



## Courageous Conversations – Who’s in Your Corner?

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There is general agreement among psychology interns that the process of becoming a licensed psychologist seems interminable. But once licensed 10 or more years, those training years can seem like the blink of an eye. Issues facing mid-career psychologists can be very different than those confronting early career psychologists. In addition to asking, “Where are you and what’s next?,” I would ask “Who’s in your corner?” Let me explain.

Reflective practice, or practicing with “personal and professional self-awareness and reflection,” is foundational to our profession (American Psychological Association, 2012). It requires critical thinking as well as the ability to independently and accurately self-assess with respect to personal and practice issues. While in training, students are required to continuously self-assess and receive feedback from multiple sources. They also have ready peer support within their cohorts. Once licensed, though, feedback generally drops off dramatically.

The General Principles of the Ethics Code encourage psychologists to work at self reflection. In Principle A: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence: “Psychologists strive to be aware of the possible effect of their own physical and mental health on their ability to help those with whom they work” (APA, 2010). The enforceable standards then delineate the steps psychologists take when personal issues begin to interfere with professional practice. See Standard 2.06 Personal Problems and Conflicts.

Wise et al. (2010, p 291) writing about life-long learning and the role of self assessment “suggest caution in assuming the accuracy of professional self-assessment in that we may tend to inflate our abilities and underestimate our skills deficits.” They comment, though, that we function as a field under the assumption that once licensed, we remain competent throughout our careers. The ongoing challenge is to: a) accurately judge our competency levels; b) appropriately monitor the impact of stress; and c) determine areas of needed growth. That assumption that we’re individually capable of assessing our needs and competencies appears untenable.

Michael Donner in his final column as CPA Ethics Chair wrote about the importance of consultation and the synergy that occurs when two people talk (Donner, 2012). Relationships with colleagues are critical to our longevity as psychologists. In the recent article (Johnson et al., 2012) the authors propose elevating the ethical obligation to maintain competence beyond the individual level to a corporate, community level along with an infusion of an ethics of care. The importance of ongoing peer-review throughout our careers is highlighted as well as the importance of care and compassion for colleagues. Courageous conversations, where you’re able to be honest about yourself with colleagues *and* able to hear corrective feedback, occur in a context of safety, compassion, and trust. And it takes both courage and compassion to be on the other side of that conversation.

Which leads back to the question — who’s in your corner? As you assess where you are at and what’s next, ask yourself the following questions:

- Who is in your corner and whose corner are you in? Who are two to three colleagues you feel safe to talk with about real issues in your life? When was the last time you talked with them?
- Who knows your work? When was the last time a colleague (not a third party payer) reviewed your work?
- Do you currently have an issue that you’re struggling with? Is there something you’re not talking about that you sense you should be? The book, *What therapists don’t talk about and why: Understanding taboos that hurt us and our clients* (Pope, Sonne & Green, 2006), is an excellent resource for practitioners at every career stage.
- Do you have a question or topic that the CPA Ethics Committee members might be able to address? Consider us in your corner.

### References

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