

SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION PLAN

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Being culturally competent is a requirement and a necessity for therapists in the counseling field. Understanding the nuances of age, language, ethnicity, gender, spirituality, and sexuality differences of your clients as well as their socioeconomic differences enables the counselor to establish a safe therapeutic environment to establish trust and effective therapeutic interventions within the counseling setting. Stepping forward, beyond the counseling arena into education and advocacy, multiculturalism must be entwined into all facets of education through curriculums and course content and even into professional conferences (ACA, 2014). To be a counselor, advocate, and educator it is important to also understand your individual worldview and cultural differences.

Life Meaning and Commitment

Today, I am a registered mental health counseling intern for the state of Florida. Before this career, I was a senior purchasing professional in corporate America for 36 years. Yet even during the 36-year journey, I knew I was a servant leader. Learning throughout my journey that there's nothing fair about life, I had empathy and a desire to help people who were struggling with life and emotional problems. In my twenties, I struggled with self-confidence, purpose, belonging, and self-worth. As a result, I sought out my first therapist. Her name was Minter Saunders and she was a psychiatrist. Attending therapy with her opened my eyes to my resilience, strength, and potential. It has been over 30 years since I attended therapy at Minter's office, but I have never forgotten her or the positive impact therapy had on my life. My counselor saw me.

As a registered mental health counseling intern, I counsel adults, adolescents, children, and couples. I meet with the clients face-to-face or via telehealth, whichever is more comfortable for them. I believe that there is a dire need in society for counselors to not only

advocate for their profession but also advocate for the clients, bridging the gap in their understanding of self and what may seem unattainable in society, and providing pathways to the attainable. If Christians are conduits of God's power and work in the world then we must also allow El Roi, the God who sees, to work through us (Genesis 16:13 NIV). I believe that all my experiences of life thus far have primed me for this purpose which is orchestrated by God.

Explore Personal Privilege

Being of African American ethnicity, I never thought of myself as having any personal privileges outside of my ethnic community. However, this is not accurate. My educational level comes with an undeniable level of privilege affording me access to institutions of knowledge and employment opportunities I would not have without it. This acquired knowledge through education along with my ethnicity opened doors to jobs because I was not only African-American but also a woman, which meets two corporate initiatives regarding cultural differences. Another area of privilege I am part of is that of social class based on income. Though I have been at higher financial levels in my past career, I am still considered middle class in my current career. This affords me the ability to live in more favorable neighborhoods with more favorable food choices, grocery stores, commercial options, and activities. I have also had the pleasure of traveling around North America (US, Canada, and Mexico), and places in Europe such as multiple cities in Italy, Germany, and Austria. My parent started this Experience traveling us over the US and Canada as children then corporate America took over the responsibility. This broadened my understanding of different cultures and worldviews. The more I traveled, the bigger the world became, and the broader my thought processes. This particular exposure to different countries, cities, and people has strengthened my worldview and identified subject areas that need advocates. It has also fostered the awareness of the continuous need for

self-awareness (American Counseling Association, 2015). Travel created a desire to advocate for many populations such as the hungry, the homeless, abused children, and women. It prompted a desire in me to seek solutions or services to meet those needs. I am also able to establish stronger client relationships because I have sought out multicultural competency through my travels and experiences. The main personal privilege is to see the actual world and life experiences of others through the client's eyes. This is not just a brief look; it is an in-depth look into their emotions and thought processes based on their worldviews.

Nature of Oppression

Oppression is visible, invisible, and an elitist method of controlling one's environment at the expense of others. It is my responsibility as a counselor to be aware of client oppressions that exist and advocate for the client (Lee, 2007). For example, being a woman I have been paid less than a man in the same position more than in one occurrence. Other times, I have been commended by people who were surprised at how remarkably well I spoke and for my intelligence. Additionally, people in business deals underestimated my abilities in my prior profession only to find out that I was more than capable of negotiating to my company's advantage. I have even been denied service in this lifetime because of my ethnicity. As far as contributing to the perpetuation of oppression I have participated in harbored feelings of resentment against the same people (ethnic-wise) that participated in oppressing me. It takes a willingness to forgive and become part of the change instead of intensifying the divide.

Work to Become Multiculturally Literate

My efforts to become multiculturally literate consist of traveling North America, Europe, and Mexico and learning about different countries and cultures as documented above. It also

consists of attempting to learn languages such as Japanese and Spanish and studying those cultures. While I'm not fluent in either language, I understand their cultures from taking those language and culture courses. There are additional efforts I can employ such as reading periodicals from other cultures and participating in local cultural activities (Lee, 2007). As times change, multicultural knowledge changes so the effort to be multiculturally competent is a dynamic endeavor that does not end.

Establish a Personal Social Justice Compass

The first tool I rely on to establish and maintain a personal social justice compass is the ACA 2014 Code of Ethics. This document details professional expectations and purpose. It also details what is considered as unprofessional and immoral within the profession, so it is my guideline and basis for my social justice compass. Additional documents to stay apprised of when establishing a personal social justice compass are the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Lee, 2007). By staying abreast of these documents and their updates, I will be aware of the social justice guidelines for the profession as well as any changes directed by social justice issues over time. Without these documents as guidelines, there is no way to establish a moral compass.

Conclusion

Counselors are servant leaders. There is no debate about that. We are expected to advocate for our profession and the client. Some of the desire to advocate comes from our own experiences. Other needs of advocacy are instigated by our client's needs. To advocate we must understand the relationship between advocacy and social justice. It affects not only our clients but the whole of society.

References

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