

DO I KNOW MY CLIENT?

BY

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Is my client really unique?

As Manager of Friary House Treatment Centre I wish to continuously emphasise the uniqueness of my client / the resident in front of me. I wish to do this regardless of the fact that he may be an addict and that I may unwittingly myself be biased against addicts. Whatever about the sometimes unconscious part of me, the unknown part, I work at believing that nobody like the client ever existed. That he has no equal. That he is incomparable. That he is remarkable. That he is unusual. That there is no alternative to him. That he is the only him that God made and that when God made him he then broke the mould. That the client does not fit any stereotype. And that for me to be able to help the client to be himself would be an amazing experience for him and for me.

It is not my purpose to enable the client to become a clone of me or of some concept I hold about who he must be. Rather, my intention is to recognise him as at least the equal of me, and to learn how to honour the client for who and what he is. It may be that the world is not ready for him; that we are not ready for him. Not only is the client unique but he is here in his and our world to make a contribution. My belief in his uniqueness will call forth incomparable love from me so that he will be enabled to become as fully himself as he is meant to be. I base this on the truth that there is only way of being human and that is his way. He is called upon to live his life in his way, and not in imitation of anyone else's life. If I do not respect and help him to be true to himself I will miss the point of his life; and he will miss what being human is for him. He should not be expected to mould his life to my demand for conformity because there is no model by which he can live outside himself; he can only find it within himself. My sacred duty is to help him find what is within himself. If anything untoward should happen to him I ought, like Zechariah (12:10) in the Old testament to "mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn."

How will my client know that he is unique?

The uniqueness of my client may appear at first to be buried in his addiction he presents to me. Make no mistake about it, I will be likely to be disappointed, to desire to disapprove, to be disillusioned, and even angry at the client's apparently out of control behaviour and even his disinclination to behave in a way expected by me and that I feel will help his sobriety. So, how do I both enable my client to behave in ways that will help him achieve sobriety and, at the same time, lay aside whatever negative feelings I may feel towards him because of aspects of his behaviour that I disapprove of?

Whether I like it or not, I have to extend time and love and forbearance to my client if I wish to enable him to change. I need to embrace a philosophy that emphasises a holistic understanding of his body, mind and soul in order to understand the root cause of his addiction and to be sympathetic and empathic towards him. To do otherwise is to reject him as others in his life have done. I need to examine and ask why he has immersed himself in crime, addiction, and / depression, and why he may be challenged mentally and physically and be socially and economically underprivileged. What are the root causes of all these manifestations of his disadvantage in the society which, like us, he inhabits? How do I diagnose who my client is and what ails him if I only stay with conventional methods for doing so? Stay with discipline only? Stay with analysing his behaviour only? What I must do in reality is to come to see him as unique; that there is nobody else like him and that nobody who ever existed will ever be like him. I need to understand his particular version of his human life with all its apparent disabilities. Objective theories are just that: theories separate from him, not of him. I have to do the impossible, that is, try to find out who he is by love and intuition. Do you think I am capable of that? I think I am. If not, I am an impostor, pretending to be able to help him change his life around, but contemptuous of who he is and sceptical of how he may wish to try to achieve it!

Do I accept my common humanity with my client, and is it something I need to continuously ponder about? I should because I may experience at times the danger that I see him as being different from me; that he is an outcast by his own choice and doing. I need to keep recalling what my vocation is. What is it? It is about needing to help my client to become new, rejuvenated, restored, to become a new man. I need to know how to calm his mind, facilitate his human growth, and to ever keep in mind that he is likely to be disadvantaged economically, mentally perhaps, and even physically disadvantaged. As compared to us belonging to 'normal' society (is there such?), he is likely to be underprivileged and so may be automatically bracketed in a separate category from me. He is likely to be deprived, more than most, of opportunities in employment because of lack of education and so his sobriety is likely to be constantly under threat by a society that has no time for him and whose mantra is: 'pull up the ladder, Jack, I'm okay!'

If my client is to be restored to his vocation as a human being what does he need? He needs to experience the gestures and language of love; he needs to find out his purpose in life; he needs to find out what he really wants from life; he needs to find out why he is here; he needs to find out who he is; he needs to know why he is different from anybody else who ever existed. Am I able to provide at least some of that for him? If not, what am I doing at Friary House?

Will my client ever be able to live a life beyond his wildest dreams?

Do I think it is possible that my client may ever cherish in his heart a dream of living a life where there is acceptance, love, respect and compassion and a life different from what he is now living? I don't fully know the answer to that, but this I do know. If he is to achieve it, it will only happen because of the quality of his encounter with me, and with you. So, what ought that encounter to be like? How can he be enabled to move towards it? Perhaps it can only happen when, as a result of his encounter with me and the rest of us he feels warmth, happiness and grace in his life. Can that happen for him? Of course it can. But it can only happen, I believe, when I drop my 'holier than thou attitude' to him, my demand that he submit his will to me, that he accepts my prescriptions for him. But it can happen, I believe, when I come to metaphorically embrace him with all his humanity. That is what I am called to do. It is an impossible task for those who do not have sufficient compassion and forgiveness and love in their hearts for others, especially for the deprived. Make no mistake about it, my client without my help will continue to spend his life aimlessly and pursue his addiction to its conclusion in death, never having known that he was loved and cherished. As helpers to addicted clients we may feel that we are so far removed from their lives that we cannot reach out to them. After all, we are different from them. We are respectable. We live in areas different from them. We know what is important to our lives. Forgive us for thinking this, but didn't we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps in order to live the life we believe others ought to live? And so, why can't we help them to do the same?

I have to continuously remember that it is only when I make the effort to reach others who I believe are different from me, and who are underprivileged, that I will be able to help them create a different life for themselves. One of my offerings to them is the gift of individual and group counselling. I know that I can only make an educated guess as to what may be going on in the mind, heart and soul of my client until he decides to trust me, fully trust me. And can he fully trust me when he intuits that I want to change him first by insisting that he does what he is told? After all, he has probably never been required to do so up to now because nobody ever told him it was important. He will do it, however, when he knows I respect him, love him, cherish him. I will only be adequate to the task of being his counsellor and guide when I first fully accept him as I find him and not as I want him to be. That sounds impossible to me a fully paid up member of society, doesn't it? I know the values of the society from which I come, don't I? And, normally, it does not include those I am now asked to help, isn't that true? So, who has to change first - me or my client? I think the answer is obvious, don't you? And that is only the start. I know that most of the concerns, problems or root causes of addiction lie in the unconscious, so helping him by addressing only the apparent won't do. I have to do much more than that. I have to exercise time and patience and an attitude of equality towards my client and then I may be in a position to help him realise and live his own potential; help him to begin to resolve whatever psychological and spiritual issues may be assailing him; enable him to experience a spiritual journey; help him heal and rejuvenate his mind, body

and soul; understand and live the larger purpose of his life; experience empowering relationships; explore his talents, personal strengths and abilities; resolve pent up issues; unburden himself; gain a new and different perspective on his life. But if any of this is to happen, I myself will need to change also, wont I?. But how? By recognising I am not all that different from my client. That he is human as I am human. That he has difficulties as I have difficulties. That he is no better or worse than I am. That he is equal to me, and I am equal to him. If that happens I will now be at base one where anything can happen, even the most magical. But it will all disappear in the twinkling of an eye if I know I am superior to my client.