Counseling and Management Values: Is There a Match?

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More than two thousand counselors who work in business and industry belong to the American Counseling Association (ACA). Many of these counselors are employed in HRD positions, some of them as managers. Most belong to a division of ACA called the National Career Development Association. Others belong to the National Employment counselor's Association, another ACA division. Some belong to both of these divisions plus other divisions such as the American Mental Health Counselor’s Association, or the Association for Specialists in Group Work, or the International Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. In all, there are sixteen divisions of ACA that more or less impact any counseling that is done in business, industry and the military.

It is therefore, important to know how the values and philosophy of ACA aligns with that of management in organizations where counselors work.

The mission of ACA (1988) is to enhance human development throughout the lifespan and to promote the counseling profession. Although promoting the profession can be viewed as self-serving, surely enhancing human development throughout the lifespan cannot be so viewed. Common values of the association involve caring for self and others, enabling positive change, acquiring and using knowledge, empowering leadership and promoting linkages. The common values of the association witness the worth and the dignity of the individual, and they forward the notion that positive change in people, organizations and societies can be facilitated. ACA fosters a kind of leadership that requires a willingness to take risks, take stands and act responsibly on vital issues. Collaboration is the preferred mode of operation because it fits the philosophical foundation on which the counseling profession is based. Each year the Association adopts a theme consonant with the common values of the Association.

In 1992–1993, the theme of the American Counseling Association (ACA) was Diversity, Development, Dignity. Those three words seemed to sum up what was considered important by the sixteen professional organizations grouped under the umbrella of ACA. As the then president of ACA, I frequent-
ly was called upon to speak to the importance of those words to counselors and psychotherapists. This article is another attempt to do so.

Diversity

Counselors in the United States do not serve a homogeneous population. Because we are a nation of diversity, we need to have cultural sensitivity to the groups of people who comprise our country. We recognize that all therapeutic interventions take place within a cultural context. The culture from which one comes is part of the field of how any concern gets formed. It is therefore impossible to do developmental work without understanding of both the importance of culture as an influence on the individual, and of the individual's cultural background.

Diversity is also a concern to us because counselors do not proportionately represent the diverse population of the United States. The number of Hispanic or Latino male counselors, for instance, in no way represents the number of Hispanic or Latino males in the population. It is also non-representative of clients from those cultures seeking therapy. This parenthetically is also true of managers. Programs that train counselors are well aware that they do not attract enough minority applicants. A question can be raised as to the perceived value of the counseling profession to minority groups. However, another question needs to be asked about the perceived value of minority groups to the counseling profession. This is an issue that warrants intense scrutinizing.

In a nation of diversity, the time has come for us to celebrate our diversity. The celebration of diversity relates not only to diversity of color, or creed, but also to diversity of opinion. Within the helping professions, as well as outside of them, individuals tend toward intolerance of diverse views, each thinking one's own theoretical perspective or specific title, is superior. And yet is is extremely important that we, as helpers, listen to our many voices, and that extends to the voices of dissent.

Counselors come from diverse disciplines, work in diverse settings, hold diverse credentials. Yet if the mental health of all citizens means anything to us we need to recognize that we can be diverse, yet unified in our work toward the common good.

Development

Human development across the lifespan has become a predominant theme in both counseling and management since the wellness movement has gained