

I'm working with a woman today whose 71-year-old mother is dying of uterine cancer and her 78-year-old father is binge drinking to cope with his grief. This woman is recently divorced, separated from her children, and away from her home and her friends while she tends to her parents. As if that isn't enough, she just learned that she too has cancer. She is depressed and overwhelmed.

In a situation like this, my role as a counselor is somewhat fluid. I have to pull out all the stops. I am a social worker, a psychologist, a mother, a trainer, a friend, a janitor, a nurse, a spiritual advisor, a shoulder, an ear, and a counselor. This may not be typical, but "typical" around here tends to be redefined frequently. You just have to be fluid to go with the flow.

3. *Family counseling* focuses on the interaction patterns that lead to dysfunctional behavior. By thinking in terms of the family system to which a client belongs, the counselor is able to intervene by understanding and changing communication patterns and coalitions of power.
4. *Couples counseling* helps partners articulate their vulnerable feelings to each other, with the goals of enhancing their intimacy, resolving conflicts, or clarifying the decision of one or both partners to end the relationship. Counselors help such couples to have productive conversations on topics that usually lead to fights at home. Interventions include blocking hurtful exchanges, translating partners' harshly worded statements into softer language, and facilitating the expression of underlying emotions.
5. *Group work structures* may be used to accomplish more efficiently the goals of individual counseling. Participants have the added advantages of interaction. Counselors also work in guidance groups in which they serve a more active role, designing educational exploration experiences, providing information, and stimulating personal awareness and growth.
6. *Consultation* activities involve initiating changes on an organizational level, often by working on program development. Counselors consult with the human and organizational components of systems to help the individual parts make a more unified whole. Counselors, as human relations specialists, will intervene to fix or prevent the problems that arise from interpersonal conflict.
7. *Coaching* focuses on helping individual clients tap into existing skills or develop new skills in order to achieve specific objectives. *Executive coaches*, using both their counseling abilities and knowledge of corporate organizations, help business executives communicate more effectively to their colleagues, improve team performance, increase their own productivity, and achieve greater professional-personal development. *Personal (or life) coaches* work with individuals to help them identify their strengths and passions and to facilitate actualizing their personal goals.
8. *Mediation* is used to help couples, business partners, or others involved in a disagreement settle their differences in an expedient and respectful way. Although this activity is often initiated at the recommendation of the court during divorce, child custody, or civil disputes, mediation can be employed as a form of structured conflict resolution and problem solving in a variety of

oday I spent a few hours in the morning leading a group, then working on a grant that I'm writing with two other colleagues. We're trying to generate some more funds that will free us up to continue doing outreach rather than just being stuck in our offices all day.

I've had jobs before where I was seeing client after client—six, seven, eight a day. Burnout city, if you

work. But I was so unprepared for this stuff. In my counseling program, I mostly learned how to do one-on-one counseling with reasonably cooperative people who were motivated to get help. What I wouldn't give for such a client now! The truth is that I don't do that much individual counseling anymore—almost all groups and family work. But I got a good foundation to learn the rest on my own.

- situations. Other forms of mediation focus primarily on helping people to understand one another and make compromises that are mutually acceptable.
9. *Administration* plays a part in many counselors' work; it involves directing the activities of a school, agency, or organization. Public relations, quality control, fundraising, the conducting of meetings, paperwork processing, and decision making are major components of this kind of work.
  10. *Supervision* gives experienced practitioners a significant role in helping those who are less capable. The counselor may conduct in-service workshops and provide individual or group supervision sessions that may be either emotionally or behaviorally focused. Responsibility for staff training and development may also include attention to improving staff morale.
  11. *Computer technology* is now a crucial aspect of the counselor's daily life; on any given day, a counselor may be exchanging e-mails with clients and colleagues, searching for articles on diagnoses and treatments, perusing e-book counseling texts, writing reports and case notes, invoicing clients, and conducting distance therapy with a webcam, smartphone, or tablet. Because information sent via "the cloud" is not as secure as hard copies stored in a locked file cabinet, counselors will increasingly need to be familiar with encryption technology as well as evolving ethical regulations regarding the use of digital communication with clients.
  12. *Research* is an important part of measuring professional effectiveness. Counselors are frequently required to justify their existence and to demonstrate to funding agencies, regulatory commissions, citizens' advisory groups, and boards of trustees that they are earning their salaries. Research is also crucial in communicating the results of experimentation to other professionals so that the field can continue to grow.
  13. *Advocacy* on behalf of marginalized, disadvantaged, and oppressed groups is not only mandated as part of our ethical codes but also a significant part of our responsibility to the greater good of our local and global communities. Regardless of our work setting and specialty, each of us is expected to devote ourself to serving others who would not otherwise benefit from counseling services. All counselors volunteer their time to work with pro bono cases, adjusting or waiving fees according to the client's ability to pay. Far more than

physical facility, and psychological climate subtly shapes a new species of counselor. It is even difficult, on the basis of the everyday practice of professionals, to recognize that they are nevertheless members of the same evolutionary family. Even so, there are probably more similarities than differences among counselors in various settings. Before we explore the roles of counselors in the places where they work, it will be helpful to review what they all share in common.

### A Unique Identity

All counselors, irrespective of their work settings, identify themselves as part of a shared profession that is distinguished from other helping disciplines. As we mentioned in Chapter 2, counseling is *not* the same as social work, psychology, guidance, psychiatry, or education—even though those other professionals often practice counseling in some form. Each field, however similar in its methods and goals, arises out of quite different settings. Psychiatry is a specialty of medicine. Social work came from the streets, psychology from the university, and counseling from the schools. In spite of their recent trends toward convergence, each helping profession is indelibly marked by its birthplace.

Exploring and articulating your own professional identity is absolutely critical, not only to ground yourself in a discipline with its own set of standards, culture, rituals, research, and theoretical base but also to be able to explain who you are, and what you do, to your clients and to the public. The roles you take on—as a scholar, teacher, consultant, mediator, diagnostician, interventionist, systems analyst, and so on, all contribute to your professional identity. Likewise, the setting in which you work, the organizations to which you belong, the conferences you choose to attend, and the licenses and certifications you hold also shape your dominant self-image as a professional.

### Many Different Roles

As would already be evident, counselors have varied roles, depending on the setting in which they practice. Some jobs demand more diagnostic and assessment skills while others require specializations in group work, or family counseling, or consultation. Generally, the most common counselor roles may be grouped into several categories.

1. *Individual assessment* comprises observation, information seeking, and interpretation of a person's behavior in areas that include performance, achievement, aptitude, personality, and interests. The results of assessment are valuable for screening, placement, diagnosis, evaluation, and planning of treatment approaches.
2. *Individual counseling* consists of those one-to-one interactions with clients in which the therapeutic process is applied to resolving personal concerns, career and educational decisions, and problems of human adjustment. In many areas of the country, counselors are also expected to work with more severe emotional disorders (e.g., depression and anxiety). More and more, counselors are called on to initiate brief interventions that very quickly and efficiently change attitudes and behavior.

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