

Article 1

VISTAS–Perspectives on Counseling 2004: Is a Judicious Makeover at Hand for Counseling?

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Knowledge is key to the effective work of professional counselors. Without knowledge, counselors can make decisions or take actions that lead them in inappropriate directions until they “bump into” a reality of which they were totally unaware. No matter how carefully planned or thought through, a counselor response driven by faulty knowledge can only be of limited utility. Basically, a counselor response is no better than the knowledge on which it is based.

The importance of knowledge to a counselor is heightened by the fact that clients look to a counselor as a source of reliable information or to verify the reliability of information they possess. Either way, the counselor has an important responsibility to assist his/her clients to obtain and use the best information available.

It is almost a truism to state that both the quantity of and means to accessing information have increased greatly, even exponentially, in recent years. Only a few years ago, the task was frequently that of obtaining *any* relevant information, let alone quality information. Today, the challenge is not so much obtaining information but obtaining *valid* information that counselors and clients can use with confidence. The Internet and search engines such as *Google* and *Alta Vista* can speedily provide a person with information on nearly any topic, but the veracity and applicability of much of the information retrieved are frequently in doubt.

ACA and ERIC/CASS have long recognized the importance of quality information for counselors. Through its journals, conventions,

and publications, ACA has offered counselors a wide variety of sources for and types of information of uniformly high quality. ERIC/CASS became known for specialized information on high priority topics, knowledge-driven skill building workshops, the use of innovative formats such as CDs and virtual libraries, monographs on frequently requested topics, and, most basic of all, building the ERIC database on counseling and student services at all levels and in all settings. Separately, and frequently together, ACA and ERIC/CASS have worked to make counselors some of the best informed professionals in the world.

As the world and conditions change, so do the types and forms of information that counselors need. Many of the existing forms of information dissemination and utilization (e.g., journals, publications, conventions) are still relevant. But newer forms are also needed which not only seek out new information from all of the specialties that make up the counseling profession but also build a comprehensive, searchable database of counseling knowledge. To this end, ACA and *Counseling Outfitters** have joined together in a partnership to develop the center that will be the linchpin for a series of initiatives developed over the next few years to ensure that professional counselors have the information resources requisite for providing effective counseling in the contemporary world.

First among these new initiatives is the creation of *VISTAS—Perspectives on Counseling 2004*. This publication, driven by program proposals submitted by ACA members, is designed to build a database of ideas and resources developed by ACA members. It reflects what the membership regards as major challenges and important resources for responding to those challenges. Twenty-five articles were selected by a VISTAS review committee composed of past and present ACA Division Presidents, Donna Henderson, Gerald Juhnke, and David Lundberg.

In addition to the submitted articles, you will find seven solicited articles that speak to topics that the editors believe are important to all professional counselors. In a real sense, these articles present a judicious makeover of counseling. They include topics that we believe all counselors must become cognizant of and knowledgeable about,

and perhaps even skilled in delivering services.

Presenting this document in a searchable CD format is an innovative form of information dissemination. It may well take some time to get used to this format. But then, adjusting to the new is what we must do if we are to remain viable.

To focus on perfecting *present* skills, while comfortable to the doer, does little to equip the professional counselor for the demands of an ever more rapidly changing world. All of us should be prepared to undergo a judicious makeover if we wish to be thought of as a viable source of help to others in these troublesome and challenging times.

**Counseling Outfitters* is a new organization created to provide the services and products previously offered by the discontinued ERIC/CASS Clearinghouse.