

The ABC's of a Thriving Clinician

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“One thing that has not changed much over the years is that the process of psychotherapy still flows in two directions. This is obviously the case in the direction of influencing the client, but it is also true with respect to affecting the personal life of the clinician. This impact can be for better or for worse, making the helping professions among the most spiritually fulfilling as well as the most emotionally draining human endeavors. Some of us flourish as a result of this work. We learn from those we try to help, and apply what we know and understand to ourselves. And some of us become depleted and despondent. Over time, we may become cynical or indifferent or stale.

We have long recognized the impact of various therapeutic ingredients in the changes that a client will likely undergo. We know that such factors as modeling, catharsis, empathic responding, sensitive questioning, and constructive confrontation will lead to greater self-acceptance and even to personality transformations in a client. But what impact do these processes have on the person facilitating them? Can the clinician be an active instigator of the therapeutic process without, in turn, being affected by its ripple effects? Can therapists be immune to the influence of prolonged exposure to human despair, conflict and suffering? Can we resist the inevitable growth and self-awareness that come from studying another life? Can we remain the same after being in the presence of so many who are changing? Whether we like it or not, the decision to be a therapist is also a commitment to our own growth.” (Kottler, 2010)

In Jeffrey Kottler’s book, “On being a therapist”, he makes our challenges and our opportunities as clinicians explicit and perfectly named. As clinician’s, the work that we do for God’s Kingdom is deeply good work, and yet it requires so much of ourselves to do it well. As natural helpers who live to pour out, we often neglect to think of our own need for self care and help. “Excellence” requires investment and stewardship of our giftings, and that hunger (or thrive drive, wink wink) to be a great clinician is in all of us. That’s why we lean into a growth mindset, we submit tape of our work, sign up for consults outside of normal hours, complete countless hours of continuing education credits for licensure, and spend our car rides listening to therapeutic podcasts and audiobooks. Then we apply those interventions in sessions, we metaprocess and give of ourselves. Oftentimes, even after we sign out of our sessions, we still take our clients home with us in our hearts and our minds, wondering how well we did or didn’t do as a clinician that day. Then we hit the ground running and striving again the next day to grow and honor God even better in our work. While this is an amazing effort and shows so much heart and care, it’s no wonder our field has high rates of burnout and emotional stress with the amount we naturally work and give for our clients.

Instead of another skill based training, this week's Guide-led didactic seeks to honor the work that we do, by pouring into each other with resources that support thriving and self-care. God has created us uniquely for a purpose. Before we are vessels doing His will, we are His sons and daughters first and foremost. He delights in His children and He desires us to feel the freedom and peace of our identity as His beloved.

It gets hard, doesn't it, walking deliberately into the darkness of other lives? It gets on us and in us. How quickly our eyes become riveted on the task and not the Master! We think somehow that our primary task is the work we do. It is a good work. It is an important work. It is even a work that God himself has called us to do. It is, however, never to become our main work. Our first task, the one that is to govern all else, is that of maintaining a relationship with the only One who is needful (Luke 10:42). The discipline is hard. The distractions of many good things often lead us to forget the best thing. - In Our Lives First, Day 5

When we can walk more and more in our God-fashioned identity, just as Christ did, we are able to live authentically, uniquely, and confidently. For us as clinicians, that freedom benefits us in ways that allow us to be more confident in who we uniquely are, helps to reduce insecurities and shame that blocks relational connection, and that truth helps us to unashamedly care for ourselves better as we walk in our worth as God's beloved.

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

1 John 3:1-2

A thriving clinician is able to balance the world of "helping" with their own humanity. Our Godly identity gives us many opportunities to do this. This week, we simply want to focus on three areas that lead to thriving rather than surviving in the work we do. Our ABC's of a Thriving Clinician include: Authenticity, Boundaries, and Connection.

Authenticity means being true to one's own personality, spirit, or character.

"We are all called to live the truth of our uniqueness. Divine creativity has never involved a production assembly line. The results of God's creative acts are never less than original and truly unique works of art. You and I are no exception. But God does not only create us in uniqueness. God meets us in our uniqueness. Think, for example, of the quite different ways Jesus encounters people in the Gospels. Some are simply invited to follow him, some are engaged in Socratic dialogue,

some are given provocative parables as answers to questions, some are healed, some are told their sins are forgiven. There has never been one standard way to meet God. God meets us in our individuality because God wants to fulfill that individuality. God doesn't seek to annihilate our uniqueness as we follow Christ. Rather, Christ-following leads us to our truest self.

The spiritual life of one person should never be a carbon copy of that of another. Peter and John had quite different personalities and quite different transformational journeys as they followed Jesus. Mary and Martha, two sisters whom Jesus loved deeply, each expressed their love for him uniquely. And he received both, not discouraging Martha from busying herself in service, simply encouraging her to not fret in doing so (Luke 10:38-42).

God's will for us is that we live out the harmonious expression of our gifts, temperament, passions and vocation in truthful dependence on God. Nothing less than this is worthy of being called our true self. Nothing less than this will lead to our deepest fulfillment. Nada nothing less than this will allow us to show the face of Christ to the world that we have been called from eternity to show." (Benner, 2015)

What freedom there is in this reminder to be authentically us. There is no need to strive and compare ourselves to other clinicians or expectations if we can instead lean into our "true self".

Boundaries support our need for self-care, show respect and self-worth, and increase our ability to love those around us. Many people are raised thinking that boundaries limit us, or that they are not kind. But in fact, Jesus modeled boundaries and self-care constantly in scripture as he cared for his human body, his personal limits, behaviors that were not to be tolerated, ways he set healthy expectations and more. Boundaries are not just a suggestion. They are vital to living a thriving life.

Jesus presents an astounding model for leadership. He says this: "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified" (John 17:19). We must be what we would have those who follow us become. If that was true for our Lord and Master, how much more so for us! The idea is not that we push and pull on others to get them to change in some aspect of their lives, but rather that we do the hard work of change as we submit to the work of the Spirit in our lives first. That means if I am to help you learn to deal with an addiction, I must ask the Spirit to work with me regarding those things in my life that own me. It means that wherever you need to go, I must be willing to go first in my own life. If I do not, though I may bring skills and techniques that may be helpful, I will not bring them infused with the life of God. - In Our Lives First, Day 12

BOUNDARIES *don't*
prevent ME FROM BEING
THE BEST VERSION *of*
myself. BOUNDARIES
allow me TO BE THE *best*
version OF MYSELF.

LYSA TERKEURST



**boundaries aren't to
push others away.
boundaries are to
help hold me together.**

lysa terkeurst

FORGIVING WHAT YOU CAN'T FORGET BOOK

Connection: Brene Brown, a great voice in our field on vulnerability and connection, defines connection, “as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship”. As clinicians, we all hope that we can impact our clients deeply with healthy connections and transformational relationships. We need that in our lives as well. Without healthy, vulnerable, and uplifting connections in our own lives, we would be left alone and unchanged. Those deep connections that help us feel seen and loved (as Christ loves us) give us the energy to live a thriving life both personally and professionally.

God in Christ did let the truth of our world and our lives get in the way of His response to us. The truth of our world shaped His response to us. He entered into our experience with humility. He became flesh and learned what it is like to be us. He listened by becoming like us. He allowed who we are to impact Him and shape His response to us to the point of death. The truth determined His response. May we as counselors learn to listen to others as our God has listened to us, with humbly entering into and being impacted by the truth of our lives. It cost Him. It will cost us as well. - In Our Lives First, Day 11

We look forward to deeper conversations and discussions around these three principles and how we can support each other as Thriving Clinicians. Please see the additional resources that we will go over more in the didactic training on ways these principles and boundaries can be applied!

Resources for additional reading and application (below and attached):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdLKBabv20A>

Boundaries Quiz

<https://www.boundariesbooks.com/pages/quiz>

Boundaries Explained Townsend

<https://youtu.be/QdLKBabv20A>