

BEING A TRAINER FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY – THE BEGINNING OF A NEW CAREER



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Abstract

The article is a recommendation for those who want to become trainers, about what it means to work with groups and what are the prerequisites and responsibilities of a trainer. It is detailed based on the author's experience of over 20 years as a trainer and her work as WAPP assessor, between 2019 - 2021. It can be a good guide for those who want to become trainers in the future.

Keywords: psychotherapy trainer, pre-requisites, responsibilities, positive psychotherapy

Introduction

This article is a personal reflection on my experience as a trainer and my last 2 years as a member of the interview committee for the certification and re certification of WAPP trainers. It is not an official WAPP statement, even if I am a member of the WAPP Board.

As in any profession, being a trainer requires a certain level of competence: knowledge, skills, and a specific attitude of working with groups. During the last years I've see that there is a wave through psychotherapists: when they start to work with clients/patients, they believe that the next level of development is to become a trainer. And this way of thinking is not correct. To be a trainer is another profession, another career, and is not the end but the beginning of a new career development.

This article is intended to be a pleading for the career of a trainer as a profession, with the emphasis on those aspects that are mandatory for those who want to embrace it.

Discussion

Since October 2020 WAPP has organized more than 100 interviews with candidates who want to become Basic Trainers and Master Trainers and with those who are already trainers and need re-certification. In the end of these more than 100 meetings, I have 2 conclusions regarding those who want to become trainers and why people are attracted by the career of a trainer:

- A. *I discovered that there are 3 kinds of candidates who want to become trainers:*
 1. candidates with a low level of awareness regarding the responsibilities of a trainer but

who are very enthusiastic and involved. They believe that being a trainer means to have some experience as a psychotherapist, to have the willingness to teach what you know, to have energy and enthusiasm to lead a group.

2. candidates with a low level of the ability to work with groups, but with a good level of self-reflection and knowledge, very responsible and anxious, especially regarding the responsibility of being a trainer,
 3. candidates who understood that, as a trainer, the main material they are working with is themselves. These people have not only a good level of knowledge and experience in psychotherapy but also a high level of reflection, self-reflection, self-development, and inclination to work with groups.
- B. *From the three pillars of training in psychotherapy: theory, self-discovery, and supervision, almost everybody wants to be a self-discovery trainer. Almost all the candidates believe self-discovery is the easiest part of the training for psychotherapy, it is for self-reflection and having fun. From my experience, self-discovery is the most difficult part of training in psychotherapy, so I recommend this as the last step during a trainer's career.*

If we try to have the big picture of the profession of a trainer, as in any career, we need a range of **prerequisites**:

- As a trainer for psychotherapy, some experience is mandatory. Beyond that as a participant in a group. A minimum of 3 - 5 years of working with patients with various problems (non-pathological and pathological) is a must-have experience.
- The fact that someone finishes training in psychotherapy is mandatory for a trainer but would not be enough. Some experiences of coordinating groups (support groups, intervision groups, psychotherapy groups etc) can be experiences that confirm or invalidate the orientation of someone to become a trainer.
- Attending conferences and congresses, coordinating some workshops, and having feedback from the participants, could also be an experience which will influence your decision to become a trainer.

- Feedback from your trainer(s) during the self-discovery and theory modules, regarding your inclination for leading groups, should be also a good in-put for those who want to become a trainer.

Be aware that being a teacher at a university does not automatically mean that someone is a good trainer for psychotherapy. University teaching is focus more on the transfer of knowledge. As a trainer for psychotherapy, the teacher should know how to develop specific abilities and an appropriate attitude for a psychotherapist.

As trainers, we have **4 main responsibilities**:

- For oneself,
- For other trainers and organizers involved in the training process,
- For the trainees/ participants,
- For WAPP and its standards

Responsibilities for oneself – means to be sufficiently reflexive and sincere with oneself about “WHY I want to become a trainer”?

- What is the motive for this decision: do I have a passion for working with groups? Is there any willingness and inclination to share my experience with others? Is this about reputation and status? Is this about money? Is it about power?
- Do I have the abilities to work with groups? As psychotherapists we learn to work individually and after some years of experience, it could be difficult to change this inclination. As trainers, we work not only with the group of participants but also as a team of trainers and with the organizers, and sometimes with candidate trainers. Ask yourself if working in group(s) and with a team is your ability.
- Am I balanced enough to keep my energy during a seminar, whatever is the dynamic of the group? Especially people who choose to become trainers because they need to get energy and self-worth from the group are in danger of losing their self-esteem and of turning the dynamic of the group, so that a training, about knowledge and abilities and the trainer as a model, is transformed into a course, only about knowledge and the trainer as an authority.

Responsibilities for other trainers and organizers involved in the training process

- A trainer for psychotherapy should know how to work in a team. We are not alone during the process of teaching Positive Psychotherapy. There are always other trainers and sometimes organizers who are involved in this process. To know how to work on a team is one mandatory competency for a trainer in Positive Psychotherapy.
- To provide feedback after your module to the main trainer and/ or to the organizer is also a responsibility of the trainer.
- As a main trainer for a group, it is helpful and mandatory to have the bigger picture of the group dynamic and how the learning objectives were achieved during the module/ seminar.

Responsibility for trainees/ participants

- I recommend to candidates who wants to become trainers to start with theory modules. A good start could be to choose, along with the main trainer, a few theory sequences to teach, topics in which the candidate feels comfortable, topics that s/he is passionate about, about which s/he reads constantly.
- A trainer must know (and have abilities for):
 - Training curriculum in PPT and learning objectives for each seminar/module
 - The content for each seminar/module
 - Group dynamics and especially how to deal with difficult situations
 - Teaching didactics
- Another responsibility of a trainer is to be prepared with your own cases. To choose and reflect on some cases you have had as a psychotherapist and to share them with the participants if/ when this is needed.
- Do not stop your practice with clients and patients when you become a trainer. It is a requirement to stay connected with your work as a psychotherapist.
- After each module, ask for feedback from participants, reflect, and reshape the way you teach the module if it is necessary.

Responsibility for WAPP and its standards

Beside all the above responsibilities, there is a major one regarding WAPP and its standards. The last

mandate of WAPP board of directors is focused on enhancing and maintaining the quality of Positive Psychotherapy's way of teaching around the world. As a trainer you must know the standards, ethics, content, and WAPP requests as a school of psychotherapy. My recommendations are:

- Read and be aware about WAPP standards, curricula of the Basic and Master Course, guidelines for Self-experience/ Self-discovery in PPT, etc.
- Apply all the required steps in organizing a group: initial interview, group documentation, examination standards, curriculum etc. All these recommended steps have years of experience behind them and will make your work as a trainer easier.
- If you work with an organizer, be sure that s/he is respecting the WAPP standards (see WAPP website). This is not only his/ her responsibility.
- Use the transcultural environment which WAPP provides, to enhance your knowledge and experience as a trainer. Attend seminars, conferences, congresses, and other events WAPP provides for its members.
- Write articles, lead workshops at WAPP events, expose yourself and ask for feedback. Let yourself be seen to be sure that what you do is aligned with our school's direction of development. Share your experiences, talk with other colleagues from other groups, centers, countries.
- Get in contact with WAPP Headquarters when you have questions, get involved in organizing events, working with subgroups etc. Use the possibilities WAPP provides to all of us for your own development.

Motivate your participants to do the same, inform them about WAPP and its offer of development for each member.

Conclusion

Do the best you can with your resources. Be aware of them, put them to work, develop and sand them as much as you live. And remember 'If you want something you never had, then do something you never did.' Nossrat Peseschkian.

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