The supervisory relationship is a key factor for professional development and creates an opportunity for rich learning experiences for both supervisors and supervisees. Yet, emerging counselors may not be fully prepared to establish such relationships. This article is designed to guide the beginning professional through the process of selecting an appropriate supervisor and forming a professional supervision relationship.

Introduction

The profession of counseling has made considerable growth in the area of licensure and certification over the past three decades (Gladding, 2001). Yet, procuring a license or certification can be difficult, costly and a confusing task for beginning counselors. At this writing, all states but five in the United States have licensure laws and regulations for practicing professional counselors (American Counseling Association, n. d.). Though each state varies in the requirements for a counseling license, each sets a standard for the amount of supervision needed to obtain a license to practice counseling. State guidelines offer procedures as to qualifying supervisor protocol and policies on necessary supervised hours. However, state guidelines are lacking an essential mechanism. For those counselors seeking licensure, there seems to be no clear or consistent means to discover how to obtain a well-designed fit for an optimal supervision experience. Some individuals may even ignore the need for supervision because of developmentally related issues. Furthermore, emerging counselors do not always understand the value of the supervision process (Halverson, 1999).

Supervision is defined as a formal process. Supervision is a relationship between a supervisor and a supervisee that is contractual in nature. When supervision occurs outside of the university, designated members of the profession provide supervision. Supervisors are individuals who are appropriately degreed, credentialed, experienced and licensed. Supervisors

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provide leadership, mentorship and directional support toward individuals who desire entry into the profession of counseling (Roberts & Morotti, 2001).

Counseling students are provided supervision in school as part of their training. The practice of supervision is foundational to most academic programs and is a established standard of educational practice (Borders & Leddick, 1987). After graduating, counselors will continue to need supervision for several reasons. Obtaining licensure to practice is one very practical reason to seek supervision. The purpose of this article is to discuss some components necessary for an appropriate supervisory match, particularly as it applies to those individuals seeking licensure. To be effective and to avoid unethical practices and eventual burnout, an emerging counselor needs assistance from an experienced supervisor (Corey, Corey & Callahan, 1998). Strong supervisory relationships provide essential support and rich learning experiences for both supervisors and supervisees (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Borders & Leddick, 1987). Supervision is an essential and often a major component of university counselor training programs. Support is readily available from university supervisors. However, upon entry into the professional field many emerging counselors need to establish new supervisory relationships. Without professional support, neophytes risk being overwhelmed by their clients’ "real world" situations (Schmidt, 1999). We raise questions for emerging counselors (i.e. supervisees) to consider as they gather information and attempt to find the appropriate person to provide supervision.

For the new counselor seeking to establish a new supervisory relationship multiple factors need to be considered (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Borders & Leddick, 1987; Prest, Schindler-Zimmerman & Sporakowski, 1992). These include: education, clinical training, field experiences (Gladding, 2000), theoretical orientation and philosophy (Aponte & Wohl, 2000), prior supervisory experiences, multicultural and diversity awareness (Fukayama, 1994), goal clarification (Borders & Leddick, 1987), supervision style and techniques (Bradley, 1989), and practical matters (Prest et al., 1992).

Counselor as Supervisor

A novice counselor should seek supervision from within the field of counseling. This may seem like simple advice. To an individual entering the field the subtle and sometimes blatant differences in professional orientations may not be apparent. Nevertheless, the field of mental health is broad and includes various areas of professional focus. For example, social workers deal primarily within a social model of assisting individuals to obtain resources in pursuit of mental health. Other mental health professionals, such as psychiatrists and clinical psychologists, focus primarily on the treatment of severe emotional disorders. The counseling profession, however, differs from other mental health disciplines in its history, clinical training, and academic curriculum (Gladding, 2000). The counseling profession focuses on the prevention of serious mental health problems through education and short-term treatment. Additionally, counseling philosophies and strategies tend to be strength-based rather than focused on a diagnosis of deficit or disease. The beginning counselor should be aware that differences do exist within the general field of mental health. Therefore, we urge emerging counselors to search for supervisors from within the counseling profession, from those who have educational backgrounds, clinical training, and experiences that will help extend and deepen the focus rather than alter the course of the developing counselor.
Supervisor’s Philosophy

Emerging professionals should seek supervision from a counseling supervisor with a theoretical orientation and philosophy, which is compatible with their own. Within the field of counseling, approaches and viewpoints can vary. Therefore, practices operate under different theoretical assumptions (Aponte & Wohl, 2000). Supervision models and theories are generally grouped into four broad categories: (1) psychotherapy-based theories, (2) developmental models, (3) social role models and (4) eclectic and integrationist models (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). Assumptions, theories and philosophies will inevitably influence the relationship and direct the supervisory processes and practices. Supervision models place varying degrees of importance on the supervisor, supervisee and client. Potential supervisors should be able to articulate their philosophies, theories and how these relate to practices. A discussion about underlying assumptions could be very helpful for deciding if the relationship will be compatible.

Supervisory Experiences

Another area of concern is the lesser level of experience of the emerging counselor. Therefore, it would be helpful if inexperienced counselors seek supervision from a well-practiced counselor. Although a supervisor and supervisee may hold many philosophical principles in common, these shared principles do not guarantee a successful relationship. It is the sharing of lived experiences that holds the promise for professional growth for both parties. In addition, a relationship needs to be established with agreed upon common goals. The two parties should engage in a discussion of successes, failures, and frustrations. Neophyte counselors are encouraged to assess for signs of a positive attitude and avoid relationships with supervisors who may be lacking professional enthusiasm or approaching burnout. In addition, those seeking supervision might ask about prior supervisory experiences including rewards and disappointments. Also, discuss needs regarding interdependence, trust and rapport in the relationship. Engage in a conversation around experiences the supervisor may have had with previous supervisees. Talk with other counselors who were previously supervised by the same supervisor, they may be able to offer valuable insights into the supervisor and the supervision process. Find out if the relationship was positive and helpful. By exploring these prior supervision relationships, the beginning counselor may be able to make a more informed decision about the supervisor’s abilities and about the nature of the relationship (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Aponte & Wohl, 2000).

Multicultural and Diversity Issues

Counselors are becoming increasingly aware of multicultural and diversity issues but information and terminology are in constant flux. If beginning counselors seek supervision from one who is aware, interested, and current about diversity issues, it may be advantageous to both parties (Constantine & Yeh, 2001). Although a supervisor’s attitudes about diversity, race, culture, gender, sexuality and spirituality may be difficult to assess, it is critical that these factors be addressed at the very beginning of the relationship. A dialogue around multicultural matters may clarify attitudes. According to Helms and Cook (1999) the unspoken assumptions regarding the racial and cultural issues in supervision and therapy influence every aspect of the counseling
process. Issues such as these will affect perspectives and impact the relationship, expectations, client assignments, client conceptualizations, treatment planning, recommendations for client referrals and evaluation of supervisees (Fukayama, 1994). Therefore, discussion related to diversity perspectives is essential for a healthy professional relationship (Aponte & Wohl, 2000).

**Personal Comfort**

In any relationship personal comfort is a vital factor. For that reason, neophytes would be wise to seek supervision from a person who will help make them comfortable when they are uncomfortable and uncomfortable when too comfortable. Supervisees should not disregard intuition and insight. It is important to heed one’s inner voice and be self-reflective. Individual comfort level should be evaluated and re-evaluated often. Assessing self-comfort serves as a guide in making prudent decisions (Corey et al., 1998).

**Goal Clarification**

As is true of every relationship, supervision involves a balancing and blending of two unique perspectives. Therefore, search for a supervisor who can express goals that are compatible with that of the supervisee. Clear articulation of goals, by both the supervisor and the supervisee, is necessary for a good outcome. The balanced pursuit of each person’s expectations enhances success (Bradley, 1989). Goals can vary for both a supervisor and supervisee largely because the two are at different levels in the development of their careers. For the seasoned professional, goals might include enjoyment of the mentoring process, ethical commitment, personal growth, and financial gain. The goals of supervisees might include educational attainment, certification, licensure, advanced registration, specialty training or self-development. Goals need not be identical; they just need to be compatible (Gladding, 2000).

**Supervision Style and Technique**

New counselors have their own counseling style and techniques they utilize. We recommend that supervisees seek out supervisors who demonstrate acceptance and comfort with their way of being as an up-and-coming counselor. Supervisors should have a strong grasp what it is that supervisees do when they are practicing the art of counseling (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). A discussion of the supervisory style and techniques that will be employed during the lengthy relationship of supervision is suggested. Theories and styles of both participants need not be identical but there should be compatible (Neufeldt, 1999). For some the process may be more like a conversation, a formal interview, a consultation appointment or a lesson with specific objectives. Supervisors may use different evaluative techniques; some may request audio transcriptions, videotape reviews or a written case analysis. In contrast, other supervisors may request clinical assessments that are primarily in vivo. Discuss any differences and other concerns in the initial stages of supervision. Formulate a plan to avoid confusion, alleviates anxiety, and prevent disappointment. If differences in theoretical frameworks or style appear to impede growth and development, probe for clarification and possibly reconsider the relationship.
Practical Matters

In addition to all the professional concerns discussed above, supervisees need to address legal, procedural, financial, logistics and other practical considerations with potential supervisors (Prest et al., 1992). Not addressing such concerns can hinder effectiveness in the relationship. As mentioned above, one of the goals of the experienced supervisor will likely involve monetary gain. It is important to clarify all financial and other contractual arrangements prior to forming a relationship. Rudimentary procedures, such as these, may be thought to be superfluous to the process, but resentment is reduced if attention is not paid to these seemingly insignificant details in the formulation stage of the supervisory relationship.

Summary

Supervision is a defined formal process. Seeking appropriate post-graduate supervision is complex. Beginning counselors need to seek supervision from experienced counselors who have similar philosophies and rich experiences. Supervisors need to be current in many areas, especially those involving the dynamic multicultural and diversity issues. For continuing professional growth, supervision should involve extending and expanding comfort zones. Although supervisors and supervisees may have different goals, the success of the relationship will depend on compatibility. Although styles and techniques may never be identical, they need to be compatible. Although they may seem less lofty than other concerns, a discussion about financial, legal and other rudimentary concerns is very important. A considerable amount of time and energy can be expended in the search for a suitable supervisory match. The supervisory relationship will likely be more successful if it is initiated by a discussion about the concerns raised in this article.
References


Biographical Data

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