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The Art of Counselling (or Life Coaching)

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Preface.

We have included 'The Art of Counselling' in our courses to give students the opportunity to learn about the basic communication skills we believe they need to be a Counsellor or Coach. The better you become at these skills, the easier a counselling session is likely to go. Most, if not all of these skills you can also use in daily life, which will make you a better listener and a more pleasant person to talk to. In addition, you can learn what you should pay attention to while counselling.

Of course counselling can only be learnt by doing it (rather than from a text), it is therefore useful to practise certain skills as often as possible.

To simplify things, from here on Counsellor and Life Coach are both referred to as counsellor, and Counselling and Life Coaching termed counselling (they tend to be interchangeable), similarly Counsellors and Clients are referred to in the male gender. Nothing should be read into this.

Enjoy practising and using the Art of Counselling skills!

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Aims

While counselling, pay attention to:

1. Introducing yourself properly.
2. Giving a clear explanation of what counselling or life coaching is.
3. Developing a trusting relationship with your client.
4. The techniques:
 - open questions / paraphrasing
 - reflecting feelings
 - summarizing
 - focusing
 - caring confrontation
 - (appropriate use of) self-disclosure.
5. Structure and process of the discussion (phase-awareness).
6. Responding to cues and verbal signals.
7. Matching your language to that of your client.
8. The content of the discussion.
9. Managing silences.
10. Enabling the client to tell his story (without undue interruptions)
11. Refraining from giving advice or solutions.
12. Effectiveness and usefulness of the session.
13. Evaluating the session.
14. Coming to an agreement regarding progress.

You know you have mastered the skills when you:

1. can describe each skill,
2. can distinguish between the different skills,
3. know when to apply a certain skill or not,
4. can recognise and identify a particular skill,
5. are able to really listen to your client,
6. pick up cues from your client,
7. are able to empathize with the client,
8. are able to integrate various skills,
9. identify yourself as counsellor (with a reasonable amount of confidence).

1. Why do you want to be a counsellor?
2. Who will benefit more from the sessions: the client or the counsellor?

Introduction to Counselling

In counselling you help people tell their story in a constructive way. Some of them can't stop talking about their problem and may tend to get sidetracked, whereas others seem to find it difficult to tell you even the bare essentials. Many clients fall somewhere in between this range. The story people bring is not new to them, they have already rehearsed it time and again and may have thought about it and talked it many times before.

Verbal flux does not necessarily disclose the real problem. A less talkative person might get to the heart of the matter in a few sentences.

When a client comes to see you for the first time, he has often hit a dead-end. Because he hasn't been able to handle his feelings and emotions well, tension caused by these pent-up emotions has built up. In response to this tension, he has developed a range of behaviour patterns that can vary from anger or avoidance to vague physical complaints etc. He may start telling you about these.

The client is unlikely to reveal his true feelings initially, since he is not actually conscious of them. It is therefore very important that you create a safe environment for the client, one in which he can trust that if emotions come to the surface, they will be accepted and that you will be a supportive presence who will help him contain things, so that it will not become too overwhelming.

What you aim for as counsellor is to help clarify the story of the client to the client himself, so rather than a repetition of the story he has been telling over and over again, it may become clear who is the author of this story and what factors and feelings have contributed to its making. Once this is clearer, the client can often access inner resources and determine what to do or how best to go forward.

Therefore, there are a few golden rules of counselling that all involve trust within the counselling relationship. You want to help the client manage his problems better. In order to do this, you may need to go deeper than he has been able to go with family and friends, or with other helping professionals. If trust has been damaged, it is important to try rebuild it, though there may not be much time for this.

Beginnings - the first session

How do you inspire trust?

At the beginning of the very first session, the client is likely to feel uneasy and most often uncertain as to what to expect. Most people picture some sort of psychiatric situation. You may want to start by exchanging some information about yourselves, about counselling in general, appointments, fees, etc. This way you give the client the opportunity to get used to you while he is still on safe territory. Any uncertainties or misconceptions can also be cleared away in advance.

Below a few examples of how an introduction might go. Read the following questions and explanations and use the most suitable one:

Hello, please come in, sit down. I am Was it easy to find the address?

May I offer you something to drink?

Have you been to see a counsellor before?

How did you get to the idea to coming to see a counsellor?

What are your expectations of counselling?

You are the client - and that's a good indication of how the relationship will be between us. You can expect of me to help explore your situation at a comfortable pace. We will look in particular at how you experience your situation, and what feelings play a role. Once that is clear, we can investigate how you would like to proceed, for example how you want to feel and what's needed to achieve that. We will then make real action plans and help you take the first step to carry them out.

In counselling we assume you are temporarily caught in a difficult situation that it is hard to extract yourself from, and that you could do with some help to figure things out. Normally you can cope well enough, but the situation you are in now is for example new to you, overwhelming, or maybe you can't figure out what causes it or how to deal with it. This may be annoying or even threatening and that means it causes a lot of emotions. You may have a sense of going around in circles, and chances are it feels like a downward spiral, where remarks like 'chin up, it will pass' or 'don't let it get you down' no longer do the trick. A counsellor can help you discover what it's really all about, so that you can pick up the thread. Not that there is always a perfect answer or a brilliant solution, but it will help you at least to make the best of it. And what the best is, you determine.

My services have a price tag and that is 50 euro per session. A session normally lasts one hour and we generally have weekly appointments. How long it will take depends on the problem, but often five to seven sessions are sufficient, though for more complex situations twelve to fifteen sessions are not unusual. However, this would be discussed together and we would evaluate your progress regularly. I will send you a monthly invoice with the request to pay within eight days.

This may be a good moment to mention a few administrative details. I need your name and the address to send the bill to. I will keep your information in your personal file. All personal information will be kept strictly confidential. I keep notes after the session to help me remember important details, and these too will be kept in the confidential file, which is stored safely in a locked cabinet that is not accessible to others. Is this alright with you? If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

As professional counsellor I am a member of .. professional association and I adhere to their stringent ethical and professional codes of conduct. This means I will not disclose things to others, unless you ask me to and give me written and signed permission to do so. Do you have any questions regarding this?

Then I suggest we start the session and talk about your situation. Please tell me more about it.....

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">3. How would you start when a client comes in?4. What if it is the very first time? |
|--|

Beginning the next session(s)

For the second and subsequent sessions it is important to get an impression of what the client's development has been since the previous session. Has anything changed in his behaviour or in reactions from people around him, and how does that affect him? What insights has he gained, if any? Briefly summarize the previous session and start asking factual questions, then move on to his experiencing. This could be followed by enquiring about the homework assignment, if there was one.

The second and subsequent discussions might be opened as follows:

Please come in, have a seat... Can I get you something to drink?

Last time we talked about...(summarize). Did this lead to any further discoveries?

How has it gone since our last session?

How did you feel after last time? How do you feel now?

What have you done with the insights you gained last time?

What did you notice in particular?

At the end of our last discussion we agreed that you would think about... How did that go?

What do you think we need to work on this session? What would you like to focus on this time?

When asking these questions pay attention to the body language of the client: the non-verbal cues. These can be more revealing than what he is telling you. You don't have to confront him with your observations (although occasionally it may be useful), but in the long run becoming more observant may make your sessions more effective.

5. How would you start after a few sessions, having come to know each other a bit better?
6. What would you say if a client calls or drops by at an inconvenient time?

Open questions

We will now explore a number of tools that can help you to clarify the client's story, not only to you but more importantly, to the client himself. To be able to do that, you should look for clues in the client's story that may clarify matters. Start by asking questions that touch on the description of the situation and gradually move to questions about his feelings. You want to stimulate and challenge the client to examine his thoughts on the situation in more detail. What could be more inviting than an open question? An open question is a question that can't just be answered with a simple yes or no, but that invites expression of opinions, thoughts, feelings, reflections. When asked open questions, the client can explain himself more fully, possibly providing you with further clues as to what is really going on.

NB: Open questions never start with a verb, but rather with words such as; who, what, where, when, how, why, which, and also: where to, for what, since when, how many/much, how often.

Exercise:

Use the interrogative pronouns above to find out more about the situation below, not about feelings just yet.

I give up, I have had it completely! Yesterday evening things went horribly wrong again with Joan. We had a major row, the children upstairs crying.....

Open questions could be:

Who started it?

What exactly happened last night?

What was the quarrel about?

When did you notice it started to go wrong again?

How did the two of you deal with the children?

What techniques did you use to try and control yourself?

Do the same exercise but focus more on the underlying feelings.

The situation was as follows:

I give up, I have had it completely! Yesterday evening things went horribly wrong again with Joan. We had a major row, the children upstairs crying.....

Open questions you could ask are:

Afterwards who was most upset?

What does it mean to you, to have completely had it?

Why did it go wrong again? You were going to count to ten first before getting angry.

How did you feel when it went all wrong again?

How did the children's crying affect you?

How did you feel afterwards?

Let's look at another situation. You can choose your own set of questions in response to the situation and the underlying feelings.

Actually, it doesn't make that much difference to me, but my wife... well, she can go on and on about it.

Open questions you could ask are:

Who do you think is the most troubled by it all?

What do you think she is trying to express when she is nagging at you?

What lies at the heart of the problem for you?

When does your wife nag the most?

How do you feel when your wife talks to you like that?

What could you do to change the situation?

Give your client time to check his thoughts and to formulate them, also give him time to let things sink in. You are helping him to clarify things and what is revealed can be surprising and emotional for the client.

You can do the following exercise in different ways: for example you can start off your questions with a specific interrogative pronoun.

Take one of the interrogative pronouns and use it with every question, for example; what. Another way to do the exercise is that you can also ask questions to get things clear and then focus on the underlying feelings.

Before you start with the next exercise here are some possible questions for inspiration:

How long has it been going on?

How did you experience it?

How do others react towards you?

What's your biggest fear?

What are your expectations from your partner?

What's your opinion on it?

7. Observe your daily conversation. What kind of questions do <i>you</i> ask?

Paraphrasing

At first the client is likely only to 'describe' his situation to you. That's fine, he first has to feel comfortable with you and feel that he can trust you. At this stage you focus on looking at the situation from different angles with the client. Besides asking questions, you can also give back in your own words what the client has just said. This is what we call paraphrasing. Because the client hears his story in your words, he now has to interpret what you're saying and thereby gets away from his familiar story (from the tape he's played over and over in his head). What you give back to your client depends on the context of what has been said, but at least it should help him increase his overall view of the situation. Sometimes paraphrasing can have an element of drawing some sort of conclusion in it, but beware of being too confrontational, especially at an early stage.

Look at the following example.

When I still lived at home things were fine, but now that I live on my own things are a mess.

Your parents took care of housekeeping and now that you have to do it yourself, it is harder than you expected.

But without context it would be just as right to paraphrase as follow:

You made sure things were running like clockwork, but now that you are gone your parents can't take care of themselves properly anymore.

The text above shows you shouldn't draw conclusions too quickly, because the world somebody lives in can be surprisingly different. On the other hand, it is not an interrogation, so only seek the information that enables you to understand why your client got into difficulties and what might help him to handle things better.

Here are some exercises in paraphrasing. Give three possible paraphrases for each situation.

I want to feel human again, that is, somebody who isn't just married, but who has a life, with a circle of friends and a normal family life and so on....

You want live a normal life and befriend other people, with or without your wife.

You are prepared to work on yourself and to learn how to meet people and to befriend them.

You have reached the point where you can muster the courage to tell your wife you have the right to a life of your own.

The next example:

My boss is a bit thick, he knows nothing about those products. So I get angry when somebody like that gives me orders.

To you a boss is somebody who should know a lot about technique and products.

The two of you don't get along.

You'd rather work for somebody you can respect.

A few handy opening sentences to use when paraphrasing:

Sounds to me like you ...

I guess it is your opinion that...

I've got the impression that to you ... means...

You think that ...

You can't understand why...

You don't believe that...

You know you've paraphrased correctly if the client nods, agrees with you or shows signs of recognition or relief at finally being understood.

8. What is the difference between paraphrasing and repeating?

9. What is a good moment to paraphrase?

Reflecting feelings

It usually won't be the case that somebody straightaway talks about his feelings just because you're asking about them, or that he recognises his own emotions in what has become a technical description of the situation ('playing the tape'). To encourage him to get in touch with his feelings, you can name what feelings you deduct from his story. This is what we call reflecting. Verbs like: have, find, be, make and feel can be useful for this purpose.

Give five reflections to each example given below, using as many different 'feeling' verbs as possible:

I got thoroughly upset when Rebecca stood me up.

You had the feeling you don't matter to her.

You got angry because you felt she had no consideration for you.

You felt abandoned, left out.

You felt angry as you could have done other things if only you would have known she wouldn't show up.

You were worried something might have happened to Rebecca.

The next example:

I'm at a loss, my wife is dead, our friends no longer drop by, I don't have real contact with anyone.

You feel doubly abandoned, not only by your wife, but also by the people around you.

You feel alone and you see no easy solution to that, like you might have in the past.

You find life isn't treating you right.

You are just terribly lonely and you're fed up with that.

You are worried that you will get more and more lonely and isolated.

A few examples of brief reflections:

You're disappointed...

You feel you have failed...

You think it is a crying shame...

You don't like her being such an easy target...

You are not ready yet to put yourself first...

The situation worries you...

10. How can you reflect in a pure way?

11. What would you do if you reflect and you get it completely wrong?

Summarizing and Evaluating

A summary presents to the client a brief synopsis of his story, coming from someone else, making it clear to him at what point he is at the moment and/or how far he has come. A good summary is short and gets to the essence of what the client has said. In the discussion there are a few logical moments to summarize, such as at the beginning and at the end of a session. But it can also be during a session, when moving from one phase to another in the counselling process. The summary should serve to evaluate the situation and it can stimulate the client to add to your interpretation or to correct or change it. Summarizing can have a positive effect on the client, who can hear how far he has gotten up to then, and also that he has been heard and understood.

Paraphrasing, summarizing and evaluating follow one another naturally. With paraphrasing you give the essence of what has just been said in a few sentences. Summarizing or evaluating can concern a whole session or even several sessions. You use it to clarify the situation is and to determine together how your client can proceed.

It is also possible to have your client summarize what has been discussed. This shows the vision of the client, what has stuck in his mind, what is going on for him right now, or what he simply 'forgets'.

At the start of a session for example:

Harry, let's have a look at how we are doing so far. Three weeks ago you came to see me for the first time because you noticed you couldn't concentrate at work anymore and you are afraid you will get fired. During our sessions we established that the relationship with your girlfriend influences your work substantially. Since you started living together you both really have had to get used to the new situation. Is there anything you would like to add to that?

Another example:

You've come to the conclusion that the last few years you've mainly put your energy in taking care of your children, in addition to the household. You got a lot of satisfaction out of that. But since your youngest has gone to school, you've got a lot of energy left and you have no real outlet for it, you feel you're going around in circles. What aspects should we still look at before we start looking for new goals or things to do?

Another example:

Bill, we've come a long way. We talked about your problems. What lies at the heart of the matter is that you start a lot of things, but you never really finish anything. The goal you set yourself was to begin something and this time finish it, no matter what, so you can get a sense of accomplishment. We devised an action plan for this. When could you start putting this plan into action?

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">12. Why do you summarize?13. Why do you evaluate?14. What is the difference between summarizing and evaluating? |
|---|

Ending a session

Keep track of time, preferably unobtrusively. Reserve five to ten minutes to round off the discussion. Look for a good moment to work towards ending the conversation. A possible end of a session could go as follows:

This seems a good moment to summarise what we have done this session.

*To briefly summarize the session, you told me about and you had the insight that you...
Then we explored some possible actions.*

Is there anything you would like to add to that?

How did you experience the session?

*I suggest you let the session sink in for a while. Do reflect on it and see where that gets you....
Next time we could continue with this or else focus on what seems most relevant then.*

*All right, shall we make an appointment for the next session. I suggest we meet
again next week. Would the same day and time be ok for you?*

That is taken care of, then. I look forward to seeing you next week.

By suggesting the client think further about the session and that this might produce further insights, you encourage the client to take responsibility for what happens next. Remember, no matter how much clients think (and often really believe) they are powerless and depending on you, everyone is in fact responsible for his own life and for his day-to-day choices. You're only guiding the client, never directing. Note that nobody can help what's being done to him by others (to a certain extent because sometimes you can let things happen), but everybody is responsible for how and when they deal with the consequences of other people's acts.

15. What do you do if a client says the session has been worthless to him?
16. What do you do if the client doesn't want to make another appointment?
17. In daily life how do you end your conversations?
18. What could you improve on?

The last session

Let's see where you are now.. Five sessions ago you came to see me because you.... We discussed your situation thoroughly and you set yourself some new goals, we also made an action plan to achieve these goals. You are now well on your way with putting your plan into action and hearing you today gives me the impression you are fairly back on track. How do you see things?

I am under the impression that you are now capable of continuing under your own steam with the action plan you set for yourself. I suggest we don't set anymore appointments right now and that you continue as planned. Of course, if at some stage you feel the need to come and see me again, then you could contact me and we could have another appointment.

Thank you for trusting me and I wish you all the best!

Experience shows clients often wait too long to come and see you again. So you can also make an appointment with the client for six months on, this could be a maintenance appointment. You can always point out that they could cancel the scheduled appointment sufficiently ahead of time, if they wouldn't have a need for it then.

It maybe a good idea to give clients you have worked well with, a few business cards which they could give to relatives, friends or colleagues, if they want to. A satisfied customer is the best advertising you can have.

19. When is a client ready?

20. How do you experience saying goodbye?

Closed questions

As opposed to open questions, closed questions can be used to go deeper into a certain aspect of a problem or situation. For instance to have the client look at the problem from a particular angle or have him talk about a certain aspect that he seems unwilling or can't bring himself to talk about.

Closed question usually start with a verb and can be answered with a simple yes or no. It doesn't really invite a person to expand on what is being asked, but rather to answer the question.

In daily conversation people tend to ask more closed questions than open questions. In counselling sessions you're trying to get things out in the open and you would miss opportunities if you ask only closed questions, because that would restrict the client and not encourage him to talk about his underlying feelings and his view on things. If you control the conversation too much, the result will be more your story than that the client can express himself and clarify his situation for himself. Using too many closed questions may give the client the impression he is under interrogation. So use closed questions sparingly and only in the right context and with the implicit invitation to tell more about a certain issue or to check on something.

Exercises:

Use the given verb to ask a closed question, in a tone that encourages the client to tell you more.

Ah well, the trouble with the children over and over again. I am glad I can go to work in the morning. I really do not envy my wife. Still, when I am at work I have trouble concentrating.

Have

Have you ever considered that your home situation could influence you at work?

Janet isn't there, I am stuck at home on my own, and I don't see a way out.... I will never solve this. It can't be easy on the kids, either...

Are

Are there any problems at home? Did something happen between you and Janet?

I really dislike my boss. We work our butts off, but it's never enough.

Be

Is it the amount of work that bothers you, or rather how he handles things?

I'm at the end of my tether, I want out.

Can

Are things really that bad? Can you think of anything that might work?

Again, use closed questions sparingly.

21. Have somebody ask you lots of closed questions and then open questions. Experience the difference. How did it feel? What were the results? Pay attention to the client's non-verbal communication.

Specific questions

Sometimes it is useful to focus on a particular part of the client's story. After all, details can fill in the gaps and in the details you can sometimes find what it is all about. Specific questions can also be used to open up areas which are a closed chapter to the client or that he doesn't like to talk about. Use specific questions sparingly, like all techniques intended to help the client look at his problems at his own pace. Keep in mind that trust is an issue: a client will only disclose certain things or go deeper when he is ready for it and it is important to be sensitive to this because you may be touching on deeply sensitive issues. A specific question is posed in order to get an exact answer or factual information. A specific question goes further than a closed question that can be answered with a simple yes or no.

Ask a specific question on the following topics:

Being bullied

By whom are you being bullied at work?

Similar situations

Does this situation remind you of another situation in your life?

Hobbies

What kind of hobbies do you have?

Medicines

What kind of medication are you taking?

Respond to your client with a specific question:

Of course I like a drink every now and then like everybody else, but I don't drink more than my friends.

What was your average over the last four weeks?

I am too old for children.

How old do you think is being too old to have children?

I would like to go on holiday, to relax and get rid of the stress.

What kind of stress do you want to get rid of?

I just want to be the best in running.

Being the best is open to interpretation. How fast would you like to run the 500 metres?

22. Why do you ask specific questions?

Probing questions

A probing question is used in a discussion to encourage the client to expand on his story. With a probing question you stimulate someone to explore certain facts or events more deeply. The focus is more on the factual and rational part of the story. Sometimes you ask a succession of probing questions, as in the following example in which such questions are used to uncover a sensitive topic.

*No, it wasn't a nice conversation. Oh well, I don't really care.
Do you want to say more about that?*

*I am through with Jessica?
Jessica?*

*Yes, my girlfriend.
Why are you through with Jessica?*

*Ah, nothing.
Nothing?*

*We haven't had sex for two months now; I can't stand it any longer.
That is quite a long time. What can't you stand anymore?*

*At work all day long good looking single colleagues pay attention to me and I only have to snap my fingers and ...
And what?*

*We'll get into the broom closet to do you know what. A man has to ease his tension, I'm not impotent yet.
To summarise: you're very tempted to go after one of your single colleagues now that you and your girlfriend haven't had sex for two months.
There, you understand me completely.*

23. What is the difference between a specific question and a probing question?
--

Exploration

Exploration, surveying and clarifying are in a way the opposite of focusing and asking specific questions. With exploration you just investigate a problem or situation together with your client. This can be the problem in a bigger context, or what feelings are involved, but also to find out what inner resources the client has, what kind of support he can get from others, possible goals he wants to achieve, what ways might lead to his goal, what it means to the client, etc.

An example of inner resources:

I'm hopeless.

That doesn't sound very encouraging. What does the term 'inner resources' mean to you?

Well, you're dealing with somebody who has lost faith.

Hum, suppose you would find your faith again, activated it! What would it contain and look like?

I would have stamina, have courage and be nice to my children.

An example of external support:

I have the feeling I can't do it on my own.

I can imagine that. But you know, there are about 5 billion people on this planet so it is quite possible there is someone who would like to help you with your project. What kinds of people are suitable, do you think?

Uh, ... I think social workers, pastors, people who could give referrals, volunteers, ...

An example of looking for possible goals:

I want to feel good again.

Sounds like a good aim. When would you feel good?

When I get my diploma, have a nice girlfriend and have a good job.

An example of different routes:

I just can't quit smoking, I have tried everything.

Everything?

Well, not everything but I usually start again.

Quitting smoking is very difficult and you shouldn't underestimate it. Still there are lots of methods that can help you to quit. What ways can you think of that could really help you and give you that extra push?

A few examples of finding out what the client means:

I have to admit, if I'm involved in something I feel guilty.

Why do you feel guilty?

What does 'feeling guilty' mean to you?

How do you handle that feeling of guilt?

If Anne acts like that again, I'll get incredibly angry!

Why do you get angry?

How is it for you - getting angry at Anne?

How do you express your anger?

I feel depressed all the time.

Being depressed means different things to different people. What is it like for you?

I can't be bothered with anything.

What other characteristics does your depression have?

Well... uh, that I eat a lot, fall asleep in front of the television and that I haven't cleaned my house for three months.

24. What is the use of exploring?

25. What kind of question do you use when exploring?

26. What happens if you only ask exploring questions

Taking stock

Taking stock is linked to exploring and clarifying. You are trying to get a clear picture of the personal (inner) resources and skills, available to the client and what he himself sees as his limitations.

Examples of taking stock:

Yes, we really should go and talk to the family, but I'm not looking forward to it. I know what they're going to say.

How

How could you best deal with the resistance you're expecting?

Of course it's a nice job, but it's completely different from the one I have now.

How

How could you prepare yourself for meeting the requirements of the new job?

I would like to climb the career ladder, but who would hire a fifty year old?

So you've got 50 years of life experience and 30 year of work experience and you're asking yourself who could put that to good use. What would you think of listing all your know-how on paper? That might help to make it more precise and explicit, so you could look for a job in a more focused way and present yourself more effectively.

Getting counselling is all well and good, but I've only been a year in The Netherlands and I feel discriminated against. In my own country I was a lawyer and here people are looking at me like I'm a nobody, just because I don't speak the language that well and have no money to buy a suit.

You're missing a couple of things such as status, money, being fluent in the language and being able to dress well. Your accommodation also leaves a lot to be desired, living in those barracks. As time goes by all that may well change. For now, let's have a look at what could help you get ahead at this stage.

27. Why is it important to take stock?

28. What things are suitable to take stock on with your client?

Intuition

It is often possible to know things or have a gut feeling about something without having any real tangible indication or evidence, by just having a feeling, an impression. The counsellor could express this intuition. Be cautious though, because the client is usually not aware of it yet and it may be hard to tell initially whether your intuition is right or not. Take into account that the feeling you get with this client is an interpretation based on your own experience, it doesn't have to match the client's feeling or experience. Be sure the client doesn't get a sense of being exposed or unmasked. Throw out a feeler or say something in casual manner.

Since my wife's passing, I am at loose ends. What am I still doing here...? Being together was nice but... You can't bring her back either, so let's just end this here.

It must be awful to lose your wife after forty years of marriage. That's not something you get over in just a couple of months. Hearing you talk, it seems like you have given up on life.

Me? No, I haven't hacked a single site the last couple of weeks. Didn't even download illegal software or sell it. I'm studying now to be an IT specialist and I am well on my way...

Sounds good, but I have this whispering voice inside of me saying you are still a bit tempted. You know I adhere to strict confidentiality, so what we discuss will go no further...

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| <p>29. How do you know the difference between your intuition, your thinking and feeling?
30. How do you know which is right?</p> |
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Assessment of the problem

As counsellor you don't have to be able to solve all kinds of problems, but it is useful with a new client to be able to quickly assess roughly what the problem is, preferably in person during the first discussion. By doing so you can evaluate quickly if it is better to refer the client to somebody else, for example a specialist. This way the client doesn't have to tell his story many times. A good counsellor is sincere in this and would rather refer too quickly than not quickly enough, or fail to refer when it is in the client's best interest. Though you can't guarantee anything, experience shows that you can roughly estimate how many sessions are likely to be necessary.

I've had so many odd jobs... It's just that I can't work with people.

Hearing your story, I think you have a good chance of finding what you're looking for. You have plenty of experience and knowledge. Okay, you are not a team player and in all the jobs so far you had to be part of a team. What would you say if we look for what kind of jobs you could do on your own. My hunch is that would suit you much better and it might be just the thing for you....

I'm so tired, I can't cope anymore and I'm going crazy. Work...? They took what I had and after that they threw me out, like a rag, the bastards...

Life has been hard on you and your boss even harder. You feel completely washed out. Does the term 'burn-out' mean anything to you?

I'm going nowhere near an elevator. I avoid them like the plague and use any excuses I can think of, like: taking the stairs is good for your health. But just the other day we had a meeting in a skyscraper and we were already late. It didn't go unnoticed that I took the stairs and arrived five minutes after the others, dripping with sweat.

Sounds to me you could have what is called claustrophobia. I suggest you have this checked out with a specialist. I could refer you to a colleague of mine, if you like. He is quite successful in helping people get rid of this kind of phobia with a method called NLP. He is also a certified counsellor and he always explores what causes it, so it isn't only dealing with the symptoms.

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| <p>31. What is the difference between assessing the problem and diagnosing?
32. Is a counsellor allowed to diagnose a client?</p> |
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Recognition

Though every person is unique, you can often recognise general patterns in people's lives. For example certain problems are related to age, gender, social status, the spirit of the time or the religious belief of the client. Having knowledge of these general human patterns enables you as counsellor to see similarities or rather to recognise when a client deviates from standard patterns. Through life experience and knowledge, you can possibly reassure clients that it is not unusual to be faced with certain problems in particular phases of life.

I will go and live on my own and work. I am finished with school, they can go to hell!

You're young, rebellious and know what you want. I used to be like that, maybe even worse. It's not easy though to leave school without a diploma and find a well paid job. Cleaning toilets might be fun for a while, but after that... What would you say if we look at what you would really like to go for?

The doctor says I'm depressed and prescribes medication just to get rid of me. Am I not allowed to be sad because my wife died?

It's not unusual that grieving over a loved one is confused with having a depression. I believe that you are very sad and that medication isn't going to help to come to terms with things. In the old days people could mourn for two years, but nowadays with the fast pace of life you're supposed to be happy again a few weeks after the funeral. But that is just not humanly possible, you do need more time.

33. How do you get good at recognition, without filling in for your client?

Directing attention

In the client's story you can often find several storylines. The discussion can go from physical complaints to quarrelling with the partner to not being happy at work. These are all ingredients of the total problem, which the client came to see you about. The problem may have started with the partner at home and because of built up tension result in physical symptoms and stress at work. Sometimes the incompatibility of having several competing goals and the client not being able to choose between them, is the problem.

In all these cases directing attention and starting with one of the problems can be a step in the right direction: towards resolution of the problem. When you are under the impression that all the story lines have surfaced, then you can summarize and have the client choose the one that seems most important to him, and then go deeper into the chosen topic.

Suzy is a sweetheart really, but lately she's been getting on my nerves from time to time. It wasn't always like that. Since I have problems with my knee, it seems to be getting worse between us. It's no picnic for me either: I would rather do something else, be somewhere else than to sit at home all day.

What's more important to you: your relationship being under pressure, or the need to come up with something meaningful to do?

I would like to get that promotion, but because of the situation at home I don't have any time to study. Look, we all want what is best for Jacky, but at the moment she's taking up so much of my time and energy.

What would you like to work on: getting a promotion or getting good day-care for your daughter?

I can't see the trees for the wood, so many problems and unfinished business... It's such a mess at home and then these three screaming kids, of which one has ADHD and now social services want me to go find a job. How could I possibly manage it?

You have more problems than you can handle. Which one would you like to start with?

Yes, and my neighbour is also acting strange lately. Since he has a new girlfriend he doesn't drop by anymore. Just as in those soaps on TV. I watched football yesterday, but that was shit too. Have you noticed how many police officers there are on the street these days - what is the world coming to?

There is a lot going on in the world. Shall we focus on your main problem? You indicated you were feeling lonely?

34. How do you direct your own attention?

35. How do you direct somebody else's attention?

Focusing

Having directed the client's attention, you may now go on to focusing. You are on track of that part of the problem that the client experiences as the most significant, and you try to get deeper into the material. By asking specific and probing questions, you focus increasingly on the underlying feelings pertaining to the experience. To prevent the client from feeling cornered, it is important that you let him know through your body language, choice of words, tone of voice and attitude, that is safe to go deeper into the matter. Give the client time to recognise the emotions he is uncovering, as you are getting into that part of the problem he has so carefully avoided thus far.

Try out the following dialogue:

I see no way out, it's useless.

I can tell it is really troubling you. How does this whole situation feel for you now?

Pretty bad.

It does not make you feel good.

What more can I say?

You're asking yourself how it really feels?

Like I'm being punished.

Punished?

Yes, my parents also always pressured me. My knee was already hurting at the time, but I was forced to go to soccer training every week and when I complained, my father told me not to be such a wimp.

What went through you at those moments?

Anger... injustice... I thought they were mean. I had problems with my knee and the other boys didn't. When your parents don't show any compassion, you feel all alone.

Which feeling prevailed?

Well you know..... lack of understanding. They should have known I couldn't do it.

Lack of understanding?

Yes, I felt completely misunderstood.

Completely?

By my parents in the past and now by my wife...

You feel completely misunderstood, by your parents... and by your wife?

Yes and no, I don't know actually...

What don't you know?

That what happened with my parents I hadn't thought about for years and that used to be much worse than now. That was hellish.

What's it like now?

Gertrude is actually quite understanding, but when she pushes me, I feel all alone again like I used to back then.

36. What is the difference between focusing and exploring?

Sharing information

Sometimes a client hasn't got all the relevant or necessary information. The information you give as counsellor is not advice in the sense that the client must follow it, but is shared when it seems the client can make good use of it. Look at the following examples:

My girlfriend is already three months pregnant, if her father finds out... She can't even go to the doctor because her parents will get the bill.

I would like to help the two of you as best I can. Do you know there are organisations that help young girls in her situation with all sorts of practical things, free of charge. If need be, they can even offer Anita a roof over her head. They respect the unborn child and it doesn't matter to them if the pregnant woman is 14 or 40. Here you have the address.

I can't face it anymore; it seems that the more I try, the deeper I sink.

I think that at the moment you are in a really difficult phase of the process you are going through. You're trying to find out how you got in this mess in the first place, without seeing any real future for yourself. It means you're investing a lot of energy in getting ahead, but at the same time it also means that it's not impossible to do so.

Yes, the homeopath said that it had something to do with my mother passing away.

A homeopath might be able to notice the imbalance of your body by certain signs. But he can't tell you anything about the cause of this imbalance, unless he is making assumptions on the basis of what you've told him yourself.

I'm powerless. Next week I'm being evicted.

As a tenant you have certain rights, even if you can't pay the rent. You can get legal assistance. To find out more, you could contact the legal affairs agency. They help people who have no money nearly free of charge. The first consult is even for free.

I just wonder why I had to get burglarized? I don't even know the guy, I didn't harm him and I don't deserve this.

Good question. Seems more a coincidence you got burglarized. He is well know to the police and seems to have committed more than a hundred burglaries. He's a drug addict. Though you're deeply affected by it, it was nothing personal.

I know I should exercise more, but when I run my knees start to trouble me.

Running is a strain on the knees, but there are other sports you could do that won't injure you, for example swimming could be an option if that's your thing.

37. When would you refrain from giving a client additional information?

38. Why do we need new information all the time?

New information

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is actually *super exploration*. In this type of exploration you don't limit yourself to what is realistically possible, but you allow your creative imagination to flow. Nothing is too far-fetched or crazy. You enter another dimension in a way. Things that might not seem possible now, just may take shape later. There are lots of brainstorming techniques, you can combine some to come up with new ones.

When brainstorming, try to come up with as many options as you can at a fast pace. It doesn't matter how relevant the options are, you can get into that later. What counts is: quantity over quality. Stimulate the client to think of the most disparate options or solutions. Have one idea lead to another. Mention a few funny ones yourself to get him going. At evaluation, some ideas will be discarded straightaway, but the more there are listed, the more the client is likely to be convinced the one he ultimately chooses will be the right one for him. Having a lot of options may also have the effect on the client that the situation is not hopeless, or that there are solutions after all.

To stimulate creativity it helps to have a few things handy, like a big piece of paper, a drawing board or such, crayons, markers, chalk... Note things briefly, don't select, that's for later.

In a weeks time I will move out of my girlfriend's house and I have no idea where to go. Building societies will put me on a waiting list for years.

Yes, and you don't seem to be the type that likes sleeping on a bench in the park... How about brainstorming about all the options? We could start with a few wild ideas,, the crazier the better. Just name as many things as you can.

Win a million.

Blackmail someone, bribe building society employees.

Squatting.

Marry a rich widow.

Live in my car, buy a van and rebuild it.

Yes, and camping might be an idea too.

Housesit for people who are on holiday.

Stay with friends and make new friends all the time.

Reverse roles and put my girlfriend out on the street.

Find people in the same boat and rent a house together.

Build a tree house in a deserted forest or build a shelter underground.

Yes, that is a good idea too You can go also start working on a cruise ship as a bartender.

Advertise for accommodation, put up notices everywhere.

You can also ask around.

Ask your family if you can stay with them for a while.

Ask others in your network.

Stay in my mother's garden shed.

Or in the garage.

Or go and live in another town with more accommodation.

You could even live in as an Au Pair or as a 'nanny'.

Right, the garden shed - it is actually nice and clean and pretty spacious... Hm, I have more options than I thought and here I was being hung up on the building society...

Not bad indeed. Shall we look at the best five and see how we do with them?

39. What is the worst thing you can do during brainstorming?

40. How can you get a client going who is drawing a blank?

Abstraction technique

With the *Abstraction technique* you generalise the problem. You do this by making specific things abstract and if possible, expand on this.

I haven't been able to chat up Helen.

Men weren't able to chat her up in Trojan times either... To analyse the problem we could make it abstract, so we can look at it in general terms.

Oh...

That sounds harder than it is. We could first make Helen abstract. In that case you say "I haven't been able to chat up a woman".

And then.... I'm unable to come into contact with a woman.

You are unable to come into contact with another human being.

The problem really is that I can't get a relationship with anyone.

You see that this feels different? That's why this way it is easier to find a solution. Now you can ask yourself 'How do I get into contact with somebody?' This gives you a wider range of choices than just Helen.

It can also help to turn keywords around in a sentence. Instead of 'I haven't been able to chat up Helen, the problem then becomes 'Helen hasn't been able to chat me up'. The goal then becomes 'Getting chatted up by Helen'. You could brainstorm about ways to reach that goal.

How do I let myself be fancied by Helen?.

Mmm, nice to be fancied by someone...

See if you can think of 20 ways to make that happen...

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">41. Look at any number of brainstorm techniques to see which ones suit you best.42. How can clients react towards brainstorming?43. What is more important, the technique that suits your client or the one that suits you? |
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Brainstorm exercises

Use the brainstorm technique called '*Wishful thinking*' to let clients think of the best and easiest ways to reach their goal.

Brainstorm about brainstorming techniques. Everything is possible from using a dictionary to using your wildest imagination. Try brainstorming with msn or e-mail or internet. You can also take an hour about a topic instead of a few minutes or you can add something every day to your list for weeks.

44. Make a list of marketing strategies for your own practice, as complete as you can. Let yourself be influenced by as many sources as you can think of.

Self-disclosure

Clients often are under the impression that they are the only ones struggling with that kind of problem. Though they may have heard of or read about similar cases, that has not led to recognition or helped them develop a better strategy. Because they have been going round in circles, they are unable to see a way out. In such cases, it can be useful to tell them of similar things from your own experience. The purpose is to show them a solution is possible.

Self-disclosure can also be used to a degree to strengthen the bond with the client, i.e. if it would help the client to know that the counsellor has gone through a similar experience. You can also use self-disclosure to break the ice or to make sure the client doesn't put you on a pedestal. Make sure self-disclosure is done in such a way that the client doesn't get the impression everybody can handle the situation, except him. Don't disclose things about yourself that you haven't come to terms with, otherwise the client might start feeling he really should counsellor you instead of the other way around.

The outside world seems to think that after two weeks you should go on as if nothing happened. I can't do that. Nothing seems fun anymore since my mother died and all I can think of are her last days.

I understand. When my mother died, it took me quite some time to get over it. I did notice that after a while, the good memories about her came back, and that I could enjoy them again.

I am afraid to speak in public. The times that I had to do it, I broke out in such a sweat I virtually floated of the stage.

Fear of failure, stage fright, fear of speaking in public - a lot of people are troubled by it. I shall let you in on a secret. When I first started, I had to give a seminar about counselling in a big firm to their employees. The entire management was present, 20 men in three-piece suits. I blacked out, completely forgot what I had prepared and could hardly get a word out - me being a professional counsellor... Please don't tell anyone. Luckily a colleague lend me a good book with lots of tips and a friend provided me with some good training on speaking in public. Nowadays it's not a problem anymore.

I feel like shit. The stupid girl dumped me for some dickhead. I will never get over it.

It can happen to anyone. It happened to one of my friends a while back. He also thought he would never get over it. He was still hopelessly in love and felt completely lost without her. But in spite of feeling desperate, he made a full recovery. He married a woman who is much more suited to him and they have two children. In hindsight he is glad his former girlfriend left him.

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| <p>45. How does it feel to tell somebody something personal about yourself? To a friend? To a client? In a group?</p> <p>46. What things aren't suitable to tell a client?</p> |
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Immediacy

Clients can ramble on or get lost in details, since you are a person who is showing genuine interest in them and who is prepared to listen. The client can also be glad to finally get it off his chest. Now it's not about how much the client tells you but what he tells you, so that you can help him gain insight in the causes of his problem and why things have not been resolved so far.

With immediacy, you help clients distance themselves from whatever happened in the past and to concentrate on the present, on what is going on right now. It also serves to address information from the story in order to help clients become aware of certain patterns, that show in the discussion with you as well. The purpose is to clear away hurdles that have formed because the client is not sufficiently aware of his current situation or avoids certain truths, that by using this technique can be boldly exposed, as it were.

Those IT guys really are in control. Boys barely twenty years old are leading the company. Did I work thirty years to be treated like this? I sacrificed everything for the good of the company and what do I get...? On top of everything I have to learn how to send an email. We used to have typists to do all the administrative work and now I have to do it myself, me being the manager. No way!

It must be hard to discover that some people can do certain things better than you. What is keeping you from hiring a girl who is good with computers and who can write your emails and with any luck, might teach you how to use the internet. You told me the other time you like Japanese cooking. I have looked on the internet yesterday and found hundreds of sites with really good recipes, dozens of sushi secrets, not to mention the virtual Geisha's.

Mmm. Sounds good.

It's not the kind of weather for outdoor sports. It's always raining.

What was the weather like last week?

Okay, but I don't have any running shoes yet.

Then you're lucky - there's a sale on tomorrow. 30% percent discount at the local sportshop.

It's no good; I've hit a brick wall dozens of times.

I understand you've had some bad experiences in the past, but what has it been like lately?

I might as well quit coming here and all... They have fired me.

You were made redundant and that means you will stop working, at least there. What do you think you could do to make the best of the situation?

I'll kill him, what he has done to me is unforgivable. I shall have my revenge.

Yes, topping him would be an option and there might be some justice in that, but how would that help you reach your goal?

Huh?

Your goal was to become businessman of the year. I don't think you that's on the cards if you are sent to jail.

47. How can you become good at immediacy?

48. How would you feel if a person is too direct and too confrontational towards you?

Congruence

Be open and honest to a client. Help him in a pleasant and straightforward way to address his problems. You are no good to a client if you don't help him discover what the real problem is and how he might solve it. Discovering the truth can be painful to the client, but the way you assist him can make all the difference. Adjust your approach to the type of client. Avoid creating a sense of being exposed or having to get all defensive because you are too direct or too assertive. The goal is to help the client, not to be assertive. Act like a friend.

Nobody listens to me. I feel like I don't exist. At home, at the office, whatever I say, it doesn't register. They think they know it all. Why don't they listen? I have forty years of experience.

You're telling me people don't listen to you. During our discussions you have taken the initiative and a tight control. It's been hard for me to break into the conversation or to turn it into a dialogue. I can imagine that some people dislike that and therefore ignore you. Do you think it might be possible that this creates the impression people aren't listening to you?

Well, uh... I don't know.

I have noticed you cross your arms a lot and that you are often looking at the floor.

Mister Johnson....

No, just listen to me for once. Maybe it's me, but every time I try to say something you interrupt me. How is that in other situations, for instance when someone wants to explain something to you?

In the next example the client is an overaged hippie looking for work:

Okay, you didn't get the job. That can happen to the best of us. I know this is not a job interview but when I look at you... the way you're dressed, your unconventional hairdo, the odour around you - I wonder what a potential employer thinks of it and if that's what he is looking for?

Has he gone crazy to say all that, the effing wanker!

I can take a lot and frankly, you can say what you like in here, but with that kind of language it is quite possible your teacher doesn't think too highly of you.

A blond visits the doctor and asks...

What strikes me is that every time we get to the heart of the matter, you start telling a joke. The jokes make me laugh, but what I would really like to do is to help you find out what the problem really is and to help you solve it.

49. What is the difference between being direct, assertive and genuine?

Challenging the client

To be able to let go of ingrained patterns, a client not only has to pluck up the necessary courage but also put up a lot of energy, while he doesn't know in advance if it's all going to be worth it in the long run. So he can do with some extra motivational challenge in order to change. Look for clues in the client's story that can be turned into 'rewards'. Stimulate the client to think in terms of daring to choose a goal and then really go for it. A good challenge will help the client to go on when he is encountering difficulties on the road to change and will help him not to give up at the first hurdle. Make sure the client regards the challenge as his own and encourage the client to challenge himself. Take into consideration not every client likes challenges or responds equally well to it.

I really have to give up a lot: going out with my friends, drinking, having fun... What do I get in return? Having to go to bed early, being on a strict diet and training till I virtually drop. And for what?

Oh, I don't know, you're already the champ of British Columbia, so if you beat a few more opponents from a few other states you're the national champion. You're still young so becoming the champion of North America could also be on the cards. There are more guys who did it, so why not you?

I'm afraid to go to Gamblers Anonymous.

Well, it is a bit of a gamble what it will be like, but it might be the best gamble you ever took in your life!

I don't know what to wear when she comes. I haven't had a girlfriend for ages. I am going to call it off.

Cancelling is an option, but think of all the nice things that can happen if you're having a candlelight diner with romantic music and enjoying each other's company.

50. What would challenge you to do the things you don't much like to do yourself?

Clients challenging themselves

For clients to challenge themselves, you need to ask the questions in such a way that the client will start challenging himself. You let him state what would motivate and stimulate him to reach his goal or to achieve his aim.

I wonder if it's all worth it?

What would help you to carry on?

It's not an easy task, you know.

Changing is never easy. What would stimulate you to change?

To swing into action I need a challenge.

What challenge were you thinking of?

Other people make it seem so easy.

How could you make it easy for yourself?

It's quite a task, you know.

Do you remember what reward you have set yourself when you reach your goal?

I can't think of anything, even though when I was young I had so many ideas - but nowadays...

Suppose we could go back in time to your young self, what would you want then?

This year I won't become the champ.

Hm, this sounds to me like negative thinking. How could you make sure you do succeed?

With the children, a part time job and my husband spending most of his spare time on his study, I don't have any time to myself.

What can you think of that would give you some time to yourself? If you like, we can brainstorm about it.

51. How can you challenge yourself?

52. Why do you want the client to challenge himself?

53. Why is it better to have the client challenge himself than you having to challenge him?

Modelling

Sometimes the client lacks certain skills in behaviour, character traits, feelings, thoughts that he just hasn't learnt or picked up along the line. Most people are good in taking on board things from others, for example certain jokes, new expressions or fads that spread rapidly.

How the counsellor is as a person can have a bearing on the client. A counsellor with a positive attitude and who is genuine, congruent, honest, and sincere could transfer some of these qualities to his clients, as he is likely to be seen as a role model. Of course the counsellor is only human and he doesn't have to have all the possible traits and skills one could think of, whereas clients may lack courage, determination, hope, etc. There are however many people, famous or not, who do have all sorts of outstanding qualities. To be able to acquire such qualities, the client could model himself after people who do have the quality he lacks. The client could try to imagine what it would be like to be like them, to feel what it would feel like having that certain quality, to be for example courageous. Not only humans can serve as role model, but also animals, plants, gods or objects. In fact anything can serve as a role model. The trick is to find the right model and to learn how to quickly copy the desired quality. It won't be necessary to copy the entire role model, just that quality you need at that moment.

I've been unemployed for a year now and nobody wants me. On top of that, there's a recession going on, so I have no chance whatsoever.

Yes, times are hard. It reminds me of the big recession before the Second World War. I believe half the people were unemployed and social services were close to non-existent back then. Nobody wanted to start anything or dared to invest money because they couldn't see the point of it. Who would buy if people had no money? Still there were visionaries, people who could see beyond the pale, who invested a lot, worked very hard and saved every dime. In retrospect, they made the right choice. People like Paul Getti. You wouldn't say it, but this billionaire started his fortune by picking up every little piece of rope he could find in the street such as shoelaces, because bits of rope represented a certain value. Maybe you should read a book about him, so your kids won't have to work later on.

I am weak, ugly, I have glasses and I am being bullied. What is the point of counselling?

Your situation looks grim. It reminds of Jean Claude van Damme. A friend of mine went to the same karate school as he did when JC was twelve, your age. He was being bullied as well and he lost every fight, and boy, was he ugly! I think even his karate teacher didn't have a lot of faith in him and considered sending him home. But JC did not give up. In fact, being humiliated gave him the inner strength to get where he is today while the ones who bullied him got stuck at their level.

I haven't got it in me, to be a good dad.

Fatherhood is an art in itself and it's not an easy job. You didn't have a good example when you grew up. What men can you think that you believe did a much better job?

I don't know a lot of fathers.

Not a lot?

Well, actually... There's an old friend I haven't seen for ages, in fact since he had kids and that is some three years ago.

Your friend had children and since then you haven't seen him anymore?

Yes, we couldn't hit the town anymore or hang out like we used to. I had the feeling we no longer had anything in common. He was always busy with his kids, but now I have a daughter of my own...

So?

I could try and renew our friendship and see how he handles parenthood.

Another example:

I think you stink as a counsellor.

Every person is entitled to his opinion. What is it you don't like about me?

I've been here five times now and I still have problems with that bitch.

Bitch?

Yes, my sweat loving wife, that still doesn't want to have sex with me.

That's a drag. Why do you think that is?

In the last example the counsellor uses him self as a role model. He reacts calmly and politely when the client attacks him aggressively. This way the client can inadvertently learn a better way to communicate or how to react and deal with problem situations.

54. How could you learn from a role model?

55. What will the effect be if you suggest an unfit model?

56. What could your reaction be if you become aware you're the client's role model

Motivation

As you read in the part on challenging the client, in spite of the fact that the client knows he is in trouble and has come to see you about it, he isn't always motivated to really work on his problems. He can also get discouraged in the course of the sessions. It is up to you then to motivate him again by encouraging him to look at it from different angles.

Here are some motivating sentences that you could use, followed by some examples:

What would encourage you?

What would swing you into action?

What inner resources could possibly strengthen your will to succeed?

How could you speed things up?

How much time do you allocate yourself?

The sooner you start, the quicker you can reach your goal.

We could go over everything again, but how about 'starting' today?

Every journey starts with the first step.

Sometimes you need to just grin and bear it, and go on.

Despite the counselling I give up. I just can't make it through the month.

I think you've come a long way, hold on. Let's look at what we can come up with to make it through the coming week. What do you think you need for that?

I really think I should cancel the evaluation with my boss. It's no use.

Look, once you've had the evaluation with your boss, at least you'll know where you stand. It might not go as you wish, but things will be clearer then. And then you can make new plans and put your energy in them. Let's see how you can prepare for the interview.

Nice plans we've made, but I just don't seem to be able to carry them out.

What's holding you back?

I keep forgetting!

How can you stop yourself from forgetting?

Write things on a piece of paper and put it on the back of the door, so I see it before I leave the house.

That's a good idea. Here's a piece of paper...

I want to quit school because I don't think I will ever graduate.

Maybe, but you've studied hard for four years. You only have a few more months to go. Actually you are virtually there and now you want to throw away four years, just like that?

Bit of a waste, eh?

It's your choice to throw away four years of effort.

I'm scared to death I will flunk.

So it's very important to you that you make it.

Yes, I didn't put in four years for nothing.

What would motivate you to go for it those last few months?

57. What is the difference between challenging your client and motivating him?

Dealing with resistance

Sometimes the client seems to be getting nowhere. He may feel resistance while telling his story, to find goals, to make an action plan, to carry it out, etc. In some cases, resistance may be caused or reinforced by the counsellor's attitude. The counsellor might want to go too fast, or not really believe in it, or not give it his full attention. Resistance may also be caused by the client not wanting to let go of the known situation, no matter how bad it is. Therefore, strengthen the relationship with the client and encourage him take small steps and achieve small successes to build up his confidence. Some clients are sent by others, they might not really want to be there, or have a secret agenda. Some people just want to be right or that their solution is proven the best.

Stop asking all these questions. I just can't help it!

You seem to have a lot of trouble to tell me exactly what happened this week.

Well, I was born stupid and haven't learnt much since.

Maybe, but are you able to remember what you told her last week?

That's a hard one.

You don't have to go into all the details, but can you give me the gist of it?

What do I care?

It sounds as though you've lost interest all of a sudden.

I really don't know what happened back then.

It must be hard, having to remember those things.

Could be, but one person says one thing and another person something else. It's not surprising I don't know what to do anymore.

It's always good to get advice from other people, but it doesn't make it any easier to choose a solution that really suits you.

I would like to quit, but can't resist the temptation.

How about making sure you're not tempted anymore?

Oh well, problems, what do you mean? No, I don't think I've got real problems.

That's good, but I do believe you came to see me about something.

Well, and then I ran into Tom, great guy, always cheerful, good job, nice wife.... She used to be a model and now they live two blocks away from me, near the supermarket. Last week the coffee was on sale and I bumped into their son and...

You meet quite some people, but that's not what we here for. What do you think your problem is?

I have studied the problem from different angles and I've come to the conclusion that science is still far from solving it, so I don't know if you have the answer.

It's correct that there's no cure for it yet. But how about talking about your feelings, so you may learn to handle the situation better?

The world is such a mess, there's not a lot I can do.

That's true, but how about starting with your own problems?

Oh no, don't start all that again. Why can't we give it a rest?

It sounds like it's still troubling you.

I didn't do the homework, just didn't get round to it.

Looks like it is hard to do the tasks we agreed to. What is really stopping you from doing them?

58. What is the purpose of resistance?

59. How can you put resistance to good use?

60. How do you handle resistance?

61. When do you show resistance?

62. How would you get rid of your own resistance to something?

63. In what way would you like to be helped to overcome resistance?

Caring confrontation

A client has become a client because his current approach doesn't work. Something will have to change, but nobody likes to admit he was wrong. Help the client to look at change as a process of growth and not because of failure. Make it appealing to the client to try a different approach and prevent loss of face.

If that is not enough, then it may be in the client's best interest to have him face what he's trying to hide. First see if the client can handle a confrontation, because you don't want a countereffect that would damage or even destroyed the carefully constructed trusting relationship. Keep showing respect and care towards the client, as he's probably not able to envisage what will happen once he lets go of what is familiar and doesn't know if he will be successful in the new situation.

Oh well, I don't know. I think it's best if I continue to take care of mother. Despite everything you said, though I understood what you meant. But still...

What would you do with all the time you would have, if you didn't have to spend all day taking care of your mother?

I understand it's not easy to stop taking care of your mother. But you've told me you're on the verge of a breakdown and if that happens you will be of no use to anyone and you wouldn't be able to take care of her anymore anyway. What would have to happen to keep you from breaking down?

I can see it's hard for you to stop taking care of you mother. Continuing to take care of her won't change your own situation, which is already too much for you as it is, with your own household as well.... What's holding you back from involving other people in the care of your mother?

I'm fat and diets don't work, it must be something genetic.

Changing your genes is impossible, but you could learn to be selective about what you eat?

It's not my fault I drink too much. Everywhere I come drinks are virtually forced upon me. And because of my profession I can't say no, all those business lunches. You can't expect me to stop working.

A good businessman keeps a level head. It might sound harsh but you came to see me because you didn't get promoted because of the orders you didn't get. And you didn't get these because you drank too much...What's wrong with saying no and ordering an orange juice?

I feel like I'm being used by my husband and children. I feel like Cinderella.

It's not easy keeping everything together... But somehow I have the impression you can't say no and that you tend to give in whenever anyone asks you to do something.

You see, I can't do it, I've been telling you that for weeks now. Can't do it and never will.

Apparently you're a master in visualizing things. Everything you say happens. What about visualizing what you do want to happen?

I think I get it now. I know what the problem is and what my goal is. How about stopping with counselling?

Seems to me that's only the start. You've known what your problem was for years. How about allowing me to help you solve the problem?

I don't think it will ever get that far, I know what I'm doing.

Could be, but how about going to the alcohol clinic this afternoon and having a chat with all those people who 'knew what they were doing' too.

64. What kinds of confrontation do you know?
65. What is the purpose of confrontation?
66. What can be the result of a confrontation gone bad?
67. What is needed to have a caring confrontation?
68. In what case(s) is a confrontation pointless?
69. Choose a subject / case. Use different kinds of confrontation from subtle, gentle, to super hard, and back again.

Listening

Listening is an art. A lot of people stop talking and in their mind they're already trying to think of what they're going to say next. That is not really listening. If you are (pre)occupied with your own thoughts, then there is no room for the client anymore. Not really.

And even if you are listening and not busy with your own thoughts on the matter, listening is so much more than just hearing the words and being able to repeat them. To get the essence of what's being said -the words behind the words, is just as important, if not more so. While the client is telling his story, try to also listen for things like a slip of the tongue, jokes, omissions, recurring themes, metaphors and contradictions. They can speak volumes.

Apart from the intonations you can pick out the different emotions in the client's voice. Bodylanguage and other signals can strengthen or weaken the story. Contradictions are called incongruence and the counsellor can either keep these in mind or ask about them. Make sure you do this carefully, so the client won't feel caught out.

In active listening, the counsellor has an open and alert attitude, he's completely there for his client and is peeling his ears, so to speak. To listen empathically means the counsellor shows a lot of understanding for what the client is experiencing and in a way he manages to convey this warm understanding to the client, who can appreciate it.

*I don't understand why my wife is getting worked up, I for instance never get mad!!
Still I hear a bit of anger in your voice. Your wife might perceive this as you being angry.*

*If you think it helps, I'm quite willing to do it, you know?
You don't sound convinced, what might be holding you back?*

*I actually wanted to stop coming here as I think I'm doing much better now.
I'm glad you're feeling a lot better and of course you're free to stop whenever you want. However I've noticed there are still some things that seem to trouble you...*

*I haven't touched a drink in weeks, it's clear I'm not an alcoholic... (hiccup)
Being an alcoholic might be too strong a word, but something tells me you still do have a drink regularly.*

*I don't know what's wrong with me or where to start.
We can take our time. You sound very sad, maybe you could tell me what has happened?*

70. How can you really listen and be there for your client?

Understanding, Empathy and Deep Empathy

In counselling you want to build up a trusting relationship with your client in a short timespan. The client has often heard from people around him things like 'it's nothing to worry about', 'it will be all right', 'don't get worked up, you only make it worse' and more well intended things that unintentionally often made him shut up. With you he is allowed, or rather he should open up and get rid of this threshold. So you want to let him know he's at the right address with his story, his emotions and how he experiences things. By showing him empathy, you welcome his inner experiences and invite him to explore his own feelings. Empathy is not a technique by itself, it is often part of paraphrasing or reflecting. You not only express empathy in the words you use, but also in your modulation, intonation and by showing the right feelings.

Understanding, empathy and deep empathy are all in line and in a way connected. Understanding is more a rational thing and involves mainly intelligence. Empathy involves feelings, including your own feelings as a human being and as counsellor.

Deep empathy even goes one step further. It goes right into the inner world of experiencing of the client for a short while. In other words, with deep empathy you can virtually feel what the client must be experiencing. You express the emotions you feel the client has. This can be overdone, not every client expects a strong emotional reaction from his counsellor. So use and express deep empathy appropriately and judiciously.

In these exercises successive understanding, empathy and deeper empathy are shown.

Mother is connected to all these tubes and can hardly say a thing anymore. She's also drugged up with medicines.

(Understanding)

That must be an awful situation.

(Empathy)

I can imagine it must be very emotional to see your mother lying there so helplessly.

(Deep empathy)

I can tell you're suffering, you would so much like for her to get well but there's nothing you can do about it and you feel powerless.

Near my house kids hang out; it's very noisy, they fight regularly, and there's trash everywhere.

(Understanding)

It must be annoying; all that noise, aggression and mess.

(Empathy)

It must be threatening; so close to your home, and that day in day out.

(Deep empathy)

Looks like it really troubles you. You were looking forward to living in a nice neighbourhood with your children and now it turns out to be just the opposite.

I got fired last week, out of the blue.

(Understanding)

Gosh, that must have been quite a shock.

(Empathy)

That's terrible, and you thought you would get that promotion.

(Deep Empathy)

Of course you feel desperate and betrayed. I would really like to try and help you to get over it.

71. How can you learn to become (more) empathic?
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Humour

Humour is something that can work wonders during a session, but that can also damage or even destroy the carefully constructed relationship. Everybody's sense of humour is different, so what you think is funny and appropriate might not be that at all to another person. Use it judiciously, and only when you are *completely* sure it is ok, when in doubt don't! It's not up to you to tickle your client's gills, but rather to help him tackle his problems better.

However, humour can be useful in helping a client to take himself less seriously or to see things more in perspective. And you can have your joke pack a punch, that may be easier to take that way. And sometimes humour can be used in a difficult session, to provide a bit of a distraction, to lighten things up a bit, though you need to carefully consider whether it is used for that or to get away from a heavy topic (for you or for your client?).

72. How do you know in advance if some humour will help the client?

73. What do you do if the joke doesn't have the desired effect?

74. What do you do if the client gets angry because the humour had some hidden truth in it and has hit a nerve

Openmindedness

As counsellor you are openminded towards your client. This is expressed in your attitude and the attention you give your client. You accept what the client says as his experience and you try to understand him as well as you can. Because of your openmindedness the client feels free to elaborate, to explore his problem and to look for solutions or how he could deal with things better. How he sees things is your starting point.

Openmindedness also means giving someone the benefit of the doubt. It is like being a good host opening the door to your guest, taking his coat and giving him a warm welcome, as though he were an old friend.

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| <p>75. How do you express or show openmindedness, other then what is already mentioned?</p> <p>76. How do you notice people have a closed mind?</p> <p>77. How do you help another person to be openminded and to express that?</p> <p>78. How can you become or stay open to positive influences in order to recharge yourself?</p> |
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Respect

As counsellor you show respect to your client at all times, no matter what happens. You do this by means of your choice of words, behaviour, attitude, and how you express your feelings. You give your client your full attention and you accept him as a unique human being with his own norms and values and feelings.

79. How do you show respect?
80. Why do you show respect?
81. How does assertiveness fit into all of this?
82. What are your boundaries and how does it feel if they are violated?
83. How do you make others aware of your boundaries?

Being genuine

It's important that a counsellor is genuine, meaning honest and congruent. He tells the client how he feels, or how he experiences the client, when that is appropriate, but at all times the counsellor stays respectful. It is important that in being genuine, the client's best interest is of overriding concern.

84. What is genuine about you and what isn't?
85. How can you become more genuine?
86. How can you help a client to be more genuine? (more himself)

Tune into your client

As counsellor you tune into your client. You tune into his use of language, words, intonation, attitude, movements and emotions. Do this unobtrusively. If you tune into your client, it will become easier for you to imagine what it would be like being him and having his problem. Your client will also feel more at ease with you. This can be called *mirroring*.

87. Think of 20 ways in which you can tune into somebody else.
88. Tune into people and see what happens.
89. Overdue it, underdue it and don't do it at all. What were the differences in the other person's behaviour, in other words what effect did it have?

Giving attention

A counsellor gives his client his full attention. By doing so, you make it easier for the client to tell his story and enables him to look at he could handle his problem better or even solve it. Giving attention you also do by listening actively, by being genuine and by showing respect, in other words by totally being there for the client.

90. How will the client react if you don't give him enough attention?
91. How can you give the client profound attention?
92. When is it impossible to give your client attention?

A trusting relationship

A trusting relationship is an essential part of counselling. Without trust a client might not come back or the process might not go as smoothly or as quickly as it could. In fact, building up trust is even more important than having mastered all the techniques given here and being able to apply them appropriately. If the trust within the relationship is strong and your intentions pure, then the client will accept the occasional slip-up or mistake.

Trust is something that has to grow and it needs to be built up consciously. If you're a good counsellor, trust is built up quickly. A professional attitude, but also rewarding like giving compliments or showing appreciation of the client can all contribute. Also remembering minor things like how he likes his tea or coffee can help and may be taken as a sign the client is important enough to you that those little things have registered. If you're not good at remembering such things, you can always note them in the client's file (like the name of his beloved pet, for example) and look it up in advance. Suggesting to use first names is another way to build confidence, though you always have to ask permission for that first. Keeping time, having a clean and tidy office and being warm and businesslike are other things that create a good atmosphere and that can help build up or reinforce trust. Please note that only if there is enough trust, you can say something fairly confrontational.

93. What makes you trust somebody enough to tell him your innermost secret?
94. Having made a mistake that could have damaged the built-up trust, how would you react?
95. What do you do if you notice the next session there still is an unpleasant atmosphere between the two of you?

Time, Space and Silence

A counselling session can be very emotional to a client. Not only does he have to look at things from a different and new angle, but he also has to evaluate his old ideas and behaviour. This is why giving the client time and space for this, as well as for coming to terms with new parameters, is an essential part of a counselling session. There are no exact guidelines for this. Relying on experience, tuning into your client and paying attention to the client's body language and other signals, combined with what you emit as counsellor, there will be a natural process in which the appropriate amount of silence and pauses is clear.

Silence can often fulfil an important function in a session and once you are comfortable with it, it can become a very useful part of a counselling session. Aim to learn therefore to experience silence and for it to become part of your regular habits.

96. How can you use *'the silence that binds'*?

Homework

During sessions a client usually starts to understand where his real problem lies. He can also get new ideas and inspiration during a session. It would be a shame if he would not put this to good use in the time between sessions. Giving a client homework or an assignment can make him start to think actively about his problem and deal with it, albeit in a small way. It is recommended to give a client homework from the start: something to do and/or think about. This way he is also engaged with his problem outside the practice. Giving homework usually benefits the speed and the quality of the counselling process.

Good assignments are a continuation of what's been said during the session, and aren't optional for the client. If the client only has to think about something, chances are it won't happen. If you also ask him to write things down, chances of something being put on paper are much better. The best thing may be to tell him in advance you want to discuss the homework assignment next time, this way committing him.

Example of giving a homework assignment:

We talked about your youngest daughter and the problems you are having with her being a teenager. I suggest you make a list at home of her behaviour and what you have problems with. It would be nice if you can also put next to it your own belief regarding that particular behaviour and your daughter's belief. This way you may get an overview of your own values and the values of your daughter. It may also help you listen to the content of the discussions you have with her. The list doesn't have to be complete, it's just to track down certain thoughts you have. Next time we will go over the list and see how you could possibly handle the situation better.

Another example:

I suggest that for the next time you write down what you want to achieve, in terms of how you would like to feel upon reaching your goal. Next time we will go over that and then we can start putting together an actionplan.

97. What kind of homework can you give?
98. How do you know it's useful to give homework?
99. Should homework always be given?
100. What do you do when a client doesn't want to do homework?
101. What do you do with a client who has built up resistance against homework - after all, he isn't a child anymore?

Conclusion

As with all the things mentioned in the Art of Counselling, you get better at something if you practise it at all times, meaning also in your daily lives. If you do this, you are likely to notice a change in people's behaviour towards you. Imagine what the effect would be if you only do the next three things: genuinely listen to them, paraphrase and reflect on what they say. People would love to be around you. Remember that 'practice makes perfect' and that the next stage will be that it becomes natural to you.

On the other hand, if you only practise the skills we have mentioned between the walls of your practise, you will have to keep them in mind all the time to be able to perform them and apart from that being very tiring, it is likely to come across as unnatural. Now we are not asking you to change as a person, meaning to alter your character, but just to improve your communication skills and attitude.

Good luck with putting everything you have learnt into practise.

Practise makes perfect!