



Building Professional Excellence- Part 1 Session 3: I'm a Counselor. . . . Now What?

Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Mark Eades and Melissa Fickling

Questions about LinkedIn from Alita Andrews, James Thompson, Wendy Simpson, LaDonna Morris, Erin Harvey, Ruth Glowacki, Kristie Lensing and Valerie LeSeure

I have a LinkedIn account and would like to use it better, any tips? Should you pay for the premium LinkedIn membership or is the basic sufficient? What are your thoughts on trying to "connect" with people on LinkedIn without having met them in person? If I have different irons in the fire, my profile could look scattered, any tips? How would I identify myself on LinkedIn if I haven't yet received my temporary license (LPC-Intern), but I have already graduated? Should you format your profile in resume style or should you use a paragraph style and promote the services of your current organization?

Answer from Melissa

Personally, I have not found it necessary to pay for a premium LinkedIn account. Every once in a while there is a free trial period for an upgraded account, so maybe you can try it before deciding to purchase the upgrade. In addition I have yet to talk with anyone who has purchased the upgraded account. I think you would only need to do this if you are planning on contacting many new people a month or requesting more than a couple of introductions a month.

I do think it is best to connect with people who you have met at least once or if you share a mutual connection (friend, professional association, etc.). I believe that LinkedIn should not replace face-to-face networking, it should facilitate it. So, try to follow every new LinkedIn connection up with a personal contact in some way. It could be as simple as an email message saying, "It's nice to be connected, I hope we can stay in touch" or getting together for coffee or lunch. Try to maintain the relationships you build through networking.

If you have a degree or license pending you can always put it on your resume or LinkedIn profile with a statement in parentheses that says (pending - anticipated fall 2014) or something to that effect.

Finally, you can present your skills, experience, and/or services in a variety of ways. Generally, LinkedIn keeps things chronological, but you can use the summary section to give a longer overview of whatever you are wanting to highlight. I think the pieces you choose to highlight will depend on your current use of LinkedIn...are you beginning to look for a new position or are you there to promote your practice or business? The great thing about LinkedIn is that you can always change your profile!

Question from Renee Murphy

If you have a website, and are already using g+, Facebook, LinkedIn, Thumbtack, do you have any other suggestions other than what you already recommended that don't cost much? I'm also highlighted on other people's websites, but that has not helped either.



Answer from Melissa

Use of technology and social media is so important! I think blogs are a nice way to share information and give potential clients a better idea of your style. Pinterest is another social media site that is incredibly popular right now.

Questions about resumes and cover letters from Steven Fox and Roxanne Davidson

What is your advice for resumes: both format and content? How would you begin a cover letter...any recommendations? Would you begin a cover letter with a question re-stating job descriptions?

Answer from Melissa

The content and format of your resume is going depend greatly on your particular experience. If you are changing careers, I like a functional resume, but you will hear some people say never to use a functional resume. Always highlight the most relevant skills toward the top of your resume. I also strongly recommend having a "summary" section at the top of your resume - NOT an objective statement.

For the cover letter, I suggest starting simple - state the position you are applying for, how you learned about the opening, and why you believe you are qualified for the position. Then, in the body of the letter, go into more detail about your most relevant skills and qualification (pick the top 2-3) without repeating verbatim what is in your resume.

Question from Krissta Kabalan

Are unpaid experiences as valuable as paid experiences? I have not worked for pay for years but have volunteer experiences for more than 25 years.

Answer from Melissa

If they are presented in a way that highlights skills that are important to the employer then they are extremely valuable.

Question from Leon Johnson

Should a counselor have a specific modality or remain eclectic? As a school counselor and mental health professional, I am not eclectic, how can I help people who are?

Answer from Melissa

I imagine many employers may care most about how you can explain or justify your theoretical orientation and how it works for you and your clients in practice. Many counselors claim an eclectic orientation, but be sure you explain very thoroughly what that means to you and what it looks like in practice. You don't want someone to think you are using the word eclectic in place of "I don't have a solid theoretical orientation." There may be some organizations which adhere to a specific model, and if that is not something you would feel comfortable or qualified to do then it probably wouldn't be a place you'd want to work for the long term.



Question from Abigail Michelle

As a student looking for an internship, do you recommend going for one geared towards my specific interest or gaining more broad experience?

Answer from Melissa

That's a great question and I don't know if there is a right answer to this one. First, I think you should try to get experience in a setting or with a population that is of great interest to you. If you really want to specialize (for example, if you really want to work with substance dependence), internship can be a great way to find out if that is, in fact, the specialty you want to pursue. Likewise, if you know you are going to want to work in a college setting after you graduate, it is important to get some experience working with college students. I started by specializing and I felt that it helped me get a job in that specialty after graduation, but I also knew that it would be harder for me to get a more generalist position later. If you aren't sure of a setting or population that most interests you, then getting broad clinical experience is a great idea for internship. You will likely get exposed to a lot of different issues and find yourself drawn to something for later specialization.

Question from Darice Dodd

My biggest problem is that I just moved to a new state and I don't know the names of any companies here, just the type of work I want to do, so I look at indeed.com which isn't all that helpful for jobs here...

Answer from Melissa

I recently moved to a new state, too, and I totally agree that knowing of companies is so helpful in the search process. One idea is to start by meeting just one counselor who has been in the community for a long time and asking for an informational interview so you can get a sense of different agencies in your new state. Often there are resource centers in town that have lists of mental health agencies for their clients that can be very useful. The public library often has this kind of information as well.

Questions about salary from Olgi Montpelier, Ayinde Robinson, Brittaney La Fond-Bobb, and Amanda Wolfe

I find that most job postings don't include the salary range. When is it appropriate to ask and negotiate pay? Would you recommend asking for a higher salary so you can negotiate? As an intern, how do I go about asking whether or not the internship is paid?

Answer from Melissa

Generally, you want to save the discussion and negotiation about salary until after an offer is made. If the employer brings it up, then it is appropriate to discuss salary, but try to learn as much about the position itself before committing to a salary range.

Definitely aim for what you are worth - so, yes, aiming higher does give you room to negotiate, but make sure it is reasonable and that you can justify the salary you are asking for.

As an intern, just as in an employment situation, you are generally given an offer which you can either accept or reject. After receiving the offer would be a great time to ask about the possibility of receiving a stipend for your internship work.



Question from Alyse Northam

What advice do you have for beginning school counselors going up against more experienced school counselors for open positions?

Answer from Mark

It's definitely tough for school counselors who are just starting out to go up against more seasoned counselors. I think the best advice I could give is to expect that you will likely get a lot of rejections from schools and that's a natural thing to happen. It's not uncommon in my own experience to get 30 or 40 "no's" by the time you finally get a "yes". So, keep your head up, and keep putting your name out there. Someone is bound to take notice. Another piece of advice would be to really examine yourself and the unique characteristics that you bring to the table that others may not. If you have a real skill for group counseling, then make sure to show that off. Bring a portfolio with you to interviews so you can show your potential employer lesson plans and programs you've created at your internship(s). Showing off your best features will likely get you noticed.

Question from Shereese Pearsall

Are you aware of any legislative changes that can affect LPC's?

Answer from Presenters

Mark: The only legislation that was affecting LPC's recently in my state was that LPCA counselors were not allowed to bill for Medicare/Medicaid patients for a short while. I believe that this has been resolved and LPCA's are now allowed to bill for Medicare/Medicaid patients; but I'm not sure about the details of this legislation.

Melissa: I know that getting LPCs eligible to be Medicare providers and being hired by the Veteran's Administration (VA) are big issues that the ACA is advocating for right now at the federal level. I encourage you to stay up to date by visiting the ACA's government affairs website at: <http://counseling.org/government-affairs/current-issues>

Question from Marbely Perez

When applying for a school counseling job, what exactly are principals/administrators are looking for? For example, if you've created any programs before, counseling style, etc.

Answer from Mark

The quick answer is: Everyone is going to be looking for something different. Some principals really value the role of the counselor and will look for a counselor who is a terrific therapist first. Other principals will almost look at the counselor as someone who's job is to deal with scheduling issues. A safe bet, though, is that all principals will want a counselor to be excellent at large group presentations. Who I do when I apply for school counseling jobs is to bring a portfolio with examples of some of my best work in small groups, large group guidance, programming, and program evaluation. By using this portfolio, I'm showing principals that I'm capable of doing many different things on the job and, more importantly, I'm adaptable and I'm able to learn new things quickly. Bringing examples of your best work is always a good thing to do on an interview.



Question from Pamela Seals

It seems to be difficult to find a position for counselors who are just entering the field. Do you have any suggestions on how to begin especially if you are looking to do more than just counseling (trainings, workshops, etc.)?

Answer from Melissa

Get creative in your keyword searches if you are looking online. Search for things like: consultant, trainer, educator, curriculum, public speaking, coach, advise, development. I have known counselors to go into human resources, college advising, coaching/mentoring, curriculum development, corporate training and development and more.

Question from Ruth Goldbloom

I am in a different position than many of the participants. I have better than 30 years' experience in the field, and am re-entering the job market after an extended illness. Listing all my skills and experiences would generate a document about the size of the Manhattan white pages. Any hints?

Answer from Melissa

Ruth, this is a great question. For most types of work, two pages would be as long as you would want to go, and of course there is no way to fit everything into two pages! Your resume does not need to contain your *entire* work history - but should cover about the past ten years or so. Highlight the most relevant skills and experiences (even if they do not fall within that ten year mark). You might want to consider a functional resume which groups your experience by skills rather than chronologically.

Question from Sherry Tietz

Are schools still looking for counselors to start at possibly lower steps as to not accept all of their years of experience?

Answer from Mark

There are benefits and problems with taking employees at lower steps, and most schools know this. Yes, schools can save money by taking teachers and counselors with less experience because they earn a lower salary. Although, 3 years of experience makes a world of difference, and the increase in salary in most states is not too large. I think the school in which you are applying will determine if they are willing to pay more for experience or not. Perhaps a school that is having numerous student issues will want a counselor with more experience to tackle this tough situation, or perhaps a school that is running smoothly will choose to take on a newly minted counselor. It's hard to know what all schools and school systems are thinking, but there is a market for experienced counselors if you find the right fit with the right school.

Question from Sunny Di Florio

I am recovering from a TBI, is this something to disclose to employers?



Answer from Melissa

Disclosing personal and health related information can be tough to know how to handle. You may want to disclose only in the event you would need an accommodation, and you probably won't know whether you would need this until you are on the job. It's a personal choice - but you are not required by law to disclose this information to an employer before receiving a conditional job offer. You can consult the EEOC and ADA for more information about what and when to disclose this kind of information to a potential or current employer.

Question from Patricia Nielsen Wilkie

I am an LPCC. In my state it is a Masters level license one step above the LPC. I am frequently in competition with MA LP (historical issue), and LICSWs for positions and frequently screened out by HR because the LPCC is a new license in my state and is not well understood. Any suggestions about how I can educate/approach perspective employers. I have a doctorate and am working on taking the LP exam. I believe I will be more employable once I have that license but am disappointed that the LPCC has not helped much in getting positions I am most interested in.

Answer from Mark

I must admit that I am unfamiliar with the LPCC license, but I share your frustration with feeling that your license does not grant you access to jobs that you are qualified for. This sounds like something that needs advocating efforts from your local LPCC chapter. I imagine that you are not the only one who is experiencing these frustrations, and so teaming up with others to educate the surrounding community could help spread that word about what an LPCC is capable of.

Question from Veronica Stawinski

I am graduating in May with my master's in psychological counseling. I am not sure exactly what I want to do with my degree so I have been searching many different careers but I have noticed all want 1+ years' experience and then only experience I have is from my practicum. What do you suggest I do for more experience?

Answer from Melissa

If you meet most of the requirements, you can (and should, in my opinion) go ahead and apply. If you are graduating you probably have about one year of experience between practice and internships. In the meantime, volunteering or being active with a professional counseling association will help you network and keep your counseling work active on your resume.

Question from Keneisha Jones

Do you have any suggestions on drawing the line between your career and your personal life to help prevent burn out?

Answer from Melissa

I think this will depend on lots of things like your current life and career stage as well as your various personal and professional roles. For me, it means being involved in some non-counseling related activities. It also means getting good sleep and taking time off as needed. If you find that you are thinking about work outside of work,



especially clinical material, it can be helpful to talk with a supervisor or counselor about this. I think this can be especially likely to happen early in our careers when we are seeing a full case load of clients. Also, try to schedule in breaks if you can (my limit used to be three clients in a row followed by at least one free hour). Know your limits and do whatever you need to do to protect your time and your energy level throughout the day. Another strategy could be to make sure you connect with friends and family who are not counselors. When I hang out with my counselor friends I sometimes have to say, “OK, we are not going to talk about work today!”

Question from Rachel Kennelly

I know you mentioned it can take up to a year to get comfortable in a position, What do you do when the employer does not recognize this time?

Answer from Melissa

Even though we may take a while to adjust to our new work, we are still expected to *do* the work to the best of our abilities...and that is appropriate and necessary. Try to schedule periodic meetings with a supervisor or manager to ask questions about your performance and about how to handle certain dilemmas. Give yourself permission to make mistakes (it's bound to happen when we start something new) and ask for help along the way.

Questions from Elizabeth Bolton and Ayinde Robinson

Do you have recommendations for self-care routines? What do you do to prevent burnout?

Answer from Presenters

Mark: Have fun. Work is work, and it can be rewarding, but fun needs to be a part of your life. So if you need to take a few days off and steal away to the beach for a long weekend, do it. Because if you are really happy in other areas of your life, you'll be happier and more productive at your job as well.

Melissa: I love doing yoga and meditation, but some people do better with higher energy activities like running, going to music festivals, etc. Sleep and exercise are so important. I think taking time off and setting good boundaries at work is essential to self-care. I mentioned it before, but talking with peers, supervisors, and counselors is also an important form of self-care.

Question from Kimberly Brown

What if you don't get a job? How do you know if you should keep doing what you are doing or if you should change something?

Answer from Mark

We are definitely in a tough market, and sometimes that means not getting the job you want right away. I've heard of some school counselors who have had to return to teaching for a few years before they were able to find a counseling job in their district. I'm not sure if there is a straight answer of when to keep pushing on and when to reevaluate what you're doing.



Questions from Lindsey Salisbury and Jennifer Bush

I've had interview after interview and I always here the same thing...we chose someone with more experience. How do I stand out in a school counseling interview when I'm fresh out of school? What can you do if you have had quite a few interviews but no job offers? And when you ask for feedback they say you need more experience.

Answer from Presenters

Mark: Getting interviews is a really good sign, and competing with others who have more experience is something you will likely bump up against in the future as well. I'd suggest knowing the unique skills and techniques that you bring to the table that can make you stand out among the other candidates. For example, I've always been pretty good at doing guidance lessons to classes. To show employers what I'm capable of, I bring in a portfolio to my interviews that shows examples of what students do and learn and my teaching style. I also show potential employers how I evaluate my guidance lessons and tweak them to make them more effective. I've found that principals really like this approach and it sets me apart from others who only offer "experience". Perhaps the same kind of idea could work for you.

Melissa: First of all, the fact that you are coming in the number two spot is something to be proud of! It's competitive out there and you are clearly a top candidate. Continue to practice speaking about your skills and how they will benefit the employer, as well as expressing your genuine interest in the position (if applicable) to the people who are interviewing you. Employers want to hire someone who genuinely wants to work with them - so don't forget to express that interest verbally. It could be as short as saying, "In closing, I just want to say that I am very interested in working here" and follow it up with a reason (company values or mission, nature of the work, etc.).

Question from Karen Bailey

Any job search suggestions for someone looking to relocate to a different state?

Answer from Mark

Relocating is tough, and can be really hard for counselors in particular. I would first suggest reading up on what it will take to transfer over your license, which in some states, can be a daunting task. But it will look much better on your employment application or in an interview if you can say that your license is "in the process" of being transferred. I'd also suggest doing as much leg work from your current location as you can. Keep on top of websites and job boards as much as possible so that you know what is out there and where to look. That way, when you do move, you can really hit the ground running.

Question from Arona Roshal

Please give examples of questions to ask that will tell you about a company's culture.

Answer from Melissa

I like to ask interviewers what they like best about working for the organization as well as where they see the department or company headed in the next five years or so. You could also ask, "Can you describe the general working atmosphere among colleagues in this department/organization?"



Question from Sarah Liro

What is the average rate for an LAC to start at if they are getting paid per client, not hourly?

Answer from Melissa

This is going to depend on setting, population, and geographical location. If you are in private practice, doing your own billing and scheduling you would probably keep a larger percentage of what you are billing insurance companies. If you are working in an office where those details are taken care of for you, you can expect to have to give a larger portion of your rate to the organization for those costs. If you are eligible to be on Medicaid or other insurance panels, the rates you can expect to be paid should be posted online. The proportion of money you keep from what is being billed for you may be something that is negotiable in a group or private practice setting (not with the insurance company but with the practice manager).

Question from Bridget Simpson

I am finding a hard time getting paid for what I'm worth. Are there any areas that would pay more such as substance abuse or the development disorder field?

Answer from Presenters

Mark: I'm not sure about a particular field that would pay more, but I do know that certain employers tend to pay more than others. Hospitals, for example, tend to offer a higher salary than other agencies. But as far as which type of counselors are paid the highest salary, I'm not sure.

Melissa: The Occupational Outlook Handbook has really good data on median pay for various counseling specialties. Go to: <http://www.bls.gov/oco>

Question from Anonymous

What if you have had an experience where you are worried about a bad reference from a supervisor who sabotaged job application in past?

Answer from Melissa

The short answer is don't use that person as a reference. An employer should only be contacting the people you present as references, not all of your old employers. If it is inevitable that the supervisor who is saying negative things must be contacted, you may have to pre-empt that reference check by giving the employer a heads up and offering your side of the story (be very brief, don't say anything negative about the supervisor or organization).

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