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Enhancing Leadership Through Observation and Mentorship

As a doctoral student, there have been many interactions with Counselor educators and esteemed counselors of the profession that have enhanced my journey. While many of these interactions have occurred in the classroom, there have also been several that have been ignited at professional conferences and events. It is through these interactions that as a future counselor educator I am able to develop into my own version of the people I admire most. Many of the current professionals that I admired share qualities related to readiness to mentor graduate students and new professionals, as well as transparency of their own career and journey. These professionals share in dialogue that is forthcoming yet respective of their own universities’ policies and privacy of their own personal information. Qualities that have inspired me most throughout these interactions have specifically reflected an unconditional method of feedback and a true servant’s heart.

It was through these same interactions that my own leadership competence has expanded. Chang, Barrio Minton, Dixon, Myers and Sweeney (2011) describe leadership as the actions of individuals in the counseling profession that have contributed to the realization of individual and collective capacity to serve others in a competent, ethical, and just manner asserting their helping role (p. 5). Paradise, Ceballos & Hall (2010) simply define leadership as one’s ability to influence other individuals or groups toward goal achievement (p. 47). Based on these definitions, a leader not only pushes others to achieve goals, but encourages them along the way. Many of the mentors aforementioned held these same leadership qualities and were servant leaders by the true definition of the phrase. Servant leaders are servants foremost, and they focus on ensuring that the needs of others are served at the highest priority (Greenleaf, 2002). My own leader competency was enhanced by watching these mentors serve in abundance with a grateful heart to people from all walks of life with an array of life experiences. It is for this reason that I am the clinician that I am today.
Counselor educators have an ethical obligation to serve as mentors and role models. According to the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014), counselor educators offer instruction and training programs in an ethical manner and serve as role models for professional behavior (ACA, 2014, F.7a). Counselor educators are also tasked with the responsibility of safeguarding the profession while teaching future counselors the techniques and theories that will aid them in serving their own future clients. The mentors that I have most enjoyed have offered constructive feedback and affirmation in a way that is nurturing to my professional identity and empowering to my personal practice as a clinician. These mentors understand cultural differences and ensure that as a new professional I am made aware of how these differences can impact my own interactions with the clients that I serve. They are careful to not tread around making mention of these differences but bring them up in conversation in a dignified manner.

Given my own personal experiences, there is a great need for counselors to become mentors. The expectation appears to reflect philanthropic efforts of giving back to the profession through supervision of beginning counselors. Clinicians are often encouraged to become supervisors and charge rates that are similar to what they offer their sliding scale clients. In charging reduced rates for supervision, beginning counselors can seek qualified supervision from established clinicians at a fraction of the price. This supervision, beyond obtaining a graduate degree, is the first step in becoming an ethically effective counselor. I believe that to personally fill the expectation of mentorship as a counselor, I will strive to become a clinical supervisor and charge comparable rates for my own supervisees as well as serve as a Counselor Educator and trainer. Often counseling students are not able to gain knowledge from professionals beyond those who serve at their university. Giving counseling students the opportunity to attend conferences and workshops at a reduced rate through grants is my primary intention for serving in this mentorship role. In serving as a supervisor, I will commit to continuing my education to stay current in the best practices for supervising future counselors. I will also serve as a mentor by continuing to safeguard the profession and offer ethical criticism of counselors who are learning the techniques and skills of the profession. In doing these small things, I feel that I am doing my part in molding future community mental health and school counselors.

Currently there is a gap in adequate attention paid to concepts of advocacy, both for professionals and their clients in counselor preparation programs (Chang, Barrio Minton, Dixon, Myers & Sweeney, 2011). As the counseling profession continues to shift and expand its standards, Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral programs should modify curriculums to mandate that mentorship become a professional responsibility of the faculty, just as continued research and teaching responsibilities are. These CACREP programs and universities should also encourage trainings that grant the certification of clinical supervisor to alumni. These training programs should build the bridge with recently graduated students to help their entry into the counseling field. Methods of mentorship and leadership will continually need to be addressed in
counseling preparation programs, as we as professionals are required to offer this information as well.

References