
Who's been sitting in your chair?



The therapist as client...Or not?

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Do we owe it to our clients to seek our own therapy?

Who is sitting in your chair?



Is it a matter of integrity?

Most therapists I know go into this field to help people.

I bet you did too. Humor me for a second as I invite you to do a short visualization exercise.

I want you to think about one of your favorite therapy client success stories. Remember that special client and the pain or confusion they experienced before seeking your counsel.

Picture them in your mind when they first came into your office. Remember their posture, tone of voice and the energy they projected. Now, fast forward through your treatment and see them emerging. The pain is less (or gone). The fear is manageable and the future looks incredibly bright. Breathe in the joy that you feel when you look at the transformation with that client.

What an amazing privilege it is to be a therapist.

People share their deepest worries and pain with us. They trust us with their hearts and their future. It is an amazing honor to do this work.

And month after month, we help people. No matter what your theoretical orientation, we do this work because we want to help people. We believe in the healing process of our work. Simply put, we believe in therapy.

Incredibly, the Psychotherapy Networker reports: "Surveys find that 20 to 25% of therapists have never sat in the client's chair."

When I first read that, I didn't believe it. Can you? How can we be so clear of the benefits and power of therapy if that many in our profession have never tried it?

The reasons that therapists don't seek therapy are interesting. Some say they felt they never needed it. Others say that they have other ways to reduce stress and do their personal growth - such as meditation or yoga.

Physician - heal thyself.

I have met therapists like that. In my graduate school, many of the students had never been in therapy. They hadn't spent anytime on their family of origin issues or had someone be a mirror looking at their cognitions and behavior. I asked one gal why she never sought therapy and she blinked a few times before responding, "I never needed it, I guess. I had a very happy childhood and I am happy now."

"Would you prefer that your family member see a therapist who has been in therapy or one who felt they didn't need it?"

Is it just me? Or is this a problem? Are we saying we are "good enough" and don't need further exploration?

When discussing why therapy is important, Virginia Satir once said, "We can't see our own backside." Truer words cannot be said. We don't know what we don't know. Have you ever stood behind the woman in the supermarket line who forgot to comb the back of her hair? You want to scream, "Get a mirror and check the back of your hair before you go out next time." Yet

this is exactly what we are doing when we don't seek out someone to help us see what we can't ... when we don't have our own mirror as a great therapist.

It is hard to help people grow past where you have grown.

These words were given to me by a sage supervisor when I was a brand new therapist. These words kept me in personal therapy for many years and helped me to grow into the woman and therapist I wanted to be. I look back at the person I was 20 years ago when I started my counseling training. I was perpetually scared. I had been single for many years even though I said I wanted to be married. I couldn't figure out why I wasn't partnered yet. I lived many days with the sole goal of trying to be perfect - or at least trying to disguising the fact that I wasn't.

So, back then, when clients came to me with similar issues, I could help them conceptually. I spent hours offering interventions and ideas. That supervisor told me "When you find yourself saying something over and over, maybe it is time you listened to yourself."

The old joke is that therapists are the only people that need 30 hours of therapy a week.

Providing therapy certainly helps us become better clinicians and better people. We can't help but grow personally and professionally with the myriad of lessons our clients teach us.

Yet, isn't it important to seek out our own personal growth as well? Shouldn't we seek out our own therapy? A knowledgeable, differentiated, empathic person who can regularly challenge us to become more authentic, happier, and more content with our lives and ourselves? Why aren't all of us turning to therapy to help us become the person we are called to be? Especially since we profess to others the benefits.

There are many laws and ethical guidelines to protect the client from inappropriate therapists and therapy. These include everything from sexual contact to record keeping. Somedays I think there are too many laws - and some of them harm more than they help.

"I sincerely wonder how many clients leave therapy thinking they failed when in reality the therapist's unexplored personal issues got in the way."

But what about the client who chooses and bonds with a therapist who has not done the internal personal growth work necessary to be really helpful to the client? Is it just a Darwinism? The client leaves when the therapist is no longer helpful?

I sincerely wonder how many clients leave therapy thinking they failed when in reality the therapist's unexplored personal issues got in the way.

Daily our clients put their hearts, their hopes and their trust in us.

They deserve our best. While we will never "have it all together" - I think it is essential that we do what we can to make sure we provide the safest place for them...the place where they can grow into the whole, happy person they are called to be.

Yes, there many things we can do to increase our effectiveness. Continuing education is mandated and important. Supervision is powerful and, in my opinion, necessary - no matter how seasoned the therapist. Meditation and yoga can bring us back to ourselves in extraordinary ways.

Is it enough? Is it okay that 20 - 25% of clinicians are treating people without ever having sought therapy themselves? Does saying we believe in therapy but feeling we (personally) don't need it, say something about us? Some might call that a bit narcissistic.

How can we walk in integrity with our profession if we don't respect it enough to take advantage of the numerous benefits?

Last year, I formed the International Therapist Leadership Institute - an organization dedicated to enhancing and enriching the lives and careers of therapists worldwide. It came to me one day

when I was listening to a commercial spoofing therapy. The (spoofed) therapist was charging the client for tissues and for privacy.

I decided that I didn't want the general public to believe that type of nonsense. I want our profession and the dedicated clinicians in it to be respected. I want the general public to see therapy as an effective solution to emotional or relational problems.

I want the respect our profession once had to be returned.

"Does saying we believe in therapy but feeling we (personally) don't need it, say something about us? Some might call that a bit narcissistic."

But, hey, just between us...why do you think that we lack some respect? Is it that many therapists are getting licensed or credentialed without looking at their own issues?

Some will ask if I think all therapists “need” therapy.

I don't think the issue is whether we need it or not.

While some therapists may do fine without ever looking at their own issues, I think it is important to take the time to see what we cannot see. We owe it to ourselves and to our clients to do the best work we can. As we do, we can grow in ways that serve us, our families and our clients.

I believe it is an issue of integrity. We need to walk our talk.

So, I ask again, who is sitting in your chair?



I welcome your comments! Feel free to leave them at our blog at:

<http://therapistleadershipinstitute.com/blog/716/#respond>

In your service,

Casey Truffo

Casey Truffo, MFT is a licensed psychotherapist, award winning speaker, and author of *Be A Wealthy Therapist: Finally You Can Make a Living While Making a Difference*. She is a mentor coach to therapists on five continents. Her mission is to support and enhance the lives and careers of therapists worldwide. For your free five-part report, “The Future of Therapy - Don't Let These Five Things Catch You By Surprise.” visit: <http://www.TherapistLeadershipInstitute.com>