



HOW I GOT HERE

Patsy Faure, couples and relationship counsellor and supervisor, shares her career story

Before I became a therapist, my background was in human resources for a commercial international organisation. Even then, I was working with people, looking after recruitment, salary reviews and job applications.

AFTER WORKING IN HR FOR EIGHT YEARS, I WANTED A CAREER CHANGE. I spent time in the library researching the different options, and counselling was an area I was drawn to. At that point, I didn't necessarily know what a counsellor was, but as I read more about it, I thought, 'This could be interesting'.

GETTING MY JOB AS A THERAPIST WASN'T A LINEAR JOURNEY. I studied a six-month introductory counselling course while I was still working full-time in HR, and later applied for the post-graduate diploma. After training for a year, I left my full-time job and then, once I'd qualified, began seeing three couples a week through my training organisation, increasing to between six and eight by the end of the course.

I'VE BEEN A QUALIFIED THERAPIST FOR ABOUT 20 YEARS NOW. Today, I see 10 to 12 couples or clients a week through my private practice. Sometimes I see couples; sometimes one partner won't attend or an individual wants to understand what's been going wrong in their relationship. I also teach courses on counselling, such as Introduction to Couples Work at the Tavistock Relationships centre.

IT SOUNDS OBVIOUS, BUT HAVING CURIOSITY AND AN INTEREST IN PEOPLE IS IMPORTANT. You are trying to understand the dynamics of a relationship and help couples who are sometimes in a lot of distress. You also need a certain amount of resilience, which is why it's important that every therapist has a supervisor. Let's say, for example, you are working with a suicidal client. If you're not experienced, that can be a difficult thing to manage and you can end up thinking about the client a lot. It can be hard to switch off.

THE NOTION OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS A BIT CLICHÉD but, as a therapist, you need to have other things going on in your life so the work doesn't take over. As time goes on, you're able to

hold a bigger case load and probably more complicated cases. It's a bit like working out in the gym – you develop emotional muscles that allow you to take on more couples.

SOMETIMES, THERE'S A MISCONCEPTION THAT THE THERAPIST SETS THE AGENDA. Actually, it's the couple who determine what they want from sessions. Often, they're getting a lot of opinions from family or friends, so it's about space to think, 'What do we want?' That can be really liberating and, maybe, also the first time they stop to think about what they want from the relationship – or from each other.

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES IS THAT CLIENTS CAN WANT DIFFERENT THINGS, and then it's a case of whether or not they can reconcile their differences. Sometimes, people might be talking about things, such as poor communication or arguing, and then we may find there are other underlying issues that the couple are not totally aware of.

IF YOU'RE CONSIDERING BECOMING A COUPLES THERAPIST, FIND A TRAINING ORGANISATION AND THERAPY STYLE YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH. Most places have an introductory course, so you can see what area you'd like to specialise in. It's such a personal thing, particularly as you are required to have therapy yourself while you study.

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I COULD NEVER HAVE ANTICIPATED THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF THIS JOB, but it's so rewarding when you meet a couple who can't communicate with each other, and then, after some work, have honest conversations. When they understand what's upsetting them, it can be a humbling and powerful experience, both for themselves and for the therapist.