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Learning Contract

Introductory

I am a fourth year student at Regis University, where I have spent countless hours dedicating my education to the study of communication. More specifically, my selected study is communication with an emphasis in marketing and civic engagement. I am extremely passionate about understanding how humans in the professional world are able to communicate successfully on an interpersonal level, while also being able to facilitate business and professionalism. This area of education interests me greatly because my personal goal in life is to promote not only myself, but all people to dedicating their professional lives to incorporate more ethical acts for the people and world around us; and I believe this can begin by being well educated on communication.

These specific reasons however were the main driving factor to me searching for my internship this semester- I wanted to do something that I could practice and live out all the interpersonal and professional communication skills I have learned in my education, in a way which also helps other's lives for the better. Within communication department the theme throughout my entire education has been to challenge myself in order to learn, which is exactly what I wanted to do with my internship.

Internship

The internship I ended up choosing is a legal advocacy position at the Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence, or SPAN. This is a nonprofit organization which

dedicates itself to helping individuals throughout the processes of mainly all that falls under domestic abuse. There are many different services which SPAN offers within its doors in addition to the legal advocacy team; these are the housing program, shelter, counseling, representation in court, lgbtqia+ specific services, as well as many more. SPAN's motto is to create a positive social change and working together to end violence.

My supervisor's name at SPAN is Erin Shannon, and they are the Director of advocacy and education within the walls of the organization. Essentially, she is the head of all advocates within law and housing, as well as the person which puts together all education efforts SPAN does within the community- from education within schools to work they do with other programs. Specific to my internship, I will be accommodating people in the process of obtaining an order from the court which protects them from their abuser, which can be as short as a few weeks process involving the knowledge of many recourses for the person as well as trauma-informed support throughout. On the other end, I will also be doing work within the outreach office, in which I will be answering crisis calls from those who are seeking services at SPAN, and offering resources to them as well as interpersonal communication.

According to Erin, within SPAN there are currently 16 employees, a consistently changing number of volunteers ranging from 0-30, and 5 interns within law advocacy and counseling. There is only competition within the nonprofit world of domestic abuse help when it comes to receiving grants- specifically the organizations with similar missions located in the Northern Denver area called SafeHouse Denver and Crossroads Safehouse, which are bigger in employee size but with similar intake of

clients. What makes SPAN unique is that the entirety of the services offered are bilingual and it includes a shelter option with a larger space compared to other shelters. These organizations often work together when providing support to people and often refer individuals to each other when the services would be better fitted elsewhere without hesitation.

Challenges

I have already been made aware of the challenge that exists of being able to consistently show up in ways that will help the client, as there are times that the system gets in the way of truly getting someone everything they need. Within this tension it can be tricky when communicating and continuing to offer support, as there can be times where we have to explain there is nothing more we can do. A client can become upset or in some cases hostile due to a plethora of reasons. This is why it is extremely important to remain solid in trauma informed interpersonal communication while also staying professional, and it has proved to be challenging for me to remain in a professional mindset when having these conversations. In working at SPAN this last month I have already come face-to-face with these challenges and am anxious to see how it will play out in larger cases.

Patterns, tensions, and conflicts

A communication pattern which exists in the workplace I have recently been made aware of is faulty communication between employees, specifically in working on the same cases. The parameters of each individual job within SPAN are not clearly

delineated, and it is common for employees to overlap in their responsibilities toward a client within the same case, and challenges within communicating through it. For instance, there has been an occasion I saw firsthand where two people have been working within the same case in which someone was in an extremely high-danger situation with their abuser and needed housing as well as law advocacy. Ideally, a law advocate only helps with the client within the court system and a housing advocate is only involved with housing- but these lines became blurred. Due to the needs of the client, there was overlap within the information they received in phone calls they had with SPAN, as two different people had those calls with the client separately. With this specific time, it led to the client being confused as to what they were actually being helped with at SPAN as two different people told them different plans- and they stopped using the services after this. There are many reasons I have started picking up on as to why this happens- one of them I noticed throughout my time doing data entry on 9/8 that falling behind on their excel paperwork of the intake of clients could be one reason as to why there is confusion with employees on specific cases. I also am aware that due to SPAN having three separate locations which employees work out of, being the outreach center, the shelter, and the police department could be cause for these lapses in communication as well.

While many times span tries to work with people individually to avoid these conflicts mentioned above, there are many times it is unavoidable to bring multiple employees onto a singular case. When tensions arise involving differing opinions in how to help the client, or discrepancies in housing needs and what housing can offer, I am interested to see what will happen in playing these conflicts out and what other

employees communication habits are when these certain situations arise. I hope to learn interpersonal communication in employee conflict from those which have been working at SPAN and practicing these educated interpersonal communication habits daily. So far, I have seen both instances play out in which employees have conflicted over cases they work together on- in which both positive and negative communication occurred. In both cases, the majority of people who had something to say on the matter vouched for better communication, enacting the values that SPAN stands for of specifically working together for the greater good, and specifically in Erin's words, "to not forget why we are at SPAN to begin with".

Learning Expectations

My main goal and expectation within this job is to learn as much as I possibly can about the professional and interpersonal world of communication as well as become much better versed in the world of nonprofits, trauma informed communication (how to best help victims of abuse) and legal processes through advocacy. I expect this to come with the experiences of making mistakes, learning valuable lessons, being challenged in my knowledge, being involved in more trainings, and being mindful and aware of my own emotions. I expect to be doing a lot of helping work to the employees around me including data entry and some other grunt work, which I will happily take on as it helps teach me more about the basis of the organization. As well as this, I expect to begin to learn what is necessary to be a truly helpful advocate by being directly in the field of law advocacy, and in this- ill experience challenges and lessons with working within the legal system. Within the scope of the class I will continue to engage in the

journals and use them to my advantage throughout my work, I will consistently refer back to my goals within the Learning Contract, and engage in class and with my professor to supplement my experiences and verbalize what I learn. Hopefully the outcome of what I learn will be a better scope of how communication impacts the world around me, how to more maturely and effectively communicate with others, becoming a more compassionate and grateful individual, and becoming an effective worker ready for the professional world for after graduation.