

A letter to my 'newly qualified counsellor self'

Dear Jay-1998,

That's great that you have got your Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling. I hope it leads to the career you want and you don't have to do your mental health project work for much longer. On the other hand if that's what happens then maybe that is what is meant to be. Just go with the flow and see where it leads. Maybe you will get that job with MIND as a mental health advocate. There are a lot of possibilities. If being a therapist works out that's probably the best outcome but don't get obsessed by it.

I think Mick Burton's WiDStBO idea is a good one – whenever you're not sure remember 'When in Doubt State the Bleeding Obvious'. The main thing is to relate well to the other person – do that and the other stuff will fall into place. There is no need for 'certainty' in an activity like therapy. You will learn by experience. As Polkinghorne (1992) puts it: 'therapists use previously effective actions as a guide for their future actions; their clinical experiences are the source of their knowledge' (p. 158). All that hoo-ha about approach x versus approach y is just something you will have to watch with frustration from the sidelines. And the politics in the NHS and NICE will unfortunately get worse. They will continue to ask the wrong questions with the consequence of generating wrong answers. There will be battles to fight there and if you want to fight those battles join an organisation like the PCU (Psychotherapy and Counselling Union). You will also have this thing called IAPT (Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies) which will unfortunately decrease rather than increase choice for clients/patients (and

decrease the chance of most therapists gaining employment in the NHS) – again if you want to fight that you will need to join something like the PCU.

In terms of conducting sessions: as far as possible use the client's language – on the other hand some clients can easily get things like the Drama Triangle and the OK Corral and find that simple understanding can transform their relationships at work or home very quickly. In my view that kind of 'psychoeducation' is really useful especially in shorter-term work which you will probably undertake for EAPs and insurance companies.

And remember you will survive and with luck thrive but it's not a get rich quick scheme or the best way to head for early retirement. If you really want to succeed in the private/independent sector you will probably have to get your head round 'marketing' but there's time for that... For whatever reasons the NHS continues to marginalise both counsellors and psychotherapists although there will always be at least a few opportunities there.

And by the way when Irvin Yalom's *The Gift of Therapy* comes out in 2002 (Yalom, 2002) get yourself a copy as soon as possible. He was going to call it '100 Tips for Therapists' but thought that was a bit crass so came up with the former title instead. A no-bullshit guide to being a therapist that should be on your therapy bookshelf even if it's the only book you have. And read his *Lying on the Couch* novel (Yalom, 1997) for a good laugh about therapy. For you it's already been out a year. Why haven't you got hold of a copy already?

As Bill Hicks might say 'Enjoy the ride' (Bill Hicks – It's Just A Ride [video file]),

Love,

Jay-2019

578 words

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Bill Hicks – It's Just A Ride (2015) YouTube video, added by Bill Hicks [Online].

Polkinghorne, D.E. (1992). Postmodern epistemology of practice. In S. Kvale (Ed.), *Psychology and Postmodernism*. London: Sage.

Yalom, I.D. (1997). *Lying on the Couch: A Novel*. New York: HarperPerennial.

Yalom, I.D. (2002). *The Gift of Therapy*. London: Piatkus.