

## Book Review

### *Using Technology to Improve Counseling Practice: A Primer for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

**J. Michael Tyler and Russell Sabella**

American Counseling Association [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)

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*Using Technology to Improve Counseling Practice: A Primer for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* is a comprehensive guide to using technology to improve counseling. It describes how technology has swiftly advanced in the last 20 years and claims that a significant number of counselors have not achieved technological competence. This book may be helpful to all mental health clinicians interested in using technology in research, supervision, and counseling to maximize time and resources.

The book is organized around the 12 technical competencies for counselors established by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision ([acesonline.net/competencies.htm](http://acesonline.net/competencies.htm)). The first chapter gives an overview of the book. The second chapter provides technological definitions and a description of what is meant by technological literacy. It addresses the use of recording devices in therapy, recommends basic equipment for tape recording sessions, and explores an array of digital Audio/Visual technologies, including web cams and video conferencing.

Chapters Three and Four discuss how software can be useful in helping counselors improve productivity. For example, spreadsheets and word processing computer programs can be used to organize notes and data; statistical software can provide counselors with assistance in understanding and processing third party payments.

Chapter Five provides counselors with vital information on navigating computer and internet-based personality, diagnostic, and other assessments. As technology advances, assessments will be available online for both the general public and for counselors to use in their practice. Administering these measures via a computer may become both cost effective and time efficient. The chapter offers selection criteria to consider when choosing an assessment and addresses confidentiality issues.

Chapter Six discusses databases that assist counselors with research. The authors explain how journal articles and publications are accessed electronically, using PsycINFO and ERIC as examples. This information about electronic databases is helpful because it discusses how to navigate these systems and how they are organized, allowing a researcher to better direct searches and compile more focused information.

Chapter Seven reviews issues surrounding e-mail communications with clients and the use of list serves—e.g., confidentiality, reliability, and other ethical concerns. It has an especially interesting discussion of the ethics and implications of charging for e-mail communications.

Chapters Eight and Nine address evaluating the validity of information on mental health websites and in postings and gives suggestions about how counselors can help their clients do the same.

Chapters Ten through Thirteen address online continuing education and training, provide information on how to evaluate on-line training, and explore current and future cyber-counseling trends and legal and ethical issues surrounding technology and counseling.

Tyler and Sabella provide a thorough and detailed explanation of the many ways that technology and counseling converge. They present a great deal of information in a well-organized and easily understood manner, so much information that their book sometimes reads like a reference text. *Using Technology* will appeal to both novice and technologically-sophisticated practitioners, supervisors, and researchers.

One specific area of concern for person-centered counselors is the authors' stance on the role of the counselor in educating clients about technology. Tyler and Sabella posit that counselors have a duty to provide "assistance and guidance, recommendations and training where necessary, to help clients in this aspect of their growth" (p. 161). In other words, it is their belief that counselors should help clients learn how to navigate computer resources and are remiss if they don't offer their assistance in this area. Helping clients gain technological confidence however, is not necessarily congruent with my Person-Centered stance. I suspect this may hold true for other Person-Centered practitioners. As Rogers (1983) noted in *Freedom to Learn in the 80s*: "As a psychological counselor, dealing with students and others in personal distress, I have found that talking to them, giving advice, explaining the facts, telling them what their behavior meant, did not help" (p. 25).

This book is, nevertheless, important to the Person-Centered Approach (PCA) community. Staying current and technologically literate is critical to all mental health professionals. Keeping abreast of technological changes and staying informed about possible changes will help us ensure that PCA voices are not lost and that the practice of PCA is not compromised as we head into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Tyler and Sabella do not advocate cyber-counseling but, if current trends continue, it is not unreasonable to imagine that cyber-counseling will become a challenge for the PCA. As a Person-Centered counselor, I see it as my responsibility to protect and advocate for Rogers' core conditions for psychotherapeutic personality change and the deeply intimate counseling relationships they entail. Yet, will deeply intimate relationships be possible or potent if psychological contact is made in cyber-space instead of physical space? Is it possible to convey genuineness, empathy, and unconditional positive regard from a remote location? Is it possible to perceive incongruence or congruence through a computer? Do e-mail communications or phone calls equal in-person contact? All of these questions are central to the debate regarding how counseling will be practiced in the future. Now is the time to for Person-Centered practitioners to ponder these questions.

## References

Rogers, C. R. (1983). *Freedom to learn for the 80's*. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.

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