

Robinsons on Parallel Counseling Questions from a Genius

Gerhard Baumer, teacher at ICASSI, and therapist for a number of years was introduced by Paul Rasmussen, Core Professor at the Adler School of Professional Psychology, Chicago, as a genius in the practice of Adlerian Life Style. At my first ICASSI in Tennessee, Gerhard taught five of us experienced counselors how to use dreams and early memories in our Adlerian therapy. Some five years later this Berlin based therapist, at ICASSI 2013, bravely asked for a volunteer from 200+ therapists to come to the stage for a counseling demonstration.

Who knows who would respond to such an awesome invitation? He did not accept volunteers from those with whom he had worked before. He asked for someone he did not know. One courageous woman stepped forward and received valuable insights for her courage and cooperation. The remainder of us participants sat spellbound as a master in the therapeutic world showed us his skill.

To share the penetrating and useful questions that Gerhard asked is the purpose of today's column. The presenting problem from the client was that her friendships seemed to break up with bad feelings, and she felt clueless as to why. So the questions begin:

- How is life for you here and now?
- What is your work?
- What is important for you in your life at the moment?
- How is your health?
- Give me one example of the break up problem.
- Could it be that you are trying to take control?
- Tell me a childhood memory.
- What's going on in your mind in the memory?
- Which part of your memory would you choose for a snapshot?
- Have you survived quite a few things?
- Who was there for you in those situations?
- Do you have examples of friendships that have lasted a long time?
- How is it just to be with people?

Holism (seeing the client as the total of personality, physique, emotions, brain, as well as the unique view of life) is very important for Adlerian understanding. Otherwise it the therapist can only work with facts and not with personal entity. In order to get this holistic view Gerhard Baumer used the empathy he has trained for and practiced for many years. From these questions, some that Gerhard uses with many clients; some that he derives from the counseling situation, he provides the insight he has seen from his years of experience and the information the client has provided.

“When people come into your life, your life changes completely. Sometimes there will be disappointments, similar to what happened in your childhood. You can think to yourself,

“What can I do differently?” You can get ideas of what you can do differently by talking with the person involved and an outside person.”

Each client is different; each memory, dream, story, and adventure is different. The counselor’s job is to see things as the client sees them and objectively point out other ways see challenges. Seeing things in a different way frees up the client to behave in a different way, giving life a new direction, on the path to peace of mind.

In the world of common chat, seeing things from a different perspective has many labels such as reframing (as in looking at a situation from a different angle) or giving someone the benefit of the doubt or walking in another person’s shoes.

When Gerhard Baumer taught 5 of us the use of dreams and early recollections, he often asked us as therapists to put ourselves in the dream or the early memory of the client. In a group setting, we therapists were able to benefit from the experience as therapeutic and educational just like the client.

The morning demonstration at Wageningen, Netherlands, set the tone for the day of classes and experiences. The classes that met following the coffee and conversation time continued the discussion of the skills so artfully demonstrated for us. We participants were grateful for Gerhard’s 22 years as a teacher and facilitator at the International Adlerian Summer Institute.

Baumer, G., Notes taken from Demonstration during Bloc I, ICASSI, Wageningen, Netherlands, July 23, 2013.