

# USING ADVISOR PERSONAL SELF-DISCLOSURE TO BUILD EMPATHY AND TRUST WITH STUDENTS

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Eric Beckstrom

[ebeckstr@indiana.edu](mailto:ebeckstr@indiana.edu)

Center for Students in Transition

Indiana University Bloomington

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# AGENDA



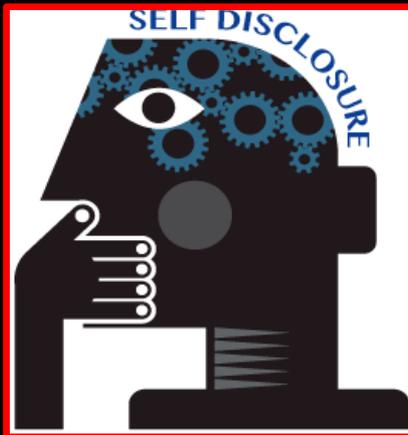
- Housekeeping items
- Brief background, and some self-disclosure
- Definitions of self-disclosure
- Best practices
- The utility of self-disclosure as an advising tactic
- Discussion

# SOME QUICK HOUSEKEEPING

- 1) Who the heck am I?!
- 2) I am an interloper. Not (currently) a career advisor. Please don't ask me to leave.
- 3) Self-disclosure of personal details to students (or patients/clients) is not an uncontroversial topic, and is as much a stylistic concern as it is a practical concern.  
So each advisor can (and should) determine where their *own* comfort zone is.
- 4) I don't claim expertise in practice of self-disclosure or related research - simply some experience with the tactic - and I'm eager to learn from you!

# FOR STARTERS, SOME SELF-DISCLOSURE

Briefly - advising background and self-disclosure evolution & a story or two about adaptive advising.



# SOME DEFINITIONS OF "SELF-DISCLOSURE"

There's a rich history of practice and controversy re. using self disclosure as a practice in mental health counseling and psychoanalytic practice (e.g., concerns about patient transference to the therapist).

"Therapist Self-Disclosure: Research-Based Suggestions for Practitioners," *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 2003

"Therapist self-disclosures are verbal statements that reveal something personal about the therapist...[with] at least seven subtypes: disclosures of facts, feelings, insight, strategies, reassurance/support, challenge, and immediacy."

# SOME DEFINITIONS OF "SELF-DISCLOSURE"

*Journal of Clinical Psychology (cont'd)*

"Through such disclosures, the analyst is...a real human presence with a range of emotionality, including such feelings as confusion, sadness, annoyance, envy, and humor. Furthermore, some analysts are revealing not only their emotional presence but also are sharing information about their lives outside of therapy, including illness, loss, sexual orientation, and childlessness" (my emphasis).

# SOME DEFINITIONS OF "SELF-DISCLOSURE"

*Mosby's Medical Dictionary, 9<sup>th</sup> ed, 2012.*

"The process by which one person lets his or her inner being, thoughts, and emotions be known to another." (So, not simply biographical factoids, according to this definition.)

*The Oxford Dictionary of Sports Science & Medicine, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, 2007.*

"Sharing one's feelings and thoughts with others. Self-disclosure is an important aspect of a coach's behaviour. Some coaches prefer being reserved, and wish to stay detached and objective; others prefer to be open and share with their athletes the way they feel about events, believing that self-disclosure generates trust" (my emphasis).

# SOME DEFINITIONS OF "SELF-DISCLOSURE"

*"The Use of Self-Disclosure in Academic Advising," Simone Carnegie, The Mentor, 2004.*

One of the main goals of self-disclosure in advising is "reducing the dissimilarity between advisers and students."

This point gets to the heart of *empathy*.

(Though Carnegie focuses mostly on advisors sharing their own past "scholastic struggles.")

JUST TO BREAK THE MONOTONY OF ALL THESE  
SLIDES THAT HAVE A BUNCH OF WORDS AND  
NO IMAGES...



# SHOW OF HANDS 1

From conversations with career advisor colleagues at IU it seems self-disclosure is fairly ubiquitous in student sessions - advisors telling students about advisor's career path & related challenges...



## SHOW OF HANDS 2

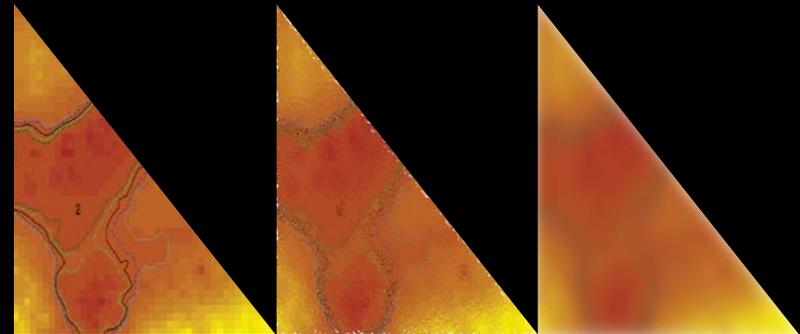
Who has used, in your advising practice, self-disclosure of more personal challenges you have faced in your personal or professional life, personal shortcomings you've had to work on, autobiographical details you would consider personal...?



# TOWARD BEST PRACTICES

Self-disclosure is ubiquitous in our lives. So:

- It's largely a matter of degree and circumstance.
- Your & your student's comfort zones may fluctuate (that's my sense, anyway), according to:
  - Mood, how day-week-life is going
  - The given topic
  - Environment
  - "The moment"
- In any case, try to think about your comfort zone in general, and what is and is not off-limits.
- It's okay to experiment! - as long as all other best practices apply.
- Self-disclosure usually begins with the student.
- Ask permission: "That reminds me of something I've experienced. Would you mind if I tell you a little about it?"



# SOME BEST PRACTICES



*Brooke Halpern, PhD, IUB Counseling and Psychological Services, interview, 2016*

- Self-disclose only if you are comfortable with it.
- Ask yourself what the purpose of your self-disclosure is. Is it pertinent to the moment?
- Ask yourself if it will help the student, and how? (E.g., will it help normalize and validate their experience, convey that they are not unusual in their experience, that others have gone through it?)
- Perhaps not current examples from your life, if especially personal.
- Don't go into too much detail. If it requires too much explanation it's probably too deep or the details too gratuitous.
- Explain, "The reason I'm telling you this is because..." Context!

# SOME BEST PRACTICES

## Additional self-disclosure best practices

- Students can form negative impressions if SD used too often, and the bulk adds up to too much disclosed (*Communication Teacher*).
  - Can happen in a session or across multiple sessions.
  - "Use self-disclosure judiciously; make sure it will really help the client." (*30 Tips for New Career Counselors*, Maureen Nelson, National Career Development Association, 2014)
- Purpose is not to meet the emotional needs of the advisor.
- Spot check student's body language and verbal cues: Does the conversation seem to be helping them feel better?
- In the moment or over time: does it seem to help improve their decision-making efficacy, efficiency, on-the-fencedness?

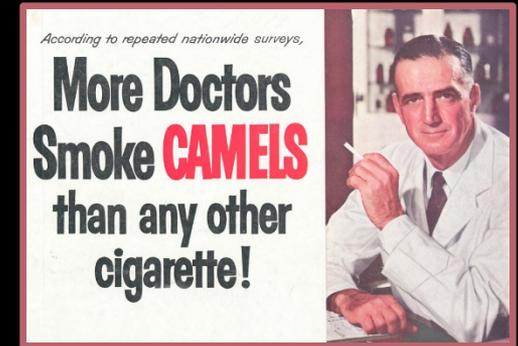
# SOME BEST PRACTICES: IU HR'S PERSPECTIVE

*Rob Springston, JD, Indiana University Director of Employee Relations*

- Self-disclosure is acceptable, as long as it's not required, and the employee is comfortable using it.
- It's fine to use "every tool in the tool kit."

In his teaching and mentoring, Rob himself uses self-disclosure

- "It must be relevant, so as not to lose credibility with the student."
- Tell them, "Here is what has worked for me..."  
"Here is my experience..."

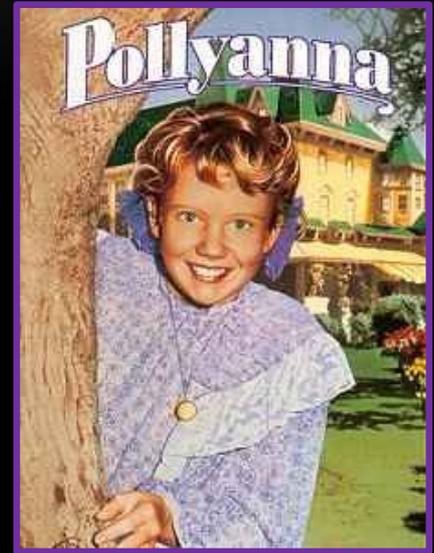


# THE UTILITY OF SELF-DISCLOSURE AS AN ADVISING TACTIC

On the one hand:

"Counselor self-disclosure...increased participant career decision self-efficacy...and increased appraisals of meaning in life for participants..."

*"Randomized trial of a calling-infused career workshop incorporating counselor self-disclosure," Journal of Vocational Behavior, Dika & Stegerb, 2008*



On the other hand:

One study (albeit an unpublished dissertation) found no significant outcome distinctions between using and not using self-disclosure in career advising calling/vocation-infused workshops.

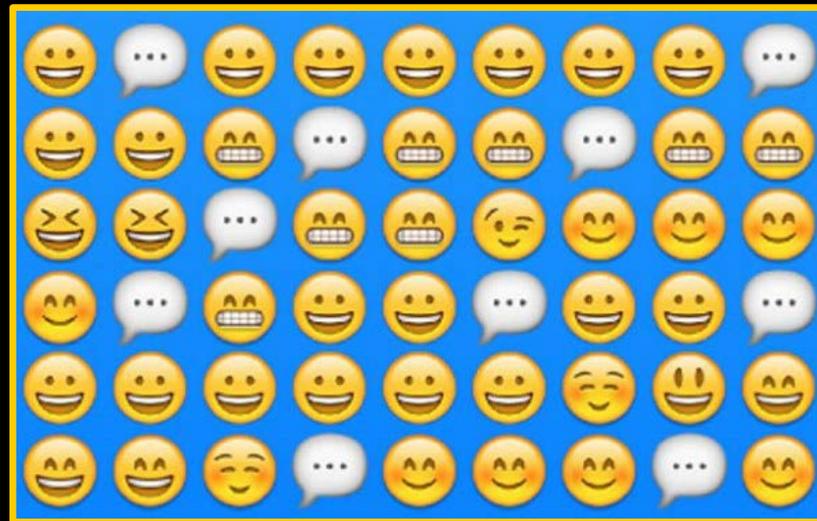
*"Testing the influence of counselors' self-disclosure in career counseling:..."  
Sendrowit , 2011*

# THE UTILITY OF SELF-DISCLOSURE AS AN ADVISING TACTIC

- *build empathy*
- *which facilitates the forming of a connection*
- *which can lead to more open and honest communication with student*
- *which leads to more effective information gathering*
- *which leads to more effective assessment of options*
- *which leads to better student Next Steps and Task Lists*
- *which lead to more effective subsequent advisor-student interactions*
- *which leads to who knows what other seeds being planted (We don't always witness the long term positive impact of our work!)*



# Discussion | Questions



ebeckstr@indiana.edu

#LLAP