply picked up a few things and hurried to your own conclusions. Instead, listen to the end. Listen without interruption. And take yourself out of things.

6.3 Look Through a Window, Not a Mirror

When we talk to others, most of us interpret what people say through our own perceptions and understandings. In reality, we can do no else. Our view of the world has to be different from theirs. This is what is meant by looking at others through a mirror. In focused listening, however, you should aim to see things according to how they see things, even if you yourself don't share their view. This is empathic listening, or seeing things through the window of their frame of reference.

6.4 Stay Tuned In Even When You Don't Like the Music

One of the greatest challenges for anyone performing the role of professional listener is to listen to someone who is talking about things that wouldn't normally interest you. Most of us are quickly turned off by things that are not on our favourite list of topics. When this happens in your professional role, don't switch off. Go to that point of listening more intently than ever, even if you have to ask more questions and seek more explanations.

6.5 Turn-Ons and Turn-Offs

There are some things that we find it easier to listen to, and so remember, while other things are harder to listen to and remember. These are our personal sets of turn-ons and turn-offs. They work literally like the switch button on a TV or radio set.

Our turn-ons include:

- information we can relate to
- information that we have an interest in
- information that is unique, uncommon, or dramatic.

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Our turn-offs include:

- information that we can't hook up to
- information that we actively dislike hearing about
- information that is boring or we've heard before.

Great listeners know how to switch on to their turn-offs, by increasing their concentration, being willing to change their views, and taking an interest in people.

6.6 Be Alert, Alive and Attentive

You can tell if someone is listening carefully to someone else. There is a stillness in their body and their mind, like a calm lake. They don't move. They give constant eye contact. They are as near as possible to being on the other person's wavelength. This is the quality of attentiveness.

6.7 Take Your Time

Focused listening is "present moment" listening. Time sometimes seems to stand still when you are fully listening to someone. You are not in a hurry. You don't think about what's just been said or what you're going to say next. You are only aware in a fluid, soft focus way of what is being said here and now. Paradoxically, taking your time to listen doesn't take you longer. In fact, it is the most efficient way to listen.

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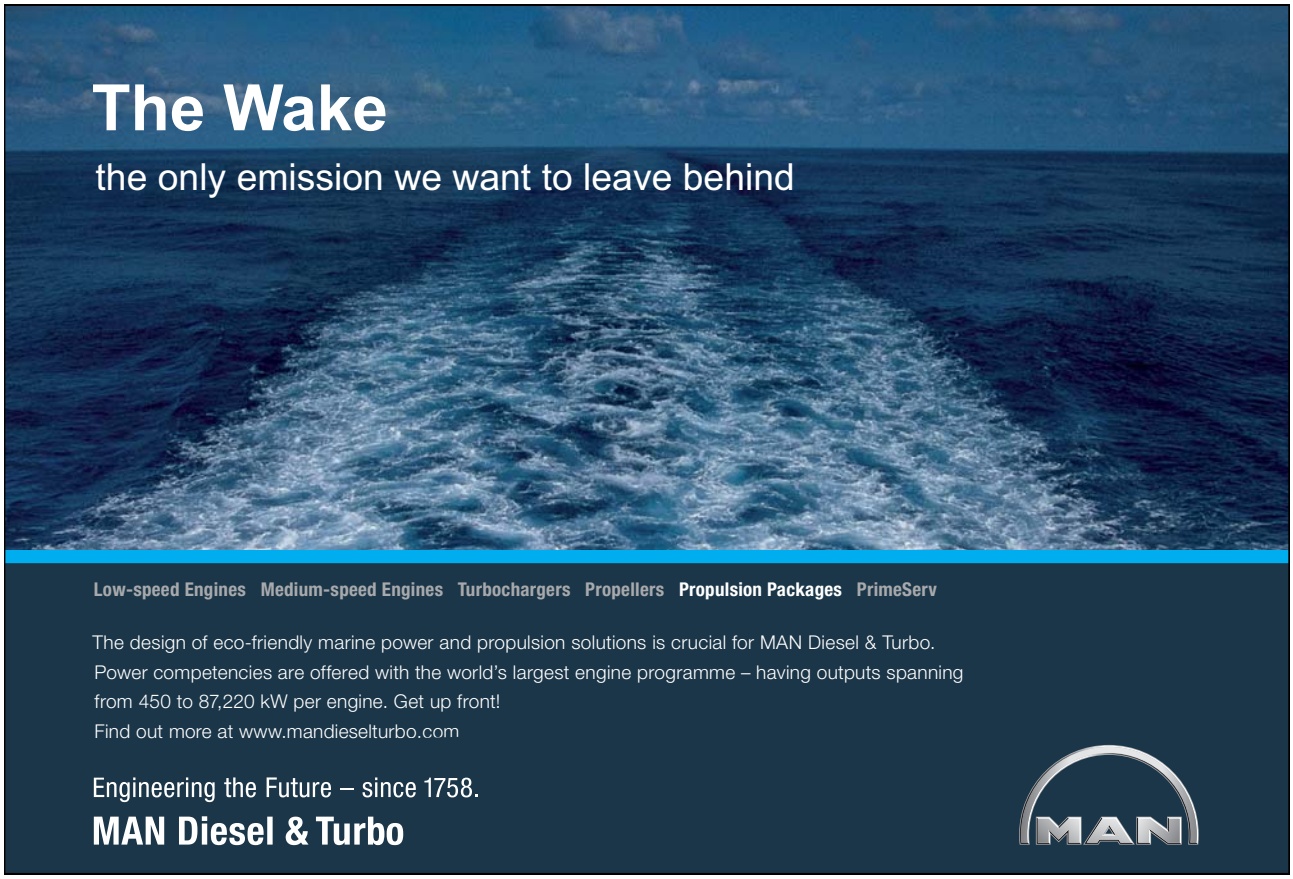

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6.8 Detective Listening

Sales trainer Art Sobczak says that you can learn a lot about listening from police detectives. That's because when they're first questioning a suspect or witness, they need to get them to talk. Art says that there are 3 listening techniques that successful detectives use:

1. detectives don't do or say anything that might cause their suspects to stop talking. While they're talking, you're learning, so stay focused, alert and fixed.
2. if the speaker is describing an event, sit tight and don't interrupt. If you need further details, go over the story in reverse chronological order. By reversing the order of recollection, you'll jar the person's memory and get more information.
3. allow your speaker some space after he or she's finished talking. Don't be frightened to pause and count a full 3 seconds before you say something. They may just fill the gap with something important.

6.9 Respond to the Moment

While, in focused listening, you may spend most of your time doing nothing but listening, you may have to intervene at some points to respond. Always respond in the moment, in other words, to where people are. Don't have a plan of what to ask. Only ask questions that pick up what the person has just said and where they are. If you have nothing to say, then say nothing. That way, the exchange is a true meeting of minds.

Listening is a powerful tool in all kinds of communication. The more skilled you are, - to the point that it has become an art, - the more successful will be your understanding and communication.

6.10 Key Points

1. Listening is the principal skill of counselling.
2. The best listening state is one that produces empathic, focused and active listening.
3. We can focus our listening best when we are calm and still.
4. We need to listen out for anything the other person says that shows awareness, acceptance and willingness to change.
5. Concentrate on the speaker to the exclusion of other distractions, including the chatter in your own head.
6. Listening means trying to understand another person's perceptions so you need to lock in to that person's way of seeing things, whether it makes sense to you or not.

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7 Questions for Meaning and Understanding

Writer Allan Pease says that there is no such thing as a natural-born salesperson, negotiator, or people manager. When someone succeeds at any of these roles, it is down to one thing: their ability to ask questions about the other person they're talking to. The same is true when you are helping someone with personal problems. Your ability to discover information and bring clarity to the way ahead depends primarily on what questions you ask.

There are 3 categories of question that will help you do this. They are:

7.1 Questions for Information

In the exploration stage of counselling someone, you will need to use three kinds of question for information. They are:

7.1.1 Open Questions

Open questions do what they say they do: they open people up. These are questions that can't be answered by a single word or phrase, such as "Yes", "No", "red", "18". Instead, they force people to give you explanations. For example, "What do you mean by that?" or "Could you tell me what happened next?"

In counselling, there are five main sub-species of open question:

1. elaboration: "Would you like to elaborate...?"
2. specific: "What exactly do you mean...?
3. personal responsibility: "What could you have done...?"
4. could: "Could you tell me about it...?"
5. feelings: "How did you feel...?"

Open questions are an invitation to others to tell us where they want to go.

7.1.2 Closed Questions

Closed questions do the opposite of open questions: they close people down to one word or one phrase answers. That's why they are helpful in giving factual answers. Closed questions often begin with "Who?", "Where?", "When?", and "Which?" type questions, as in "When did this happen?" and "What did he say?"

Closed questions are valuable for getting others to disclose specific facts about themselves that you want to explore, but don't result in anything extra. They are also important for confirming exact information. The following starter words signify closed questions: "are...?"; "do...?"; "who...?"; "when...?"; "which...?";"where...?"

Continuous closed questions result in dull conversations followed by awkward silences. People who are asked a series of closed questions often feel as if they are being interrogated.

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7.1.3 Summarising Questions

Summarising questions can be used to sum up information. In a counselling session, you should get into the habit of asking summarising questions at the end of each stage, ie at the end of contracting, exploring, challenging, and solution-hunting. They check out what has been agreed and help you move on.

There are two ways to gather information by summarising: the summarising statement and the paraphrasing question.

- summarising statements try to boil information down to make sense of what's been said. They can be interjected into a counselling session at any point when you want to draw breath and at the end of each of the main stages.

"Have I got this right? You said you were confused about everything. Your partner wants you to have the baby. You're not sure about that. Your career means a lot to you. At the same time you want to have children but not just yet."

- paraphrasing questions are your interpretation of what you think the client means, eg "So, you think that by putting your notice in, the company will beg you to stay?"

7.2 Questions for Confirmation and Response

These kinds of question are valuable when you want to confirm information with someone else. They are used when you want to know more information than you've already been given. There are 3 kinds of question for confirmation and response.

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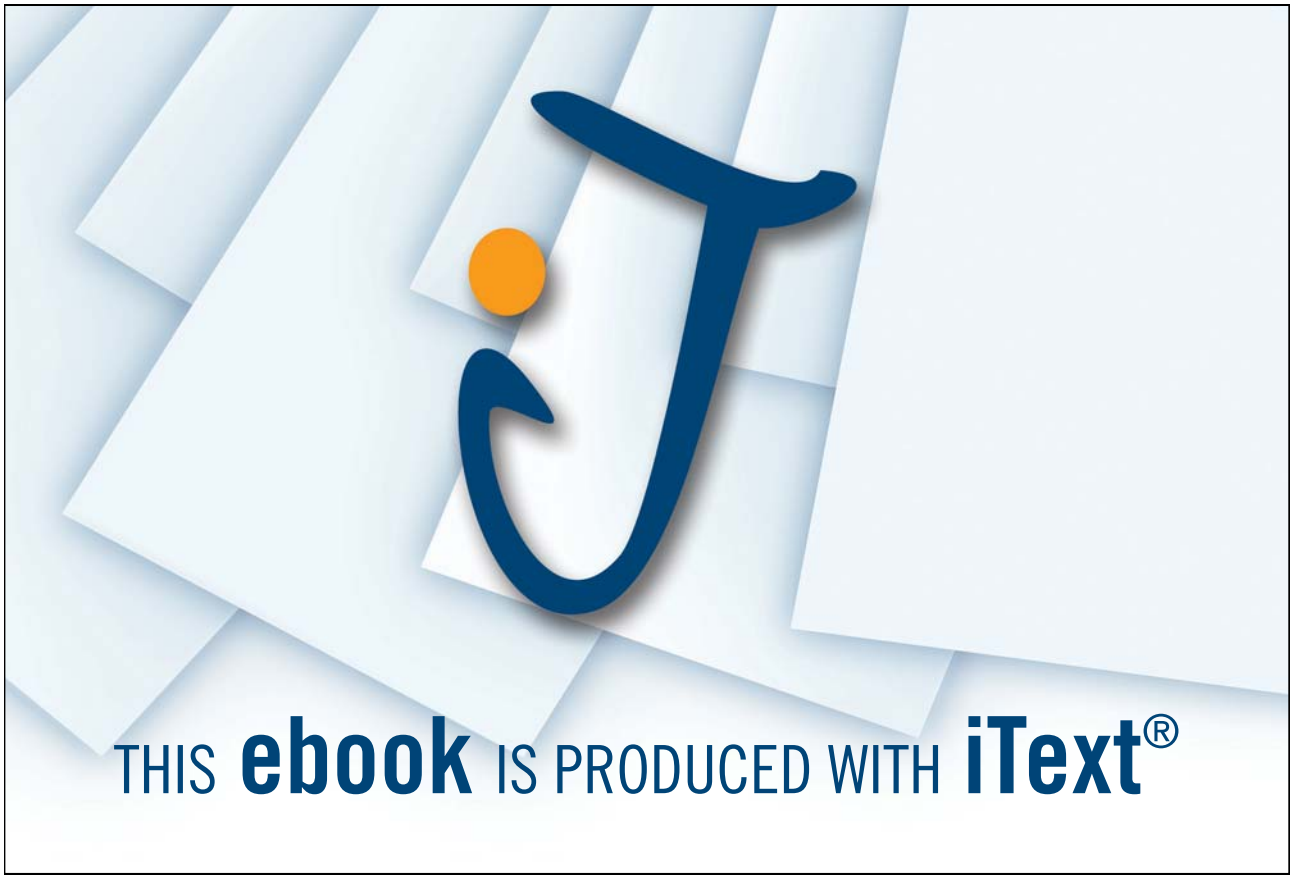

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7.2.1 The Reflect-Back Questions

The reflect-back question is also known as the minimal prompt or bridging. The technique is very simple. We pick the key word or last word in what the employee has just said and put it back to them. This signifies we need to know more...

"I couldn't do it..."
- "You couldn't?"
"No, it was too risky."
- "Risky?"
"Yes, it would have meant losing everything..."
-"Everything?"

You can use some simple body language techniques when asking a reflect-back question. You lean forward with your palms open, stretch the last letters of the word and then lean back and stop talking, eg "Riskyyy...?"

7.2.2 The Empathic Response

In counselling, the empathic response is a way of reflecting back what you understand the other person to be feeling. This type of response needs to be crafted with care: interpreting something important as trivial for example might result in you losing all credibility with the employee.

Notice the different ways we often respond to a small child who has fallen and grazed his knee and is crying.

1. "It doesn't look that bad."
2. "Stop crying! You're putting most of this on."
3. "I bet that feels sore, doesn't it?"

Only 3 is the truly empathic response. It is the one response that is likely to lead to the child stopping crying.

7.2.3 The Tentative Hunch

In counselling, the tentative hunch is a response in which you put a suggestion to the other person describing what you think he or she may be feeling or meaning. It uses three steps:

1. tell the person what you saw him do and heard him say
2. tell him the meaning you've tentatively given to his actions
3. ask if you're right.

For example: "You just said you liked your job and then you frowned. Would I be right in assuming there are good points and bad in what you're planning?"

An alternative if you have drawn no conclusions is to state what you see and ask them to confirm it. "When I mentioned John's name just now, a little smile came over your face. I'd be interested to know what you're thinking."

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7.3 Questions for Understanding

In counselling, people are often dealing with issues that may be difficult to discuss and unclear to them. They will often use language that masks what they truly mean. As a helper in the process, you can ask two types of question that either dig deeper into what is going on, or stand back and look at things from a different perspective. These kind of questions are sometimes called "downtime" and "uptime" questioning. They are often used in conjunction with the Reflect-Back question we've just looked at. Here are 7 examples:

7.3.1 Deletions

A "deletion" is a word used in conversation which has deleted other words that would fully explain it.

There are four main types of deletions that we slip in to everyday language. These are: unspecified nouns, unspecified verbs, unexplained comparisons and unsubstantiated judgments.

If someone were to say in a counselling session, "It's much more obvious what she wants: money. She throws money around like water." you could use the following questions to find out what is meant:

- "Money? How much money?" (unspecified noun)
- "How do you mean "throws it around"...?" (unspecified verb)
- "Why is it obvious?" (unsubstantiated judgment)
- "More obvious than what?" (unexplained comparison).

7.3.2 Distortions

Distortions are statements we make linking different ideas which we assume are connected, eg "It's bound to end in tears". Uptime thinking can usefully explore such distortions to find out why the speaker makes their assumptions. There are four main types of distortions: assumed links; cause and effect; presuppositions; and mind-reading.

If someone were to say in a counselling session, "I know you'll think me stupid but this is just another talking session. It'll lead nowhere. They bore me.", you could use the following questions to find out what they meant:

- "Why should I think you're stupid?" (mind-reading)
- "So have you had a similar session before?" (presupposition)
- "If you're bored, why is that due to the interview?" (cause and effect)

7.3.3 Generalizations

Generalizations are words used in everyday speech which suggest that one-off experiences have universal application.

There are four main types of generalizations. These are: nominalizations (general nouns); can't and must's; and universal comments.

If, in the course of counselling, someone were to say: "I've lost my self-esteem. I can't seem to think highly of myself. It must be the blows I've had. That's what working here does to you.", we might ask:

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- "What exactly do you mean by "self-esteem"? " (nominalization)
- "Why can't you bring yourself to think highly of yourself?" (can't)
- "Why must it have been the blows...?" (musts)
- "Does it happen to everyone then?" (universal comments).

7.3.4 New Angles

New angles means offering people who are stuck in the way they see things alternative ways of thinking. There are various techniques including positive re-framing; positive outcomes; second person quote; long time frame and different goal.

If, in counselling, somebody said "I feel really low for missing that promotion" we could respond as follows:

- "This means you have a valuable experience under your belt" (positive re-frame)
- "Perhaps you're meant for better things" (different goal)
- "I knew someone who missed a promotion and landed a better job a short while later" (2nd person quote)
- "I'm sure in a few years' time you'll see how this fits in" (long-time frame)

7.3.5 Wider Angles

Wider-angled questions are questions put from a wider-angled lens than the one the employee is currently looking through. A counsellor can take an objective view when a client sometimes can't. Five types of wider-angled question are: the generalized question, the values question, the different goal, the further goals and the big picture.

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If, in counselling, someone said "I feel really low for missing that promotion", we might ask:

- "That must mean you care very much about getting on." (values question)
- "How are things otherwise?" (generalized question)
- "Is this the right move for you?" (different goal)
- "What can you learn from this experience?" (further goal)
- "What are your overall career plans?" (big picture)

7.3.6 Counter-Evidence

Counter-evidence questions are useful in re-balancing excessively gloomy or overly optimistic views of things. Their effect is to suggest a new way of seeing a situation.

If in counselling someone said, "I feel really low for missing that promotion" a counter-evidence question might be: "Can you recall a time when you thought things were pretty bleak and they never turned out anywhere near as bad?" When people think of other experiences and compare them to the present one, they get a more rounded picture of what things mean. Counter-evidence questions are examples of downtime thinking.

7.3.7 Metaphor

The metaphor is a useful device to get someone to take a wider view of things and change their thinking.

If in counselling someone said,
"I just sort of sank at university. It just happens and now I feel I can't get out of it. Once I'm out of it I can see what it was all about but not while I'm in it."
you might suggest a metaphor such as:
"It sort of feels like the weight of the world on your shoulders?"

Any exchange with others is a live, unrehearsable, and unplannable exercise. How successful you are depends on the range of questions you can call upon and your skill at using them in the right place and at the right time.

7.4 Key Points

1. The only way to get others to talk is to show interest in them.
2. There is no such person as a natural counsellor; these are people who have learned the skill of asking questions.
3. Successive closed questions sound like an interrogation.
4. A typical response in counselling may be a request for more information or a suggestion as to what is going on.
5. When you suggest what is going on to the other person, do so in tentative ways that allow them to disagree.
6. We can explore meanings by analysing what people say or by asking them to take a wider view.

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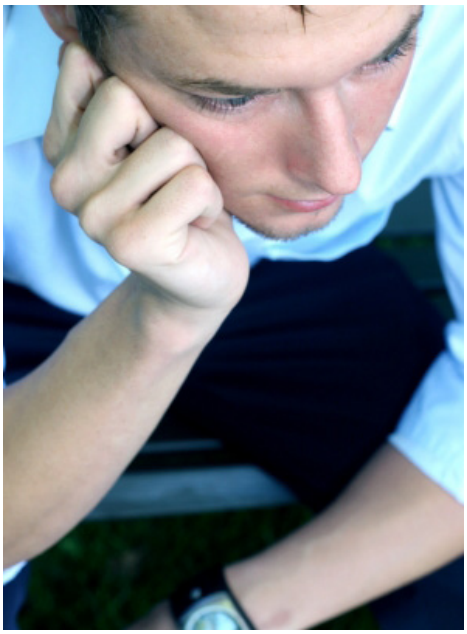
8 Challenging

In a counselling interview, challenging is the stage that follows exploration and precedes solutions. When you have exhausted your discussion on what the current situation is, you should have an idea of what the problem boils down to. It ought to be something that can be expressed in one sentence. In the work context, it will be the difference between how the organisation needs things to be and how things are. Challenging means putting this gap between what is and what should be to the employee and then asking explicitly or implicitly: "So what are you going to do about it?"

Challenging is not meant to be a confrontational stage of counselling, rather a holding up of the mirror to the employee who has the problem. Sometimes, employees will reach the same conclusion as you do and your challenging will not need to be too forceful. In these cases, the challenging stage will be short and you can both move on to solutions.

However, sometimes, your employee will not fully grasp the position and you will need to be explicit in your challenging. The following techniques can help you.



8.1 Bring Things Out In the Open

Sometimes the only way to make people aware of the nature of the problem is to spell it out, along with the implications of doing nothing. For example, "You realise that if you don't sort out this personality clash between you, one of you will eventually have to decide whether you are to stay in the team or not". Psycho-analyst Alfred Adler called this "spits in the soup" because spelling things out disturbs the employee's unawareness and, like spits in the soup, no longer makes it taste so nice.

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8.2 Point Out the Discrepancies

We cannot be whole and healthy in ourselves and our obligations towards others if things do not fit. High absenteeism doesn't sit with a need to work to contract. Good teamwork won't happen where there are unsatisfactory relationships between team members. Your role as counsellor is to point out these discrepancies and help those concerned take responsibility for getting things to fit again.

Discrepancies can exist in many different ways. Here are three examples:

- body language, eg, "You say you like the job, but you frown when you say it."
- statements, eg, "Robert, you say you like working here. Then you say you don't like the way things are organised."
- positions, eg, "Julie, your contract says you have to work these hours, but you're saying you can't guarantee to work them."

8.3 Incongruence

As children we are very good at congruence, or making things fit. When we want something, we line up everything to get it: our goals, our values, our actions, our expressions, our reasoning, our feelings, our needs. As adults, things don't always fit so neatly.

"Yes, I do work here.
Yes, I have a contract.

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Yes, I have missed some days.
Yes, I know I'm supposed to do what she says.
Yes, I did say she could stuff her job.
Yes, I still want to work here."

8.4 Link the Contradictions

One other way of looking at people problems is to identify the contradictions that cause the problem. "You say you want to work here and make a valuable contribution. But you've already had 9 days off this year." Or, "You know that the organisation needs this team to work harmoniously together. But you two aren't talking...". Putting the contradictions side by side is a powerful way of challenging because it presents the problem in stark detail.

8.5 Not Getting In Their Way

One of the best examples of using a reflect-back or empathic approach in counselling comes from Alfred Benjamin who is debriefing a counsellor after a session with a young lady disabled in a car accident. This is how the conversation goes:

"When Lucy said, "I'll never get married now that I'm disabled", what did you do? You know you felt terrible. You felt that the whole world had caved in on her. But what did you say? What did you show? Did you help her to bring it all out? To hear and examine it?

You almost said, "Don't be foolish. You're young and pretty and smart and who knows, perhaps… But you didn't. You simply looked at her and weren't afraid to feel what you both felt.

Then you said, "Right now, you feel that your whole life has been ruined by this accident".

"That's just it," she replied and cried bitterly.

After a while, she continued talking. She was still disabled but you hadn't gotten in the way of her hating it and confronting it!"

8.6 Challenge Faulty Thinking

One of the reasons people don't reach the same conclusions as you about their problems is because they may be stuck in faulty thinking. They make assumptions that seem like absolute truths to them, even if they're not. Challenge their faulty thinking to make them think again. "Why exactly does your mother's health mean you can't leave home?" "Are you really sure he'll react in the way you think?" "Why must you work every day for 10 hours?"

8.7 Gentle Suggestion

If you are stuck with employees who don't respond to your challenging, you can combine your challenge with the next stage of the process, solutions. This works where people may be stuck at the challenging stage because they don't know what to do next. By suggesting things they can do in a non-forceful and gentle way, they may come to realise that things aren't as difficult as they thought. The solution isn't such a big step after all. "You know, you could always give things a try for a week or two and see how it works out." "Have you thought of speaking to Ron? He had the same problem and now he's fine."

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In any kind of people problem, you have to get past the stage of Challenging if you and your employee are to move on. Sometimes, you will have to be brutal and throw cold water on people. At other times, you may only need to state the problem for a solution to be found. But deal with it you must.

8.8 Key Points

1. You should not force people into the challenging phase of counselling until they are ready for it.
2. One of the reasons for challenging people is to point out something important that they cannot see.
3. Irrational thinking patterns are those "musts" and "shoulds" which rule our lives for no good reason.
4. We can point out things that don't fit by reflecting back to people the discrepancies in their arguments, their positions, their body language.
5. Linking is a way of pointing out views, feelings and positions that are similar and which the person may not have noticed.
6. When we quietly repeat some of the things a person says, we help them to see their own positions.

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9 Moving On

Counselling solutions exist on three levels.

At one level, the outcome is the resolution of a troublesome problem (to the organisation, if not necessarily to the employee). At another level, the outcome re-affirms the ability of people to cope. And, at another level, it is a reminder that, no matter what life throws at us, we are always able to accept it, integrate it, and move on.

Every case of moving on needs to fit the situation and the person.

- for the habitual latecomer, it is a decision to rise earlier
- for the poor performer, it is a willingness to be coached
- for the bereaved employee, it is a plan to talk to a support group
- for the colleagues who can't get on, it is a commitment to see their relationship in a different light and to both make changes.

Ideally, solutions arise naturally out of the process of counselling. People see their problems and also see what needs to be done. Occasionally, however, solutions need to be imposed.

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9.1 Referrals

Referrals are outside solutions to people problems. An agreed referral of a problem to a third party is a solution, albeit a half-way one.

Referrals can be made in any of three directions:

1. to outside specialists who may be able to offer more detailed and expert support.
2. up the line to senior managers if more authority or power is needed behind a decision.
3. to internal specialists such as a medical department or Personnel department or the organisation's own counsellors.

The decision to refer should not be taken lightly or hastily. If someone is passed on to outsiders, there needs to be a link maintained between the referred organisation and the employing organisations.

9.2 Specialist Help

The following people are those who may need specialist guidance. As manager, your counselling skills are unlikely to provide them with the help they need:

- those with long-term problems going back many years
- those with problems that have no obvious cause
- those who are silent or lack feelings
- those who refuse to change
- those who minimize the effects of their problem, eg heavy drinkers, social drug-users
- those who become dependent on counselling
- those who show little or no ability to relate to others
- those who run away from difficulties rather than face them
- those who display bizarre thoughts and behaviour
- those who blame others for their problems
- those who become aggressive.

Not every solution that is suggested at the outcome of a counselling session may be an acceptable one. It may suit you as representative of the organisation but not suit them, eg a change of job, a change of hours, a change of location. On the other hand, a solution that they propose may not be acceptable to you, eg a break from work of a few weeks; a change from full-time to part-time work; being moved away from someone they don't get on with.

To work, solutions need to satisfy a number of criteria. The mnemonic POWER provides us with five such criteria. These are:

9.2.1 P for Practical

Practical solutions are workable solutions. At their best, they are what the employee can do with relative ease, and they also meet the organisation's aims and ways of working. They don't set precedents or make special cases. They don't treat people with favouritism. The solutions are ones that others in the team can live with.

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9.2.3 O for Owned

One simple test to see if the solution to a problem is going to work or not is to ask how much work you have to do and how much work the employee has to do. If it is all down to you, there may be more work ahead. If it is all down to the employee, then you are on the right track. When employees own their solutions, they have invested in them and want to make them work. The starting point is always that the employee must want it to happen.

When people get the chance to move forward with all the help and support they have been offered, some still hesitate.

They may fear change, having become used to living with a limiting problem. They may lack the confidence that they can really do it. They may simply convince themselves after the counselling that the risks are too great and that they would rather stay as they are.

Trevor Bentley is a teacher, facilitator and counsellor. In his training workshops he often displays a sign that says:

"If you can talk, you can sing.
If you can walk, you can dance.
Anyone can juggle and ride a unicycle including you.
But you have to want to."

9.2.3 W for Win-Win

A win-win solution is one that meets everyone's needs. It doesn't matter if it is a solution that you propose or the employee proposes, as long as it is acceptable all round. When you find a solution that appears to be a win-win one, always test it to see if it genuinely does bring benefits to all parties.

9.2.4 E for Executable Now

If you find suitable solutions at a counselling session, aim to include in the plan something that can be implemented straightaway. This sets the change in motion and increases the likelihood of success.

9.2.5 R for Realistic

Make sure that the solutions you agree with your employees are realistic. Don't make the plans too detailed or imprecise. Don't set targets that are impossibly high or unexcitedly low. Don't set time frames too far ahead. And don't set outcomes that are way beyond a person's hope of achieving.

9.3 The Follow-Through

The final acts of the counselling session, once plans for change have been made, is to organise the follow-through. This involves:

- reviewing your contract that you made at the start of the counselling and asking: "Have we achieved what we set out to achieve?"
- closing the counselling by checking that the employee is happy

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- agreeing the employee's plans, targets and time-scales
- fixing review sessions
- making plans for further supportive action
- informing everyone who needs to know about any changes that you've agreed
- considering how the relationship has changed
- evaluating your own performance.

A change should always be the outcome of a counselling process. But it should be a change that can be managed. That means checking that it is a POWER-based solution.

9.4 Key Points

1. The ideal outcome of a counselling session is a commitment by the person to move on.
2. The aim of counselling is not to make people dependent on counselling, but dependent on themselves.
3. You should recognize those people who need specialist help and refer them on.
4. Solutions in counselling should be practical, owned, win-win, executable now and realistic.
5. A counselling solution is unlikely to work unless it is fully owned by the person themselves.
6. Change is not possible unless people want to change.

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10 People Problems

It is impossible to predict how each instance of counselling will develop. It depends on the individual, the manager, and the problem. However, there are a number of principles that can be applied to all types of people problem and, if followed, will result in positive outcomes.

Here are 5 examples of common problems and the principles that help solve them.

10.1 Performance Problems

No manager can afford the problem of poor performance for any length of time. Poor performance affects your business, undermines your management, and affects others in the team. If it is new, unexpected, or relatively minor, counselling should always be your preferred first option. Sit down with the employee and talk through the problem, the reasons, and the solutions, using the classic counselling structure. Make sure you have accurate information about the current performance level. Then at the challenging stage, contrast the current performance with the performance expected by the organisation and ask the employee how they are going to close the gap. Only if the employee digs his or her heels in and refuses to come up with solutions should you consider further options such as some kind of discipline.

10.2 Sickness Absence

Many managers flinch from getting involved with employees who are absent through sickness or injury on the grounds that there is nothing they can do. If this is the case with you, then your organisation first needs to develop a sickness and absence policy that allows you to manage cases just as you would any other absence. Even if it is difficult finding a quick and easy solution, you should still hold regular meetings to discuss things with the employee. These can range from the straightforward back-to-work catch-up, - which is a miniature version of a counselling session, - to the more formal home visit. One of the things you need to get clear is that being "on the sick" does not absolve people from their responsibilities as employees. Like all forms of people problem, the responsibility to decide how to get back to work rests with the employee.

10.3 Career Counselling

Helping employees with career plans is one of the more positive kinds of counselling. In many cases, employees may start the ball rolling by asking you for help, possibly because they do not feel they are in the right job or because they are ambitious for promotion or a move to another career.

10.4 Bereavement Counselling

Bereavement happens to all of us at some time in our lives, with different levels of coping ability. Counselling can demonstrate genuine concern for employees who are going through the grieving process as well as helping them come to terms with their loss. In extreme cases, one of the solution options may well be to refer people to specialists for help and guidance.

These guidelines are useful when counselling employees trying to come to terms with the death of a loved one.

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- provide support in practical areas such as pension and insurance matters, house sales, what to do with possessions
- encourage people to express their feelings in their own time, possibly through recounting what happened
- help people face the finality of the loss through recognising separation
- use discussion to focus on positive but realistic memories of the dead person
- get the person to accept their new self-image as widow, widower, childless, no longer pregnant and so on.

It needs to be remembered that if you counsel one of your team following a bereavement, it is still as a workplace responsibility and is within the organisational context.

10.5 Personal Relationships

Personal relationship problems are likely to be one of the most difficult issues you will have to face. These can range from personality clashes between colleagues to inappropriate relationships such as sexual liaisons to personal problems such as body odour. Many managers are sometimes reluctant to get involved with these issues as they can be delicate, sensitive and embarrassing. Sometimes, the form of counselling offered may have to be discreet and private. Nonetheless, the same principles apply as with all other types of people problem. First, identify the facts of the problem; second, demonstrate the gap between this situation and what is required; third, help the employee find their solution to the problem.

10.5.1 A Personal Relationship Counselling Script

Here is an outline of a personal relationship script that follows the key stages of a counselling session.

Contracting framework: Thanks for coming to see me, Jan. You know we need to talk about yesterday's incident between you and Mark. This is off the record. I just want to see what's happened and what we can do.

Exploration: Would you like to kick off?...So, in a nutshell, you and Mark have split up but you still have to work together? How do you feel about that?...

Challenge: You do see that this situation can't be allowed to just drift, don't you? On the one hand you have an important job to do; on the other, you have a difficult personal relationship getting in the way.

Action: OK, let's agree that we aren't going to solve this overnight. You need time to make some decisions. I understand that. You know we are very pleased with your work. But you do see how this might look...

Ending: Thanks for being so open and honest. Let's pencil in a date next week just to review where we've both got to...

Handling people problems is never easy. It sometimes seems easier to ignore them or hope they'll go away. But there is a solution and it lies in the counselling approach. Using its skills, principles and techniques you can be sure of a positive outcome.

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10.6 Key Points

1. When people have performance problems at work, counselling is nearly always a more effective solution than discipline.
2. A performance counselling session works because it avoids the overtones of judgment and accusation associated with discipline.
3. A corridor chat with everyone returning from short spells of sickness can be seen as a form of "quick counselling".
4. A visit to people's homes when they are off sick for a long period of time is a form of "off-the-job counselling".
5. A career counselling session can be given as part of an appraisal scheme or whenever someone needs help with personal development.
6. Counselling after a bereavement may be needed if work is affected.

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11 Web Resources on "Counselling Skills"

The following instantly-accessible website resources provide more in-depth information on some of the tips, techniques, and features in this book.

Here (http://www.manager-tools.com/2007/06/managing-through-a-personal-crisis-part-1-of-2) is part one of a podcast from manager-tools on how to prepare yourself to deal with a staff member who has a personal crisis and *here* (http://www.manager-tools.com/2007/06/managing-through-a-personal-crisis-part-2-of-2) is the second part of this podcast on the actions to take.

Find out what is meant by Emotional Intelligence in Steve Hein's online book *here*:
http://eqi.org/eqe96_1.htm

This is a feature on the Person-Centred Approach from thecounsellingguide.

Use *this* lesson plan to learn more about the Johari Window and self-awareness:
http://www.cls.utk.edu/pdf/ls/Week2_Lesson12.pdf

Let changingminds explain the meaning of "introjection" and "projection" *here*:
http://changingminds.org/disciplines/psychoanalysis/concepts/projection_introjection.htm

Learn all about Lifespan Psychology on the learning-theories site *here*:
http://www.learning-theories.com/eriksons-stages-of-development.html

Take a further detailed look at the qualities needed in a counsellor *here*:
http://www.howto.co.uk/wellbeing/counselling-skills/exploring_essential_counsellor_qualities/

You'll find an excellent explanation of "being concrete" in counselling on *this* howto page:
http://www.howto.co.uk/wellbeing/counselling-skills/being_concrete_to_help_the_client_be_more_specific/

Here's a youtube clip with Audrey Hepburn explaining "empathy" to Fred Astaire from the film "Funny Face":
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOjL6baOwu0

Take a *test* at mindtools to see if you are vulnerable to burn-out from the stress of helping others:
http://www.mindtools.com/stress/Brn/BurnoutSelfTest.htm

Learn how to help your employee feel safe *here* in this feature from how-to.co.uk:
http://www.howto.co.uk/wellbeing/counselling-skills/helping_the_client_feel_safe/

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Here's how to counsel a member of staff:
http://www.wright.edu/~scott.williams/LeaderLetter/counseling.htm

Learn more about the 3 main stages of a counselling relationship at suite101 *here*:
http://www.suite101.com/content/the-counselling-process-beginnings-middles-and-endings-a290425

Here is a very full and interesting feature on helping someone explore a problem they have:
http://www.howto.co.uk/wellbeing/counselling-skills/helping_the_client_explore_the_problem/

This pdf from HighGain will show you how to set yourself apart with total listening skills:
http://www.highgain.com/bulletin/How_to_Set_Yourself_Apart.pdf

Read Dan Erwin on "Minimal Encouragers: a Not-so-Obvious Listening Skill" *here*:
http://humancapitalleague.com/Home/2407

Find everything you need to know about Empathic Listening at beyondintractability.org *here*:
http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/empathic_listening/

Here from Scott Williams is a feature on how to counsel a member of staff:
http://www.wright.edu/~scott.williams/LeaderLetter/counseling.htm

Download *this* set of activities from sagepub on counselling style, attitudes, and questions:
http://www.uk.sagepub.com/millward/files/activities/ch6_activities.doc

Here is a more detailed study of questions for meaning and understanding from sooperarticles:
http://www.sooperarticles.com/self-improvement-articles/questions-meaning-understanding-227007.html

Skillsconverged offer an exercise in open and closed questions *here*:
http://www.skillsconverged.com/FreeTrainingMaterials/tabid/258/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/629/Open-versus-Closed-Questions-Exercise.aspx

Learn how to use the *empathic response* at NotAlone.com:
http://www.enotalone.com/article/2830.html

Find out more about "digging" questioning skills at ymresourcer *here*:
http://www.ymresourcer.com/model/counsel.htm

Here is a set of counselling microskills which include getting at meanings from the Australian Institute of Counsellors:
http://www.aipc.net.au/articles/?p=118

This is an excellent outline of the role of counsellors in challenging and confronting:
http://www.howto.co.uk/wellbeing/counselling-skills/helping_the_client_understand_the_problem/

Download free ebooks at bookboon.com

Here is a howto page describing how to help people resolve the problem in counselling:
http://www.howto.co.uk/wellbeing/counselling-skills/helping_the_client_resolve_the_problem/

Read through the issues of terminating a counselling relationship from howto.co.uk *here*:
http://www.howto.co.uk/wellbeing/counselling-skills/terminating_the_counselling_relationship/

This pdf from the University of Adelaide will show you how to apply the counselling approach to performance issues:
http://www.adelaide.edu.au/hr/performance/improvement/managing_unsat_ performance_guide.pdf

Use this link to download the ManageTrainLearn trainer's manual on "Counselling Skills":
http://www.managetrainlearn.com/product-info/mtl-e-manuals-counselling-skills/

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