

## 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 you go for help?

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: all, 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 the right counselor for 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 concerned with patient satisfaction rates have shown that it is far from a sure bet. A good critical review of these studies is presented in "Track or Treatment?" by Dr. Richard Stuart, a University of Michigan sociologist.

WE POINT out that even the most positive studies indicate 10 to 30 per cent of most counseling clients are not fully satisfied with the results.

While more conservative experiments have estimated that 30 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 not 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 counseling is the motivation of the client to improve his life. Mostly, this depends on how unhappy he

By  
BOB  
TRENZ,  
Ph.D.



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 relief 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 this if their present life is not all that miserable.

Nearly as important as the 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 an integral part of the professional counselor's technique.

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

Unlike automobile maintenance, the business of repairing the emotional lives of human beings uses 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 isn't surprising that the success of a counseling experience depends 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 an approach and seek a counselor who treats them as equal participants in the counseling process.

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

THE ARRAY of different tastes in counselors is no less than the range of human tastes in food or esthetic experiences.

The important thing is to be aware of your preferences and let them be a 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 asking friends who have 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 source has had enough experience with the counselors 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, don't shy. 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 compatibility may only become clear after a few counseling interviews. Even then it is not too late to discuss this with your counselor and to consider finding another if the relationship is not the right one.

Like any other significant investment in time and money, counseling should be carefully chosen. And if it is, you are not likely to get a lemon.

Questions for Dr. Trenez may be sent to the Rochester Observer & Eccentric, 410 N. Main St., Rochester, 62603.

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