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Developing Effective Client Relationships

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PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics of an effective helping relationship?
2. What qualities do you think the career practitioner should have?

Introduction and Learning Objectives

At the heart of our expertise is awareness.
— Ronald R. Short

The focus of this chapter is to explore the importance of building and maintaining effective client relationships throughout the career-planning cycle. The chapter begins with an outline of the *Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners* (S&Gs) competencies related to effective communication and relationship building. Then, the philosophical ideas that influence the way career practitioners envision their relationships with clients are considered. In the next section, the primary needs of clients are summarized followed by an explanation of relationship building blocks. In the final sections of the chapter, challenges to active listening are explored as are ways to work with clients who are unwilling to engage in the relationship.

The following are the learning objectives:

1. Identify the S&G competencies in building effective client-practitioner relationships.
2. Understand philosophical ideas that form the basis for relationship building between the career practitioner and client.
3. Be knowledgeable about the primary needs of the client: inclusion, affection, and shared control.
4. Be familiar with the building blocks of the client-practitioner relationship.
5. Recognize three common challenges to active listening.
6. Consider barriers to client change.

The tools presented in the chapter are not intended to be “used on” clients. The intent of presenting these skills is to increase the practitioner’s personal repertoire of skills so that they might position themselves “in” a client relationship with a keen *awareness of self*. Respect for the autonomy of the client including self-determination, providing career development services appropriate for the life circumstances and interests of the client, doing no harm to the client by maintaining a high level of self-awareness, and providing service to clients with competency and integrity are all part of the profession’s ethical imperative. As Short (1998) states, “You will shift from managing others to managing yourself with others” (p. 31).

Competencies Required

The *Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners* (National Steering Committee, 2004) identify seven competencies that underpin an effective client career practitioner relationship. (<http://career-dev-guidelines.org/career_dev/>)

1. C2.2.1 Work with climate and context to enhance communication to support clients in a courteous, respectful, and authentic manner in order to create a “**mattering**” **environment**.
2. C2.2.2 Use a framework for verbal communication that promotes a co-operative and productive work environment and that validates a client’s own beliefs, values, and opinions.
3. C2.2.4 Use effective listening skills to actively listen in a climate of confidence, openness, and safety in order to understand the client’s world.
4. C2.2.5 Clarify and provide feedback to develop clients’ abilities to self-assess and to support them in their growth and development.
5. C2.2.6 Establish and maintain collaborative work relationships by recognizing the importance of starting from the client’s point of reference.
6. C2.3.1 Foster client self-reliance and self-management to encourage independence and self-directedness.

7. C2.3.2 Deal with reluctant clients by understanding the difference between a reluctant client and one who is simply not yet ready to take the appropriate steps.

The Foundation of the Client-Practitioner Relationship

The changing Canadian economy has resulted in an increased need for individuals to seek assistance with a wide variety of career-related issues. While clients commonly seek information regarding occupational skill development, further education, job search techniques, and job maintenance skills, they also need assistance with a declining standard of living, underemployment and unemployment, company downsizing, and the challenges in making decisions due to the shifting labour market (Larkin, LaPort, & Pines, 2007; Trevor & Nyberg, 2008).

One of the most difficult challenges faced by career practitioners is to encourage optimism and hope in the face of uncertainty (Niles, Neault, & Amundson, 2011). The level of optimism and hope in clients is the only significant predictor for both career success and job satisfaction. Clients often feel a certain level of vulnerability when sharing concerns with a career practitioner; therefore, creating an effective working relationship that fosters hope and optimism with a client requires a foundation built on trust and collaboration.

Career practitioners must take a position of "walking alongside" their clients, and work through issues and concerns in a collaborative and supportive manner. Any positioning of authority within the relationship should be due to subject-specific knowledge and not to status, role, or location in social life (Peavy, 2004). The career practitioner and client are experts in different fields of knowledge, each having something to offer, and each party entitled to respect. Individual differences that exist between the parties are to be explored and nurtured. From this framework, the career practitioner steps away from the self-presentation strategy of being perceived as the sole "expert" and presents a more human face to those they help (Peavy, 2004).

Yukl (2006), a leading writer on organizational leadership, believes that clients have three intra-interpersonal needs — inclusion, affection, and shared control — that must be met before the collective goals of the client and practitioner can be addressed. This shift will happen when clients feel safe and have confidence in the practitioner. "Supporting," Yukl (2006) noted, "includes a wide variety of behaviors that show consideration, acceptance and concern for the needs and feelings of other people" (p. 43).

According to Buber (1958), the issue that the client presents is perceived as the actual problem and is worked out through a relationship that is based on reciprocity (or mutuality), spontaneity, acceptance, and confirmation of the uniqueness of the other. Analysis of how individuals position themselves in relation to "the problem" challenges more traditional views of the career practitioner and offers new insights for career education and practice. From Buber's perspective, the career practitioner, like the client, discovers who he or she is in relation to the other. By seeing the situation from both sides, the career practitioner gains an understanding of the client, and is able to imagine the client's situation while maintaining personal perspective. The client is perceived as more than just the career issue that is presented, and is instead "encountered" as a whole person.

Amundson draws on the concept of "mattering" (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989) in an effort to make clients feel welcome and important — that they matter. "Mattering" is expressed not just in words but through action. Clients can feel special when they are offered something to drink or are asked to choose which chair to sit on in the office. Within this milieu, the focus is on creating a warm and inviting climate and on giving clients the opportunity to fully tell their story.

Amundson, Harris-Bowlsbey, and Niles (2009) outline three levels of mattering: (a) visibility, (b) **active listening**, and (c) offering of help. *Visibility* implies that the client feels noticed. The expression of acknowledgement starts with the very first contact between career practitioner and client, and can set the tone for the rest of the sessions. The second level of mattering is to *actively listen* when the client describes the problem, thus confirming the importance of the client while providing emotional support. The opportunity for all parties to *offer and receive help* is the third level — it contributes to a sense that each person has something of value to offer. Generally, help is provided from the career practitioner to the client in the form of instrumental support (e.g., providing information, conducting assessments, and discussing the results with the client, etc.). However, clients integrated within a group career psycho-educational experience benefit from the opportunity to help other group members through sharing of personal experiences.

Peavy (2004) suggests that genuine, ethical helping should be offered under conditions of respect for the integrity and uniqueness of the individual. In Peavy's estimation, professional practitioners should make it their practice to:

- focus on alleviating the problem;
- assist individuals in identifying personal strengths and potential;
- improve clients' self-understanding;
- help individuals develop their capacities and strengthen their self-concept;
- increase their capacity to identify meaningful goals;
- recognize the range of choices available to clients;
- help clients to increase the skills needed to perform in the world of work.

The Client-Practitioner Relationship in Action

Relationship building is a two-way street. The helping relationship is not something practitioners "do" to clients; rather it is a process that practitioners and clients work through together. Tuning in to each other, is at the heart of relationship building. This awareness becomes the basis for an approach to counselling called "eyes out" — what do I need to learn about this person? — rather than "eyes in" — what knowledge and information can I bestow on this person? Try folding your arms across your chest as you would naturally. Then, uncross your arms and refold them with the opposite arm on top. You may discover that assuming this position is rather uncomfortable and unnatural. This is what it can be like when building rapport with a client.

Meeting the Client's Three Primary Needs

People need to be acknowledged to feel validated and that their problem matters. To validate someone doesn't mean agreeing with the person's feelings; it means acknowledging those feelings. Clients need to know that they can feel safe sharing their experiences and their feelings. You, as the practitioner, can show that you have been expecting the client and that you are devoting this time to the client's concerns. One way to show inclusion is to acknowledge the client with such welcoming comments as, "Thank you for coming in today," or "I hope you found our office without any difficulty."

Affection or recognizing the impact your personal style has on clients includes showing genuine care and concern for the situation. The "affect" you have on clients will be based on the congruency of your words and actions. If you express your concern and desire to support your clients, then you have an obligation to follow through with actions. The behaviours used to attend to clients should present the message that you are genuinely interested in them. The "affect" you have on clients is the "impact" they experience after meeting with you (intent + delivery = impact).

Practitioner motive(s) + actions = how the client has been affected by the practitioner.

To engage in authentic behaviour with clients means you put into words what you are experiencing as you work together. Actual understanding occurs when we suspend our own personal frame of reference and, through paraphrasing and empathy, show that we have taken into account what the other person means and feels from his or her frame of reference. "This is the most powerful thing you can do to have the leverage you are looking for to build client commitment" (Block, 2000, p. 37).

Shared control is built on meeting clients' needs for validation and affection. It refers to the collaborative nature of the relationship. It involves sharing the conversation in ways that may require practitioners to withhold their comments until clients have finished speaking. It can mean interjecting when clients' stories become cyclical; or, it can mean encouraging clients to say more. Practitioners are responsible for balancing the manner in which information is shared. This "co-operative" method ensures that the responsibility for outcomes of the session is shared between practitioners and the clients; that is, clients need to walk away intending to act upon what has been discussed. Practitioners, in addition, need to follow up on concerns and issues raised in the session. There are times when clients may want practitioners to give them answers and tell them what to do (e.g., Can you do the work for me?). In this case, practitioners will have to guide them towards finding most of these answers themselves. Practitioners might want to give suggestions; however, it is best to avoid giving "advice" to clients. The intent is to have clients act on their own self-directedness rather than on the direction of the professional (S&Gs C2.3.1).

Practitioners have the responsibility of developing rapport with clients. When the three primary needs of clients are met, a relationship bridge is built. Here is an equation for your consideration.

> *Inclusion* (validation and acknowledgement of the client) + *Affection* (genuine care for the person and concern for their situation) + *Shared Control* (equal contribution to the process) = *Safety and Trust* for the client, thus building an effective client relationship.

Relationship Building Blocks

Active listening is often identified as an important interpersonal skill; an inability to listen well is certainly a deficiency. Active listening involves the listener clarifying and restating what the other person is saying. This process increases the listener's understanding of the other person, helps to clarify the client's thoughts, and shows that the listener is attentive to the client's viewpoint. This process stimulates an open exploration of ideas and feelings while establishing trust and rapport. Important to this process is the suspension of value judgements and total acceptance of the client's thoughts, ideas, and feelings. The listener clarifies information by reflecting back to the client what has been heard. The practitioner begins by looking at the person and fully focusing on what the client is saying. In your role as a practitioner, it is imperative that you listen with the intention of understanding as you build your relationship with the client (S&Gs C2.2.4).

There are five specific listening skills that make up the concept known as "attending behaviours" and are identified by the acronym *FIBER*.

F - Following
I - Equal I–Thou language
B - Body Language
E - Eye Contact
R - Relaxed Response

Tips for Active Listening

by Lara Shepard

Active listening involves clarifying and restating what the other person is saying.

1. Listen to the emotions as well as the words.
2. Be sincerely interested in what the other person is talking about.
3. Restate what the person said.
4. Ask clarification questions once in a while.
5. Be aware of your own feelings and strong opinions.
6. If you have to state your views, say them only after you have listened.

(F) Following

Clients know that practitioners are following them when both verbal and non-verbal responses are used in the listening process. Verbal encouragers should be employed with non-verbal prompts. This could involve using simple spoken terms like "Yes," "Uh huh," "Right," and "Hmmmmm." In addition, reflective listening, by which practitioners restate what clients have just shared (i.e., paraphrasing), demonstrates to clients that they have been heard and understood. When enough trust has been built, practitioners can add further points for clients to consider. Non-verbal listening involves looking appropriately and comfortably at the speaker. Head nods, smiles, and frowns — all are positive attending behaviours. A pleasant tone of voice that portrays concern for the other person's comfort is another attending behaviour. Practitioners' facial expressions mirror clients' words.

(I) Equal I–Thou Language

I–Thou Equality is an attitudinal skill that involves "staying on the client's rock" when listening. The relationship is one of equality and balance and shows respect for others as equal human beings, even though the roles are different. Practitioners do not take over the conversation or the space through story-telling, or body posture, or by any questions or comments that might be inappropriately timed.

Empathic listening is perhaps the most important listening skill and involves remaining focused on clients at all times and providing safe and respectful environments by paraphrasing, clarifying, questioning, and remembering details of clients' stories.

(B) Body Language

Physical attending is the way practitioners use *body language* to communicate understanding to clients: square shoulders, an open posture, leaning slightly forward, making eye contact, and maintaining a relaxed position. The body must be quiet from the neck down avoiding any fidgeting behaviours. Practitioners' bodies are often synchronized with their clients; they may find that they automatically shift positions as their clients move.

(E) Eye Contact

Eye contact allows practitioners to let clients know they are "observing" what is being said and that they are not distracted by other movements such as someone walking by. However, adjustment is often necessary when listening to individuals whose cultural norms do not include direct eye contact. Eye contact is not staring or glaring; it encompasses observing faces of clients, reading their lips, viewing their expressions, and, when appropriate, making direct eye contact.

(R) Relaxed Response

A *relaxed response* indicates to clients that you have time to listen to them. Practitioners are quiet, still, and purposeful in their responses, responding in a relaxed manner that does not rush clients. Practitioners ensure that there are no interruptions and their body language shows that their focus is solely on their clients. Practitioners much learn to quiet down their own thinking in order to hear completely.

A process known as *tracking* is a great listening tool. Our minds can think more than twice as fast as people can speak. It is therefore necessary for us to repeat the client's words in our own head to avoid our own mind chatter from running ahead of clients, or drifting off into our own thoughts (Walters, 1992). Remember that people feel validated when they feel heard. Repeating the main point of their issue or concern lets them know their message was received. You might offer the following: "I understand you to say …", or "I'll summarize what you've said just to ensure I've heard it correctly."

Stumbling Blocks to Active Listening

There can be several stumbling blocks to active listening: insufficient time, clients who are not sure of their career-related needs, and the inappropriate use of questions.

What Not to Do — Blocks to Communication

by Lara Shepard

Active listening means not judging what is being said, and controlling the urge to provide information. Any of the following actions can stop communication dead in its tracks.

- "Why" questions, which tend to make people defensive.
- Quick reassurance, saying things like, "Don't worry about that."
- Advising — "I think the best thing for you is to move to assisted living."
- Digging for information and forcing someone to talk about something they would rather not talk about.
- Patronizing — "You poor thing, I know just how you feel."
- Preaching or lecturing — "You should" or "You shouldn't . . ."
- Interrupting — May indicate that you are not interested in what someone is saying.

SPOTLIGHT: *ENGAGEMENT/INVITATIONAL SKILLS*

by Lara Shepard

Eye Contact

- Suggests that you are attending to what the other is saying.
- Should be natural and culturally appropriate.
- Is more likely to be modified when a break in discussion occurs or when either party is thinking.
- Can signal understanding and provide feedback.

Body Posture

- Should be natural, attentive, relaxed, and communicate interest.
- Gestures should be easy and natural.
- Facial expression should be appropriate to the material under discussion.

Verbal Responses

- Should be made in a warm and expressive tone, made at an appropriate pace, and communicate involvement.
- Should follow from the client's comments.
- Should relate to previous aspects of the client's story when the topic being discussed is exhaustive.
- Should be made with regard to both the verbal (content and tone) and the non-verbal (glances, gestures, and other physical reactions) behaviour and culture of the client.

Silence

- May occur, since clients need time to think.
- Can be a positive form of communication.
- Should not become excessive without an interviewer response.

From: Evans, D. R., Hearn, M. T., Uhlemann, M. R., & Ivey, A. E. (2004). *Essential interviewing: A programmed approach to effective communication* (6th ed.). Toronto, ON: Thomson & Brooks/Cole.

Insufficient Time

Lack of sufficient time to listen to a client's story is a common problem. Many organizations that employ career development practitioners are contracted by their provincial or federal governments to offer career development services. Unfortunately, the time a practitioner can spend with each client might be dictated by the terms of this contract. In these situations, it is necessary for the practitioner to inform the client, on the first visit, that additional appointments may be necessary.

Lack of Clarity

The second stumbling block is the client who, being unsure about the problem, describes the situation through many stories. It becomes the practitioner's task to figure out what concern the client wants to address. There may be an individual or cultural characteristic that predisposes the client to give a great deal of background information before making a request. In this situation, the FIBER concepts of Relaxed Response and Following provide appropriate responses. Let clients talk and, when you think you have heard the root of their concern, you will need to intervene (not interrupt) and state what you have heard. Then lead clients towards the next steps in problem solving and action orientation.

A Case Example

In this scenario, a recent immigrant described his work situation to the career practitioner.

Back home in my country, we have a lot of war and it is very hard to make a future for myself and my family. I have two brothers and a sister who are working in Canada now and I was sponsored by my brother to come here. He wanted me to have a better chance than I had back home. He told me that I could go to school to better my English and there were places that I could find work. My friend told me to come here. He came here last year and you helped him so he told me to come here. He speaks English very well. I know that I don't speak it that well. I need a job so I can support my family but I can't find a job because I don't speak English well. My wife stays home with my kids and she doesn't need English. My kids learn it in school.

The practitioner's intervention would be to say the following:

- I understand the many reasons you came to Canada and I'm glad to hear that you have had the support of family and friends since you arrived. (Validate)
- I just want to repeat what I've heard you say so I know I've understood you correctly. (Care for the Person)
- You would like to learn more English and you would like to work in Canada. (Concern for their Situation)
- What is more important for you right now? (Shared Control)
  - — Do you want to go to school to learn English?
  - — Do you want to find work right now?
  - — Do you want a program that lets you learn English and helps you find a job?

In this scenario, the practitioner met the primary needs of the client: inclusion (validation), affection (genuine care for the person and concern for their situation), and shared control (questions posed by the practitioner to gain the client's perspective or answers).

As the time scheduled for a first meeting might be limited, the practitioner must acknowledge the client by listening to the story, while trying to identify the issue to be addressed, and then intervening with a supposition. Intervention is not an interruption of a client's story. The intervention is timed carefully to ensure the client does not get lost in the story, especially if unsure of how to ask for support. The practitioner gets a contextual picture of the client's circumstances and is then able to lead the client towards identifying specific issues.

Building the relationship is accomplished by the practitioner showing understanding for the client's circumstances. The practitioner listens with the intention of discovering the issue that needs to be addressed, and uses questions to determine if there is a shared understanding of the client's needs (S&Gs C2.2.1). Whereas empathy is the accurate understanding of the world from the client's perspective, **validation** is the active communication that the client's perspective is real. To validate means to confirm and to authenticate. The primary need of inclusion is expressed through validation. Listening with intention is validating to the client. Taking a genuine interest in a client by asking the critical questions that need to be answered is validating. The practitioner listens carefully to the client's point of view and realizes how much it is influencing the client's behaviour. The practitioner realizes that at some point this perspective may need to be confronted or challenged because it may be this outlook that is keeping the client stuck. Active listening and other relationship-building skills are supportive and encourage a client to open up, but it is by asking difficult questions that the client will begin to examine choices, feelings, and thoughts critically.

Use of Questions

Questions are a critical component of the interview: Well-phrased questions will build trust and gather information — the client may be encouraged to volunteer information and think about the issues; poorly phrased questions can quickly close down the conversation and damage the relationship. Questions are most valuable when they challenge the individual to think, organize, compare, relate, or draw conclusions. Well-formulated questions are almost guaranteed to stimulate mental activity and generate much useful information (S&Gs 1.4.2). Excessively long or poorly formulated questions may distract the client from listening, or worse, make the client feel interrogated and evaluated. Leading questions will be seen to be disguised attempts to push through the client's acceptance of the practitioner's agenda. The challenge is to know when to ask questions and which questions to ask.

Questions may be open ended (please tell me about), or closed (how old are you?). Both forms are useful for gathering information but the career practitioner must know when and how to use these.

An **open or open-ended question** allows freedom of expression and encourages the client to speak about the topic: it elicits more information than a closed question. An open question is used to gather lots of information and has no correct answer. As seen in Table 1 below, the question typically begins with who, what, where, when, and how.

TYPE OF QUESTION	TYPE OF ANSWER	EXAMPLE
Who	Answered with a person	Who is looking for work?
What	Identifies a list of one or more options	What kind of work are you looking for?
Where	Answered with a place or location	Where do you live?
When	Answered in time	When will you be ready to start work?
How	Identifies a process/ procedure or a measurement in response to the question	How long have you looked for work?

Table 1: Types of Interview Questions.

A **closed question** is used to gather specific information and can normally be answered with a single word or a short phrase. Examples would include: Where do you work? Are you ready to stop doing that job now? Closed questions are good for collecting facts and short answers, and for bringing a talkative client back on track. Although useful for getting the facts straight, closed questions can have a dampening effect on the relationship as clients can feel that their job is to respond to the practitioner's questions rather than to tell their story.

Here are some guidelines for good questioning:

- Use open-ended fact-finding questions rather than closed questions that demand a yes or no answer. Where have you applied for work? versus, Have you applied for work?
- Use open-ended questions for information seeking rather than asking "why" questions that ask for the client's opinion. What skills do you have that match this job's description? versus, Why do you think you would be suitable for this job?
- Use open-ended questions to elicit information instead of direct (probing) questions: How many positions have you interviewed for? versus, Do you usually get an interview when you apply for a job?

You will note that closed-ended questions (such as those starting with the words "have you" and "do you") give a limited response. Closed-ended questions can be used to confirm information; however, they do not generate new information.

Why was not included on the list of critical elements of action inquiry for a very good reason. Why is considered a deficiency-based question, often requiring a justification from the client rather than an explanation. It is often misused or overused and carries a negative impact for the client. Characteristics of "why" questions that form stumbling blocks to the relationship:

- WHY may pose a threat: Why did you leave your last job?
- WHY implies blame or wrong: Why didn't you call them to tell them you might be late for the appointment?
- WHY implies that there is an intention behind the question and the answer you get may not be truthful: Why were you not looking for work during the month of August?
- WHY puts people on the spot and individuals will often defer or avoid a why question: "Why didn't you include a cover letter?" "I don't know."

As you can see the why question can close conversations and can create a conflict between people because the question implies a big "I" and a little "thou."

If you want your questions to be answered factually and without ambiguity, it is important to choose your words carefully. People feel validated when they are asked questions that demonstrate someone is truly interested in them and are not just interrogating them. Identify the potential impact of your questions by distinguishing between the various types of questions as outlined in the previous paragraphs.

❖ *Stop and Reflect*

Reflect on the following quotations:

- *Asking the right questions takes as much skill as giving the right answers.* (Robert Half)
- *I love the early process of asking questions about a story and deciding which questions matter most.* (Diane Sawyer)
- *You've got to ask! Asking is, in my opinion, the world's most powerful — and neglected — secret to success and happiness.* (Percy Ross)

Working With Difficult Clients

Occasionally, despite a practitioner's best efforts, clients will fail to act in their best interests and respond negatively to all interventions. The behaviours displayed by these difficult clients are often collectively referred to as "resistance," or "a process of avoiding or diminishing the self-disclosing communication requested by the interviewer because of its capacity to make the interviewee uncomfortable or anxious" (Pope, 1979, p. 74). Resistance can interfere with the practitioner's perceived efficacy, impede client motivation, and undermine the ability of the client to change (Nystul, 2001).

It is important for practitioners to recognize the expectations clients have about seeking help. Unsure of what to expect, clients are asked to enter into a working relationship built on trust and intimacy with an individual they have just met. They must be ready to explore personal issues they might not have shared with even their closest friends and family. For some clients, the choice to seek help might not have been their own; they may have been coerced into it, and as a result they are not willing to fully commit themselves to the process.

There are several ways practitioners can work with a difficult or challenging client:

- Establish an amicable relationship from the beginning using the building blocks of the client-practitioner relationship outlined earlier in the chapter.
- Convey a tolerant, accepting attitude towards clients. A relaxed, non-defensive demeanour may help to put clients at ease and counteract resistance.
- Examine the equality of interpersonal responses or style. Avoid being critical, impatient, or overly directive. Practitioners should strive to be patient and supportive, and to have realistic flexible expectations of clients.
- Establish as much mutuality as possible. Effective practitioners will apply the principles of collaboration and reciprocity. They will appropriately model these principles for clients, while making role expectations clear.
- Help clients explore and find incentives for moving past their resistance. Sometimes it makes sense to acknowledge the resistance overtly and to paraphrase and restate both the feelings and words of the client.

Conclusion

The development of effective client relationships is a process rather than an end product that focuses on what happens while the relationship is taking place. Here is a review of the seven competencies explored in this chapter that underpin an effective client-practitioner relationship.

1. Use appropriate verbal and non-verbal techniques to meet the primary support needs of clients.
2. Actively listen with the intention to understand.
3. Design questions that will gather the information you need and require clients to reflect and respond.
4. Demonstrate professional ethics in your relationship with the client.
5. Support clients in a courteous, respectful, and authentic manner.
6. Encourage independence and self-directedness.
7. Recognize that each client has his or her own needs, goals, level of understanding, and awareness. Recognize the client's point of reference.

This chapter on developing effective client relationships opened with a quote by John Short: "At the heart of our expertise is awareness" (Short, 1998, p. 3). As a practitioner, you have an obligation to recognize the impact of your personal style on the clients you serve. Be aware that your personal values, beliefs, culture, and assumptions influence your relationship with a client. As a career development practitioner, you have a responsibility to serve clients with competence, integrity, and authenticity. Doing so ensures proficiency with the models and processes of career development, adherence to a Code of Ethics, and helps build client commitment.

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Glossary

Active listening is a structured form of listening and responding that focuses the attention on the speaker. The listener must take care to attend to the speaker fully, and then repeats, in the listener's own words, what he or she thinks the speaker has said.

Affection is the genuineness, realness, or congruence that the practitioner brings to the relationship. The more the practitioner is "real" in the relationship, the greater is the likelihood that the client will change and grow in a constructive manner.

A **closed question** can be answered with either a single word or a short phrase. Closed questions are intended to give facts, are easy to answer, and keep control of the conversation with the questioner. Also referred to as **closed-ended question**.

Mattering environment is a climate where the client feels acknowledged, respected, and valued.

An **open question** is a question that is likely to receive a long answer. These types of questions ask the respondent to think and reflect, to give opinions and feelings, and they hand control of the conversation to the respondent. Also referred to as an **open-ended question**.

Shared control refers to the co-operative approach in the client-practitioner relationship. The practitioner considers the client as the expert on his or her life and as the practitioner's teacher. There is a sharing of time and space in the session, with the practitioner listening more than talking in the initial stages.

Validation is similar to mattering. The practitioner ensures that clients feel that they are important to the process and that their experiences, thoughts, and feelings are valued by the practitioner.

Discussion and Activities

Discussion

Class Discussion Questions

1. The following is a common career concern encountered by career practitioners. An ideal opportunity has been provided to you (guaranteed security, room for advancement, good benefits, great salary, lots of resources available to do your work, and the position matches your personal interests, qualifications, and training), but the dilemma is that you would need to relocate to a place far away and be immersed in a place that is culturally very different from your current home. Please break off into pairs in which one individual acts as the career practitioner and the second individual shares personal reasons for accepting or rejecting the job offer. Debriefing of the activity should centre on the complexities of making a career decision with a focus on the importance of self-awareness.
2. Brainstorm a list of competencies needed to form effective client relationships. Number these competencies from most to least important. Then, as a class share your answers and try to reach a consensus.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. Think of a time when you asked someone for help and the outcome was successful (from your point of view). What was helpful about the interaction?
2. Think of someone you really enjoy talking to. What are the qualities that make speaking to them so enjoyable?
3. What are some traits of active listening?

Career Practitioner Role Questions

All elements of communication, including listening, may be affected by barriers that impede the flow of conversation. The next time you engage in a conversation notice what gets in your way of actively listening. What strategies can you use to improve your listening ability?

Activities

1. Try your hand at answering these "why" questions. What are the challenges you encountered in attempting to answer the following questions?

   - Why do we press the start button to turn off the computer?
   - Why is the sky blue?
   - Why do we put our suits in a garment bag and our garments in a suitcase?
   - Why is it called quicksand if it sucks you down very slowly?

2. Role-playing conversations using the skills of effective listening:

   - The "gossip" game involves a person telling one person a short story (three to four sentences that are written down); the listener then whispers the story to his neighbour, and this continues until the last person in the chain tells the story out loud. The object is to see how much the story is changed by the time the last person hears it. To demonstrate the benefits of effective listening, do the same activity with a different story but have the participants use good listening skills rather than whispering.
   - Divide the group into pairs and have each pair select a listener and a speaker. The speaker is given a situation to talk about as the listener actively listens. After the speaker is done, the listener tries to rephrase the speech and offer solutions or feedback to the speaker. They can then review each other's performance and swap roles.

3. Leaders and Followers
   Ask everyone to find a partner in the room, preferably someone they don't know well. Have pairs decide who is A and who is B. Instruct the pairs to do the following:

   1. Face your partner with your palms open but not touching.
   2. When you say GO, A should begin to move and B will follow or mirror the movements of A. They are to move slowly and precisely, so that it will be hard to tell who is leading and who is following. They are to keep eye contact and to not look at the hands or any other part that is moving.
   3. When you say SWITCH, they are to change roles: B is the leader and A is the follower. This should be a fluid transition.

   Eventually there is no way to tell which player is leading the exercise. The focus is being shared rather than taken by one player or the other.

Resources and Readings

Resources

Web Resources

Active Listening

New Jersey Self-Help Group Clearinghouse. Improving your listening skills <http://www.mededfund.org/NJgroups//Listening_Skills.pdf>.

MindTools. Mind Tools on Active Listening (2005) <http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/Mind%20Tools%20Listening.pdf>.

The Careers Group. Listen very carefully <http://careersintheory.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/types-of-listening.pdf>.

Communication Skills

Developing Effective Communication Skills <http://www.slideshare.net/nusantara99/communication-skills-51895>.

New Conversations Initiative. The seven challenges workbook: Communication skills for success at home & work <http://www.newconversations.net/>.

Counselling Skills

Life Strategies Ltd. Life Strategies articles <http://www.lifestrategies.ca/resources/articles.cfm>.

The Careers Group. Past-Present-Future <http://careersintheory.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/past-present-future.pdf>.

The Careers Group. The questioning type. <http://careersintheory.files.wordpress.com/2009/10/questioningtype.pdf>.

The Life Role Development Group [website] <http://www.life-role.com/>.

Vance Peavy. Sociodynamic Counselling. A Constructivist Perspective [website] <http://www.sociodynamic-constructivist-counselling.com/>.

Supplementary Readings

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