

A Quiz for Young Therapists - By Jay Haley

Therapy is now a major industry with neighborhood clinics subsidized by the government, millions of dollars invested in training, more millions collected by the therapists of many different schools, and a vast literature inundating the nation's libraries. Yet what is still lacking is a proper examination, or quiz, for the aspiring therapist who is turned loose upon the public. How does one know that a therapist knows what he, or she, should? Among the difficulties in developing a proper test is the obvious problem that skill as a therapist can only be determined by examining the result of therapy, not by a written test about ideas. Therefore schools that take the training of student therapists seriously do outcome studies of their therapy. Yet granting that a quiz cannot measure skill, a certain amount of knowledge can be expected from a therapist and measured with a written test. The proper attitude about therapy can also be shown to be present or absent by the results of an examination.

The major problem in developing a test of knowledge and attitude has been the fact that attempts at examinations immediately reveal a dogmatic bias of a particular school of therapy and so the test is not useful to the wider field. What is needed is a quiz based on the big, broad, flexible viewpoint so that it can be given to the therapist of any school to determine if he, or she, knows what should be known. Fortunately a modest beginning has taken place in solving the problem of the unbiased quiz on therapy, and one is offered here. The quiz presents the most important questions in the field, and the correct answers are given for anyone who might not know them.

1. Should a therapist think of himself, or herself, as a skillful technician or as a humanist and philosopher?

Some authorities argue that a therapist should be a Renaissance man, or woman, who is learned in physiology, psychology, the social sciences, and the arts. When confronted with the problem of a child who wets the bed, the philosopher clinician does not review in his mind 11 ways to cure that problem. Instead, he thinks that the child is wetting the bed as a way of expressing his, or her, conception of the world. Is this child pissing on the universe, asks the philosopher clinician. Yet such a therapist must know the routine ways of curing a child of wetting the bed. If not, what are therapists for?

The proper answer to the question? It is all right to be a philosopher and a humanist if that does not interfere with being a skillful therapist.

2. In relation to being a successful therapist, what are the differences between psychiatrists, social workers, and psychologists?

Except for ideology, salary, status, and power the differences are irrelevant.

One should not mention the differences in training of the three professions because of possible embarrassment. If the faculties of departments of psychiatry, departments of psychology, and social work schools really believe that what they teach is necessary for training a therapist, then they should require that all three disciplines have medical psychiatric training, all get Ph.D.s in psychology

departments, and then all go to social work school before learning pastoral counseling.

3. Is the goal of therapy to change people to become members of special elites or to change them to be normal like other people?

Special elites are composed of people who are privileged to have a special knowledge about man or who have had extraordinary experiences shared only by members of the special group. Therefore elites tend to be created by educational therapies of revivalist therapies. A therapy that solves problems has as its goal people who live normally and are not more special than other people. Take your choice.

4. Should a therapist join in the madness of others or remain outside their universe?

Besides a long academic education and excessive self consciousness, the worst handicap for a therapist is to be unable to accept what is offered by a client. When spoken to, such a therapist interprets, corrects, points out, confronts, argues, debates, patronizes, and so does not join the people who have come to him to be changed. If a therapist is warm and empathic with a patient who is a cold fish, there is something wrong with that therapist and he should be more appropriate and human. If a woman says she gives her child an enema whenever she (the woman) has a stomach ache, the therapist should not say, "My God, you'll never go to heaven behaving like that." The woman will feel that yet another person does not understand her. The therapist must join that woman's universe and from within that universe bring about change.

Yet, if a therapist joins the universe of his clientele, he will be as mad as they are and will thrash about helplessly with them in their failing endeavors. How would a therapist ever change anyone if he only joined them in the ways they are already behaving? He must introduce new ways to them.

The answer: He, or she, must join people in their morass while not allowing that morass to continue.

5. Should the therapist work swiftly or leisurely?

One of the most important requirements of a therapist is patience. Struggling with human misery, complex social situations and long perduring difficulties, the therapist should not expect quick and magical cures. Life moves slowly and inexorably, as anyone knows who has tried to change people or therapy training institutes. One must have patience and, in a leisurely, way build one small change upon another.

Yet we must recognize that people in distress need immediate relief and often will change only if the action is quick. A therapist must respond promptly with directives to take advantage of the opportunities only available in periods of temporary instability.

The answer: Consider the posture of the diamond cutter. He is patient and yet he swiftly produces his results - and in the therapeutic situation errors are more reversible since opportunities, like merry-go-round horses, are likely to come round again.

6. Will reflecting upon himself, or herself, improve the results of a therapist?

A therapist should not become so concerned with himself that he cannot see the client. A therapist who is thinking, "Am I responding to this woman before me or to an introjected image of my great Aunt Edna of whom she reminds me," is not responding to the woman who is trying to get his attention. Such a therapist is probably suffering from didactic personal therapy. There is a great deal of propaganda, and no evidence, that personal therapy increases a therapist's skill and improves the outcome of his therapy. Didactic therapy is financially important, perhaps necessary, to the profession, but in fact for some therapists, such a self-reflection incapacitates them. One cannot change another while thinking about oneself. In truth, if one is really doing something he is not there.

Yet the therapist with experience knows that--like the man who turns on the light to see the darkness more clearly--his acts produce the data upon which he acts. The married couple fighting in a therapist's presence are in a fight partly because he, or she, is triangulating with them and spurring on their war.

The answer: A therapist must be unaware of himself and focused upon others while responding to the situation with full awareness of his part in creating it.

7. When one thinks of therapy as poetry, does a skillful therapist write sonnets or free verse?

A sonnet writer is confined to a set number of lines and rigid meter. Quite the opposite is true of the writer of free verse. Spontaneity is the thing and anything goes. Which approach is most creative? Every therapist must take a position on this issue.

The argument of the sonnet enthusiast is that only under law is there freedom: creative expression comes to an author when he is restricted by rules. Only if a therapist behaves in an orderly manner can he be a professional and practice a disciplined art that is teachable. Being confined within rules forces the artist to new flights of imagination.

The enthusiast for free verse argues that any restriction prevents self expression: total freedom comes only when there are no rules. A therapist cannot respond appropriately to a new and unique situation if he follows preordained rules, and is not each situation actually new and unique? When faced with the complexity of the multitude of messages happening in any human situation, a therapist does not have time to consciously think through what he should do, he must simply respond. Obviously, a therapist must trust and follow his impulses if he is to adapt quickly to complex situations.

The answer: The therapist must be a spontaneous free verse poet and follow his impulses while observing the rules of professional conduct and having the self discipline of the composer of sonnets.

8. Will a therapist be more successful if he is curious about life's complexity or if he is single minded in his focus upon his goals?

Once a student said to a Zen Master, "Isn't the mountain beautiful?" The master

replied, "Yes, but isn't it a pity to say so?" Although that story is not relevant to this question, it is an enlightening story and reminds us all of the narrowness of the world of words. When a woman quietly sighs after her husband speaks, the skillful therapist does not attempt some absurd translation into words of that expressive sigh.

Yet, what of curiosity? Why did that woman sigh and what does it mean? Should not curiosity be one of the most important facets of a therapist? Surely we want explorers with an interest in all the ways of human beings in their infinite variety.

Consider the master Botanist who must grasp the extraordinary complexity of the flower and its growth process while not losing his appreciation of the beauty of a field of poppies. The Botanist who cannot enjoy a flower is as handicapped as the one who has learned nothing about the flower's structure. The therapist must understand and appreciate the extraordinary complexity of a person and his social network. Yet, he must accept the simple process of life and know that children should mind parents and parents respect grandparents. While appreciating complexity and maintaining an attitude of uncertainty about what is really found in human life, the clinician should be willing to be an expert and say what must be done.

It is evident that the therapist must be a person naturally curious about people while single minded in his pursuit of goals.

9. Name two ideologies that handicap a therapist.

- (a) The theory of repression that offers a negative and pessimistic view of human beings and confines a therapist to a narrow theory of change.
- (b) The theory that therapy is to help people "grow." Such a view excuses a therapist for not knowing how to deal with the real problems of people.

10. Should a therapist insist upon change?

A therapist must be willing to go to the mat with a client and struggle with the problem until it is solved or the participants are dead. Should a therapist give up too easily he will never win the difficult cases. Some people will never change until they are sure the therapist will not give up! When he, or she, talks of failing, the therapist should do so with anger. Just as the trajectory of a flying ball is determined by the energy with which the player swings the bat, so is the success of therapy determined by the energy and dedication the therapist is willing to put into a case. Let him even pursue the client outside the office and down the street until his goals are achieved.

Yet while being a determined person, the therapist must learn not to care too much. If he is too determined to win, he will be at a disadvantage and lose. More important, what right has he to intrude upon people who have become reluctant to change? The restraint of benevolent helpers is one of the most important tasks for us all. Certainly the therapist should not pursue his client because of pity for him, or her, because a therapist should be a person without pity.

The solution: As every housewife knows, one cannot make a flower grow, or produce an erection, by pulling on it. One can only fertilize the ground. A therapist must be absolutely determined to cure while being casual about his investment in the effort.

11. Is it unethical to adopt the theory that change is slow and difficult and

every patient must come to therapy several hours a week for many years?

Only if the therapist is paid by the hour.

12. Will a therapist be more successful if he is humble?

While self confidence is important, humility is a virtue that allows one to continue to learn. A therapist should take pride in his ability to be humble. There are practical advantages too: if a therapist is arrogant it becomes a challenge to his clients. They develop a desire to topple him and can easily do so by simply not changing. Therefore, self confidence in this form can be a handicap. Many therapists have found it wise to retain a symptom themselves so they can reassure themselves they are not superior to the people they cure.

The answer: It is best for the therapist to be humble while full of confidence in his abilities.

13. Should the therapist be a serious person?

The clientele coming to a therapist are in trouble and in despair. They have gone mad or fear the dark or live in fury at their fellow man, or woman. Failures and incompetents are the daily company of the therapist. In this grim world the therapist must take seriously the human misery upon which he feeds and which he must ease. To treat the lives of miserable folk lightly is the behavior of a cad, or caddess.

Yet, the most important attitude of a therapist is the spirit of play. In his training and in his work the therapist must be able to transcend human suffering and rejoice in a playful and innovative spirit. He cannot allow himself to be as grim and miserable as his clientele for what hope have they in that case? Often it is only the light touch that can turn away wrath and transform despair into grudging optimism.

The answer: A therapist must be serious about the grim situation of his clientele while being free to change the framework of the situation in the spirit of play.

14. What is therapy?

The introduction of greater complexity into behavioral systems by changing specific problems. The result must be a change in the complex, repeating sequences of an intimate group and consequently the creation of more alternatives and greater variety in people's lives.

15. Is it true that therapy in the past consisted of someone offering an unformulated problem to a therapist unable to specify a goal who was working with an irrelevant theory in an ambiguous style to achieve an immeasurable outcome?

Well, that certainly is a good sentence.