

# Choosing a counselor can be complicated

How can a person find good professional counseling? The answer is more complicated than most people realize.

Overwhelmed by personal problems, frightened by fading marriages, a common response is to think about getting help from a professional counselor. But where should one go?

Some help-seekers treat the problem like any other consumer question. They open the Yellow Pages. There, they are confronted with a list of private and public counselors. All have about the same professional credentials, and presumably have been approved by governmental licensing bodies. So, in a kind of counseling roulette, they choose the first name on the alphabetical list that is near their own address.

That would be fine if you could assume any counselor with sufficient professional credentials is qualified to help you.

Unfortunately, this is not always true. Unlike dentistry, physical medicine and automotive repair, the success of professional counseling depends on a lot more than the competence of the counselor.

Scientific studies concerning treatment satisfaction rates have shown that it is far from a sure bet. A good critical review of those studies is presented in "Trick or Treatment?" by Dr. Richard Stuart A. University of Michigan sociologist.

Most studies indicate that most positive studies indicate 10 to 20 per cent of most counseling clients are not fully satisfied with the results.

While more conservative experiments have resulted in 40 to 50 per cent of the counseling done by trained professionals produces no measurable effect on their clients.

Such information can be very disconcerting to an already troubled individual who is thinking about spending large fees for professional help that may be worthwhile. But, it may help to know that there are some things a person can do to maximize the chances that he will have a worthwhile counseling experience.

The greatest single factor determining the effectiveness of a counseling session is the client's motivation to improve his life.

Mostly, this depends on how unhappy he

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is with his current existence. The counseling client who is utterly miserable and ready to try anything to get better is likely to find satisfactory results from almost any legitimate counselor.

INTENSIVE SELF-EXAMINATION and personal growth are often frightening and even painful, and clients are rarely willing to go through them if their present life is not all that miserable.

Nearly as important as this client motivation factor, is the personal compatibility of the client and the counselor. It is amazing how often this is overlooked when you consider that the counselor-client relationship is a major part of the professional counselor's techniques.

Almost every counseling approach pays attention to how the client and counselor are treating each other.

Unlike automobile maintenance, the best way of repairing the emotional lives of humans does not use the personal feelings and character of the professional helper as a primary tool.

Considering the vast range of personal tastes and individual attitudes of prospective clients, it is important that the counselor's counseling style demands a great deal on such personal factors.

Some clients, for example, need a counselor who takes a strong, directive approach with them. Others are turned off immediately by such a style, and the counselor who uses it treats them as visual participants in the counseling process.

Many clients are drawn to techniques which verge on mysticism, while others are repulsed by them and turn to counselors with very practical problem-solving techniques. Some like their counselors to be warm and supportive, some like them cold and distant.

THE ARRAY of different tastes in counselors is as less than the range of human tastes in food or esthetic experiences. The client should be sure to be aware of your preferences and make a personal consideration when you are selecting a counselor. If you don't, you are probably reducing the chances that you will be part of a successful counseling experience.

One of the best of the informal counselor guides is a friend who has had counseling experiences. Family physicians and clergymen are often somewhat knowledgeable about local counselors too.

But no matter whom you talk to be sure they know your personal tastes. Be equally sure that your counselor has had some experience with the counselor they recommend to know about their personality and approach.

Ultimately, it's up to the prospective client to look around. When you call for an appointment with a counselor, ask him what he does. Ask about his approach. Tell him what you prefer and see how he reacts.

A good professional counselor is interested in maximizing the chances of success too. He knows that he cannot be equally effective with all clients and that many of his failures might have been another counselor's successes.

Sometimes, a personal incompatibility may only become clear after a few counseling interviews. Even then it is not too late to decide that you and your counselor counselor finding another relationship is not the right one.

Like any other significant investment in time and money, counseling should be fully chosen. And if it is, you are likely to get a return.

Questions for Dr. Trenz may be sent to the Rochester Observer & Eccentric, 410 N. Main St., Rochester, 4802.

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