

The Cycle of Mentoring

by Angelica McDaniel, Entry-Level Award Recipient
Gamma Zeta Chapter, The University of West Georgia

For years, I have heard how important it is for counselors to seek positive relationships with other professionals. My experience as a counselor-in-training has shown me that there is a great expectation for counselors to become mentors and to foster these relationships. I have had the privilege of having three wonderful people invest in me through such a long-term, mentoring role. From each of these relationships I have learned more about myself, my abilities, and service to my profession. Through these extraordinary mentors, I have seen what mentoring in counseling did for me and I can see how continuing this tradition now and once I am a counselor will continue to help the field of counseling produce the best counselors possible.

In my experience over the past four years, I have had a variety of mentors. A beloved part-time psychologist in the community helped me by giving me books, asking about my progress through the program, and listening when I needed to talk. A school counselor in the community has allowed me to shadow him, answered questions for projects, and sat down with me to discuss the benefits of studying school counseling and following the path to licensure. Finally, my advisor for my counseling program at the University of West Georgia assisted me in changing my focus from Clinical Mental Health Counseling to Professional School Counseling, taught me about opportunities through Chi Sigma Iota and is working to help me find funding to study abroad. Each of these mentors has brought me very different experiences, and each of these has helped me to grow as a professional and as a person. Because of these individuals, I learned that I was more geared towards working in the school setting, but could still meet my goal of obtaining licensure. Without their support, encouragement, and even expertise I would not know what mentoring looks like within counseling.

These poignant experiences have shown me that there is an expectation for counselors to become mentors to others in the field. Upon entry into professional counseling in the school system it is my plan to continue this tradition and meet the expectation of becoming a mentor to others. To do this I will need to continue learning about what it means to be a leader in my field and in my community. I have served the past four years in leadership roles in the local chapter of the Kiwanis club, a civic organization that strives to serve the children of the world. Additionally, I am currently the President of the Gamma Zeta Chapter of Chi Sigma Iota. These positions taught me leadership and ownership of the responsibilities I hold. Through these roles, I have learned the value of getting to know the ins and outs of my organizations and how to take care of the trust that has been placed in me.

The counseling field is no different than the leadership roles I have held. According to the Principles and Practices of Leadership Excellence, service to others is the primary reason for leadership (Chi Sigma Iota, 2018). Leadership, like mentors, has the responsibility of providing services to others. The primary reason for the counseling field is to assist those who are caught in their problems and to help them cope or better function as they work through those problems. Mentoring others in the counseling field allows those coming up in the field to be more well-rounded and better prepared counselors. They, in turn, will be equipped to mentor to the generation of counselors following them. This leads into the secondary Principle which speaks to

continuing the commitment to furthering the mission of their organization (Chi Sigma Iota, 2018).

The Missions and Visions of both CACREP and CSI strive to produce high quality counselors (CACREP, 2018; Chi Sigma Iota, 2018). Emerging counselors, like me, are taught multicultural competencies, ethics, and self-care. Through these important learning objectives counselors are prepared to work with every type of client. Supporting other counselors in this learning is another way for mentoring to play an important role in the development of leaders within counseling. Through mentoring, supervisory, and even consultation relationships counselors have the resources to ensure they provide sound and quality services to their clients. Beyond that, counselors have individuals who understand the field, to bounce ideas off, and talk to when cases are difficult to deal with. These resources help to ensure we can continue to preserve the human capital resources of counseling (Chi Sigma Iota, 2018).

After observing people as they poured their wisdom and energy into me, I realize that I have an important legacy to uphold. Even now through my role as President of my university's chapter of Chi Sigma Iota, I can help to provide mentorship that allows newer students to learn what is ahead. I can also provide resources and advice that help them to study and prepare for exams that will increase the likelihood students become licensed, as well as provide information about obtaining practicum or internship sites, and information on what the application and job interview process entails. The legacy of mentorship in the field of counseling is one that unconsciously, I have been upholding for the past two years.

When I graduate, and get started in the field, I plan to continue to be a mentor. I will work to help students through providing supervision while they go through their practicum and internship. I will also join a group or even create one so that counselors in my area can easily consult or support each other. These may seem like small contributions, but like any form of mentoring, they will make a long-lasting and eventually large contribution to the field. Without the mentorship provided through my CACREP accredited program and the Gamma Zeta chapter of Chi Sigma Iota I may not have successfully made it this far in my program. As I complete my program, it is my turn to give back.

References

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Enhancing Leadership Through Observation and Mentorship

by Michele Pinellas, Doctoral Students, Professional Counselors, and Counselor Educators
Award Recipient

Alpha Upsilon Sigma Chapter, Argosy University, Tampa

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 respectful 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 safe guarding 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

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