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To Be Known; A Supervisee Experience

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Presented before you are a collective of raw, untamed poetic thoughts from my experiences as a Youth Treatment Counselor. In writing this personal narrative I have been able to let the inner turmoil of my soul soar with peace once more. You will discover how invalidation from supervisors and staff can quickly leave you at a standstill, being left to feel alone. My goal for writing this piece has been to create mental metaphors for others in the field who built up walls as a form of self-preservation, to feel comfort when there is no end. I hope my honesty can leave someone else to feel alive again. That may be you right now or a near and dear friend that would appreciate being heard. We weather storms and more often than not have difficulty finding the right words.

KEYWORDS youth treatment counselor, treatment centers, supervision spirals, voices being heard, incompetent decision making, recognition in the workplace, conversational sin, employee turnover rate, burnout

Right Now

Here I am standing, pumping soap into a small paper cup. I am talking but my words fly and the children's words soar higher. Can I soar above their words? No. Just give up. What if I lost gravity, elevated? Sticking my body to the ceiling, yes, that will work. To be above the noise and words flying around like origami birds; except the birds are slowly forming pointed edges, tips of swords. Circling, they are going to attack. Dive. Slice. Rip. Torn is a child. Torn is a staff. There in the middle of the floor, lay a crumpled craft. The sculpted mess is rising; one folds over another. I think they found me. Just when I thought I flew high enough. If only the ceiling would open up. Will I be severed? Or will their edges crumble at the touch of my skin? I am alert, for there are never the right words written on fast wings.

A Youth Treatment Counselor

Within the confines of this facility, there is a wrestle among the children, teachers, counselors, and supervision. There are no promises, no promotions, and no lawful validations. From one fellow co-worker to the other who put in blood, sweat, and tears for the love of those in front of them, you are known. It is time for recognition to be bestowed. The ones holding notable willpower that naturally radiate light through the chaos and storms - I wish you could have stayed. I would have stayed. Repeat. When are teams restored?

Unfortunately, for those above, it does not matter how one foresees staying, you are pushed out of the system and it all starts over again. If only visions mattered, voices would be heard. There are no gatherings, just cycled herds.

Some recently, have titled themselves "glorified babysitters." Day in and day out managing tantrums, outbursts, runners, and taming the leaders that funnel the violent street talk.

Mentally, checks must be made because over time the body becomes frayed. One truly gets lost in it all and before you know it, you, yourself, are insane. Am I ill?

I personally find myself feeling like a guard, policing violent rage and re-directing clients to turn toward one, instead of the other. It is a constant push and shove of circling for clarity and separation for sanity. Somedays I teach. Somedays I play. Somedays I have therapeutic groups or moments in hope to only witness harmony, whether that is on the cottage floor or with co-workers off campus watching the children explore. More days than not, however, I am a cop. All emotions turned off. I am afraid to feel, for what comes after I may not heal. The thought of laying my head to rest, just for today, would be best.

The Spirals

There is this constant churning in my mind where words are being deleted, remembered, and justified. It's as if I am watching a hidden screen within my forehead reload and reboot a database from all the trials of the day, combined. They rewind. A terminal tunnel you cannot erase. Rolling out replays - my own, the clients, the supervisors, my own - "Wait, what even happened today?" This churning, words coming at you from every which way generate a mind f*** in your brain. So please, *note to myself*: watch where you are headed. Breathe. You are okay.

What we discuss one Wednesday meeting may get addressed one month later and even then; sometimes forgotten. Everyone scratches their heads wondering how *we ended up* in the same conversation and the circle of absurdity remains. People get up; walk away, as if there is no problem to be tamed. This can be bewildering and strange. I want to shout something out, but I am once more, led astray. Who is actually at war with whom? Through my perspective it is not the counselors versus the youth. When does change begin? We, the counselors, are actually very loud and vocal, but funny in the meetings how no one says one word - *nothing at all*.

In this sanity cycle, you have a supervisor, then none; then another supervisor, and another one - who educated or not, have to find their professional way. As the way is being paved, everyone is in search of themselves and power for control that day. When you get a supervisor unable to control facilitated conversation in a tense atmosphere, the meeting is fueled by emotional fire instead of constructive leadership that allows everyone to start clear. Clear for thoughts. Clear for ideas. Clear for those who wish to talk. In this sanity cycle, you are just a rock.

Selfish motives that suffice to inexperienced roles, you may not see it for yourself but it shows. The sounds of babble occur as you're muddling your way out only to begin to bake in the molding trend of keeping people low, out. If you have self-love, you know. It is not right, but to stay above others there is a hate within the confines of one's soul and that boiling uncomfortableness with one's own self, naturally wants to steal glow away from someone else. As babble presents itself again, I choose to stay on my stoop, planted firmly, yet holding some doubt within.

Intellect or Incompetence

Is their intellect in constant justification within this kind of atmosphere? Or simply, made up voices replacing what we wish we could hear? Because when no one is curious, *flesh becomes ghost*. Who is going to be courageous enough to step up and host? Host a meeting that has intentional meaning or care so much about what is in front of them that people stop leaving. I

knew a few who would have been amazing, profoundly qualified. However, they are already up and gone. This is why the turnover rate stays so high.

As one counselor starts to disappear, the next counselor follows and then it comes down to decision based fear. Youth Counselors making fast decisions and the outcomes are either keeping everyone safe or getting a beating. Therapeutic Crisis Interventions, you are always in the grey and always questioned. In your own heart you may have a solid answer for why you went “hands on,” with no need for explanation. Although, supervision spirals have you once again guessing, “Am I wrong?” and clarity for one’s own intellect is judgmentally mistaken. The game goes on, you’re pushed to the point of breaking, just so they can once again tell you there are better choices, but in the incompetence of it all what makes you right? Where do I swim? You say you are always here to listen, but never trust our reasoning or inner intuition. I am confused. When do you sit with me when I am sinking?

In my own therapeutic practices at school, we are constantly growing new muscles to sit with challenging information and ever evolving to be comfortable with silence, more silence. I’ll be honest, right now I hear only ringing noises in my head and they’re mostly sirens. I feel dead. To be *mindfully* watching behaviors, body language, words, behaviors, body language, words; all in relation to another. In the treatment world nothing is quieted and at the end of the day I would like to melt into a puddle – gently stream away. In the privacy of a therapy office competency may hold true; on the milieu floor it is only cruel. To apply a mindfulness track to a milieu pack, can quickly leave you with a heavy heart and flat - very flat affect.

In the Office

SUPERvision. You think you are more superior in some super way, rather than having a vision that grabs at the minds below you, who are screaming “Hey!” let us in. *To be known*, valued, heard; I am ignored, mistaken, blurred. You confess I am not taking advice, building a wall, and do not suffice. I confess I am burnt out, emotionally numb, and have been programmed to channel my energy into one bone of my inner device. That one life-giving bone that is left in me is for the kids; then, I leave.

Tears build in my eyes. You think it is because you are on to me. Personally, I have moments where it feels more like bullying. If my tears could talk, they would tell you once more I wish you actually knew me and not just the person on the floor. Each tear rolling down my face is the inner torment I have had to face. And there it is - the phrase that overpowered them all, “Let me play therapist on you now, how is that working out for you?” “Is it at all?”
No response.

Emotionally raw, I continue crying. Everyone in the room is side staring, trying not to look at the mini rivers overflowing. My chest is pumping hard to find a normal pulse again; stable your breathing. You can do this. Just begin. In the back of my head I am trying to let out what is being unsaid. I feel satisfaction has been achieved by them. It is extremely difficult and I am unsure why I get this sense you want to grin. Is this communication *sin*? I start wondering if you see only tears and not the pain within. I leave the office. I come back in. Everything is back to normal and that dominating moment, ignored. You win.

SUPERvision. When you do not address employees properly and focus too much on building your own powerful property, there is a complete lack of will for engagement. Everyone around you discreetly starts wishing to quit. You are continually disregarding your own professional development. So please, do everyone a favor and get off your mighty horse sh**.

Alone

At the end of the day, the only two phrases that come to my mind on my drive home is “What was genuine?” “What was kind?” I search for special moments that brought a simple smile to me or another. Although, most days do not feel fine and after a long day having an answer to these questions is hard to weather. My gears continue to grind. What we counselors laugh at is sadistic - a child’s rage. It may sound like, “Give me a f***** apple bitch or I am going to run” followed by “Give me the f***** orange and I will hop the gate,” “Can I have a gun?” The child just wanted a banana; I had none.

The other day ended with a child saying, “You’re more messed up than the devil.” Well, that is great; I am too tired. Nothing left to say, just another child finding their way.

My spine is laced up in a hard wire and any vertebra of kindness does not wish to physically appear. Succumbing to those above and working at an inhumane pace to keep those safe below.

Do I go home or buy a beer?

Now, it is night and I am lying in bed, staring at the ceiling. I cannot hold a single thought clearly in my head, so the tears form, pouring out. My breath, it is stuck. I slowly bring my knees into my chest, holding myself - rocking. Whispering sweet words aloud, “You’re okay, you’re okay. It’s going to be okay, it’s going to be okay. YOU are okay.”

A professor once stated in class, “Somebody angry at you is still in relationship with you.” This phrase grabbed my immediate attention. I envisioned my current profession. Time felt like it stopped in the room because instead of flourishing on the floor, currently I feel like regressing, doomed. All my relationships have been built off anger, turmoil, and depression. I’m officially caught, wearing thin my expression. A part of me loves it; a part of me does not. I want to get away, but I am once again pulled back in - make it stop. Just wait another day, one more day.

It is easy to get stuck here. It is even easier to build walls; walking through your own hallway of life - until another duty calls.

In Search

What I have come to experience firsthand as a Youth Counselor is employees’ struggle trusting in the unknown of each incident that presents itself and seek out others to weigh in for reassurance, to avoid reprimand. In actuality you will never have a solid plan and no matter how many times you find new answers to a problem, rest assured, there is always an incident waiting with surprises. This is where you have to immediately dive into your own creative skin and trust that your inner instincts will kick in. *If you are unable to trust a process of your own, something will get thrown.* What will be thrown is imminent, so stay present. Find small victories. Stay diligent.

Choose to hold confidence in unknown situations to show the client or child in front of you that you see them, and no matter what severing words fly or emotions are acted upon, you are the strength that can withstand their weak moments, lies and cries. There is a constant search to escape the dark den. Once again, *you believe in and with them.* Doors will open; you will not be locked in. Once again soar, swim.

My hope within the treatment world is that people recognize the importance of keeping Youth Counselor’s alive and well. More superiors, rather than just a few should recognize the value in endorsing counselor’s inner strength, integrity, and positive energy through and through. Everything it takes to keep a child and staff safe is more than just words being exchanged. From

one superior to the other, when you thrive on one's weaknesses to have a problem exist for your own entertainment - the problem becomes a fabricated unrealistic conversational mess. PLEASE, take care of this emotional thread that is weaving in and out of everyone's head.

The employee, who starts as a fragile seed that needs to be nurtured and known, is only pushed farther into the ground unable to grow. What would be SUPER in many ways is to let counselor's visions rise above the raging, conventional craze. There is beauty in teamwork and building up young minds. There is even more power in facilitating an all-encompassing atmosphere that keeps people here. Maybe one day the Youth Counselor that perseveringly paved their way to stay, will be heard and appear. Appear in a role that drives constructive synergy, stopping the cursed cycle we all continually foresee. We have to care for one another deeply, so another one is not erased quickly.

For everyone who has been on this battlefield, you are admirably known.

Right now sits several stones, waiting to be next throne.

Play-Apart-Together-Apart-Together-Play-

Keep searching,

Or stay.

