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Therapy Gems©
**The Right Stance – The Therapist’s Stance Towards the Client:
Seeing in Patterns and Systems of Behavior©**

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On Horizontal Versus Therapeutic Listening

One day recently, an Intern presented a family case in which he could not see the way through the problem situation.* This often happens to new therapists and even sometimes to the experienced. As a result, he *over-identified* with one parent. The mother concurred in a young child’s wish not to see her father, a man who lived separately. The father wanted to see his child. The therapist had some insights into the father’s ideas about parenting, ideas that may have affected the child’s avoidance of him. He also understood how some historical events in the family may have affected the child’s attitude towards her father. Those events and the child’s attitude about her father had also been shaped the mother’s position. Mother had had reinforced the avoidance and, thereby, reinforced anxiety and a negative view of dad. This situation created a therapeutic impasse.

However, by *being too close to the action*, so to speak, the therapist could not see the situation *dynamically*. The old adage fits, not seeing the forest for the trees. As therapists so often are, he was caught in the family *stasis*. He identified with the inadequate *protective and security functions* in the family as whole, and so he slipped into *over-functioning* in the areas the family was *under-functioning*. That is, the family did not have a conflict resolution process and the child’s anxiety seemed to be a function of reduced attachment functions. Protective functioning in this family was not comforting to the child, but, rather, increased her anxiety. Co-parenting functioning was conflictual rather than cooperative, leading to one-sided decisions and increasing polarity. The father’s unhappiness was less relatable than the mother’s distress and the child’s reluctance.

A meta-position is a position above positions, that is, in therapy, an observational position above the interactional, interpersonal position.

A larger vision of the moving parts in this system, which we call a meta-position, may have revealed a way to reshape relationships. That in turn could shift away from *stasis* towards new behavior that may have resolved the tensions, pain, and alienation in this two-household family.

Meta-Positions, Stances, and Listening

Meta-Positions. A *meta-position* is a position above positions, that is, an observational position above the interactional, interpersonal position. In the experiential position – let’s call it Position One -- the therapist is an emotional-response-participant in the treatment relationship. That is called the Experiencing Ego or the Family-Therapist Interface. In Position One, the therapist becomes aware of the client’s emotions and his or her own. In Position Two, the *meta-position*, the therapist is an observer of the *therapeutic self* and experiencing parts of self interacting with the client(s). At the meta-position, the therapist steps back to a more objective position where he or she can see the dynamics, patterns, and beliefs of the client or family and his or her own. In essence, the meta-position is above the interpersonal field.

The same day, another Intern, who was extremely distressed and discouraged, told me of her first solo interviews. She had been assigned new clients who had stories filled with dramatic traumata. She felt “invaded” and “overcome by these frightening stories. She could not release herself from the images she had heard about and imagined, the empathic connection and compassion she felt, and, thereby, the client’s painful experiences. In our discussion, we uncovered that her own *pathogenic experiences* emerged from *preconscious awareness*; they resonated with the therapist’s perceptions of the clients’ experiences. The *secondary traumatization* she experienced that day cut deeply into her self-esteem. That means being traumatized by hearing about someone’s trauma. She could not get to a more objective place anymore than the first Intern could extricate himself from involvement in the family dynamics.

They both needed a new way to see and to listen.

Further, clients and friends often ask therapists, “How can you listen to these stories all day?” Their conception of listening to what others say is different than the therapist’s conception. I believe they mean “Some of this must scare you. Some of this must bore you. Some of this seems so traumatic. Some of this seems so trivial. Some of it is new. Some of it is repetitive. Doesn’t it overwhelm you at times, make you want to just tell them to knock it off, or say ‘I can’t listen to this’ and then leave?” Of course, I am not listening the way they imagine they would listen. I am in a very different “stance” vis-a-vis the client than I might be outside the consulting room.

<p>Finding the Optimal Stance, we oscillate between</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▣▶ Therapeutic empathy versus objectivity▣▶ Engagement versus observational/evaluative distance▣▶ Experiencing ego versus self-observing ego
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Listening. The therapist learns to see and to hear in a very different way.

Listening to the interns and my friends, I remembered a way to talk about therapeutic seeing and listening, what Theodor Reik called LISTENING WITH THE THIRD EAR, a way I grasped from reading Reik's remarkable work.

Reik was a student of Freud and one of the first non-physician psychoanalysts. Freud wrote a book to support Reik and all non-physician practitioners. Thus, Reik is the forerunner of all of us psychotherapists! He was a master at allowing his mind to experience the client, letting his mind travel through its own associations and reactions, paying attention to those thoughts, then *shifting to an observational-evaluative position*. From there, he examined all that internal data and mined his reactions for insights about the client's own inner life.

Listening with the third ear EXCLUDES listening in order to have something to retort or to come up with a practical suggestion, advice, or recommendation. It excludes listening in order to come up with a story of your own.



Rather, listening with the third ear means all of these processes:

- ✓ listening actively, consciously, with a goal to reflect, to be a mirror filled with the light of what the client presents to us
- ✓ listening not merely to content, but to the process, the flow, the sequence of associations
- ✓ listening for what is not said, but lies within the content of what the client presents
- ✓ listening for very small details, such as a sudden cutting off of a sentence and shifting to another idea or a small verbal gesture, such as a laugh or throat-clearing, with curiosity as to the meaning it may reveal
- ✓ listening for the emotional foundation of the content
- ✓ listening for the subtext, the hidden emotional agenda
- ✓ listening for the meaning in slips of the tongue, metaphors, life stories suddenly remembered, that is, the preconscious and unconscious processes at work
- ✓ listening with silence

Stance. Before I could master that kind of complex listening, first I had to understand how to shift from a person-person horizontal way of listening, the level we use in daily life, to the right stance. So, my actual understanding did not come in graduate school, but in an art class on Japanese woodblock prints I had taken before going to graduate school.

The concept of *stance* means *the psychological position we take towards another*. In a conversational stance, we talk to one another as approximate equals, sharing personal stories, perhaps trying to keep our friend's interest, or telling about interesting news. That is person-person horizontal listening.

A therapeutic stance is quite different. **It combines nurturance with fostering independence, experiencing the interaction alongside observing patterns in it, being in the present and allowing our knowledge of the client's history to emerge in our minds, listening alongside explaining thoughtfully the meaning of what is being said.** The important theme here is to find a stance that balances empathy with objectivity, engagement with objective-evaluative distance, experiencing with self-observing.

On the one hand, we enter into the client or family dynamic. On the other hand, we also remain apart from it. We note the inevitable emotional pull the client or family exerts upon us, then step back to think about what it means about them. We experience the client's emotion directly and empathically, but then we observe our experience of it. We do not act from within that emotion.

After all, we are members of families and cultures. So, we naturally respond to needs, patterns, rules, alliances, and structures in the clients and families we experience "up close and personal." Rather than letting that pull us in, therapists step back in order to understand what we are observing.

This is also related to the difference between *compassion and empathy*. In the former, we are on an equal plane. We experience a person's experiences. We show concern, offer solace. In the state of **therapeutic empathy**, however, we allow ourselves to experience what the other may be feeling, but we choose whether the very best next choice of a response is compassion, reflection of the emotions, interpretation of the pattern behind the emotions, or some other intervention.

All of our lives, we are members of families embedded within a culture. Even if no one from our family is present, we are nonetheless at some level, both archaic and present, still *of* it. When we form a dyadic relationship with an individual client, the client is part of a family. So we inevitably connect emotionally with our interior construction of that absent family and our own absent family. We do that through our own experience of being social creatures who respond to the social field. Using a concept from Robert Langs, the *bi-personal field*, in the therapy room, as with a musical instrument, plays harmonic overtones of the families of both members.

Similarly, in family therapy, we are pulled into the family's system. We sense its missing or under-functioning roles. We have an impulse to fill them. We may identify and connect with one member more than another (alliances). We may understand the story told from one perspective and not hear the story told from another. Or we may identify with the former and not the latter (triangling). Or we are suspended between both. We are subject to *recency bias* – that the impressions we hear first shape how we see later information. We may react to different members in different ways, like them differentially, relate to them or ally with them or distance from them. Our own experiences within families and relationships is elicited.

But, at the same time, we have to perceive at **both an experiencing ego** level and also a meta-position** all of that emotional and interpersonal activity. It is indeed daunting to learn how to do that, to find a place to stand from which we can get the necessary perspective. It is daunting to find a solid place within all those pressures to reflect upon what we are watching and hearing. And to do it in the moment in real time.

So, the challenge for new therapists is how to develop the *observing ego*, a set of internal functions and skills, of *therapeutic ways to see and hear*. Experienced therapist have developed these skills, yet they still sometimes fail to meet that challenge

On the Optimal Stance

So, I will illustrate the optimal stance. I will do it by analyzing a few Japanese woodblock prints. I attended a series of lectures on these prints at the Art Institute of Chicago during a year when I took my first graduate classes in clinical psychology across the street from the museum at Roosevelt University.

I will start with saying that several of the artists who were then changing our Western way of seeing the world, Van Gogh, Monet, and Frank Lloyd Wright, and others from about 1860 to about 1920, collected these prints. So, these prints influenced Western art and architecture and that, in turn, affects how we were shaped. The image below of the bridge in the rain was reproduced in oils by Van Gogh. Monet's home in Giverny has his collection on the walls. Certain interior images in these prints feel like they mirror visuals in Wright's home designs. Wright's collection is at the Art

Listening with the Third Ear

Stepping back and observing our own thoughts and reactions:

- ✓observing ego
- ✓reflection
- ✓seeking deeper meanings
- ✓connection between present stories and anecdotes and historical events
- ✓patterns of behavior
- ✓behavior chains, sequences
- ✓reaction patterns
- ✓defenses
- ✓client's implicit self-conception
- ✓relatedness, such as transference and counter-transference

Institute. He worked on a hotel in Tokyo in 1905 and collected the prints at that time. There is something in the perspectives in them that changed western vision. Let's see how we can use these images in our understanding of *stance*.

One of most iconic images in all of art is Hokusai's c. 1831 wood block print of *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*.



When you see it in person, it is even more dramatic. It is a small piece. Yet, in a digital format, it conveys the impression of a large canvas. It moves. Only in person do you realize the subject is the small cone just off center, Mt. Fuji. It's still majesty contrasts with the motion of the wave and the small boat climbing the wave on the right side.

The print is from a series of 36 scenes of Mt. Fuji. Like seeing the Gestalt illusion that flashes between an old woman and a younger woman, knowing the context causes us to focus on the distant mountain rather than the wave. And then we return to the wave about to crash – its uncompleted momentum and potential energy. The eye at first sees the wave, it's crashing-downward spray completing circles of activity. Then the eye comes to the mountain, then cycles around, tossed to both sides of the image. For me, the image evokes memories of the roughest storms on Lake Michigan when I was a boy living a block from the lake or when I was driving along Lake Shore Drive when the waves kicked up over the bike path. It also evokes Cave Point in Door County on a windy day when the waves' motion is thrown upward against the limestone escarpment. Then the mind returns from those memories to the image and what was a still picture is now completely restless and agitated. Having seen that small mountain, which I had barely noticed for decades after first seeing the image, I no longer can look at this picture without a sense of motion and, pulling back, a reflective sense of wonder.

Let's get back to the point of how to learn to pull back to the optimal distance in therapy. The picture shows us the importance of moving between the immediate emotional storm in the wave and the quiet peak – the unsettled image on the one hand and the steady presence on the other. We also notice the triangular low wave under the large one – which mimics the mountain and sets it off – and the right triangles of waves in the right hand corner. Those are like elements in a family drama that may appear in a session. Our personal experience, the other part of listening with the third ear, is

elicited and then we pull back to the optimal distance from those memories.

Then ask, **Where is the artist standing?** *What is his stance?* No beach or land is present. No prow of a boat. The artist is on some perspective parallel to the land in the distance. However, the artist is not tossed by the waves. Like the therapist, the artist is there *with* the experience and in some sense not there, not *of* the experience, a participant and an observer. But the observer is not *of* the scene.

Consider this image of a bridge. It is Hiroshige's 1833 wood block of *The Great Bridge at Senju*. In Japanese art of the 17th to mid-19th centuries, there are numerous depictions of bridges. Most images of bridges that I have seen in woodblock prints share this visual perspective and the sense of distance we see in this image. Many are depicted from the left side looking down on the bridge on an acute angle to the span.

In this image, the artist Hiroshige is above the bridge and at a distance. Then, we look more closely and see a number of people going about their business, crossing a bridge, a symbolic gesture full of significance. The people are small pieces of the depth, order, and serenity of nature. The unnatural idealizing of the details in the scene quiets the composition and adds to its sense of the perfection and serenity. The homes on the far shore are also small pieces. We see the natural elements miles into the distance. The river, the plain, and the mountain are all calm, solid presences, all undisturbed.

The small boats in the lower corner are still as well. No one is running. The sailboats traverse the river, yet they seem quiet and unperturbed. The story is kinetic and also still, simultaneously.

The solid, planted bridge contrasts with the disarray of the plants and the unwieldy river banks. Actually, nature takes up much more of the print than does its subject, the bridge.

So where is the artist standing and why is he there?

Only by being above the scene can he see



the mountain, the plain, the sailboats, the bridge with its walkers, and its structure all at once. He is not on a real surface, but rather an imagined vantage point.

As in therapy, we can relate to elements that are within our own experience. We all cross bridges. Perhaps we do not see them, however. The therapist may think about standing on the bridge, talking to the people, standing at the railing, watching the sailboats, then moving to the place where the artist stands. From there, the therapist watches all the elements. From there, the perspective is entirely different. Yet, there is no evident hill. The artist is standing in an imaginary place, a *meta-position*.

In a more western perspective, the artist might depict the bridge from a horizontal perspective straight on and relatively perpendicular to it, or from just below one end, capturing the magnificence of its structure or its length or just the drama of the bridge. That contrasts to the more humanizing view of the print with its meta-position. Images of the Brooklyn Bridge or Golden Gate Bridge or Mighty Mac, the Mackinac Bridge, tend to impress us with their grandeur, architecture, steel-work, and strength. We are more likely to celebrate the bridge, the construction. It would not be so much about the relationships among elements of a larger system or even the relationship of the bridge to its surroundings, but of the bridge itself. We have to escape the limitations of that perspective.



Claude Monet, who, remember, also collected of Japanese wood block prints, built this bridge over his waterlily pond in Giverny. You can visit it. He painted numerous studies of this bridge and from this bridge. His views are almost all perpendicular to the bridge.

In this image, the bridge frames the pond and helps us to see its front-to-back depth, giving it the appearance of a long flow of water. The bridge's shadow in the water frames the near edge of the pond.

The solid bridge is a design element. It sets a frame for the waterlilies. The plants have a kind of moving stillness, quiet in the water, yet full of visual movement to the far end and back. The arc of plants surrounding the pond in the upper half of the painting are more riotous; they are arrayed in a horseshoe shape and they echo the span of the bridge.

So, **where is the artist standing?** Knowing this pond, I know he is on a path at the near side of the pond. But his stance is not a significant feature of the scene. It is a natural place to be. That contrasts with Hiroshige's stance.

Monet's bridge and its reflection form a kind of horizontal oval creating a decorative frame for the meaningfulness of the contained and yet timeless system of the flora and the pond. Hiroshige's perspective sees all the human and non-human spaces in a harmonious union, a larger system.



Here is another view of a bridge. Hiroshige's 1857 *Sudden Shower Over Shin-Ohashi Bridge* was reproduced only a few years later in oils by Van Gogh as *Bridge in the Rain*. The image is also taken from a perspective 20-30 degrees above the scene. This scene moves. The figures do not appear to hurry. They hold the rain off their bodies. Like the other bridge image, the structure under the bridge is depicted, with its

strong lines, as it supports the bridge and, in a way, the image.

The characters cross the bridge. The rain is subtly moving to the left in a minimal breeze. The man on the raft seems to be using an oar or pole to move it in the river. *Like a family, the members are joined together and yet moving in their own ways. Like a family therapy session, they are almost equidistant to the viewer.*

Interestingly, Van Gogh painted the scene with more drama, making the labors of the bridge-walkers more intense, the water more turbulent, the bridge structure more prominent. More Western?

Again, **where is the artist standing?** Why is he standing there? He is physically closer than in the first image. But he is in an imaginary *meta-position* to the elements.

This image by Kunisada from 1857 has a similar viewing angle. But it is an interior scene. There is a Japanese style art of *fukinuki yatai*, literally, the roof is blown off.

That is a perfect angle for viewing a family or a therapist engaged with a client!

We see a scene that blends looking down through the roof into an interior scene simultaneously with



looking through the scene to elements of the outside scene. Rather than setting up an easel on the floor as we might in a western perspective, the artist is looking down at a 30-40 degree angle on a scene of women performing various arts involved in print-making. The walls and bowls on shelves convey order. Yet,

the desks and figures convey activity. Some figures converse. Others concentrate on their work.

Where is the artist standing? He is not. The ceiling would be in the way of any viewing angle. The artist in this style engages in an act of *systemic observational distance*. He feels the scene and is far enough away to observe all the interactions from an imaginary stance and to create *meaning*.



This image by Moronobu in the 17th century is another in which the walls and roof are missing we are observing the scene from above. We see the interaction and we imagine it. But we are not of it.

Interior and exterior spaces blend. The character standing on the right may be coming outside or may be inside. She is standing in the boundary.

Where is the artist standing? Perhaps he is on the second floor of an adjacent building. Perhaps he is taking in a real scene, but he is removing

himself – much the way we need to do in therapy – to a safe viewing distance that permits

observation of the interaction as a whole. While we see the whole, we also see the *subsystem* of the two on the deck and the two *subsystems* of the interacting dyads on either side, the interior and exterior environments. At first glance, the scene just holds together as one larger system inviting deeper observation. We wonder what this *group* is doing and discussing. We can see interaction and context. Unlike therapy, we cannot have the closer perspective from within the group simultaneously with the view from a distance.



This last image by Utagawa of the *Sales Room at the Foreign Trade Building in Yokohama* (1861) is quite busy. It's a business scene. **As in therapy, every detail means something and contributes to our understanding.** Money seems to be changing hands. Many characters are in western dress suggesting a scene from after the opening of Japan to outsiders by Commodore Perry in 1853. Everyone is working within their roles. It looks like about 10 different nationalities are represented. That would be unusual for a country whose Shoguns closed it off to foreign involvement for many decades. The artist has even given us a section of the tile roof along the top border and also the supporting beams. Japan has cold winters, so we know the part of the room close to us as viewers should be a wall. The scene even adopts western sense of linear perspective.

Where is the artist standing? He is not on the floor, but above, looking through where a wall and roof would be. We takes in the entirety of the activity. As if telling the westerners they can recognize their cultural representatives in familiar commercial activities and the Japanese viewers that this is what those unfamiliar westerners look like and how they interact, the artist lays out an entire interactive system.

Put yourself into the scene on the trading floor. You can hear commotion. Letting your ear settle on one conversation or another, you can make out the transactions of *subsystems*. Stepping back, you can see the interactions of *subsystems* form a whole, the nature of trade and transactions per se.

As in therapy, by knowing a bit of the history, then we take in the entirety in an even larger context. At each level of experience and observation, we can make inferences about the meaning of what we observe.

I followed the same concepts for each of these prints as I do for therapeutic interactions and anecdotes (that is, the reports of events and the stories the client brings to therapy).

1. See the scene. Ask what is happening. The *Content* and Action in the story or scene.
2. Experience the impact of the story or scene.
3. Look more closely with an eye towards *Process*. On the one hand, we can move closer to the scene and we can empathize. We can imagine walking across the bridge in the rain or the commotion in the trading room. Then we can step back to and think about it. It's similar to moving from Primary Process to Secondary Process, from emotion to observation.
4. Observe what the sets of characters are doing in their subsystems. Apply intellectual analysis to the scene.
5. Observe what they are doing collectively in the larger system.
6. Look for the emotion in the people in the scene
7. Look for the emotion in the entire presentation
8. Observe the elements beyond the people and how they interact.
9. Now, step back further to a perspective that enables observation of the entirety from a safe, objective stance that enables emotional reaction and observational distance to co-exist. That is where the artist is standing.
10. Find the words to describe that you have observed. Finding the descriptive words and professional language is a crucial step. Apply professional language to the processes.

Putting Meta-Position Thinking Into Action

Knowing what we now know, let's return to the examples on pages one and two.

In the case with which we began this article, the case of the young child, with separated parents, the child did not want to see her father. Mother allied with that avoidance. The father wanted to see his child. The therapist saw this as an impasse and the horizontal choice is whether or not to have the child see the father. That impasse lends itself to giving advice about parenting children in divorce. It also could institutionalize the father-as-outside and the mother-daughter as allies – two positions that could prove dysfunctional long term. Even if the father had done something harmful in the past, that does not usually mean the relationship should automatically be cut off. So, a non-meta-position could actually condone dysfunction.

On the other hand, the therapist may have seen the mother as exercising a protective function. The subtlety is then the therapist is stepping into the missing paternal function in that dyad.

So, what is the meta-position for this family? Stepping back, we observe we have a two-household family. At present, it is a three-person unit. In the future, it could be a larger unit. The child's long-

term needs must not be side-stepped. Rather than decided on the immediate topic, the actual task at hand is to develop a working *co-parenting relationship* in which the parenting function in the family is not broken off, but is more effectively coordinated. The father's perspective should be solicited. If a repair can be made in order to improve safety functioning and parental decision-making, that would be a task for the near term. Both parents have positions that we can understand. Whatever conflict may exist between the parents, whatever trauma or division or hostility, that needs to be mended so the child's needs are not the territory over which to conflict. Now, instead of a duality of choices, we have a number of reparative and negotiable tasks to work on.

The second situation was one of **compassion fatigue** or **vicarious traumatization**. The new therapist was overwhelmed by what she heard from clients. Because the therapist serves a **containing function** for the life stories and pain of clients, she was correct in letting client stories touch her. But she could not contain all that emotion. What she had not been prepared for is the tendency to **over-identify** and to be swept into a helpless place by her own empathy. So, two questions must be answered:

1. What may there be in your life history that could make you vulnerable to vicarious traumatization or to over-identification?
2. Can you move back and re-examine the interaction with clients in light of all the steps we have discussed in this article?

As to the first question, she reported that when the first client reported having an abusive father and then a sexual assault in late adolescence, a date rape, the therapist associated to an unresolved experience of violence against her from a boy she dated at age 16.

As to the second question, the therapist had the idea that therapy is about *helping*. She had not been trained adequately to think of the role as one of *understanding*, of *supporting client growth*, and of *supporting client self-determination*. The two questions overlapped when we understood her deeper sense of being a therapist as reparative for herself. That is indeed a common theme in therapists. But each

h of us must learn to manage those needs, not to project them onto clients. The therapist consulted with the EAP which directed her to a trauma therapist. We were able to help the therapist shift her focus so she could separate from client trauma.

Let's put all this together so we can help the interns whose difficulties led me to bring out these images.

PERCEPTUAL AND CONCEPTUAL PROCESS OF THE THERAPEUTIC EGO

1. The goal is to move between experiencing the interaction, whether individual or family, and observing, Experiencing Ego and Observing Ego. The former includes empathy, attachment, connection. The latter involves objectivity, evaluation, professional processing.
2. Like the Japanese print artists, step back from the experienced scene to a place above the scene where you can transform the scene from one in which you are an emotional participant to one in which you are an observer. Activate your developing *Therapeutic Self* and its major elements, Experiencing Ego, Observing Ego, and Interventional Skills.
3. Be patient. Don't rush to intervene. Take the time to see, hear, and observe. Take the time to clarify (ask for more details) and probe. Take the time to reflect. This can all happen rapidly, somewhat like a *Gestalt* popping out from the field of observations. Sometimes, it takes considerable thought, similar to the artist putting together the composition. **This contrasts with the urge to intervene, make suggestions, or give advice in order to take some action rather than patiently observing.** Beginning therapists are subject to what I call "the rush to the surface," namely the horizontal, head-on position in which practical suggestions, advice, and throwing techniques at the problem substitute for "gliding to the depths." This is a reflection of lack of experience with depth, modern training that implies we can just use techniques, and lack of time learning The Right Stance.
4. From the experiencing position, notice the emotions and feel the pull to respond with suggestions, advice, taking sides, or whatever else may be happening for you. Notice the emotions you see in the client and those you experience empathically.
5. Activate the *Third Ear*, the use of your emotions, intuition, sensitivity, and awareness—a 'third ear' of liminal and subliminal cues – to interpret clinical observations .
6. Oscillate between
 - ▣ Therapeutic empathy versus objectivity
 - ▣ Engagement versus distance
 - ▣ Experiencing ego versus self-observing ego
7. From the observer position, from the interpersonal field between you and the client(s), consider possible understandings.

Beginning therapists are subject to what I call "the rush to the surface," namely the horizontal, head-on position in which practical suggestions, advice, and throwing techniques at the problem substitute for "gliding to the depths." This is a reflection of lack of experience with depth, modern training that implies we can just use techniques, and lack of time learning The Right Stance.

- ✓reflection
- ✓seeking deeper meanings
- ✓connection between present stories and anecdotes with historical events
- ✓patterns of behavior
- ✓behavior chains, sequences
- ✓reaction patterns
- ✓defenses
- ✓client's implicit self-conception
- ✓transference and countertransference

8. From the observer position, you can engage in core skills.

- ✓Empathy for each participant
- ✓Non-judgmental acceptance
- ✓Validation
- ✓Perception of the interpersonal dynamics, transference, and internal dynamics
- ✓Considering what to reflect
- ✓Considering what patterns emerge for you from the background of all the activity

9. Co-create meaning. Upon further reflection, consider interventions that take in all the observations. Your responses convey a meaning, hopefully one that fits the client(s) well. Clarify until you understand enough of the client's or clients' experience (and/or family system) from an angle above that you can give an intervention – such as an interpretation of defenses or a mindfulness exercise or a solution-focused exception or a reflection or a behavioral prescription or interpretation of the precipitant or radical acceptance, etc. – with a sense your intervention is focused in just the right spot.

So, after all that, in your sessions, **where are you standing?**

*Note: Information about clinical situations has been modified to protect confidentiality.

**Note: “Ego” is used in the correct, original psychological meaning of personality functions that adapt us to our intrapsychic and external worlds.