

## Cyberwork

# Writing through the changes

## Sarah Worley-James

worley-james@cardiff.ac.uk



New beginnings and change are a pairing that we can have conflicting responses to. Evoking an array of emotions, unique to the situation and the context of our life in that moment, some beginnings connect to choices about where we are going, our hopes, expectations, excitement and anxieties about this new, or next stage, of life. Other beginnings may lead us to reflect or even ruminate on what we are leaving behind. We may need to grieve and process the implications of the change before we are ready to embrace and connect to the new, particularly if we feel the change is foisted upon us.

Beginnings so often emerge from the uncertainty of change, and within our working lives, it is likely that we have experienced many changes, often implemented from 'on high', with varying degrees of genuine consultation and support. It's a common theme in workplace counselling sessions, and when change is experienced negatively, it can leave staff feeling unheard, undervalued and insignificant, detrimentally affecting their self-esteem, confidence and motivation.

### Taking space

The disinhibition effect of counselling online can free up the member of staff to openly express and share their concerns and anxieties. This can be particularly valuable if they feel alone in their perspective and worries, unable to voice them for fear of being labelled 'negative', 'obstructive' or 'unwilling to move with the times'. Equally, a manager may be struggling to cope with being caught between the twin pressures of demands from senior managers to complete the changes, and the anxieties of staff seeking answers and reassurance.

Their support needs are often overlooked, but the additional security offered by online counselling, such as composing their thoughts in an email to their counsellor, can be freeing.

Appreciating the complexities of conflicting demands and pressures, and the myriad range of responses to change, will aid the counsellor's ability to work effectively with the client from whichever position and viewpoint they stand within the change. Naturally, our own experiences of organisational change can increase our empathy, while potentially clouding our ability to stand beside our client and perceive their worldview.

Key themes of uncertainty, loss of control, fears for the future and changes to identity emerge strongly during periods of change. Hearing and accepting these are crucial in the counselling process. Too often in brief therapy, we can be caught up in a client's desire for solutions and forget to give them space to be heard.

### Reflections in an email

Offering a client email counselling can provide a space to be heard and enhance the client's reflective processes as they see their thoughts, feelings and responses written down. Describing their own, and others' reactions can encourage them to step back, identify and empathise with others' positions and concerns, in a way that verbalising them alone may not afford.

One important aspect of the online counsellor's role is to use their understanding of the change process to read 'between the lines', seeking clarification and comprehension of the client's standpoint and encouraging them to use the counselling as an opportunity to vent, before searching for a new beginning.

Taking this time to write our

thoughts and feelings down can bring some natural space into the outpouring of emotion. The necessitated slowing, as it is not possible to write or type as fast as we think, enables a catharsis and deceleration of the racing emotions that often accompany the powerlessness of not feeling in control of a change.

### Embracing new beginnings

Being heard, and having those thoughts and feelings validated, creates an environment in which the client will be able to begin considering new beginnings, opening themselves up to appreciate the benefits and gains of the change. Until the sense of frustration, injustice and powerlessness that accompany the losses are acknowledged and accepted, it will be difficult for the client to look up with fresh eyes to see what the future may bring.

'Acceptance' is a word I use with careful explanation of my personal definition – it does not have to mean liking something, being content or at peace with something, or even involving forgiveness. For me, acceptance is, 'it is what it is'. I may not like this situation, and I may never agree with this change. But it is happening, so how can I find a way forward, minimising the detrimental impact of it?

Focusing on a new beginning necessitates identifying and focusing on what choices the client can make. Refocusing on choice, puts them back in a position of control of their responses within a bigger situation they may have little control over.

My favourite phrase – 'what we focus on gets bigger'. ●

**Sarah Worley-James** is a Senior Counsellor and Co-ordinator of the Online Service at Cardiff University.