

# PERSON-CENTERED COUNSELING IN ACTION

*David R. Buck*  
*Athens, Greece*

*Edited by Jeanne P. Stubbs*  
*State University of West Georgia*

*Edited and typed by Herschel McNabb*  
*State University of West Georgia*

## INTRODUCTION BY DAVID BUCK

In the film you are about to see, I will be entering into a relationship with a person I have never met before. I have absolutely no idea what she will talk about or share with me, but I do know that I will do my best to accompany her on a journey of self-exploration; in short I'll be client centered. Client-centered therapy is a unique way of being with another person. It is a theory developed by Carl Rogers, the American psychologist, and his colleagues more than fifty years ago. Client-centered therapists believe that within every human being there is a vast resource for altering their self, basic concepts for changing their attitudes for better self-understanding and even changing their behavior patterns, if only definable climate or attitudes can be displayed by the therapist. Now, what do I mean by these attitudes or what are these attitudes? Well, we think that the first attitude which might be helpful is being empathic with our client. Entering into that inner world as if it were my own. If that is present and I can communicate that to my client, we think that would be helpful. Secondly, if I can be accepting of my client, if I can be non-judgmental, accepting them where they are, without wishing to change them unconditionally, I think that might be helpful too. And thirdly, if I can be myself in the relationship without any facade, be genuine, we think that might be helpful. We feel that if these attitudes are adopted by the therapist and displayed to the client, then there is a high probability that the client will feel heard, understood and hopefully be able to make changes in their lives, if they wish. I now invite you all to join us in this relationship for the first session.

*Note: Comments by the therapist were inserted into the tape after the therapy session. The therapy session is between a client-centered therapist and an individual from Eastern Europe.*

T= Therapist C= Client

T: Welcome, glad you made it.

C: Thank-you, Yes I am glad to be here.

T: Please have a seat.

T: If you are ready to share something with me, I am really ready to listen to it.

C: Thank-you, yes, you know I would present you one of my problems and when I decided which one it should be, I think that the most or the biggest problem at the moment that bothers me is the problem with my managerial work that bothers me.

---

*Therapist's Comment: It is worth noting that in my opening invitation to the client I gave her permission to choose the area which she wanted to share. It is imperative in my view that the client has this power to choose, the essence of client-centered therapy.*

---

C: Oh, I feel that you know I am in a position of a leader of an institute for in-service training of teachers and the problem, when I want to describe it as most precisely as I can, is that I cannot find enough stimulating procedures to motivate my people to work in a responsible way, in as good partners and good counterparts, as experts and specialist and so on. So I am not excited with them and I was thinking if that the mistake or the fault is not in myself. Perhaps you could help me?

T: Well, I will try to do my best to help you help yourself.

C: Yes.

T: It seems to me what you are really saying is I want to motivate, to be part of a team somehow and to make the thing happen and you don't know how and that can be pretty frustrating for you.

C: From time to time it is frustrating because I think that I have been involved in that business with all my flesh, body and heart and all my psychic forces are implemented in this work for almost three years. And I don't think that the results are as good as they should be.

T: Giving everything you could both physically and mentally and it's still not happening!

C: Yes I don't know where the problem really is, the problem is in my dissatisfaction with myself, with my position and perhaps with my co-workers and perhaps the results of the institute.

T: It is not just you, it is a mixture of all those things?

C: Yes, when I am thinking over the whole matter, I think it should be divided and that not only myself is responsible for all those unsatisfactory things.

T: It is not all me you are saying, it is them too?

C: Sorry

T: It is not all me you are saying, it is them too, other people too?

C: First of all I felt that perhaps only the fault is in myself, it is difficult and as you said frustrating to bear all the responsibility upon yourself or upon myself and that is why I try to find somebody to load him with the responsibility for this state.

T: It's a big burden for you, but you are trying to off load some of that on to other people who have some responsibility, you think?

C: Yes and no, because also it is simpler to share the responsibility with somebody else, and then it is also more sensible, more comfortable and it is more pleasant.

T: Off load the pressure and responsible a little bit and that feels good, but it seems deep down you are blaming yourself?

C: Perhaps, probably yes..... probably yes..... because the external way how you do it is one thing, and the internal state of you mind is another one, and that is why I am here.

T: um huh.....You do one thing but deep down in here it's a real concern for you.

C: It is ..... It is..... it is um a possibility evidence that I have been involved in the business too deep. And I actually don't know how to retreat from it.

T: .Too deeply immersed and you would like to distance yourself from it a little bit, step back.

C: Yes..... I think so..... I think so because it takes me a lot of energy and a lot of time and sometimes, it also could be considered as a waste of time.

T: um huh.

C: Perhaps I am not right.

T: Giving all your energy into it and then not seeing any results, it's like a waste of time for you.

C: Yes..... because there is the outcome is the frustration and when you want to make the frustration more objective and so you have to find some reason and this reason can described or this condition can be described as a waste of time..... is one way how to do it.

T: Going in circles?

C: Yes, That I cannot manage the problem.

T: You're feeling pretty helpless at this time?

C: Not definitely..... Not definitely, not absolutely but you see that..... I take it very seriously. Perhaps too seriously.....Perhaps I shouldn't take it to seriously.

T: It seems like you're saying It is really important to me?

C: Yes it is..... um huh..... O.K..... so.

T: I think it seems like you're also saying I'm putting so much of my life into this?

C: Yes..... It might be true..... A true statement..... Too much of my life sacrificed in this work.

T: You're giving more than you really want to give without the results.

C: Perhaps..... not like this .....perhaps in the following way, I can give more if I see the results. (Laughs)

T: If I could see something at the end of it, I could give even more of myself.

C: Yes..... sure because it is a kind of satisfaction and if I am given the satisfaction that the power or my effort was positive or reflected or objectively presented somewhere. In that case, I think that, I can give more.

T: Yes, If I could give more.....

C: Yes.

T: Excuse me, go ahead.

C: I don't think this is not a matter of giving more energy or not enough energy, it is a matter of perhaps satisfaction if I can describe it now.

T: Yeah, if I could see something at the end of all this energy that I am putting in, it would be worthwhile.

C: Yeh, sure.

T: If I could see the result.....A positive result.

C: Yes..... going further perhaps that this is not a good attitude..... because this attitude gives you the evidence that I am oriented towards the professional achievement actually and not towards the people.....I don't know.

T: Yeah, so a bit of you doesn't like yourself very much, more about the result than the human beings that are involved in it or is that too much?

C: You know the problem is ..... it can be split again the professional achievement on the one hand side and on the other hand side actually still the people themselves. I cannot omit them from my life, and I cannot omit them from my work because I live with them. I work with them; they reflect my attitudes; and in a certain way I reflect their way of communicating with myself and things like this.

T: It's all so interwoven very much.

C: I would say..... yes.....yes.

T: It seems you are also saying I would like balance between the professional success and the human relations within that?

C: It might also be considered in this way..... yes..... It is a good way how to think about yourself. I am not still quite sure what is the main reason, but if you could perhaps summarize or what is in your opinion, where is actually the problem and what are reasons for the problem as you can see it?

T: As I can see it?

C: Yes.

T: I don't think I could do that, I think it is more important that you do that, you see it um.....in a sense, rather than me do it, I'm not there. But I'm willing to help you explore that.

---

*Therapist's Comments: It's quite natural in our society to seek experts to fix things. If something is wrong with our car, we send it to a garage for a mechanic. So it seemed the natural thing for the client's to ask me as an expert to solve her problem in her work place. But I believe that the client is the expert for problems in her life. I did my best to show her that I trusted her to solve that problem, but I would accompany her on that journey of exploration.*

---

C: What would you recommend or how would you see the way how I deal with people? I think that I communicate with them in a way which I personally think is democratic way or the way of leadership I apply more democracy than authoritarian; and sometimes people, again in my opinion, are not able to accept this way of democracy.

T: So you would like to involve them in the decision making process.....

C: Yes, definitely.

T: Some people can't handle that very well.

C: They actually expect from me to give a very precisely formulated directions- I mean orders- what to do, how to do, by what time to fulfill the task, even in what form to present the task, in written or oral..... and they also expect me to give them very precise formulations of the procedures, how to fulfill the task. I don't think that this is actually O.K. and if they should change their perceptions or the way of handling effects, I think that they should be as autonomous as everybody should.

T: You would like for them to feel autonomous and see that's a positive way to work.

C: Yes.

C: To be autonomous, it doesn't mean to be independent but this should be the way to the independence.

T: You want them to be autonomous, but part of a team.

C: Sure, yes, autonomous individuals in a team.

T: Yeah.

C: And uh.....they should be self-responsible and self-reliable, self-conscious and self-acting.

T: You would like them.....Are you saying you would like them to be more like me?

C: You mean myself?

T: um huh.

C: I don't know if I am actually am the being I have been speaking about..... you know, I was thrown into the water, to say in a metaphoric way, and I had to learn to swim, otherwise, I would be drowned. And I think that I succeeded in learning swimming.

T: You were thrown in the deep end and you survived.

C: Yes..... up till now I have survived.

C: I think that this is not very difficult. That's why it makes me.....crazy when they are not so self-confident and autonomous, once again to say.

T: I dived in the deep end and learned to swim, and maybe you could too, if you tried.

C: Yes.....perhaps.....perhaps, and uh.....perhaps my expectations are too big-ger than they really can fulfill. This might also be true.

T: You're thinking well, am I expecting too much of these people?

C: Probably yes.....probably yes.....perhaps they are not able to see the source of the work and activity. Perhaps I am able to see it, and, perhaps I am not able to give them the right idea or the sense of the work.

T: It's almost like, You're saying I can feel it, but they don't have the feel that I have for it, the sensitivity.

C: Yes, un huh.

T: And that's frustrating.

C: It is.....it is a little bit. Because it makes you..... it makes you less effective and but on the other hand it gives me reasons to think of your work and to evaluate it from the beginning till the end and to search for main milestones in this work. To look around you, because I think that can't work with my co-workers, I cannot be the only member of the army. I am the only member, but the army consists of .....

T: Right, you're sick of being just a General out there, you'd like it to be an office team, somehow?

C: Somehow.....because you know, if I don't think that if I am a real General I don't think that I am a real General - because General, it would demand perhaps other way of dealing with people. And this is the way I actually don't think it is the right way.

T: Seems you are saying it is not the right way, it is not me, my way of being.

C: It is not my way of being..... with my people. No.....No.....so.....I suppose that perhaps one of the ways how to solve this problem because this actually is a real problem for me..... is to..... is to inform them of my expectations..... or to let them speak their expectations of myself.

T: So one of the ways you are thinking is actually being honest with them and sharing with them how you really feel about the situation.

C: Yes.

T: And I think you also said creating an environment which makes it easier for them to share how they feel about the situation.

C: Yes, right.....Then, perhaps the other ways to be very strict with them when they don't fulfill a task, to give them the feeling that they have not fulfilled it correct or in time or you know..... or in that quality or in a sufficient quality.

T: To be up front and straight with them.

C: Yes.

T: This is .....

C: But I am asking myself is this the right way how to teach them?

T: That's the big question.

C: Yes.

T: um huh Seems you're also saying should I be teaching them something O.K. should I be helping them to learn something?

C: Yes, if I should choose one of these possibilities, I would prefer for the second one.

T: Helping them to learn something.

C: Helping them to learn something, not to teach them.

T: Right.

C: So..... when I should or when I come to the end of the conclusion of that. Perhaps I am too strict, perhaps not, I think that these people are the reflection of myself.

T: They may be like me.

C: The reflection, not perhaps in that positive way they are not like me. That is one I refuse to accept. I think that perhaps they are a reflection perhaps of my habits, of my attitudes, my way of work. And well if this is not correct perhaps, their way of work, their way of attitudes, their expectations is not correct too.

T: They could be modeling themselves on you, some of their attitudes?

C: Not owning or refusing my attitudes and my way.

T: Not accepting them.

C: Not accepting them, yes.

T: What you would really like them to do is to accept.

C: Probably, yes..... but not to accept me as a person but accept perhaps the volume of the work or the individual task or the way this institute should direct the activity and so on.

T: And so you are saying, I don't worry too much about you accepting me as a person, but I want you to accept my philosophy?

C: Yeah, exactly..... exactly not me as a person but perhaps the philosophy..... I don't think that I embody the philosophy of the institute but in a certain way or measure perhaps yes..... yes..... This is one of the main problems and uh at a recent time it really bothered me too much. I have been dealing with it after work and also in my leisure time. So you know that perhaps this is pretty natural that you have work, but when your work or my work is one of the main parts of my life, I am experiencing it not in the limited or during the limited time but actually the whole day long.

T: Permeating right through your whole life and your leisure time too.

C: I told you at the beginning that I think that I have been giving a lot of energy into my work so..... no wonder.

T: You are right, You said..... It's a part..... It's my life.

C: Everything, it is my life, it is my life for the time being. It might change, of course, but not very decisively. Because... I suppose that the work is really a permanent part of your life when you really don't work you actually..... you loose something of yourself.

T: The work intensity, the work you are doing right now, part of you will disappear. Do you mean?

C: Perhaps yes, because you don't activate your efforts and your energy, you let it somewhat down, you let it sleep. You let it .....unused, unutilized.

T: Utilized and it goes dead?

C: I think that the absence of work or activity is the way of decay, utter decay; so that is why perhaps why you are here in this work.

C: soft laugh.

T: soft laugh.

C: I don't know.....You know that, each coin has got two sides and my way of looking or viewing.....

T: Un huh.

C: These two sides is to say.....or to be in doubt or looking and to say I was looking at the back side of the coin.

T: Look at both sides.

C: Look at both sides, but I always have got some doubts of things being right, or being not right.

T: Never quite sure.

C: I would say that I am always very sure about the correctness of things, but I think that it is interesting but also so necessary to ask questions, and try to see things also from another point of view. Sometimes it is also how to express your hesitation. I hesitate.....I hesitate.....yes..

T: But your explanation of the hesitation is in a sense to research and analyze, and to look at both sides of the coin as you said.

C: The hesitation makes me explore things.

T: It is the other way around, the hesitation makes you.....

C: Yes, it is the outcome of the investigation of the activity, no, on the contrary the hesitation is perhaps the stimulus.

T: Right..... I'm sorry the time seems to have beaten us. We have to stop now.

C: Yes.

T: Is that O.K. with you?

C: Yes, it is O.K. with me.

T: Thanks for trusting me.

---

*Therapist's closing remarks: I feel I did my utmost to follow my clients and accompany them on their journey. If we had more sessions together, I think we'd travel even further. Most of the time I think I was in synche with my client.*

*What I do know is that they felt heard by me and hopefully understood.*

*It was a moving experience to be trusted with another person's feelings and a great privilege.*

## **Policy Statement**

The Person-Centered Journal is sponsored by the Association for Development of the Person-Centered Approach (ADPCA). The publication is intended to promote and disseminate scholarly thinking about person-centered principles, practices, and philosophy.

All materials contained in The Person-Centered Journal are the property of the ADPCA, which grants reproduction permission to libraries, researchers, and teachers to copy all or part of the materials in this issue for scholarly purposes with the stipulation that no fee for profit be charged to the consumer for the use or possession of such copies.