

1.5: Using Supervision Effectively

Introduction

This chapter provides a look at the relationship between you and your supervisor at the internship site. Along with their other professional responsibilities, this individual may be the director of the agency, a department head or simply a staff member whose duties include helping interns learn about the work along with all their other professional responsibilities. For our purposes, the supervisor is the one who works with you the most at the agency and who usually is the one with whom the instructor communicates in terms of your performance or evaluations. During the internship, you will go through the different developmental stages of a professional supervisory relationship and how it pertains to your learning experience. This chapter will also discuss such things as setting goals for an internship, ideas on how to manage conflicting goals should they arise, and the purpose of assessment.

Key Words

- **Style:** A particular way of perceiving, understanding, and expressing oneself that is characteristic of a person and the way they either react to or go about dealing with a situation, task, or activity. Everyone has a unique style and each one has a set of related strengths and weaknesses.
- **Supervision:** The process of observing, supporting, or directing what someone does or how something is done by another. May also be seen as a resource, especially in an internship.
- **Supervisor:** In the case of human services workers or interns, the individual at the site to whom one reports or who is responsible for one's work, or the course instructor.

Supervision

What we call internships today have their historical roots in apprenticeships. These are teaching and learning relationships in which the student learns an art, trade, or job from a skilled professional. This type of learning environment usually takes many years. It begins with a selection process, such as having a certain ability or grade point average. It involves finding someone to guide you through the learning process (e.g. an experienced craftsman or instructor). The apprenticeship often concludes with some sort of "final examination" that ends in graduation and the apprentice's recognition as a professional. As with teaching relationships in general, this one can also be mutually beneficial as most people like to share their expertise with others, and teaching often "teaches" the teacher, as well as the student.

Supervision is at the heart of fieldwork. In this sense it is like an apprenticeship although you are likely to continue to have supervisors if you go on for a graduate degree or license. Learning how supervisors interact with coworkers and clients gives you an opportunity to observe and even model similar behaviors as you start to turn theory into practice. Supervisory insight, experience, and involvement with your education will help you develop a sense of what it means to be a professional in your field as well.

Occasionally, a supervisor can also become a mentor, which is a special type of teaching-learning relationship and can have a positive impact on one's career. Most times, a supervisor will schedule individual time with an intern to go over the student's duties, clients, and caseloads. However, sometimes supervisors are too busy to give interns as much direct supervision as interns would like. While disappointing, it might be helpful to remember that supervisors usually sacrifice productive work time and space to make room for interns. So even if your supervisor does not seem to meet your expectations, that does not mean they do not care. Similarly, not all supervisors have the same style or approach, so be prepared to be as flexible and realistic with your expectations as possible.

The Supervised Internship

Internships are an efficient and effective way of learning because they provide professional guidance. Often, supervisors can work one-on-one with you in ways that are compatible with your learning style, which is more difficult to achieve in a classroom environment. Although course work gives you an idea of what to expect, it is the guided experience that turns theory into knowledge and knowledge into ability. This fieldwork setting is like a laboratory where you can test ideas and techniques without, hopefully, things "blowing up" in your or your client's face. Similarly, supervised experience allows you to test theoretical concepts and perspectives in a real-world environment and to find out which techniques work best in various situations. During this learning process, you are also beginning to develop your own style as a helping professional.

Knowing Your Role

Beginning the internship can be stressful if you have not prepared for it. Researching the site and the kind of services it provides can prepare you and give you a sense of what to expect. By understanding your role as an intern, you also show the supervisor that you are a team player who will try to enact the supervisor's suggestions. Accordingly, it is important to respect the boundaries of being a student in training. Even if you think you know how to handle a situation, the supervisor ultimately makes the call as to whether you are ready to handle a client alone.

Paying attention to the daily activities in the office will help you anticipate tasks and make yourself more useful when the supervisor is busy. Offering to help with duties that are not defined on your list shows that you will be easy to work with. When the supervisor is overloaded with duties you cannot perform, you can still network at the facility. Asking questions is often a good way to interact with others and shows that you are interested in knowing what to do and how to do it.

Developmental Stages in Your Supervisory Relationship

Like most relationships, the one that occurs between an intern and a supervisor is constantly evolving. Ideally, the quality of the relationship will improve as the degree of communication does because that allows both parties to better share information and develop interpersonal connections. Trust builds over time and helps you to talk more freely, examine your strengths and weaknesses, recognize your mistakes and achievements, and do the type of exploration that is necessary for professional development to occur. Unless the relationship is problematic for one person or the other, it usually goes through three stages: the novice stage, the learning stage, and the independent stage. Each one has its own distinct characteristics.

Novice Stage

This stage begins when the student and the supervisor first meet and start to form impressions of one another. First impressions do matter, so be sure to dress appropriately, be friendly, and try to conform to the role of an intern, which is somewhere between a student and a professional. This stage is a bit awkward at first for the intern because everything is so new, but the supervisor is likely to be aware of that and try to reduce your anxiety. The same type of exchange goes on in many types of relationships, such as with instructors or bosses in classes or jobs you have had, so you are not as ill-equipped as it might first seem. Of course, such factors as age, individual preferences, maturity level, personality, and interpersonal skill level also play active roles in the process of forming a relationship, so they are likely to be alive here as well. Also remember, in addition to what is said, how it is said also conveys information in a relationship. Your tone of voice and other nonverbal communication cues matter, too. Over time, you will both have a better understanding of how you work together in the roles you play as supervisor and intern.

Clear communication and goal setting are crucial parts of the novice stage. It is helpful to be prepared with questions prior to the beginning of a shift. For instance, you can ask about the day's responsibilities, which tasks need to be addressed, and what expectations people have for the projects that are assigned to you. It is also helpful if you communicate what you wish to learn at the site in terms of your goals and expectations.

Learning Stage

The next stage revolves around learning your roles, acquiring the skills necessary to fulfill them, and establishing relationships with your co-workers. Progress in these areas is usually accompanied by an increase in trust between you and your immediate supervisor, which is a two-way street. If things are going well, your development as an intern should include moving up to increasingly complex assignments or tasks and an increasing degree of responsibility or functional independence.

Supervisors usually encourage and welcome questions because they help them assess your progress and bring attention to areas that they can assist you with as you improve your abilities. Consequently, it is important that you realize it is a good idea to ask for help or at least clarification if you are unsure about how to proceed. This practice also reduces the need to have information repeated or doing an assignment poorly and then having to do it over again. Of course, timing is important when asking a question and so is the way it is framed. There may be no stupid questions, but there are poor ways to ask them!

In this stage, your ability to communicate with staff and clients improves as you learn your way around the agency and your duties. This growing sense of competence also increases learner confidence and is rewarding as well. Similarly, as you become more familiar with the agency's rules, functions, and interpersonal culture, you are likely to expand your role and make it more your own. Some indications of progress at this level are asking to or being asked to take on more responsibilities, being treated like a member of a team, and offering to help when you see something that needs to be done instead of waiting to be told to do it.

Independent Stage

This stage is characterized by having a more advanced set of skills, demonstrating a higher degree of decision-making ability or autonomy, and having more comfortable or friendly interactions with your colleagues at the site. A good indicator of reaching this level is the quality of the communication between you and your supervisors, as well as other members of the staff. Another one is feeling less anxious about your place in the agency and your ability to complete jobs assigned to you. At this point, successful interns usually find themselves doing the duties of an entry-level employee at the agency.

Assuming your skills have progressed, the supervisor may offer opportunities for you to work more independently, which is to say with less supervision. You may find yourself, for instance, spontaneously asking for extra assignments, though it is important to make sure you are competent enough to succeed at them. Making sure that you have already demonstrated some of the skills necessary to succeed in those tasks helps both you and those you work with, including your supervisor, see that you are ready to take the next step. Finally, it is usually good to be flexible as an intern. Not only is flexibility an important asset in human services because it helps you “go with the flow” when the need arises, it also reduces tension.

The Dynamics of Dealing with a Supervisor

Accommodating Supervisor Style

Every supervisor is unique in that each has their own clinical and supervisory style. A skilled supervisor will teach, guide, and sometimes even mentor you in order to better prepare you for your future in the field. However, it is important to remember that even the best supervisors may not always be as accessible as you would like, so try to be patient when necessary. Remember, they have many responsibilities at the site, including overseeing your work. Supervising your growth is an additional duty, not one that replaces another.

While it is most desirable to have a supervisor with qualities and teaching methods that mesh well with your style, sometimes those styles may conflict with one another. In order to solve conflicts in general, it is important to have good communication skills and be willing to find common ground. In this situation, the same relational dynamics that you have experienced with differing supervisory styles in the past may help here. For example, if you find yourself in an internship site where there are difficulties with supervision, try not to get discouraged. Also, seeing things from different perspectives can help. Finally, your colleagues and instructors can help you during class meetings or office hours. You may find that you are not alone when facing such a challenge. Your peers may even help you understand the strengths and weaknesses of your style, as well as those of the supervisor. Your instructor and classmates can also help you come up with ideas on how to improve or at least better deal with the situation.

Keep in mind that your supervisor has their own personality and style, too. Generally, supervisors are happy to help because they want to see you succeed. After all, they became professionals for the same reason most of us do, which is to have the opportunity to help others. However, occasionally, a supervisor may have a difficult problem or be dealing with a stressful day and seem irritable or even short-tempered because of it. No matter what kind of day it is, do the best job you can. Remember, although your supervisor’s style may be irritating to you, it is not your role to change it.

It is, however, your job to learn how to deal with different styles, which means that this situation can be a learning opportunity. Although unpleasant, having a difficult supervisor is valuable because learning about different styles, and how to cope with them, are likely to come in handy in the future. This type of awareness can be an essential skill that can be carried throughout your entire career, so even a poor supervisor may turn out to be a good one in the long run, even if it is only to show what not to do! After all, there is no guarantee that says you will always have a good supervisor or boss.

Everyone has communication and relational styles. Some common examples of how they appear in the supervisory relationship are provided below. Each one is accompanied by its strengths and weaknesses. It may be helpful to try to identify your style and that of your supervisor so that you are better equipped to make appropriate adjustments when necessary.

Examples of Supervisory Styles

- **Over-Involved Style:** Manifested by micromanaging or sometimes by being “buddies.”
- **Authoritarian (Controlling) Style:** Needing to demonstrate they are in charge, demanding perfection, having strict rules, showing a low tolerance for individuality
- **Laissez-Faire Style:** An attitude of letting things take their own course without interfering. May appear under involved, offering little direction.
- **Authoritative Style:** Knowledgeable, appropriately assertive, and open to suggestions when appropriate.

Examples of Student Styles

- **Passive Style:** Accepting or allowing what happens to happen. Tends to avoid active input, responses, or resistance.
- **Aggressive Style:** Pursuing one's interests too forcefully, sometimes unduly so or without listening to others.
- **Assertive Style:** Having and showing a confident, energetic, goal-oriented approach.
- **Realistic Style:** A person who accepts a situation as it is and is prepared to make the best out of the circumstances.

Preparing for Success

The site supervisor plays an essential role in the professional lives of internship students, so they can be one of the keys to having a successful internship experience. There are several things that can be done to increase the chances of a positive relationship. For example, simple things, such as being prepared and being courteous, can go a long way to help this process. Trying your best to stick to the established schedule is important because supervisors, and sometimes even clients, count on you being there at the appointed times.

Still, life is complicated and unexpected events, such as sudden illness, bad weather, family emergencies, and so on, may happen. Thus, it is best to establish procedures to follow and to avoid schedule changes or problems as much as possible. It is a good idea to have a backup plan in place. For instance, if you have children or care-taker responsibilities, then having alternative arrangements made with someone in advance can help. If your work schedule changes, give the site or the supervisor as much advance notice as possible. Above all, avoid simply not showing up. While most supervisors are understanding, you alone are accountable for your decisions. Requesting a day off for an activity is significantly better than calling off at the last moment or just not showing up.

Staying on Track

Some people look at time requirements of the internship and its schedule as an intrusion because of family, school, or employment responsibilities. However, sometimes it is possible to coordinate schedules in advance. For example, many schools have spring breaks that may make it possible for you to increase hours at the internship site, which reduces their impact on the rest of the semester. Working weekends may be possible at some sites, such as a residential program, if the time is supervised. This type of schedule balancing or time management also facilitates the development of a good working relationship with those at your site and fosters a sense of working with someone, as opposed to working for someone.

The ability to settle into a routine quickly helps facilitate movement through the developmental stages of the internships. Supervisors and other coworkers know that you are there to learn. They want you to feel included and part of the agency or team. If you are shy, keep in mind that many others have been through the same experience, including the people you work with. After all, they were interns or beginners at one time, just like you!

Contracting to Meet Student Needs

It is important to have an idea about what you would like to achieve during the internship because it will help you focus your time in those directions. You should, for instance, be able to describe what your goals are so that others can help you identify opportunities or assignments that will help you reach them. This type of planning and prioritizing allows you to play an active role in your education and helps others know what to do to help make the internship a good one for you.

Internship Forms

Your college, the placement site, or both may have certain legal obligations or routine requirements that must be met. One of them, for example, may be the need for a formal legal agreement between your educational institution and the placement site. Another one could be a written plan detailing such things as who you will be working with, what duties you will be performing while at the site, and the educational objectives you, the site, and your instructor feel are important for you to master. One of the most empowering ways to achieve your goals is to draw up an internship or educational "agreement."

This type of agreement is often developed in written form so that the college, agency, supervisor, and student are all quite literally on the same page in regard to expected duties, requirements, and objectives. Another benefit of a written agreement is that it allows you to track progress and provides you standing if the agency points you in directions you did not intend or agree to go.

In other words, these agreements are better handled by spelling them out on paper so that they can be used as a guide to help create a good internship plan and to maintain this focus throughout the internship experience. In this sense, the internship agreement is like a contract that you may refer to throughout the process. It should also include such information as to what your expected duties

will be, the number of hours you will work, and who will supervise your time and work at the placement. Most colleges do not permit students to drive clients in their own or even agency's vehicles because of liability issues. However, some colleges will provide professional liability insurance to cover your interactions with clients. If these matters are not spelled out, you should talk to both the supervisor and your instructor about them.

Sometimes, especially when things are busy for everyone at the site, it may seem as though the supervisor or the staff does not care about what happens to the intern because they are a lower priority. However, you have some responsibility for making the internship a good training experience as well. So instead of showing up and simply following someone around, you may need to be flexible and even creative. For example, if you spot something that needs to be addressed and feel doing so is within your range of abilities, you might volunteer to take on the project. In addition to filling in hours that otherwise might go unused or be less than educational, you will also show that you have initiative and the willingness to help where you can.

Good contracts provide the foundations for a good internship experience. Consequently, your goals will also be reviewed by supervisors and agencies who will have some sound ideas and suggestions regarding your expectations and limitations. Sometimes they even see more potential in an intern than the student does. This situation can create the opportunity to grow beyond your expectations. Accordingly, sometimes it is best to modify an agreement. In that case, changes should be approved by the intern, the supervisor, and the instructor. Occasionally, a college or site will not use a contract but have only a verbal agreement with the intern. Although this isn't the best situation, at least you can document what you agree to do, and not do, and then discuss that with your instructor.

Although rare, sometimes an internship does not work out well for a variety of reasons. For example, there may be a sudden change in supervisors or insurmountable interpersonal conflicts. Though no one wants to see things go in this direction, the clinical editor of this book has found that it is always possible to find alternatives, sometimes including finding a new site, without penalizing the student, unless they are responsible for the conflict. Your instructor may also find helpful ways of dealing with this situation if you bring it up to them.

The Classroom and Classroom Discussion

Most internships are accompanied by a regular group meeting, class, or some other type of regular gathering. That practice is important because it is a conducive environment where students can describe their learning experiences, express how they feel about something connected to the internships, ask questions, seek help, as well as offer and receive support to and from their colleagues. This part of the internship is valuable because it is part of what case management theory calls "monitoring" (Moxley, 1989). The purpose of monitoring involves gathering information and receiving feedback about what is going on for students and how they are progressing through the stages of the internship process. This information, in turn, allows the instructor to assess the development of the intern, offer helpful guidance when needed, spot problems early on, and intervene when necessary. Even internships that do not have a regular classroom component have some sort of monitoring built into them at the site or with the instructor of the course.

Consequently, it is beneficial to attend classroom discussions as that is where people hear about, reflect on, and offer ideas to each other concerning the experiences they are having at their individual sites. Not talking about the positive and negative experiences of interning may even hinder your development and interfere with your ability to grow as a professional, not to mention limiting your ability to help your colleagues. In addition, class discussions or conferences with your instructor (if you do not have a class meeting associated with your internship) act as a support group where you can talk about your experiences--good or bad--and the group can help you effectively work through them. Talking through certain scenarios will also show the instructor signs of your growth.

Similarly, there may be times when you feel stuck, are uncertain, or face a problem at your site. Your classroom colleagues can be an important resource for such things as brainstorming solutions and suggesting different approaches to the problem. This aspect of the internship also gives you an opportunity to see the growth process from different perspectives as everyone goes through it a little differently. Sometimes just knowing that others are dealing with the same issue is helpful all by itself.

Example:

You have a question about your site that could not be addressed on the day you were there. One thing you can do is to remember that you will have time to discuss these uncertainties with your classmates and your professor. Furthermore, it is important that you share your questions and concerns so that your professor can make suggestions and offer you guidance. Of course, it is also important to realize and honor the confidential nature of these discussions.

Goals and Obstacles

You may encounter problems reaching some of your goals during the internship. Typical issues include not feeling you are learning as much as you expected, feeling lost, or feeling like a burden. Such problems can be discussed with the supervisor, with the professor, and with classmates. Classmates and professors are an outstanding resource and can be used as an information tool for self-monitoring and reflection during the internship and may help you find ways to make the experience more satisfying. Often, people use role-playing scenarios in the classroom to help deal with a problem concerning one's supervisor or a given staff worker. The goal of a good "working alliance" with your supervisor is to create an atmosphere where both of you feel free to talk to one another honestly.

Being Under-Challenged

Sometimes students find themselves feeling like they are not getting the type of experience they expected. For instance, it may be that their priorities or goals have been pushed aside or their work at the agency has become routine. These situations arise for several reasons, most of which are not the students' fault. For example, it could be that the agency's busy season is at another time of the year or that the funding streams have changed in ways that make original agreements untenable. In general, the agency's priorities come first, so the intern needs to adjust, not the other way around.

The professor and your peers can help you adjust your goals or find new ways of meeting them during the remainder of the internship. Brainstorming ideas may help you know how to approach the supervisor, find other alternatives to meet your goals, and restructure your goals.

Example:

Jane is interning at a crisis center and has the goal of working face-to-face with clients in crisis. Unfortunately, since starting her internship, she has been unable to sit in on an intake session for various reasons not of her making. Instead, Jane's work has been focused on organizing paperwork and making copies for her supervisor. While Jane understands the importance of the work she is doing, she fears she will go through the entire internship missing out on other valuable experiences. Jane discusses her concerns in the classroom, and classmates encourage her to have a discussion with her supervisor. Jane then makes some suggestions to the supervisor about how to include more client contact into her routine without dumping all the paperwork on someone else. The supervisor tweaks the suggestions a bit and together they find a strategy that meets Jane's goal of increasing her clinical skills with clients in crisis while still meeting the clerical needs of the agency.

Setting up Self-Directed Goals

Often, a supervisor will help set up a work schedule but then become too busy to adjust it in ways that lead to increasing degrees of training and skill acquisition. At that point, it may seem like they are just keeping you busy with mundane tasks to simply fill up your time to meet the hours. If you feel that the internship has lost its sense of direction or that you are not progressing any further, it is important to think proactively. Instead of complaining to the supervisor, you might consider presenting them with a plan that would move you toward your goals or increase your level of responsibility or involvement. If you have trouble formulating one, it might be a good idea to share your situation with your instructor or classmates since they are part of your network and can act as resources who can help you generate possible solutions.

Example:

Mohamed is working at a busy mental health facility and found himself underutilized. Since he is interested in doing community work, he proposes to create a book of community services that can identify resources people can use to find assistance with housing, transportation, utility services, job training, food, childcare, and so on. The result of his efforts is a set of Facebook pages that list basic human services, names to contact, phone numbers to use, and active links to click on that can put clients in touch with those who can help them. The supervisor valued his contribution enough to assign someone to maintain the site even after Mohamed graduated.

Developing More Challenging Goals

Sometimes interns reach the point where they feel they have met the goals that were set down in the original educational agreement and have time to do more. Of course, it is wise to make sure you have met those goals before discussing the situation with your supervisor. Take a moment to make sure that all expectations have been met and then try creating a goal or set of them that you

think would help you grow while also offering something of value to the agency. Next, approach the supervisor with a tentative plan. If the supervisor feels that you are ready, and if there is no longer a need for you to continue to perform your current duties, you may be able to take the next step in your professional development.

Every person with whom you have contact may be a source of education and opportunity. Getting to know others within the agency allows you to discuss career interests with them and learn about career possibilities associated with their roles at the agency. Offering to help others in their work and creating new tasks are just a few ways to take things into your own hands when there is nothing to do or when your jobs have become routine. Taking the initiative in learning about the agency and the services it provides often makes a good impression and opens new doors.

Example:

Rosetta works at a center that focuses on dealing with substance abuse. In her downtime, she did research on other agencies in surrounding counties because she saw that clients often move from county to county. Consequently, Rosetta identified, compiled, and printed out a list of AA/NA meeting schedules for each county so that clients would have the opportunity to continue to attend meetings after they moved.

Evaluations

A good supervisor will regularly assess your ability to take on new tasks. However, it is important for interns to evaluate themselves from time to time as well. Most interns will want to review their objectives periodically and conduct reflective self-assessments. This process can be done informally, or through keeping a journal, a file on a computer or phone, and so on. Near the end of the internship, the instructor often requests that the supervisor do a final report, evaluation, or summary of the student and their performance at the site. Of course, you are likely to have a general feel about how things are going based on the supervisor's reactions or meetings regarding your work performance. So, if the internship does not seem to be allowing yours goals to be met, requesting time for a meeting before the semester is over can prevent problems.

Regardless of how challenging the tasks may be, always do your best work. If you take pride in your work, coworkers and supervisors will notice. Remember, these people are now in your network. When it comes to future jobs, they could be potential references.

Handling the Discomfort of Negative Feedback

It is also important to keep in mind that no two interns will progress at the same rate. Sometimes interns feel that they are not given the freedom to develop more fully. Other times they may feel they were asked to do too much. You may look at the situation and feel discouraged or lose confidence in your abilities. It is important to discuss this reaction with your supervisor and ask for suggestions for improvement. Learning how to accept constructive criticism is a crucial component of this process, especially if you are a beginner. Try your best to listen, but also realize that the supervisor is looking at the bigger agency picture that you cannot see.

In situations where it seems that the supervisor and staff are talking about you in a way that does not feel good, be sure to avoid forming any cognitive distortions or irrational thoughts about it. Avoid overgeneralizing, personalizing, and surrendering to emotional reasoning. Be sure to look those terms up if they are unfamiliar to you (Mruk, 2013). After all, they may be discussing progress as well as the lack of it and your potential rather than your limitations. If you feel that the discussions are taking place in a negative way, or if it seems that the problem is a personality conflict you are having with the supervisor or their style, it is advisable to talk with your instructor about it. After all, the instructor is the individual who oversees your internship and who has the responsibility to make sure it is progressing properly. It is also likely that the instructor is more interested in your professional development than anything else.

Embrace Learning Opportunities

It is a good practice to experience as many dimensions of the internship and agency as possible. In addition to the supervisor, other staff members and your duties are opportunities for you to learn something new.

Learning from Co-workers and Supervisors

Talking with co-workers at the internship site is a good way to build rapport and to network. They can teach you about diverse community resources. Office staff also tend to have the benefit of direct contact, can offer insights, and have more time for you

than supervisors. They might even take a liking to you and become an informal mentor. This person might be able to teach you many aspects of the job that your supervisor does not have the time to do. Consequently, make sure you ask to be introduced to other co-workers. Often, they know more about “office politics” than anyone else and can offer insights or support about this more subtle and informal dimension of the agency. Talking with people in the break room or at lunch can be instructional if you approach it as a potential learning opportunity!

Example:

A supervisor was constantly busy dealing with different departments but made time to have the intern attend a professional team meeting. The intern watched how co-workers conversed with each other about different cases. They were able to support one another in finding solutions for different situations when dealing with clients and found the experience of working with others beneficial. One staff member at the meeting with whom the intern had little previous contact seemed to respond very positively when the intern volunteered additional information about the client. After this meeting, the intern made it a point to seek out that staff member and began an amicable, professional relationship that blossomed over time.

Learning from Clients

The clients at the site can also be a source of learning, perhaps even the greatest one in the long run as they should be the focus of your work. Clients usually have their own perspective about the site and how it works. Learning about how someone else experiences the process is another opportunity to gain insight. In fact, client perspectives are necessary to appreciate if you truly want to grasp the whole picture. Positive and negative client-related experiences can be some of the most instructional ones you have as you learn how to become a professional. Most of us in the field, including the clinical editor of this book, still remember what we learned from clients many years after the interaction or relationship ended.

Observing and Modeling Others

Being a student in the internship course offers an opportunity to observe the instructor, supervisor, and the staff around you. The internship gives you a chance to see first-hand how people in the field dress, greet people, comport themselves with colleagues, contact other agencies, as well as their clients. You will also have the chance to form interpersonal relationship with staff at the facility during your lunch and break periods. Reflecting on what you observe is a good source of insight or learning that cannot be found in classrooms or textbooks. If you happen to find yourself admiring someone's professional capabilities, interpersonal style, and ways of approaching the work, you can experiment modeling your own behavior after theirs. Learning what feels good to you, what is compatible with your style, and then trying it out can be a great way of increasing your skill set and confidence.

Challenges Along the Way

Often unexpected circumstances and events happen when working with the public. Although they may cause anxiety in the beginning, these are times when you can start relying on your developing professional skills. Observing how your supervisor handles delicate situations, for example, may help you navigate your way through a similar situation or task. Seeing how someone handles an irate, sad, frustrated, or anxious client effectively gives you a larger range of possible responses when you encounter similar situations. Therefore, part of the learning process involves noting good professional skills in action, including such things as the individual's mannerisms, tone of voice, non-verbal behaviors, and so on. Observing and reflecting on this type of information may help prepare you for the unexpected situations you encounter at your site and later in your career.

Example:

When the family of a client demands information and answers to questions that they are not privileged to, the family member may become demanding and agitated toward you. In this case, if possible, you might remember how someone else at the agency handled the situation effectively. For example, listening intently and responding in a calm, clear manner is often helpful. Be sure to report such situations to staff or your supervisor and document everything that transpired. Then reflect on what you learned from the experience.

Tools for Chapter 4

General Suggestions

- Be prepared before meeting with your supervisor by making a list of personal goals you want to achieve at the site.

- Ask to be introduced to other co-workers who can provide information and support when needed. Be sure to note their names and titles for future use.
- Listen for new learning opportunities and experiences.
- Learn to speak up when appropriate so others know you want to be involved at the site.
- Feel free to ask questions when needed.
- Be sure you understand what is required before you take on a task.
- Try to have patience and understanding with others.
- NEVER put yourself in danger or in a situation that feels threatening.
- ALWAYS try to do the best you can. Do not just put forth the minimum effort required to get the job done.

Going above and beyond the minimum effort and taking pride in your work is noticed by others. If possible, find time to talk with your supervisor, instructors, and colleagues about the positive and negative events that stood out to you in the last week or so. This type of "debriefing" allows you to examine the experience, reflect on it, make observations, and consolidate your learning. It also helps to review the objectives of the internship every so often and evaluate your progress.

Activity 1: What would you do?

You have been at your internship site for a few weeks now. You and your supervisor have a good working alliance, and she is entrusting you with a small set of duties each week. As you are reporting to your supervisor, she seems almost annoyed if not angry that you are telling her about your day-to-day experiences at the agency. Your supervisor did not finish listening to you before she gathered a stack of papers from their desk and told you they had to go. These are the courses of action you can take:

- Follow her out of the room and demand an explanation.
- Talk to her about it when you come back next time.
- Talk to co-workers about your supervisor.
- Do not let it get to you; she is a busy lady, and she could just be running late.

What do you do? Why? Discuss the options with your classmates.

Activity 2: True or False?

- You should be angry when your supervisor is too busy to help you.
- You should meet with your professor and go to the classroom session if you have any problems at your internship site.
- You can discuss case information with a client without supervision because you are providing the service.
- You should not talk to your supervisor about future career plans.

*A. False, B. True, C. False, D. False

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