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How to Fail as a Therapist: 50 Ways to Lose or Damage Your Patients

Reviewed by Pamela E. Monk

Bernard Schwartz & John V. Flowers. (2006). *How to Fail as a Therapist: 50 Ways to Lose or Damage Your Patients*. Atascadero, CA: Impact, 160 pp., \$22.95 (paperback). ISBN 1-886230-70-6.

Whether you are a counseling student, experienced counselor practitioner, or counselor educator, Schwartz and Flowers have developed a handbook to assist in avoiding the pitfalls of premature counselee-initiated termination. By stating the often imperceptible truths in a negative perspective, they bring heightened attention to their points.

How to Fail as a Therapist: 50 Ways to Lose or Damage Your Patients provides poignant case vignettes demonstrating errors and possible consequences. Most important are the numerous suggestions offered to avoid the particular therapeutic error replete with citations from master therapists.

For example, controversially the most significant failure for therapists is the recognition of their own limitations. “As we reviewed the literature on the traits of ‘master therapists,’ we found that one characteristic they seemed to have in common was that of humility—the recognition of their own limitations” (p. 6). An appropriate vignette and three suggestions for avoiding the error are provided. Each suggestion is appropriate for new counselors and a wonderful reminder for the experienced practitioner.

Some of the important topics addressed in this book include how to fail even before therapy is started, how to perform incomplete assessments, how to ignore science, and how to ruin the therapist–client relationship. Counselors will find vital self-help for how to achieve therapist burnout (or how to avoid it).

All sections have something to offer all counselors, whatever their developmental stages. In an important section on the power of human resilience, the reader is reminded of the resilience of both the counselor and the counselee. “As therapists, our greatest contribution may be to enhance our clients’ belief in their own inner strengths, resources, and resilience” (p. 108). Recognizing client resiliency and personal resiliency gives a much more positive perspective of counseling.

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For the counselor educator, this book is appropriate for practicum, supervision, and clinical internships, as a possible adjunct to current textbooks. Students will enjoy the organization, easy readability, and negative statements about errors in therapy. The vignettes are useful as subjects for role plays or as discussion topics.

For the experienced professional counselor, this book can be helpful as a quick reference reminder of the not-so-obvious reasons for premature client terminations of the counseling process. Reading and rereading this book may actually assist individuals to become better counselors and caregivers.

Finally, for the novice counselor or counseling student, “elusive clinical pieces of wisdom are handed to you on a platter” (A. Lazarus, p. xii). The information presented gives new insights into the counseling relationship with critical thinking opportunities along the way.

How to Fail as a Therapist: 50 Ways to Lose or Damage Your Patients is a comprehensive handbook to assist graduate students, supervisors, experienced counselors, and counselor educators to be their best, thereby better serving their clients with “best practice.” In the words of the authors, “We hope this book serves as a reminder that we are all works in progress” (p. 6).