

Take Heed, CYC Supervisors... Take Heed

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Many of the most important life or practice changing events in Child and Youth Care are not planned or thought out but seem to just “happen in the moment”, and we later look back at them as those “magic moments”. When Jill Shah and I developed a working definition of Supervision (Delano and Shah, 2009) we suggested that the dynamics in the supervisory relationship can create a parallel process in all other relationships. We were not referring to the traditional clinical definition of parallel process but rather the observation that as a supervisor plays out their relationship with a CYC Worker they can expect some of the basic components in their relationship will play themselves out in similar fashion with the worker and the child.

When a supervisor orients a new CYC worker to the work they will be doing with children they will hopefully be stressing the importance of the worker being self-reflective and to be making strong ef-

forts to consistently “meet the child and family where they are at”. Few would dispute that excellent practice entails the worker

using their skills and knowledge to adapt to the needs of the child. To best assess those needs it entails a desire to “enter the child’s world” and to carefully listen to the child in regard to what the child feels they need to grow. In this way it becomes a healthy, collaborative adult-child relationship. The supervisor will likely also stress the importance of the CYC worker role-modeling the behaviors the worker wants the child to develop.

I think we will all look back at the 2013 Child and Youth Care World Conference and refer to many life and practice changing “magic moments” that took place for us. One of those for me that just seemed to happen, without plan, in the moment took place in the workshop I facilitated on helping Child and Youth Care workers “Own Their Own Supervision”. I asked the group to write down responses to the



question “If I Could Supervise MY Supervisor I Would...” The responses were anonymous and only a few were read out in the class. The question is meant to get workers to reflect on what they need from their supervisors to grow and become more effective working with the children. Often there is a mixture of responses and sometimes people use it to gripe or complain about their supervisor. However, this time when I was able to look through and digest them later, I was taken by the quality and insightfulness of the responses and the way nearly all were positive and forward moving. There are many theories and thought out strategies for supervisors to determine how to best supervise the CYC Worker. Sometimes the “answers” are very complex and intricate, and sometimes they can be right before our eyes...or ears! When reading these I had a magic moment that said so many of the answers are right here in these responses. I also thought that it might be a magic moment for many CYC Supervisors to practice the role modeling skills they ask the workers they supervise to do with the children...to simply listen in the moment to hear the worker’s needs and to use this list as a framework for guiding their supervisory style.

Rather than try to paraphrase or summarize the comments I think it is most appropriate to simply list them raw and then summarize some thoughts after as to how many of these seem to reflect the basic qualities of excellent Child and Youth Care Practice. The direct listing also respects the value of letting our practice emanate from “just listening” to the needs of those we are working with.

If I Could Supervise My Supervisor I Would ...

- Set guidelines and rules that are clear and the same for everyone
- Listen to problems to make sure you have all the information
- Share info and ideas to make the business better for the people we help
- Make sure problems are heard, not assumed
- Help my supervisor to understand that even though I am struggling right now it doesn’t mean that I don’t have the ability to do a good job (even a great job) with the right support and supervision
- Set expectations, give weekly feedback
- Provide positive feedback often
- Weekly meetings, discussion, helping me critically think my job
- Provide meaningful encouragement
- Ask the two magic questions
- Be clear in feedback how I have done in specific situations
- Find solutions with me on issues presented by funders
- Ask him to just listen to me sometimes, that’s all
- Have supervision in a room, not in program space and without phone, disruptions, or computer
- Share my experiences/expectations
- Start with a check-in
- Ask me a question, listen for my response, be present
- Tell me constructively what I should be working on, give me examples...concretely and specifically
- Ask me about my goals and help me actualize them



- Give me air time
- Review expectations of my role and gently/respectfully challenge me
- Provide feedback on her experience with my work
- Help me navigate the politics of a large organization and keep focus on how to do the business of the program in spite of it
- Encourage more independent work and decision making
- Provide smaller roles to front line staff to empower them
- Ask him how he developed his critical thinking skills and knowledge
- How did he choose/process in selecting his mentors...which criteria did he use?
- Ask him how he determines short and long term goals
- Ask him if I could see his first developmental plan and then his plan now
- What information do they have that will help me see it their way?
- What information do I have that will help them see it my way?
- Provide more concrete feedback, either positive or what I need to improve on
- Possibly be clearer with expectations and at times job description
- More explanation as to why a decision is being made
- Have them ask questions and not make judgments on just what they think
- Be clear and concise
- Share info and ideas to keep staff informed
- Practice what you preach
- Have more uninterrupted time together to discuss supervision

- Complete your performance appraisals
Ask him to be clear on time frames and deadlines. Don't spring things on me because you "forgot to tell me" weeks ago
- Be "present" in our meetings. I know you have a lot to do but I need our time together to be focused
- Ask him/her to be sure I have the necessary information to make an informed decision
- Give me enough rope to hang myself...but interview me before the lynching...give me space to do my job
- Set aside more time for supervision sessions and schedule on a regular basis
- Ask them not to "beat around the bush" when addressing issues/concerns
Be present...genuinely present...active listening, non-judgmental and respectful
- Challenge and accept feedback in the spirit of helpfulness
- Avoid passive-aggressive actions and deflection with sarcasm or false humor
- Reflect on the goals and leave "ego"/taking things personally out of the equation
- Setting appropriate boundaries
- Being clear on relationship expectations and tone
- Create a safe environment

Once again in looking at the last comment I am struck by the parallel process here. "Create a safe environment" would likely be the exact phrase a supervisor would use to orient a new worker to the most crucial things in helping a child develop in a healthy manner. In "Characteristics of a Child and Youth Care



Approach” (Garfat and Fulcher, 2011)
Thom Garfat and Leon Fulcher laid out a number of core components for quality Child and Youth Care practice and many are reflected clearly right here in this list. “Find solutions with me” clearly reflects doing ‘with’, not ‘for’ or ‘to’. Simply reflecting on this list as a foundation to guide their practice involves the supervisor exhibiting a needs-based focus. Having the suggested regular supervisory sessions with agendas demonstrates purposeful use of activities. Being the “skilled hunter” Garfat and Fulcher (2011) talk about might help the supervisor use the strengths based and resiliency focus necessary to identify the core strength in the CYC worker above who says “even though I am struggling it doesn’t mean I can’t do a good (or even a great) job”. The poignant references to the need for the supervisor to be “present” suggest the importance of working in the now.

The 2013 Child and Youth Care World Conference provided a number of “magic moments” for me that I am sure will change my life and my practice for the better. Many thanks to the participants in my workshop for this list that opened my eyes so much wider to how much the crucial qualities of the supervisory relationship reflect the same core qualities of a quality CYC worker/child relationship. Sometimes it is simple as creating a forum, and, if you just listen, that magic moment that helps you frame and improve your practice with someone you are working with may just appear. So, if you are a CYC supervisor, as you read this list digest it and think about similar forums you can create ... then “Take heed, CYC supervisors ... take heed”!

References

- Delano, F. and Shah, J. (2009). Defining supervision in a professionally packaged way. *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, 22(1), pp.49-57.
- Garfat, T. and Fulcher, L. (2011). Characteristics of a Child and Youth Care approach. *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, 24 (1-2), pp. 7-19

