**Social Work and dancing**

Today I´m sharing you my knowledge about social work, and it´s not an evidendence based or experience based knowledge, it is more like user’s knowledge.

I know that you think comparing social work and dancing is weird or at least uncommon… or putting these two together is like hotpot. But I think that if you can make good hotpot then you are an excellent cook, because all ingredients must be in the right position with each other, only then it will taste great. Actually it doesn´t matter what you compare social work with – gardening or cooking – you can find similarities from everywhere.

I started my ballroom dancing lessons when I was 7 years old and danced 8 years alltogether, but finished before professional level. So I still remember some things about dancing and for what judges give you points in competitions. There are at least nine features in a good dancing performance. These are: steps, moves, body control, listening to the music/rhytm, listening the lyrics, chemistry between dancing partners, history/tradition of each dance, love of dancing, trust of the floor. Please notify that all this is a student view of things, classic dancing book can give other perspectives.

**The steps and moves**

In social work you have real tools in your pocket, like counselling, services, benefits. In dancing learning steps is actually quite easy, it´s a mechanic procedure. You give your brain a command which gives signal to foot to step, you only have to remember that you can make a step with the foot, which is free for movement. You have two legs, so step on them. Same pattern goes also for working with the client.

In social work you have to learn the techniques, the laws, regulations and how to implement those. Logic thinking helps a lot but also learning to give what kind of technique to use and how much to give/to dose comes from the real practise. It´s hard to dose, because you have to diagnose at first, and remember that early diagnosing gives always better results. Dosing also means calculating proportion of counselling, services and benefits – the hardest clients are the ones who need all three and something extra.

**The body control**

Body control is already much harder to learn, you need a lot of practise and sometimes even a little bit of virtuosity of an actor. Body control and moves seem to be impossible at first but, then you have to focus and realize what to do, maybe you have to take this move to a smaller parts, then practise over and over again, and then you realize that you can tango. Social work is so much about control, whose body is in charge? What a great opportunity to come with your problem and just hand it over and look with big eyes how social worker struggles. Controlling your body language is hard, to show respect and warmth and also at the same time that you won´t take over the control of somebody else’s life. But of course if you have done wrong, your body is responsible – that´s the hardest thing to deal with in social work. As an expert you always have responsibility of using control. In political terms, the wolf is not a vegetarian but sheeps have power over wolf when they gather. Do you know who stays in the middle?! The body control while dancing is much easier, believe me.

**Listening to the rhytm /music**

Listening to rhytm equals in social work what client tried to say – it will be always difficult I guess…you never know what the composer really meant when he wrote the song, but you can try to guess, same with the client. In social work, like every counselling business, they teach you to train to be a good listener. You remember the techniques of rephrase or being a mirror ... so mirror inside yourself the music, so besides data you are able to hear the message. What the „composer“ really graves for.

Another thing which is crucial in dancing/listening – the pause. Pause is not a stupid silence, pause is so i n t e n s i v e. Pause between something is meant for you to underline some things. Pause in dancing is also for gathering strength for another quick movement. Very important is to keep in mind that doing the pause you cannot really show at all that you are tired. The pause is wasted then.

**Listening to the lyrics**

Listening to the lyrics sounds easier than listening to the music. But it´s not. In social work listening the lyrics means what the client said. Why listening lyrics is hard, because we are trained to read more from the appearance, looking behind the words, from the databases and so on – it´s because we don´t trust the client as the expert, expert of his life. And we like to construct the client ourselves. We compare the client with other clients, we like to believe that some things that she says are not true or she points out the importance of wrong things. Sometimes you don´t have to look behind the words of the client. Please just hear the story, it´s his/her truth and world, respect it.

**Chemistry between partners**

That was the hardest thing for me in dancing, that´s why we quit. Little bit of chemistry is not good enough. To become a good dancer/social worker at first you have to understand the essence of the dance, realize how to show it and put it into practise. I mean maybe you are not sometimes so well educated specialist but you really ARE with partner/client. You just feel them, how to approach – that makes you an expert. In dancing competitions these are the winners, because they have that something extra – like a bonus. if you have the chemistry, it´s so much easier. Of course for good chemistry you have to be honest and respect each-other. But don´t expect miracles, your partner/client is human. Also evaluate each-other capability of changing things and power to make it real, you as the leading partner have more knowledges to do that.

**Historical background**

To dance well you need to know the history of dance, then maybe you have better possibilities express the essence of dance. Let´s take Tango as an example. Tango comes originally from Argentina, although it´s Standard dance, people think it´s Latin, because it´s temperament is very different from Standard dances, it´s energetic. It´s actually knife-fighting dance. Every client has it´s own history, the way of doing things. If he is used to act like this, you cannot change it at once. I hope you relate the feeling that clients can surprise you by acting sometimes like Latin and other second so slow – like Walz (classic Standard dance). There is a beliefe that tango is the dance which you can love or hate, being between is impossible.

**Importance of loving the things you do**

To feel joy, you have to love what you do. We have to love social work otherwise we are not able to do this job, at least not for long. When you love, you see things in longer run, you are inspired. I can tell one story about my experience in dancing camp. I was 13 years old, for that time I had already danced 6 years and then my ballroom teacher said during these 5 days we will only deal with Slow Waltz, 8 hours per day – because no one of you can really dance Slow Waltz. Can you imagine the same client for 5 days 8 hours per day!!! On the first day we made only squatting and standing up slowly, so we could get the taste of the difference between tide and low tide. So that´s love of hard work!

**Trust**

I should have started from this –You have to trust the floor, it´s most important. Floor is basic. Floor existed before and after the dance. Floor will even exist when you fall, especially then, because you probably hurt a bit. But actually floor is your friend, your tows and feet have to be connected with it. Also the same pattern is in social work – trust your competence, be connected with it. When you have done good job but positive changes won´t take place, still trust yourself. You cannot help everybody, see the world with open eyes – the world will go on. Do you know that in dancing competitions they make this special parafine mixture and wax the floor with it– it´s for that reason that you could be more connected with the floor. The purpose is not to fly away.

For conclusion: using Piet Hein original:

*The one who only takes a joke for a joke,*

*and the serious only seriously,*

*he and she actually has taken*

*both bad*

Now my versioon: Piet´s grook

*The one who only dances for the dancing,*

*and do the social work only for the social work,*

*he and she actually has taken*

*both bad*