

WORDS FROM AN UN-DEGREEED IDIOT COUNSELOR

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When we become BSU Directors, it seems we are supposed to automatically become counselors. I am one who believes there is some validity in that assumption. God has opened a door of personal ministry and we have walked through that door and He has assured us that His grace is sufficient for our needs. We have confidence that He will not give us a responsibility that He does not provide resources to accomplish.

I came into Student Work when I was in my mid-fifties. My husband and I lived in the Baptist Student Center and so our hats were many. We were maintenance people, parents, teachers, friends, and yes, even counselors. God had spend many years schooling us to be a significant part of students' lives even when we were not aware of that schooling.

I began to have a great desire to help students to know Jesus in a special relationship and therefore be able to cope with college life and all its temptations, decisions and issues. I read every book on counseling I could get my hands on, took courses, went to every workshop and seminar in order to sharpen my skills. I believe that God gave me some special talent in listening and helping. In addition to my own family experiences as a married person, as a mother and as a Christian, I was very concerned and also amazed at all the problems students face.

Perhaps it can be of some encouragement to you to know that some of the ways I operated. Even though I had no formal education, I loved Jesus and had a heart for people.

One of the first big mistakes I made was to be the rescuer for everyone. My first reaction when a student needed help was one of protection. I am so grateful to my BSU Director at the time, for his guidance and "closed door talks" were invaluable in

helping me through that early error. Another thing that meant so much and I recommend is to give co-workers as much space, confidence and assurance as they are capable of handling. This allows for growth and encourages creativity.

One of the first people I was involved with on a regular basis was a young man who was homosexual, but did not want to get into the lifestyle. Because I didn't know very much about that problem, I thought prayer, scripture and "God-talk" would solve his problem. But I was wrong, very wrong. One night he called and said he couldn't live like that anymore. He had a gun and had decided to end his own life. I begged him not to do so and finally he let my husband and I come to see him. After a great deal of talking and crying, I realized he was using me and then his problem became my problem. I realized I could not make any decisions for him nor could I be responsible for his behavior. So after going to get him out of two or three more suicide threats, I had to trust the Lord and risk openness. I told him that I did not think that shooting himself was the answer, but I did have one small favor. I said, "Be sure you take good aim and do the job right because I don't have time to take care of a cripple!" That would have been the wrong thing to say had he not been confident of my love and concern for him. However, it worked and he began to work on changing his life-style.

I needed to learn I couldn't rescue everyone from their problems, and my role changed to that of a healer. Mental health for people who come to me for help was my business, but belongs to the person who comes. This was for me an expensive, but significant lesson to learn. I have since learned that there is a difference between curing and healing. When students come to me for help, I must be sensitive enough to know they want to be healed and not just be cured from the crisis.

There was a time that I was afraid to confront someone about their personal relationship with Jesus. I was afraid they would think I was a fanatic and not interested in their problem. I had a need to be loved and trusted before I could talk to them about Jesus. That did not work very well, and so I began to pattern my style after Jesus. I read in one of Bruce Larson's

books about needing to be "Jesus with skin on." I learned to confront students during the first visit and let them know I cared at the same time. Jesus talks to us about being a whole person, so I would start by asking them to tell me how they felt about Jesus and what He meant to them. After working through their relationship with Him, then we could work on the specific problem together. There have been some students who could not handle that approach, but most of the time they came back and were open and ready for healing.

Something has happened to accountability in our students. When I made a commitment to my husband or my supervisor, part of that commitment is to be accountable to that person. Making someone accountable to you as their healer makes you vulnerable and transparent. With this in mind, I give the student some scriptures to read on a daily basis. Then I promise that when they are really having difficulties, I will talk with them, if they call me. I have gone to gay bars, to abortion centers and jail houses to see them. This willingness to share in their misery gives me authority to help them consider alternatives for their behavior. After one such encounter, a young man was able to say, "Oh, you don't care about what I do or say to you, it is how I respond to my behavior and to God that concerns you." When that happens, healing has really begun. Perhaps that is what Jesus meant when he asked us to choose each day who we will follow.

One of the most difficult cases I have dealt with was when a young man told me his girl friend was pregnant. After I had refused to judge him, I was able to counsel with both of them with much crying, talking and decision making. All of their alternatives were written down with consequences considered. Together they made the decision that abortion was their only answer. The tough decision for me came when they asked if I would go with them. I spend the night walking the floor and praying about what to do. Though I am diametrically opposed to abortion, I thought it was my Christian duty to love them through this crisis. So I went with them knowing all along what they were doing was wrong. But I had to love them in Christ. I

do not know how anyone else would handle such a situation, but I became "Jesus with skin on" to them. They were later married and are very happy serving the Lord in their home and professions.

To be a counselor is to be yourself more than anything else. Use your own personal skills and always search for other resources. Always be honest and open with students, giving each situation to the Lord in prayer, allowing the Holy Spirit to help with guidance and healing. Always consider the long-term consequences, and don't dwell exclusively on the short-term cure.

Though I have no formal training in counseling, I do have years of practical experience. Most of all, I love the Lord and I know He loves students in crisis. All I want to do is bring the Lord and students together. I don't think you have to have formal training in counseling to do that, do you?