

COUNSELING TODAY

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Part 1 of 2 parts

Blending Eastern and Western approaches to counseling

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Looking for work and brimming with potential

Nicole Michaud recently received her master's degree in mental health counseling. She is in that spot shared by many of our members: new graduate, looking for work and wanting to accumulate hours toward licensure. She is a sponge for knowledge and wisdom; a young, eager, open, warm and wise young professional. She is currently unemployed, but her spirits are high. Here is her story.

Rebecca Daniel-Burke: Typically, I ask about your current position. In your case, you are a recent graduate, not yet employed. How do you describe your current situation?

Nicole Michaud: I am currently searching for a position as a clinician. I recently graduated and have been trying to find an opportunity for employment that provides supervised hours toward licensure. I am hopeful that the right position and I will find each other as soon as possible.

I have a five-year plan. I hope to work, accumulate hours, take my licensure exam and be in my own practice in five years.

RDB: Perfect answer. Tell me, what initially led you down the path toward a career in counseling?

NM: If I think back, I can recall a clear moment when I knew that I might be meant for this field. I was about 12 years old, and I was away at camp for a couple of weeks. Another camper came up to me and a group of girls to say a friend of ours was crying in their tent. Another girl immediately volunteered to go and talk to her. One of the girls stopped her and said, "Let Nicole go. She knows what to do." It was the first time I really thought about the idea that I was not only drawn to helping others but might actually be good at it.

RDB: As you look back on practicums and internships, what was your favorite position?

NM: I would say that my main internship was my favorite position. I worked at a community counseling agency. I began

to feel confident in my role as a counselor there. I also built up my caseload to a comfortable level. In addition to my work with my clients, I was able to do outreach within the community at two local schools as well as at a Boys & Girls Club.

The experience made me feel for the first time that I was really living my dream of having a successful practice. It allowed me to gain confidence in my abilities as a counselor. I was able to feel the immensely rewarding experience of seeing clients feel that our work had been valuable to them.

RDB: Do you gravitate toward one theoretical orientation more than others? If so, why?

NM: I feel my overall approach is definitely person-centered. I really work to make the session revolve around where the client is at the time. I tend to pull from different frameworks based on the needs of the client. For me, this approach offers the most flexibility and is an effective way to address each client's unique situation.

RDB: Of all the counselors I have interviewed, Carl Rogers is referenced most often. There is something in person-centered that really resonates with us.

NM: Yes.

RDB: Who in your life saw something special in you early on? Who valued you as a unique individual?

NM: The person who believed in me literally from my first breath was my dad. For much of my childhood, he was the only person who made me feel I was worthwhile. My creativity was nourished by his support. He saw the potential in my writing for something greater than what started as childish gibberish. The honest feedback I received helped me to push myself to do my best and to always stay humble. He lit the fire inside me to always keep going and to never turn my struggles into excuses.

He was an inspiration to me. He came to America from Trinidad in 1916 as a small child and lived an extraordinary life.



Nicole Michaud

He was 61 when they had me, and I was his first child! He achieved phenomenal success based solely on his intelligence and unshakable spirit. He was a devoted father and a wonderful human being.

RDB: How fortunate for you and for him.

NM: Yes.

RDB: Has being in the field of counseling been transformational for you?

NM: It definitely has been. Applying what I have spent years studying and reading about to real-life situations has had a profound effect on me. Seeing the results of working with clients has assured me that this is my calling. It has helped me to gain a deeper sense of humanity in my relationships with others. Counseling has also led me to become more introspective in my own life.

RDB: I know you are early in your career path, but what mistakes, if any, have you made thus far? And more important, what lessons have you learned from those mistakes?

NM: I learned it is OK not to know all the answers and to allow there to be silences in session. In the beginning, I was so stressed over making sure I was not saying the "wrong thing" that I was not allowing myself to be truly authentic. What I realized is that simply being in the moment with the client and being your true self is the best we can do. I am not here to be an expert but to help the client to see and hopefully reach [his or her] potential.

RDB: What saying, book or quote inspires you regarding your work? What do you try to remember when the going gets tough?

NM: My favorite band, Marillion, has a quote that really resonates with me. It says, "I want you to wake up and do something strange. I want you to listen. I want you to feel someone else's pain." They are certainly words that speak to the best part in each of us.

When I feel challenged or need a friendly reminder, I think of “The Starfish Story.” It begins with a man walking on the beach. He sees a young boy in the distance reaching down, picking up something and tossing it into the ocean. As he draws closer, he sees hundreds of beached starfish. He calls out to the boy, “What are you doing? You can’t possibly save enough to make a difference.” The boy bends to pick up another starfish and tosses it into the ocean. He turns to smile at the man. “It made a difference to that one.”

This story is one that I hold very dear.

RDB: How do you fill yourself back up after a long day of counseling and learning?

NM: Writing has always been a therapeutic tool for me. Luckily, these days I have a few outlets that keep me writing, both professionally and creatively. I also find making time for yoga to be one of the best things I have ever done for myself. It helps me to feel a sense of calm and get in touch with my inner strength.

From as far back as I can remember, cooking has brought me a sense of joy. I love being able to take on culinary challenges and share the results with those I care for. I have learned the value of taking care of myself in order to truly be there and care for those around me.

RDB: We have more than 50,000 members in the American Counseling Association. Is there anything else you want our members to know about you?

NM: I would like to thank everyone who has helped me to get to this point in my life. I am so grateful to have the support and love of an amazing husband and our two children. They drive me to always push through the challenges and keep working harder. This is just the beginning of my story. I can’t wait to see where the journey will lead me in the future. ♦

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