



# CYBER SUPERVISION

ANNE STOKES

Recently, attempting to create some order in my life – or rather my loft room – I went through 27 years of journals, removing articles worth keeping, and binning the rest. I came across ‘Relationship Serenity’ by Michael Neill, looking at relationships between clients and coaches in face-to-face work. He quoted that wonderful prayer of Niebuhr, commonly called ‘The Serenity Prayer’. A friend had just given me a bookmark with it on, so I began to be curious about its application to Online Supervision.

The starting point was acknowledging that I’m at my best as an online supervisor when we’ve co-created a good relationship. This isn’t as easy online as it is f2f, as perhaps more time is spent f2f paying attention to relationship building. In synchronous supervision, there can be pressure to ‘get on with it’, or asynchronously, a feeling that boundaries may be crossed if I make enquiries that appear more personal in an email response. Yet if I don’t do this, how do I really get to know my supervisees, support and hold them, or know when there may be ‘buttons’ touched? So I need to have the ‘wisdom to know the difference’ between what is purely ‘nosey-ness’ on my part and what is

genuine relationship building, enhancing online supervision and therefore benefit the client.

I also then need to have the courage to change aspects of our relationship where necessary. Neill talks about the possible desire of a coach to control the ‘coachee’. This can also be true in online supervision. As supervisors, we can be so sure that we can see what the supervisee’s ‘problem’ is with this client, or have a useful bit of theory to inform the process, that we thrust this on to the supervisee! In other words we’re attempting to control the other. Now, I am not suggesting that we shouldn’t use our insights, hunches, and knowledge. If we don’t, we are being withholding, which can

# Serenity in Relationships in Online Supervision

also be a way of controlling the other. All I am thinking is about changing the way we make the intervention – is it from a position of trying to control, or is it an ‘offering’ for you both to consider to see if it fits? If it’s the former and happens repeatedly, it will sour the relationship very quickly.

It’s particularly important in the relationship for supervisors to be tentative in ‘sharing their wisdom’ in the online environment. We haven’t got the luxury in asynchronous work to moderate, to temper, our remarks to suit the supervisee’s reactions – to know when to say more or less. Even in synchronous sessions, we need to be alert to pick up whether we’re overstepping

the mark. An obvious, but sometimes overlooked, way of avoiding controlling, or inadvertently being seen as seeking to control, is to ask! This ability to be open to feedback both strengthens the relationship and models good practice for the supervisees in terms of how they work with online clients. Sometimes it does take courage, as we can’t be sure we will like the feedback!

What about ‘accepting the things I cannot change’? In fact I cannot change anything about another, as we know from our client work! **They** have to want to change and I can solely offer an environment in which that might be possible. It’s the

same in supervision. So maybe what needs concentrating on is not ‘what do I want **from** them?’ (i.e. what have they got to change to do/be as I want) to what do I want **for** them? If I do this, I’m more likely to be guided by genuineness and empathy, rather than by my own needs! Then maybe I am providing that online atmosphere where a supervisee might choose to change. Once again, I think that this aspect of the relationship may take more concentration and awareness to achieve online, since it takes time, and has to be spelt out literally, rather than being picked up from non-verbal cues.

Neill also mentions the concept of starting each session

with a 'clean slate'. Silly idea I thought... surely the idea is to build up relationships from previous sessions/emails? However, if I carry into today's supervision the things that have not been good about the last one, I taint the relationship. You know the old saying during a marital dispute 'And in October 1975, you said...!' Whew, either deal with it in the next online contact, or let it go! That way we might get to serenity in our relationship.

#### REFERENCE

Neill, M. (2006). *Relationship Serenity*. Counselling at Work, pp 24-25. Summer. BACP Rugby

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## Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.