

Cyberwork

Congruency and the art of omni-channelling

Kate Anthony

How many forms of communication do you undertake in a working week? I'm going to hazard a guess and estimate at least six: face-to-face; email; chat messaging of some form; telephone; texting; and videoconferencing. Now add in the other forms of communication you may partake in: tweeting; Facebook (status updates and messaging); commenting and posting on LinkedIn; using an in-house project management platform; blogging; and maybe contributing to a forum or two. Taken as a whole, we are no longer subject to scrutiny just when we open our mouths to speak – we also have a very public status available for anyone with an internet connection to examine and judge us on.

I bring this up because I think we underestimate just how skilled we have been as a race at adapting to these new methods of communication – and what seemed to be a novel experience as we waited for the ping of, say, a new email message is now just part of our daily lives as we take our smartphones to bed for one last daily fix of being connected to each other.

It was once the case that we dressed a certain way, and adopted a certain face, when our clients were due to be visiting us. With technology enabling us to work from home, or on the move, this is becoming less the case. My core training as a psychotherapist taught me to sit a certain way to ensure my client's maximum therapeutic experience – now,

when talking with online clients, colleagues or trainees – I am sitting how I like for my own comfort because I trust that the client is going to benefit from me being relaxed and able to give him or her my full attention, rather than worrying if I have placed my knees in the wrong position.

All my online communication channels show me as my true congruent self. Although I choose what to post and when (and in particular when not to post at all), my personality and core character are generally heard loud and clear – whether writing a column, using chat to check in with my colleague, or composing an email to a vulnerable client. I may check in the mirror that my hair doesn't look weird before opening my video platform, but that is generally as far as I go in preparing for a meeting. By embracing all the forms of communication the World Wide Web has given me, I can be my natural congruent self across all of them. I call this having an omni-channelled presence.

Our profession has historically treated technology with suspicion, unable to marry a talking cure with the concept of computerisation. At the heart of this distrust has been the lack of in-room physical presence, as if it is our sitting position and gesturing that enable the client to explore him/herself and make changes in their lives. But it is precisely because I have had to work therapeutically without a physical presence, that I have been led to trust that it is my core ability as a therapist that does the enabling for the client as we work together intentionally (whatever modality of communication we choose) towards their improved mental health.

So consider your presence when using any or all of the ways of communicating I mentioned at the start of this column. Do you change your core self when using any of them, apart from the occasional closer attention to correct capitalisation of letters or accurate use of apostrophes? If not, you are as skilled at being omni-channelled as the modern client is likely to be, able to convey meaning and

therapeutic support however and whenever it is asked of you. If we consider the face-to-face conversation to be but one of many channels of communication, we can move away from the persistent need to identify the therapy taking place by the way it is being conducted, and move back to what therapy is essentially about – communication between one or more human beings.

I may communicate using non-verbal gestures, or my voice, or my typed word, or my tweet, or by smoke signals at a push – but my heart as a therapist is in all of them. The client is asking for you as a person to be present with them, and modern communication tools allow this to happen in myriad ways. Omni-channelled therapy means meeting the client where they are at, when they need it, as your congruent self. So don't throw out your chairs or your box of tissues just yet – but do welcome the dynamic, newer ways of communicating into your workplace practice as well.



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