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Article 19

Counseling Management's Ethical Imperative: Responsible Quality Service

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In the first decade of the millennium the cost to organizations and individuals of ethical violations has been measured in the loss of reputation and confidence, the loss of human life and health, the loss of environmental safety and ecology, and the loss of billions of dollars. The modern discourse on ethics seems to focus more on risk management and compliance than values and virtues. However, at its best, ethical discourse brings one's mind to the responsibilities of quality service, summarized by Bennis and Nanus (1985) as "doing the right thing" (p. 21). The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of counselor managers in the promotion of an ethic of responsible quality service and to provide practical strategies from management literature toward the fulfillment of that role.

Professional Identity and Ethics of Counselor Managers

Counseling as a profession, barely a century old, joins the ranks of the classical professions--medicine, law, and theology--and the myriad of modern professions that have emerged to address the needs of society. Welie (2004) defined a profession as:

. . . a collective of expert service providers who have jointly and publicly committed to always give priority to the existential needs and interests of the public they serve above their own and who in turn are trusted by the public to do so. (p. 531)

Professional ethics can be seen as the implicit and explicit understanding of the relationship between the profession and society. Miller (1990) suggested that a model of understanding the relationship of a profession to society is the covenant. She suggested that a covenant model of the professional relationship with society and consequent obligations to society was useful in broadening the narrow *quid pro quo* agreement that is inherent in a contract model of professional responsibility. Miller (1990) pointed out that in the covenant model, each individual counselor “in assuming professional identity . . . promises to return the gift he or she has received in being trained for and granted professional status” (p. 121). It has been argued that the ethics of counseling are inextricably connected to the professional identity of counselors (Ponton & Duba, 2009). What counselors promise to do and the way they promise to do it emanates from who they are called by society to be. Counselors who are called to serve in the capacity of manager, at whatever level in an organization, continue their covenantal relationship with society as a counselor. They also enter into an additional covenantal relationship with society, the organization, and the people who comprise it. The successful transition from counselor to counselor-manager is measured by the degree to which the counseling habits of mind and covenants are merged with the habits of mind and covenants of management (Ponton & Cavaiola, 2008).

As counselors move to positions of leadership, their responsibility expands to include the provision of quality and ethical service not only by themselves but by the organization as a whole. While it is true that each counselor working in an organization is responsible for his or her own behavior, the manager is principally responsible for promoting the ethical behavior of the organization as

a whole. The ACA code of ethics (ACA, 2005) clarifies the responsibility of counselor-managers in regard to the hiring competent counselors (C.2.c) and insuring their subordinates' maintenance of client privacy (B.3.a) and employee relations (Section D). However, by and large, the Code of Ethics is moot on the responsibilities of the counselor-manager to insure organizationally the same standards to which they are called personally.

Research suggests that managers play a significant role in the development of an organization's ethical culture and positive environment (Logsdon & Young, 2005). Whetstone (2005) pointed out that leaders control the most powerful means for embedding and reinforcing the culture of organizations by means of several mechanisms including reactions to critical incidents, allocation of resources, allocation of rewards and status, and the choice of issues to which they attend. It is in their day to day decision making, as well as the formal statements of mission, that managers announce, shape and reinforce the organizational goals and strategies, values, and behaviors that form the culture. Likewise, it is the culture of the organization, as it is formulated both formally and informally throughout its history, that calls forth the leader, determines the leader's fit to the organization, and thus the leader's effectiveness. It is the ability to shape the culture of an organization that calls counselor-managers to promote an ethic of responsible quality service. Such an ethic extends beyond the legalistic and minimalist view of compliance with the law and the standards of practice. Such compliance presents (to use a familiar phrase) the necessary but insufficient conditions of responsible quality service. Henderson (2009) suggested that managers promote the mission of their organization by establishing work environments that provide excellent, culturally responsive services to clients and she calls on counselor-managers to continuously update their management skills. As leaders of professional endeavors in the classroom or clinic, counselor-managers have much to learn from their counterparts in other industries in regard to quality assurance and organizational development.

Responsible Quality Service

Quality assurance and customer engagement have significant implications for counselor-managers and their organizations.

Perhaps the most basic lesson counselor-managers learn from managers in other industries is the impact of quality on the bottom line. Counselors in private practice recognize how important it is to have people walk through the front door and how important it is to have them choose to return. Whether the enterprise is a small practice or a large multi-service agency, whether the counselor manager is an academic department chair or counseling center director, focus must be placed on the bottom line. Clients and students, directly or indirectly, support the organization. It is the responsibility of the manager to promote those practices and services that keep clients and students coming through the door.

Secondly, quality assurance assists counselor-managers in program improvement. As professionals, the covenant with society directs counselors toward excellence; therefore, managers of both treatment programs and educational programs have an implicit agreement with their constituencies to strive toward program improvement. Society expects better than “good enough surgery,” more than “it’ll get us by” dentistry, and attorneys whose ads read “we’ll do in a pinch” would soon go out of business. The commitment to excellence stems in professions not from a competitive market but rather from the public trust. Consumers of professional counseling services, be they students or clients, in ways that are subtle and sometimes not so subtle, sacrifice their autonomy to be in a relationship in which there is a power differential. The truth is, counselors’ customers are less likely and often less free to take their business elsewhere. This relationship suggests that our obligation for quality management exceeds that of other industries.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for counselor-managers to be concerned with quality management is its relation to the power of engagement. Customer and employee engagement research (Wagner & Harter, 2006; Fleming & Asplund, 2007) has

demonstrated the relationship of a constellation of variables identifying customers who are emotionally satisfied and employees as committed to the organization. They have found that enterprises that have employees who are engaged and passionate about their work are more likely to have customers who are passionate and committed to the enterprise. It is reasonable to suggest that engagement at the organization level mimics the power of therapeutic alliance at the counselor level. Promoting both employee and customer engagement through a systematic quality management program is a strategy for improving client outcomes and enhancing organizational function.

The ethics of responsible quality service is shaped by the professional identity of the counselor. The effective counselor-manager can communicate this rich and complex understanding of the need to do the right thing that goes far beyond the risk-management mentality. From intake to discharge and from application to graduation the organization and all those working in it have a responsibility to the client and student to provide quality service. The receptionist and the C.E.O. and all the other employees have a commitment to serve in their unique roles toward the accomplishment of that mission. It is the role of the counselor-manager to maintain the focus of the work group on that mission and commitment. A simple five-step approach can assist the counseling-manager in maintaining the focus of responsible quality service.

A-Assess: The counselor manager can assess the organization's quality of service utilizing several formal or informal assessment tools. Gallup Institute provides tools that assess both customer engagement (Fleming & Asplund, 2007) and employee engagement (Wagner & Harter, 2006). Other formal instruments exist to provide similar information. However, such assessment may also be done on a less formal basis. Mayor Ed Koch of New York City, during his tenure would assess his administration by asking citizens on the street, "How'm I doin'?" A great way to find out how the organization is doing is to ask the stakeholders and the employees. Another informal method was introduced by Peters and Waterman

(1982) in their seminal work *In Search of Excellence*. They referred to it as “Management by wandering around.” Essentially, they suggested that executives and managers get out of their office and talk to those who are doing the work, see the work being done, and learn. Counselor-managers wandering about their clinics may find that clients are put at ease by their receptionists, appointments are scheduled in a timely fashion, there are adequate parking places for staff and clients, and the temperature in the offices is comfortable — or maybe they will find room to go from good to great. Counselor-managers wandering about their counselor education programs may find support staff who are helpful to students, treating them as customers rather than interruptions. They may find faculty who are models of professional counseling, involved with their students and their professional colleagues in the academy and beyond. They may find phones that get answered, messages that get returned, and resources that are available. On the other hand, they may find room to go from good to great.

B-Build positive relationships. Positive relationships in the workplace have been seen as unique in their contribution to personal wellness and organizational success (Dutton & Raggins, 2007). Research in the area of organizational development has demonstrated the impact of positive relationships on collaboration (Powell, Kaput, & Smith-Doerr, 1996), organizational flexibility (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999), safety and well-being (Wagner & Harter, 2006), and organizational success (Fleming & Asplund, 2007). If the counseling office or classroom becomes a silo of solitary endeavor, relationships beyond those walls are seen as non-essential interruptions to the work of dedicated, albeit disengaged, counselors or counselor-educators. It is the role of the counselor manager to shape the culture of the organization toward one that promotes positive relationships both within the organization and beyond it. The internal relationship building processes are shaped by the counselor-manager through attention to positive communication with and among staff and stakeholders. The counselor-manager provides the opportunity for relationships to develop through the allocation of

space, time, and attention. It is the role of the counselor manager to insure that the organization develops positive relationships beyond its own walls. A successful organization is holistically integrated in the wider world of the community, the profession, and global concerns (Waddock, 2005). Longsdon and Young (2005) suggested that managers influence the organization's ability to interact positively with the world around it. The counselor-manager who attends to building such relationships actively promotes community awareness and connections in the work place, seeks out opportunities to involve the organization in community and professional activities, and promotes global social justice.

C-Clarify the mission. Counselor managers who are effective in promoting the ethics of responsible quality service recognize their role in formulating and announcing the mission of the organization. Champy (1995) suggested that managers have a primary role in articulating the mission of the organization as the "motivating explanations--why this business and its people must do what they're being called on to do" (p. 40). He refers to the manager's statement of the organization's mission as "...a master script...in which we all play out our different parts. It's the corporate meaning in which we find our personal meaning" (p. 58). The philosophical principle that once the *logos* is established, the *ethos* follows, applies to counseling work groups. Once the organization knows its meaning and organizing principles, the behaviors and customs follow. The counselor-manager's articulation and clarification of the organization's commitment to the ethic of responsible quality service provides meaning and direction to all levels of the organization. When clients are treated with respect and kindness by the reception staff, the manager articulates that to be in concert with the mission of quality service. When consideration is given to operating hours that meet the needs of clients, service delivery in languages spoken by the clients, and fee schedules that allow access to those who need service, the counselor-manager acknowledges the organization's fidelity to its mission.

D- Develop authentic leadership. Luthans and Avolio (2003)

defined authentic leadership as a process that draws on the positive qualities of both leaders and the organization, and also yields leaders in the organization who are self-aware, confident, hopeful, transparent, ethical, and future-oriented. The counselor-manager who is committed to quality recognizes that leadership does not reside in titles but rather in persons. Finding and promoting strengths in individuals within the organization expands the leadership network and promotes engagement. The counselor-manager committed to responsible quality management will implement a systemic approach to leadership development that is woven into staff assignments, performance evaluations, and succession planning.

E- Explore new horizons. Cooperrider and Sekerka (2003) summarized the need for positive exploration as foundational to organizational change, “Human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about” (p. 234). Lewin’s theory (1951) recognized the inevitability of change in the environment and the consequential need for organizations to change. The effective counselor-manager is aware of the impact of conditions on the organization and its need to adapt to those changes. Additionally counselor-managers are aware of the need to manage change in the organization in an effective manner that considers both the impact of the proposed change on the employee and the impact of the employee on the proposed change. The counselor-manager who scans the horizon for change may find that the primary language of the organization’s constituency has changed, there is a need to provide childcare to keep talented workers, or there is no longer a need for a particular program that has “always” been provided by the agency. Awareness of such environmental change introduces the challenges of change and the opportunity for growth for both the organization and its employees.

Conclusion

The management of responsible quality service builds on the foundation of the Code of Ethics (ACA, 2005), and goes beyond those standards to recognize that counselors who manage counseling work groups in the community or the academy are responsible for the competence, effectiveness, viability, and well-being of the organization they serve. Browning (2007) pointed out that the skills of the counselor, while valuable in management, may not be sufficient to insure success. The covenantal promise of competence impels counselor-managers to equip themselves with knowledge and skills of management and organizational development to insure that clients and students are well served by the work groups they manage.

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