

White W. (2003). The addiction counselor/supervisor as trainer. *Counselor*, 4(4), 27-33.

The Addiction Counselor/Supervisor as Trainer

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Abstract

Addiction counselors and supervisors are increasingly being called upon to teach and train their clients, their professional peers, and the general public. This article provides tips on how counselors and supervisors can design and deliver effective inservice training programs. Inservice training is viewed as a means through which the field can strengthen the oral folklore through which our knowledge has been historically transmitted.

Fully developed addictions professionals are also trainers. As the aides in 19th century inebriate asylums, the lay therapists of the Emmanuel Movement, the counselors on alcoholism in psychiatric hospitals of the 1950s, and as modern addictions counselors and supervisors, we have been the conduits for the transmission of information, ideas, skills, values, care, and hope. We have carried these precious gifts to the addicted, to their families, to our professional peers, and to our communities.

In the past two decades, the training aspects of the addictions professional role have become more focused as counselors have taken on greater responsibilities in client and community education. With the tightening budgets of our current era, another training role has increased. Where a decade ago, an agency sent four counselors to a workshop, today's fiscally frugal agency sends one counselor to a workshop or conference with the admonition to return and conduct an inservice training session on what was learned for those staff who didn't attend.

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The purpose of this article is to provide addiction counselors and supervisors with some practical tips on the design and delivery of such inservice training.

Counseling and Training

While many counselors are intimidated by the training role, the fact is that there are many counseling skills that constitute the foundation for successful training. The ability to listen, read non-verbal behavior, pose meaningful questions, speak clearly and concisely, and teach through story and metaphor are as essential to training as they are to counseling. Those of you with extensive work facilitating groups and family counseling sessions will bring even greater natural aptitudes for the trainer role. It is important to see training not as a new role but an extension of what you already do well.

Selecting Training for Potential Replication

When asked to go to a conference or workshop and bring back what you've learned, it is important to realize that not all training is appropriate for replication or adaptation for inservice training. Some training is far too technical to replicate, other training is far too experiential, while still other training has too little substance to warrant replication. Make sure that you and your supervisor select training that can stand up to this replication demand. Choose training conducted by presenters known for their rich content, training that has clearly defined learning objectives that seem transferable to the inservice format, and training that comes with handouts—the best indicator you have of a trainer's preparation and organization.

Attending Training of Trainer Courses

Participating in training that you yourself will later present brings different responsibilities than when simply attending training for your own personal learning. Some counselors go to a training and then come back and share, almost as an afterthought, a few interesting things they learned with other staff in an inservice training. This isn't training; it's leftovers. This method can be dramatically improved by the following procedures:

- 1) Before attending the training, use a few minutes in a staff meeting to announce that you are going to be attending the training and will be returning to share what you learned with others. Ask the staff if they have

particular concerns or questions related to the training topic. Your goal is to create a shopping list of interests. You will then be going to training on behalf of all your peers—seeking out information and asking questions on their behalf as well as your own.

- 2) Before the training begins, ask the sponsors and the presenter for permission to tape record the session and for permission to reproduce any handouts. Emphasize that these recordings will only be used for purposes of inservice training within your agency. Professional trainers get such requests all the time and are usually quite agreeable to such requests. During your forthcoming inservice, you can share the handouts and note that you have a full recording of the session if any staff are interested in listening to it.
- 3) Take notes at the training and edit these notes into a brief synopsis of the major points made in the training. These notes can then become part of your handouts for the inservice training.

The tapes, handouts, and edited notes should become part of the agency's permanent inservice library.

The Uniqueness of Inservice Training

The counselor or supervisor who conducts inservice training is in one of the most unique training settings. There are many things that work against the success of inservice training sessions. First, the counselor/supervisor-trainer standing in front of his or her peers is a known quantity. There is none of the mystique and "halo effect" that tends to accompany an outside trainer, nor is there any expectation that staff will be on their best behavior as they would more likely be with an outside trainer. Second, inservice training is plagued by short time constraints, people arriving late and leaving early, and, in some agencies, innumerable interruptions. These conditions are the professional nightmare of the most experienced trainer.

There are, however, special advantages to the inservice training format. There are usually lower expectations for such training because all of us share the training responsibilities and don't enter the role as either an alleged content expert or training delivery expert. The biggest advantage is that, as a trainer, you will never have a greater knowledge of a trainee audience than in the inservice format.

You will know your audience better than any professional trainer could—their strengths and weaknesses, their special interests, their ideological sensitivities, and their learning styles. The design and delivery of successful inservice training requires an understanding of the unique constraints and advantages of this format.

Designing Inservice Training

Some simple design considerations for inservice training include the following:

- 1) *Keep it simple.* Define what you can and cannot do within the prescribed time frame. Don't try to cram the one-day workshop you attended into a one-hour inservice—that's what the availability of tapes and handouts is to avoid. Select a few learning objectives that seem appropriate to your group and to the time restrictions.
- 2) *Keep it specific.* Include special topic references that link your general topic to what you know to be the special interests of key staff. It reinforces the fact that you are there not to show off what you know but to respond to their needs and interests.
- 3) *Keep it logical.* Organize the inservice so that there is a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- 4) *Get everyone involved.* Design the inservice with a focus on inclusion and participation. Ask open-ended questions, use a quick brainstorming and reporting out exercise, solicit a case example, use structured learning experiences guided by written handouts (worksheets). Do anything, but get'em involved.
- 5) *Stimulate their senses.* Involve as many senses in the learning process as possible. Vary the media and use different media to convey the same material. You want them to hear, speak, see, touch, and, if possible, taste and smell your topic.

Training Delivery

There is a simple motto for training delivery: preparation avoids perspiration. What this motto emphasizes is that the most important elements of training delivery occur before you begin training: preparing, organizing the training space, checking and rechecking all equipment and supplies and, last but not least, checking yourself physically and mentally. The importance of the last item can be gleaned by asking any group of professional trainers to share their worst training experiences. You will hear stories about having a slide projector breakdown in the middle of your keynote address to 400 people, ripping the seat out of your pants just before you are to begin training, having someone in the front row slip you a note while you're presenting that says your dress is stuck in the back of your pantyhose, or forgetting to turn off your portable microphone when you enter the restroom during a break in training. These are the kinds of experiences that really build character in a trainer and make the best trainers compulsive about the training environment and their own presentation of self.

When you are ready to begin training, three things should be completed: 1) your preparation of the room, equipment/supplies, and yourself, 2) an outline of the content of what you are about to do, and 3) an outline of the training process. The latter might be a single sheet of paper that lists the sequence of training activities that you are going to use and their approximate times.

We noted earlier that good training has a clear beginning, middle, and end. In the beginning you want to achieve three things: 1) introduce yourself, the topic, and the boundaries of your knowledge of the topic, 2) define the learning objectives that will be the focus of the inservice, and 3) get everyone involved. Introducing yourself may seem silly for an inservice training when you are training staff who already know you. But it is important to share with them what you are bringing to this particular topic, some of which may include experiences that predate your current position. You also want to diminish your power in the trainer-trainee relationship by shifting the framework of training from that of expert-to-student, to that of a mutual exploration of a critical issue. The goal of getting people involved is to quickly avert the propensity for trainee passivity before it has a chance to set in. If your inservice topic is on solvent abuse, you might ask by a show of hands how many staff have served as a primary counselor for a client whose drug of choice was volatile solvents, or with a very experienced group of staff, you might ask people to brainstorm some of the special obstacles they have encountered counseling solvent abusers.

The middle of the training involves the content of the training and the activities you have built in to explore that content. Experienced trainers build menus of potential activities from which they can make selections depending on the response of the trainees. The selection of training delivery techniques hinges

both on the topic and what kind of skills you bring to the training process. Some counselors are excellent speakers and can rely on more formal presentations of information. Other counselors will bring greater strengths in the area of group facilitation and may wish to provide training on topics that lend themselves to this style of training delivery. It is best to start with your natural strengths and then begin to develop an expanded repertoire of skills.

The successful closure of an inservice training session should: 1) provide a concise summation of key points, 2) provide everyone an opportunity to personalize the information and its relevance to their role and the program, and 3) provide each participant an opportunity to evaluate the training. The latter can be achieved through either a group evaluation exercise or through use of a standard inservice evaluation form.

On Training Terror and Training Intoxication

Being the center of attention in the trainer role can be as terrifying as it can be intoxicating.

For those whose experience comes closer to terror, the trick is to channel the fuel generated by the fear into an ally in the training process—to transform anxiety into positive energy. For those particularly vulnerable to such stage fright, two techniques may prove helpful. First, design and utilize facilitation focused training (as opposed to presentation focused training) that keeps the bulk of the attention on the trainees rather than on yourself. Secondly, master some simple rituals that allow you to get positively focused—you know, the kind you teach your clients all the time. I have been training for 25 years and I still use such techniques to get myself centered. I remind myself that what I am about to do is not about ego but about message. I try to reduce my ego-consciousness by focusing on the importance of what I'm about to do rather than on what people are going to think of me. I refer to this as humbling myself before the training gods. The training gods do need help, however. Ultimately, the best antidote for nervousness in the role of trainer is meticulous preparation.

A few cautions are in order for those who find themselves drawn to the limelight of training like an insect to fire. Personal charisma and great speaking rarely constitute good training. While these natural talents may serve some of us well in other arenas, there tends to be hidden harm when personal charisma and spell-binding speech are brought into the training environment. Trainees often leave such an event impressed, overwhelmed, even worshipful. Their gushing praise can be dangerously intoxicating for the neophyte trainer. But trainees often

leave such an event awe-struck by their new guru, but feeling worse about themselves—less capable, less confident, less powerful. (The corollary to this point, by the way, is that great evaluations do not necessarily reflect great training.) The key to training is not to impress trainees with our brilliance and our skills but to elicit the best ideas and best skills from within each trainee.

Training Techniques, Training Style and Knowledge of Your Audience

As someone who has spent most of the last two decades traveling 120 days a year as a professional trainer, I can assure you there are no training delivery techniques or styles applicable to all audiences. Technical knowledge will not make up for a lack of knowledge about those to whom you are speaking. And just because you work with a group of people doesn't mean that you know them as trainees. In the past month, I have made presentations to a small group of AIDS case managers, a group of Chicago Probation Officers, a large group of physicians, several shifts of police officers, a group of civil engineers, and several groups of addiction counselors. Can you for a moment think about the differences between these groups in how you introduce and qualify yourself, the differences in general learning styles, and the differences in the relative balance between cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of training?

The research unit of which I am a part contains analytical thinkers who learn primarily through cognitive maps and who would consider exercises commonly used in counselor training as bizarre and a waste of time. They are research-based learners. They look for evidence. The counselors for whom I regularly provide inservice training within the broader organization of which I am a part learn very differently. They learn through sharing stories and through seeing new behaviors modeled. They learn affectively as well as cognitively. They look for experience. This is all to say that the selection of particular training techniques and even formulation of a training style for a particular training event requires some precision. Using a blank sheet of paper, jot down in as much detail as possible what you know about your staff and their styles of learning. Think about their ages, their gender mix, their cultural backgrounds, their developmental experiences, and their educational and professional backgrounds. Given your observations, describe how you might approach designing and delivering training to this group.

On Enthusiasm

When asked what I consider the most important quality of a successful trainer, I discard numerous possible answers. First, I discard technical knowledge

because I know many exceptionally intelligent individuals who are terrible trainers. I also discard being a great counselor because some of the most skilled clinicians fall short in their abilities to train other counselors. I quickly discard physical attractiveness because many of the best trainers would never win a beauty contest. There are many qualities that contribute to making a great trainer but which would still fall short of being THE most important quality. When all is said and done, I think what the great trainers bring to their work is an insatiable curiosity and an unquenchable enthusiasm about their field of study. That's what I think each of you who is called upon to train must reach inside to find. You must find a way to bring passion and excitement to the learning process so that even the most resistant learners get caught up in the process in spite of themselves. That means that you must find within each topic that which moves and excites your own interest and passion and then bring that energy to your design and delivery of the material.

Answering Questions

The general guideline for answering questions in training is: answer the question as clearly as possible, as briefly as possible, and give the questioner an opportunity for a brief follow-up response. The fear of questions intimidates many a would-be trainer, and often leads to avoiding training opportunities or to over-preparation. There is in the trainer role this fear of being humiliated—the fear that we will be asked something we don't know and that our response will embarrass us in front of our peers. But there is a very simple antidote to such fear, and that is an open acknowledgment of our limitations. (We, of all people, should now this. Bill Wilson once referred to this as "the sublime paradox of strength coming out of weakness."²) The most important and underutilized phrase in the trainer's vocabulary is, "I don't know." When posed a question to which you have no knowledge whatsoever, say first and foremost those magical words. The follow-ups to that pronouncement can be as varied as, "I'll have to see what I can find out about that and let you know" to "Does anyone else have anything they could add as a response to this question?"

The Ethics of Inservice Training

² Wilson, W. (1945). The Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. In *Alcohol, Science and Society: Twenty-nine Lectures with Discussions as Given at the Yale School of Alcohol Studies*. New Haven: CT. *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, p 464.

Yes, there are ethical dimensions of training. The most important ethical guidelines for conducting inservice training include the following:

- 1) *Know your limits.* Stay within the boundaries of your education, training, and experience in your role as a trainer.
- 2) *Respect the source.* Trainers are notorious for stealing from each other, but we try to do it respectfully. Respect involves not claiming others ideas as our own and giving credit where it is due.
- 3) *Distinguish fact from opinion.* Separate (by appropriately labeling) the presentation of fact from the presentation of opinion.
- 4) *Strive for professional objectivity.* Present as objectively as possible the multiple sides of complex issues.
- 5) *Protect your audience.* Remain constantly cognizant of the physical and psychological safety of trainees.

The Question of Self-Disclosure

There are some direct parallels between the use of self-disclosure in counseling and the use of self-disclosure in training. Both involve three questions: 1) Is self-disclosure at this time, in this context, with this person (or these people) an effective strategy? (Will it achieve a positive outcome?) 2) Is self-disclosure at this time, in this context, with this person (or these people) ethical? (Is there any inadvertent harm that could occur as a result of such self-disclosure?), and 3) Am I using self-disclosure as a shortcut to acceptance by trainees?

The question of the effectiveness of self-disclosure varies greatly from audience to audience and varies according to what purposes are to be achieved by the trainer, e.g, knowledge or skill acquisition versus attitudinal/value changes. The ethical question involves exploring the nature of the trainer-trainee relationship. This relationship, like the counselor-client relationship, is a fiduciary relationship, implying that one party assumes a special duty and obligation for the care of another party. It means that the needs that will drive the decision-making process will be those of the client/trainee and not those of the fiduciary agent—the counselor/trainer. For trainers, this means that self-disclosure must be used, if at all, strategically to enhance the learning of trainees and not to meet the needs of the trainer for emotional catharsis.

Some of the best trainers are inveterate storytellers and weave wonderful personal and professional anecdotes into their presentations. But as spontaneous as such stories may appear, they are usually carefully selected and sculpted to meet particular training goals. The general rule on self-disclosure in training is threefold: weigh such disclosure carefully, use brief strategic disclosures that do not break your emotional contact with the audience, and NEVER, NEVER, NEVER disclose personal or professional material of immediate emotional intensity in training. We must be careful not to exploit the privilege of the lectern to shift the focus of the interaction from the needs of trainees to our own needs. Trainees are there to learn, not to provide the social backdrop for the trainer's own therapy.

The Training Autopsy

For those of you interested in developing yourself as a trainer, take a few moments after each training opportunity to evaluate everything related to its preparation and delivery. You may even find it helpful to keep a journal of your various presentation experiences. What is captured in the journal is what you learned from each training experience—learned about your audience, learned about the trainability of particular material, learned about yourself as a trainer.

-Improving Training Skills

There are three primary ways to improve your training skills. The first is to attend one or more training of trainer courses. These provide an excellent introduction even for those persons who bring great natural skills as a trainer. The second method is to search out master trainers (persons who have achieved an incredible degree of training skill) and watch them work. Find master trainers and focus your attention, not on the content of what they train, but on how they organize and deliver their material. Watch their every move—including before training starts, at breaks, and when the training is over. What you are looking for are aspects of technique and style that fit your own temperament and your own training formats. The third, and most important, method of improving your training skills is to train, and to train at every possible opportunity.

If one is really serious about pursuing the area of training as a dimension of one's identity as an addictions counselor/supervisor or as an activity that supplements and complements this role, it is helpful to develop a network of other individuals who share this interest. It is also helpful to include within one's mentor relationships one or more individuals who bring special training expertise.

Training Coordination

In many small and medium sized programs, a counselor may be asked not only to deliver an inservice training session but to organization and coordinate such sessions. Such coordination can either be done by intuition or quite systematically. The latter involves conducting needs assessment surveys to determine the most important inservice training topics, recruiting, and assisting staff in presenting these sessions, and evaluation the inservice training program. An increasing number of programs are finding creative solutions to maintaining high quality training in the face of tightening program budgets. One approach involves creating a wider network through which agencies can exchange staff resources for inservice training. This bartering system provides a variety of experts that are traded back and forth between programs with no fiscal resources required. A more formal version of this method involves creating multi-agency training consortia or networks through which resources can be pooled to bring in outside trainers that no single agency could afford.

On Our Responsibility to Write and to Teach

The effectiveness and integrity of our whole system of addiction treatment ultimately rests on the knowledge, skill, judgement, and ethics of those who sit face-to-face with addicts and their families. The Achilles heel of our whole field lies in the lack of preparation, orientation, training, and retention of those who are charged with this most central task. The addictions field is handicapped in its efforts to support counselors by an underdeveloped technology for transmitting the field's knowledge and folklore. The oral traditions we have relied on to transmit such knowledge and folklore are breaking down due to the rapid changes within the field. We are a field in motion whose collective experiences—our perceptions, understandings, methods—are being bled out regularly through excessively high turnover. Inservice training programs and inservice training libraries of literature, handouts, and audio- and video-recordings are vehicles that can capture the best of what we are and what we do for future generations of counselors. Francis Bacon once wrote that all people are debtors to their professions. Embracing the role of inservice trainer is one way that each of us can repay our debt to those who came before us and delivered the field into our hands. This is a torch that we each have a professional and moral obligation to reach out and grasp.