Humor and Service: The Importance of Not Being Too Earnest

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The “Joys” of Counseling
The Challenges and Stressors of Counseling
“If ‘Misery’ Loves Company...”
Unique Ethical Challenges of Service Workers
AND...
Mental Health Challenges, Too!!!
The “Pursuit” of Humor???
Our Objectives Today

- Participants will:
  - Gain further familiarity with the general roles and significance of humor;
  - Explore the general roles and significance of humor as a technique in counseling to facilitate client well-being (e.g., emotional well-being, physical well-being, social well-being, vocational well-being, intellectual well-being, spiritual well-being);
  - Gain insights regarding the unique roles and significance that humor plays in the life of one who serves (i.e., the counselor);
  - Gain an enhanced appreciation for the roles and significance of humor in enhancing counselor well-being (e.g., emotional well-being, physical well-being, social well-being, vocational well-being, intellectual well-being, spiritual well-being); and
  - Acquire skills in the assimilation of humor into their lives as counselors in service.
“Humor”

- “Good humor is a tonic for mind and body.”
  (Grenville Kleiser)
- “Humor is mankind’s greatest blessing.”
  (Mark Twain)
- “He who laughs...lasts.”
  (Carol Wyer)
- “A sense of humor is good for you. Have you ever heard of a laughing hyena with heartburn?”
  (Bob Hope)
Yes, but...

Inherent Challenges

- Can distract
- Can backfire
- Can be hurtful
- Can be distasteful
- Can be ill-timed
- Can be overused
- Your sense of humor is YOUR sense of humor.
- Their sense of humor (assuming they have one!) is THEIR sense of humor.
- ...

...
The Lesson???
Play with fire and you could get...!!!
Now Consider the Inherent Challenges We Face as Counselors If...

- Humor can distract, backfire, and prevent progress in counseling.
- Certain clients lack a sense of humor.
- Humor can be seen as a put-down of a client or a group.
- Humor can be overused and thus become ineffective.
- Humor that is badly timed and out of tune with the client’s mood or desires detracts from the counseling relationship and can result in a waste of time and effort.

...
With so many things that go wrong
To “humor” I bid a “So long!”
With potential for biting,
Amidst what seems inviting,
I must say, “It does not belong!”
Forget It? Hold on a Minute!
Let’s begin with a little “deeper” consideration of just what is happening when humor is used.
The “Science of Humor”

- Humor can increase employee morale and productivity.
- Humor can reduce stress.
- Humor can strengthen the immune system and provide pain relief. Mirthful laughter has an impact on most systems of the body.
- Humor can provide fresh perspective and insights, enhancing creative problem-solving (“the relationships between ha-ha and aha!”).
- Humor can be an excellent way to enhance communication and build relationships (“the shortest distance between two people”).
“Humor in the workplace may be a new wrinkle in management style, but it also seems logical and worthwhile. Today’s employees want to be participative, and want to feel positively about their work environment. If they are enthusiastic about being at work, everyone benefits...” (“Humor at Work”)
- Teaching – developing creative thinking
- Humor in nursing practice
- Using humor to teach statistics
- Using humor to teach technology
- Increasing pain tolerance
- Global advertising
- Using humor to cope with stress in home health care
- Stress and humor in oncology
- Using humor to reduce stress and improve relationships in nurse management
Art and Science!
Well, Maybe!

- I can see how some other vocations
- Can use this without provocations.
- But I still harbor fears
- And I’ve had ‘em for years
- As I cling to my own hesitations!
But What about Humor and Counseling?
Science and Art!
Consider This Template

- Client-Initiated Humor
- Counselor-Initiated Humor
- Introspective (Insightful) Humor – Digging Down
Rationale

- Opens up an environment for change to take place
- Promotes insight
- Fosters creativity
- Helps counselors and clients become calculated risk takers
- Sometimes helps one to realize and appreciate anew the realities of life
- Helps overcome resistance
- Helps in dealing with taboo subjects
- Enhances mental health of the counselor
“Relaxed Alertness”
“Bisociation” (“Koestler defines creative acts as the combination of previously unrelated structures in such a way that you get more out of the emergent whole than you have put in; the interaction of two mutually exclusive associative contexts; two ideas brought together that are not ordinarily combined; perceiving a situation from incompatible frames of reference...”)
• “The value (also) includes strengthening the rapport between the client and counselor...offering to a client a less painful perspective of a painful experience; adding to a client’s social repertoire; and providing a stress control method.” (Goldin and Bordan, 1999)
Consider These Applications

- The consideration of humor in client assessment
- Career counseling
- Group treatment of clients with depression
- Family therapy
- Analytic therapy and analysis
- Coping with a disability
- Returning to work after the onset of disability
- Addictions counseling
Admonitions/Cautions

- The counselor is advised to pay particular attention to cultural differences in appreciating and expressing humor in treatment.
- Understand your humor.
- The ethics of humor: Explore your motivation in using/not using humor.
- Client’s use/perception of humor
- Use judiciously
Improper (Gladding, 1995)...

- When the counselor uses it to avoid dealing with client anxieties
- When a client views it as irrelevant to his or her reasons for being in counseling
- When it is experienced as a put-down
- When it is used too frequently and becomes boring
- When it is inappropriately timed
Additional Thoughts/Possibilities

- Working Alliance
- “Whackpack”
- Power Differential
- Supervision
“OK, but with Wisdom!”

- I can see now the use of “Ha-Ha”
- But we dare not digress to “La-La”!
- There’s a time and a place
- We need not be strait-laced,
- But we dare not indulge in “Blah-Blah”!
Humor

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“Laughter, it has been said is more than a defense mechanism; it is a means of adjusting to circumstances, a safety-valve against tyranny; it is an agency in creative enterprise.” (Joseph Stocker)

“Erikson (1963) spoke of humor as being a redeeming specialty in mankind whereby man could ‘play with and...reflect fearlessly on the strange customs and institutions by which man must find self-realization’.” (Goldin and Bordan, 1999)

“Humor is a natural occurrence in some counseling situations and it is a resource that should be used.” (Gladding, 1995)
• “...people are generally aware of the power of humor. From the wit of Will Rogers to the acting of Lucille Ball, humor makes life bearable, shareable, and changeable, or an Jimmy Buffett (1977) informed us in his lyrics: ‘If we didn’t laugh, we would all go insane.’” (Gladding, 1995)

• “...the judicial use of humor...can be used to reframe various troublesome events so that a positive spin is gained and the proverbial silver lining comes into view, Humor can enhance rapport. It can enable people to take their problems less seriously.” (Arnold Lazarus)
• “Maintaining a work environment in which there is a sense of humor with an acceptance of individual humanness is conducive to optimizing professional and personal well-being...”(Weaver and Wilson, 1997)

• “My point is that every course of therapy consists of small and large spontaneously generated responses or techniques that are impossible to program in advance.” (Yalom)

• “At its very core, the flow of therapy should be spontaneous, forever following unanticipated riverbeds...” (Yalom)
Revisit our Objectives Again

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Recap

- Hang on to the testimonies and what they are saying.
- Understand usage in other fields.
- Remember the cautions.
- Ponder the Potential Applications in Counseling.
- Reflect on your thinking and practices.
We Invite You to Join the “Pursuit”!

“A well-developed sense of humor is the pole that adds balance to your steps as you walk the tightrope of life.”

William Arthur Ward
Stay in Touch

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