

Success Counseling

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Working as a camp counselor can be exciting, rewarding and enriching. But it's hard work. Perhaps the most difficult task is dealing with a wide range of human behaviors. In most cases, counselors come to camp with some good natural instincts about working with children. But just as natural athletes need coaching and training to become consistent and disciplined, quality counseling must be developed through training and practice.

Quality camp counseling demands that counselors understand how the counseling process works as well as how its procedures fit into camp's overall beliefs about the nature of human behavior and personal growth. Over the last 15 years at Lanakila and our two sister camps, Aloha and Aloha Hive, we have developed and refined a counseling model based on a comprehensive method of understanding human behavior. Our model, which we refer to as *success counseling*, is built around the ideas of William Glasser's control theory and reality therapy. Effective counseling practices are the result.

One of the ongoing advantages of utilizing the success counseling model over time is that new counselors can

grasp the techniques rather quickly. After completing pre-camp with its emphasis on training in control theory and reality therapy, most counselors understand that success counseling is not only effective but fairly easy to apply. One does not have to be a psychology major in college to understand the control theory/reality therapy process.

Foundations of Success Counseling

At the foundation of the success counseling process is what is believed by many to be an accurate understanding of how and why human beings behave. Once we understand why people do what they do, we can begin to develop tools to help children and adults choose more responsible behaviors and be more effective people.

In Glasser's control theory model, the *why* is very consistent. He says that human beings choose *every* behavior they use for the same reason—it is always their best attempt at the moment to meet one or more of their five basic needs for 1) love and belonging, 2) power and worth, 3) fun, 4) freedom and 5) survival. People are always evaluating the behaviors they are choosing according to their effectiveness

in helping them meet these needs.

If asked to use a certain behavior (like following a rule, or cooperating on a camping trip, or stopping the use of obscenities), people will evaluate how well they believe this new behavior will help them meet their needs. If they cannot see a connection between the behavior they are being asked or encouraged to use and its probable success in meeting their needs, they will not do it unless they are coerced.

Since we believe children will grow and develop more fully and responsibly in an environment that uses minimal coercion, we try to have campers make the connection between the actions they have been asked to perform and their ability to meet their needs for love, power, fun and freedom.

Control theory goes on to explain that when people feel out of sorts (upset and frustrated), it is because they are not able to meet their needs in the present situation. Success in these situations is measured in two ways. First, an internal signal (intuition) indicates their level of happiness and sense of control in the world. Second, their perceptual ability compares their idea of what

should be happening in the world with what is actually occurring. Their self evaluation of how well they are meeting their needs at any moment is the clue to understanding their depression, anger, joy or loneliness.

In staff training, the goal is to learn to see both our own problems and those of our campers in light of this information. As we do, we can focus on developing ways of working with people in both counseling and discipline situations that will help them more effectively meet their needs.

Control theory does not rely on the "traditional wisdom" in explaining human behavior. The ideas which underlie almost all traditional psychological theory (and therefore almost all counseling and discipline models) are contained in stimulus-response psychology. The basic premise in stimulus-response psychology is that people do what they do and feel how they feel because other people and events *make* them do it or feel it. For example, the weather *makes* me depressed, my cabin mate *makes* me angry; the rules make kids do what they are supposed to. Stimulus-response psychology focuses on changing the *world* because it is believed the *world* is what makes us feel the way we do.

Control theory, in contrast, states that we *choose* what we do and think as well as how we feel in every situation. Things happen, but we *choose* (not always consciously) to deal with them as best we know how through our actions and thoughts.

For example, if presented with a camper who is angry at her cabin mate for using her stuff, control theory would explain that the camper chose to feel angry as the best way she knew of getting back the *power* she lost by having her *stuff* used without her permission. Had she had other behaviors that she perceived would better meet her need to have an impact on others at that moment (power), she might just as well have felt forgiving, understanding, indifferent or generous. The feelings of anger and resentment didn't happen to her; she created them to deal with the situation.

We are not always aware that we are *choosing* the behaviors we do, and in using the control theory model one must always attempt to help people learn what we have control over and what we do not. We cannot choose our basic needs, but we can choose our idea of how we meet them. We cannot choose whether we feel an intuitive frustration signal when the world is not as we want it to be, but we can choose how we deal with that signal.

Success counseling teaches problem solving by helping people see the incredible power they have to affect their own well-being in any situation. Thus our goal as counselors is *not to solve camper problems*, but rather to give campers the information and support to *create themselves* as their own solutions.

Procedures That Lead to Change

The procedures we use in success counseling help campers look at their wants and needs, evaluate their behavior and its effectiveness, and develop options to better meet their needs. These procedures are the specific steps we take after we have created a positive counseling environment and developed relationships in which children feel safe from criticism and judgment. Children will talk about themselves much more easily if they know and trust the adult with whom they are conversing. Getting involved at a significant level is the foundation of all the procedures that follow:

1. What do you want? After making friends and finding out what is going on for this camper, the first step is to help her understand her needs and to find out what she wants. In some cases, a counselor might think she knows what a camper wants, but her job is to help the camper become aware that all her behavior is purposeful: she is always trying to get what she wants (and needs). Thus, the role of the counselor is initially to ask her "What do you want?" as a way of clarifying for both of them the picture of how the camper wants the world to be. Despite the simplicity of "What do you want?" the question might exact a look of confusion from a camper. Indeed, it is not what is expected from an adult, and the answer is often a shrug or an "I don't know." This is where the process takes time, for the child must understand what she wants before the counselor can go on. Once the picture becomes clearer, the next step follows in a logical manner.

2. What are you doing now to get what you want? There are many ways of asking a person what *she is doing* to help herself get what she wants. But the real function of this question is to have the camper self-evaluate, to look at her behavior and how she is handling the situation she is in. The question itself has profound ramifications, because it reflects a basic belief that the camper is feeling the way she is feeling because of what she is doing rather than because the situation is making her feel that way. Asking "What are you doing now to get what you want?" puts a camper's behavior right in front of her. Once someone sees that she can do something about her situation, she may be more willing to act differently. As the counselor moves to the third step below; the camper may see that her current behavior is not helping her get what she wants, thus providing the motivation to do better.

3. Is it helping? In whatever way the counselor chooses to phrase this question, the next step is to ask the camper, "Are you getting what you want by doing what you are doing?" and "Do you think you will continue to get what you are getting if you keep doing what you are doing?" This question allows a camper to self-evaluate the effectiveness of her own behavior. A reasonable follow up to this question is then to ask if the person wants to make a change.

4. Look at your options and make a plan to do better.

Once people know what they want and understand that they have the "response-ability" to meet their needs, they are generally more willing to look at new options and try something different. At this stage in the process it is time to create new options and evaluate whether any of these would be *better* than what has currently been chosen.

Coming up with new options in difficult situations may not be easy, but good plans start small and then lead to larger steps down the road. Plans must be small, specific, and workable; a good plan is always focused on a *next step* rather than the ultimate solution. In success counseling, the counselor does not look for *answers*, merely better behaviors for getting what is wanted. If success counseling does fail, it is often because the plan is rushed or was primarily developed by the counselor before adequate self evaluation was done by the camper.

5. Follow through and commit. If a counselor expects a camper to follow through on a plan, she must assume some responsibility for creating a plan that is workable. Then she must follow through by checking back with the camper to see how it worked. Part of creating success is sharing those small victories with campers. The role of the counselor is first to assist in creating a new behavior that the camper will find more successful and pleasurable, and then to share that success with the camper. If the new behavior doesn't work better than the old one, checking in allows time to evaluate and replan. In most cases, the plan is followed by

another plan and more follow through; it is actually a series of plans which leads to more effective patterns of behavior.

6. Never give up. Changing behavior is not always easy, nor do feelings come around as fast as one might like in difficult situations. Change takes time. An important part of the process is to believe it will work, even when there are times of doubt. After using these skills and ideas for a long time, the many, many successes help people "keep the faith" when it seems that nothing is getting better.

Counseling Scenario: Homesickness

The following scenario allows us to compare the traditional stimulus- response counseling with success counseling. The traditional counselor's goal would be to find a way of making a homesick camper feel less homesick. In the success counseling model, the counselor goes through steps that culminate in a plan for the camper to do better. The idea is not to have the camper *stop* feeling homesick, but rather to *start* feeling successful so the homesickness will disappear by itself.

Traditional Counseling

Counselor: Hey Billy, you don't look that happy what's wrong?

Billy: Nothing really, I just kind of miss my mom and my dog.

Counselor: Kinda sounds like you're a little homesick, eh?

Billy: Yeah, I miss everybody at home.

Counselor: Well, don't worry about them, they're okay. This is a fun place and you don't need to feel homesick. There's a lot to do around here and you can make lots of friends. Why don't you go and try archery? You like archery right Billy?
Billy: Well, yeah, I guess.
Counselor: Good, why don't you head down to archery and get a bull's eye for your family back home. And stop worrying; your mom and dad want you to have a good time.

Success Counseling

Counselor: Billy, I've noticed that you've been holding your head down a lot, how are you feeling today?
Billy: Not too good. I don't like camp and I miss my dog and family.
Counselor: Well, that's certainly understandable for a new camper in his first week. Do you want to be having fun at camp or do you want to keep feeling homesick?
Billy: Yeah I want to have fun, but sometimes I miss my family.
Counselor: Do you want to miss them so much that you can't have fun at camp?
Billy: No, I guess not.

Counselor: What is it that you want?

Billy: I guess to not feel homesick and to have fun like I do at home.

Counselor: And what are you doing to have fun here?

Billy: Nothing, but I just feel so bad that I can't do anything.

Counselor: Well, if you were feeling the way you wanted to be, happy; what would you be doing?

Billy: Well, I guess I'd go to crafts.

Counselor: Which crafts? What craft would you go to if you were feeling good?

Billy: Archery; I guess, but I haven't been able to go lately because it's always been full.

Counselor: If I can work something out for archery this afternoon would you go?

Billy: Well yeah, I'd love to, but what if I feel homesick?

Counselor: Well, you can sit alone and feel bad or you can go to archery. You told me that you wanted to feel happy.

If you were serious about feeling happy, what would you do if you start to feel homesick? Which would be better for you?

Billy: Archery; I guess!

Counselor: Okay; so

how can we get you to archery?

This scenario demonstrates some fundamental differences between a traditional approach and the success counseling approach. While the traditional counselor's intentions are good, they will likely not help Billy gain more effective control of his behavior. The counselor might know what will help Billy feel less homesick, but Billy himself needs to make his own decisions in terms of his own feelings. In short, Billy needs to evaluate himself in some way that will generate a sincere desire to change his behavior.

One of the advantages of the success counseling model is that Billy develops his own next step. Going to archery is Billy's answer to dealing with *his* home sickness. Billy now has a new balance and a new understanding of both his choices and the reason why he is choosing his behaviors. The counselor understands that Billy must both *act* and *think* differently if he is to feel differently. The time taken to develop the significance of Billy's going to archery is what develops the change in thinking.

The counseling interaction itself is designed to help Billy gain more love, power, fun, and freedom. The relationship that develops between Billy and the counselor in this process is important for a number of reasons. First, the sincerity of the counselor allows Billy to engage in a relationship in which he better meets his need for love and belonging. By simply listening carefully to Billy, the counselor has helped

Billy gain a sense of personal power. When Billy decides that going to archery will be fun, he is making a choice that is complemented by a sense of freedom that would be absent if the counselor solved the problem for Billy.

Going to archery, however, may only be the first step and will be followed up by at least one meeting between Billy and the counselor. In most cases, the counselor will follow up and create several more success plans, because the process of change takes time.

In success counseling, much of the counselor's role is to ask questions instead of looking for answers. Solutions are always within the individual, but many times children don't look within themselves for answers. Success counseling culminates when a camper looks at his own behavior and finds the power to change feelings within himself. As counselors and campers internalize this process over the weeks they are at camp, they learn a process they can carry with them during the rest of the year.

Counseling Scenario: Boredom

While a homesick camper is a common scenario, a more unique situation involves the camper who may have been to camp for five or more summers, and is growing bored with camp life. To her, camp may have become routine, and while she might have had lots of freedom, power, and love in earlier years, she may now be having difficulty in challenging herself, especially in the area of having fun.

Typically, a counselor might be impatient with such a child. "What do you mean you're bored? There's so much to do here." Or "Stop feeling sorry for yourself." But an experienced counselor schooled in success counseling might approach this situation differently. Compare once again the approach of the traditional counselor with that of the success counselor.

Traditional Counseling

Counselor: You haven't been too productive lately, Sara. Why aren't you going to activities?

Sara: I'm bored. This place stinks and there's nothing to do.

Counselor: That's too bad. Why do you think it stinks?

Sara: I don't know, there's just nothing new or interesting here. I've been here three years and I've already done everything.

Counselor: You like boating, don't you? Go do that, it's fun. Or try something new, like arts and crafts.

Sara: The counselors in boating are dorks and I hate arts and crafts. I can't even draw a dog.

Counselor: Sure you can. Anyone can. Go ahead, give it a try.

Sara: It's stupid!

Counselor: Well, I don't think it's stupid and you need to go to crafts during the assigned periods. I'm sure you'll have fun if you just give it a try.

Sara: What if I don't go? etc., etc.

(This scenario can often deteriorate into a power struggle rather than a counseling session if the camper doesn't self-evaluate.)

Success Counseling

Counselor: Hey, Sara you seem a little down lately. Do you want to talk about something?
Sara: I'm bored. This place stinks and there's nothing to do. I wish I hadn't come back this summer.

Counselor: Wow that's unique. I haven't heard about anybody being bored around here in a while. Do you want to feel bored?

Sara: No, but how can I not feel bored? There's nothing to do here.

Counselor: Well, how do you want to feel?

Sara: I don't know.

Counselor: Well, would you like to feel excited or do you want to stay bored?

Sara: Excited, I guess.

Counselor: And, have you done anything exciting?

Sara: Not really, but there isn't much to do.

Counselor: Do you think not really doing anything is working? I mean, if you complain about how bad things are, do you feel more bored or less bored?

Sara: More bored?

Counselor: Well, is that what you want?

Sara: Well, I want to feel like I used to, you know when things seemed more new and exciting. But, what can I do?

Counselor: Well, I don't really know. If you were feeling like you used to, what do you think you'd be doing?

Sara: I like tennis, but I'm not very good at it. Every time I hit the ball it goes over the backstop. I'm used to softball and know that kind of swing.

Counselor: Do you think that if you were feeling excited you might go and try tennis again?

Sara: I guess so. When I play tennis I find myself concentrating hard on trying to do better.

Counselor: That's great, and I bet there are some counselors down there who can help you hit the ball better. If you go down there this morning, I'll see if we can get a counselor to work one-on-one with you. Would you feel more excited if that were your plan?

Sara: Yeah, I guess so.

Counselor: Okay, right before rest hour why don't we talk on the way to the unit and we can see if things are better for you than they are now.

Sara: Okay.

Counselor: Okay Sara, I'll see you after lunch. Have a good morning.

In the traditional counseling example, the counselor feels responsible for finding a solution for Sara. As a result, the counselor is guessing what Sara wants and Sara leaves the conversation feeling no less bored than when she started. The counselor sees Sara's boredom as something that must be dealt with, so she puts a Band-Aid on the situation and sends the camper on her way.

The success counseling model, however, shows that it is possible for Sara to explore what she wants herself, and to come up with answers to her own problem. Campers come to learn that boredom, like fun, is an internal problem, not an external one.

As we strive to create quality camping experiences for children, parents and staff, a

common vision and consistent philosophy is of the utmost importance. Success counseling provides such a unified focus for all members of the camp community.

In teaching these ideas to all concerned, it is amazing how quickly they catch on. Many people remark that the concepts of control theory and reality therapy just seem like common sense. And yet the practice of these ideas is not common at all. The ideas are a dramatic shift from what most of us have been taught about how to manage and supervise children and adults, and it may be surprisingly difficult to change old patterns.

The results, however, are worth it. In moving to the concepts and skills of success counseling, there is a dramatic increase in the depth of personal "response-ability" among campers and counselors.

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