

Counting Down: The Social Work Practice Top 10!

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10. Maintaining Consistency and Integrity in Practice.

- ◆ In order to reflect on our practice we need a base to work from - a well developed and evolving practice framework.
- ◆ The purpose of a practice framework is to guide our practice by ensuring that we are conscious of what we do and why.
- ◆ Through a process of conscious reflection we ensure integrity and consistency in our practice.

10. Cont.

- ◆ The most important aspect of any framework is to ensure that there is consistency between the different elements.
- ◆ When there is a consistency between our values and actions, we tend to feel content.
- ◆ When there is inconsistency between our values and actions, tension usually results and it may become a significant issue in our work and how we feel about ourselves.

9. Keeping Our Practice Purposeful

- ◆ We need to be able to articulate what we are doing and why.
- ◆ Our purpose dictates our role in some ways and determines what's ok and what is not.
- ◆ We need to ensure that we don't take responsibility for things that don't belong to us.

8. Continuing to Learn

- ◆ Learning through formal means
- ◆ Learning through reflection
- ◆ Personal learning
- ◆ Update your truth!

7. Staying Connected

- ◆ Connecting with our colleagues for support, networking, professional identity.
- ◆ Establishing communities of practice in your area of expertise.
- ◆ Join the AASW - you're a professional and this is your professional association.

6. Don't Get Burnt Out!

- ◆ Stay purposeful.
- ◆ Consistency between our values and our actions.
- ◆ Only taking responsibility for our part.
- ◆ Self care and a balanced life for all parts of us.
- ◆ Reflection, reflection, reflection - be aware of how you are and you are less likely to wake up one morning and find yourself burnt out!!

5. Don't Get Traumatized!!

- ◆ Vicarious Trauma is the impact on a worker after exposure to trauma work with clients and it reflects the impacts and the changes, or transformations, of the worker over time.
- ◆ The issue is not whether or not workers experience VT, the issue is how aware we are and how active we are in dealing with and attending to these issues.
- ◆ If experiences of VT are not dealt with well, or at all, negative impacts can be overwhelming and detrimental to the worker's quality of life.

5. Cont

- ◆ It happens over time; it is a process not an event
- ◆ It can affect any workers not just those doing long term intensive therapeutic work
- ◆ Vicarious trauma in particular is a result of work with survivors of trauma, regardless of the nature of this work
- ◆ It affects most of us at some time although workers who have been doing this work for a long time have usually developed sufficient coping strategies that they are only minimally affected

5. Cont

- ◆ Our own personal experiences, especially of trauma will impact on our susceptibility to VT
- ◆ The organizations we work in can have a massive impact on either enhancing or inhibiting our ability to cope with the work we do
- ◆ VT is not just an individual worker issue or even an organizational or sector issue, I believe it is also a social issue and a feature of the way in which we live in our society
- ◆ We are all greatly and profoundly changed through doing this work.

5. Cont. Risk Factors Personal

- ◆ Our personal make-up
- ◆ How we deal with things (avoid or not especially our emotions)
- ◆ Own experiences of trauma but also if they are not resolved
- ◆ Our own therapy
- ◆ Current life circumstances
- ◆ Supports
- ◆ Spirituality
- ◆ Work style, boundaries, etc
- ◆ Training and professional history
- ◆ Supervision
- ◆ Balance in our lives generally.

5. Cont. Risk Factors Situational

- ◆ The nature of our work (work with survivors, level of intensity of our work, cumulative exposure)
- ◆ Support in workplace
- ◆ Overall organizational culture

5. Cont. Risk Factors Cultural Context

- If as workers we have a sense of powerlessness about social responses to the issues we are working with.

4. Focusing on Yourself Everyday

- How Am I?
- You've probably got your hands full!
- What are the things you do to calm yourself after a stressful day?
- How do you nurture yourself?
- What makes you happy?
- What makes you unhappy?

4. Cont.

- The Headington Institute suggest 3 categories of self care:
 - Physical (regular exercise, sleep, healthy eating, water, humour, limited alcohol, yoga, relaxation techniques, massage, repetitive activities);
 - Emotional and relational (nurturing relationships, contact with friends, talking, humour, reflection in all forms, creative activities, movies, books, music, balanced priorities, realistic expectations, counselling);
 - Spiritual (knowing your values, participating in a community, regular meditation, meaningful conversations, singing or music, contact with inspiring adults, being in nature, solitude).

4. Cont.

- Morrison gives examples of self-care strategies:
 - Socio-political involvement
 - Interests which are separate from work
 - Taking breaks at and from work
 - Debriefing opportunities
 - Maintaining professional connections
 - Maintaining connections with people outside the sector

4. Cont.

- Accepting support
- Giving support
- Treating ourselves well
- Physical activity and bodily self care
- Spiritual engagement
- Humour
- Identifying successes

4. Cont.

- ◆ Self care is not just a yearly or monthly occurrence but is an integrated and consistent process of attending to ourselves and keeping ourselves well and happy.
- ◆ Self care needs to be both proactive and reactive.
- ◆ Self care happens at work as well as at home
- ◆ It is just as important to take the time to do nothing and give ourselves some space to just be. Our aim is to be a human being not a human doing.

4. Cont.

- ◆ On a very practical level:-
 - ◆ We need to be checking in with ourselves often throughout the day and you need to establish your own routine.
 - ◆ Time to become conscious of the day at the beginning and end of the day. Look at the day and what it hold and what your hope are for the day. Then review the day at the end and see how you feel and how intact you are now.
 - ◆ At the end of the day do something that will help you move into a new space that is about you and the other parts of your life.
 - ◆ Explore and express the other parts of you when you're not at work.

4. Cont.

- ◆ In addition to this we need to ask ourselves the question about how we can sustain our commitment to a higher level of self care.
 - ◆ Making appointments with ourselves and treating them as seriously as appointments with other people;
 - ◆ Regular professional supervision appointments (internal, external, peer support);
 - ◆ Regular checking times throughout the day to ensuring we are being mindful of how we are;
 - ◆ Always something in the diary to look forward to; something for you, not for work.

3. Being Compassionate

- ◆ Compassion is different to empathy, although they are related.
- ◆ Empathy is when we try to understand how another person is feeling.
- ◆ Compassion is the feeling of empathy coupled with a sense of non-judgement and an imperative to act.
- ◆ Compassion also involves gaining a depth of understanding about a given situation or person.

3.Cont.

- ◆ This means asking the deeper questions - why is this person behaving in this way.
- ◆ This is not an excuse or a reason for the person to not take responsibility for their actions - it is just an understanding that can lead to change.

2. Reflection

- ◆ Reflection is the process or activity that leads to increased awareness of ourselves, our work, the world.
- ◆ Increased conscious awareness is one of the important factors leading to an increase in agency which in turn leads to change.

2. Cont.

- ◆ We can encourage reflection through formal and informal means.
- ◆ Supervision is time for you, to focus and reflect on on whatever is most important to you.
- ◆ Internal, external and peer supervision all serve different purposes and are useful in different ways.

2. Cont.

- ◆ We need to have our own reflection processes –
 - ◆ throughout the day,
 - ◆ at the end of each day,
 - ◆ reflective journaling,
 - ◆ case review processes, etc.

- ◆

2. Cont.

- ◆ As well as reflections on ourselves and our world, we have a commitment to critical reflection (and activism) on the way we live together.
- ◆ Critical reflection is an essential part of social work and allows us to combine our vantage point with our knowledge and experience to effect change.

1. Maintain Your Rage!

- ◆ And your hope and belief in what you are doing!
- ◆ Don't lose sight of our professional purpose.
- ◆ Don't lose sight of your integrity.
- ◆ No complacency.
- ◆ Never forget that the majority of traumas and social issues / problems are preventable and are in fact caused by misuse of power.

1. Cont.

- ◆ The de-individualisation of social and structural issues is part of our responsibility as social workers.
- ◆ We need to step up and be responsible adults and speak out when we see injustice or misuse of power.
- ◆ We need to find new ways of achieving change and working together to create a more peaceful and equitable world.

Urged to Deny the Secrets

*Urged to deny the secrets within our natures
And to reject the differences of others
We are taught to be fearful of ourselves
And contemptuous of others.
Separated from ourselves and isolated from each other
We are taught to huddle together for comfort
Under the socially acceptable banners
Of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia –
We are discouraged from seeing the ways in which
We are all connected
We are thus rendered powerless
And immobilised by our prejudices
This is not an accident.*

Blanche Wiesen Cook

Thanks for listening.

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