

# Lifetime Achievement in Counseling Series

## An Interview With Theodore P. Remley, Jr.



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*This interview begins the Lifetime Achievement in Counseling Series at TPC that will present an annual interview with a seminal figure who has attained outstanding achievement in counseling over a career. Although there are many people in counseling who deserve to be designated as the first interviewee, I am honored to present the inaugural interview of Dr. Theodore P. Remley, Jr. I have known Ted for 25 years and consider him to be a mentor, a colleague and foremost, a friend. His contributions to the counseling profession, from teaching, research and scholarship to mentoring and introducing students to the globalization of counseling, is laudable. Dr. Neal Gray and Lindsay Kozak are no less worthy in accepting my editorial assignment of interviewing Dr. Remley. What follows are thought-provoking reflections from an outstanding counseling leader and visionary. —J. Scott Hinkle, Editor*

Theodore P. Remley, Jr. is an author or editor of three counseling textbooks, a monograph series, numerous book chapters, and over 40 refereed journal articles, most of which are related to law and ethics in counseling. His co-authored textbook with Dr. Barbara Herlihy, *Ethical, Legal, and Professional Issues in Counseling*, is the most widely used ethics text in the counseling profession. He also has published books on ethical and legal issues in school counseling and marriage and family therapy. Dr. Remley has been a professor of counseling for over 35 years and currently holds the position of Professor of Counseling and Booth-Bricker Endowed Professor at the University of Holy Cross in New Orleans. In addition, he has held full-time faculty positions at Old Dominion University, where he was also the Batten Endowed Chair, the University of New Orleans, Mississippi State University and George Mason University. He is a former Executive Director of the American Counseling Association. Dr. Remley held the rank of Captain in the United States Army and has practiced as a school counselor, college counselor and private practitioner in both counseling and law.



Dr. Remley received a PhD in counselor education and supervision from the University of Florida and holds a JD degree from Catholic University in Washington, DC. He is a National Certified Counselor and a Licensed Professional Counselor in Louisiana, Mississippi and Virginia, as well as a Marriage and Family Therapist in Louisiana. He also is licensed to practice law in Florida and Virginia. Dr. Remley is a Fellow in the American Counseling Association and is the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision. He was selected as a counseling leader and featured in the book *Leaders and Legacies: Contributions to the Profession of Counseling*, edited by West, Osborn and Bubenzer (2003).

Dr. Remley has directed international counseling institutes in Ireland, Bhutan, Argentina, Africa and Italy. He was President of the Virginia Counselors Association and Chair of the Southern Region of the American Counseling Association. He was one of the leaders involved in getting the first licensure bill for counselors passed in Virginia in 1976. He has served on four state counseling licensure boards and chaired the boards in Virginia and Louisiana. He helped draft regulations for the District of Columbia board when it was first established and chaired the ethics committee for

the boards in Virginia, Mississippi and Louisiana. He is the Founding President of the American Association of State Counseling Boards, the organization that provides a forum for counseling licensure boards in all states and jurisdictions to communicate with each other and work toward appropriate and fair regulation of the counseling profession. He served as a trustee on the board of Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa, and was a member of the TRICARE study panel for the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine. Dr. Remley offers readers a valuable perspective on the counseling profession based on his extensive experiences.

In this interview, Dr. Remley responded to seven questions formulated to explore his career, his impact on the counseling profession, and his thoughts about the current state and future of the counseling profession:

**1. The counseling profession has made substantial progress during the time you have been a member of the profession. In your opinion, what are the three major accomplishments of the profession?**

I earned my master's degree in counseling from the University of Florida in 1971. More than 45 years ago the counseling profession was in a much different place than it is today. At that time, counselors in schools were called *guidance counselors* and most had minimal preparation in the field of counseling; there was little conversation about the professional identity of counselors; cultural differences were not acknowledged in the counselor preparation curriculum; almost all counselor educators were counseling or clinical psychologists; and employment possibilities for master's-level counselors were limited primarily to schools, higher education, and rehabilitation agencies. Counselors who earned doctoral degrees in counselor education and supervision at the time would obtain licenses as psychologists because there were no licenses for counselors. The profession has indeed come a very long way in the past 45 years.

The most significant accomplishment the counseling profession has made during my career has been achieving licensure for counselors in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2010). I was involved in lobbying the Virginia Legislature, which resulted in the first counselor licensure bill being passed in 1976. At that time in Virginia, counselors had been accused of practicing psychology without a license, and we thought the best response to that injustice was to create a separate license for counselors. We were fortunate to have Dr. Carl Swanson, who at the time was a counseling faculty member at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, lead the effort that resulted in the first counselor license in the United States being established. In addition to being a counselor, Dr. Swanson also was an attorney and an Episcopal priest. I'm not sure whether it was his legal preparation or his spiritual connections that helped us get the bill passed, but we were successful in Virginia and the rest of the United States followed our lead. California was the last state to pass a bill to license counselors in 2009 (ACA, 2010). So, the effort to establish counselor licensure in all states took from 1976 to 2009 . . . a total of 33 years.

The second most significant accomplishment of the counseling profession has been the successful accreditation of counseling graduate programs through the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2015). My international work in counseling has taught me that to be a recognized profession in any country, counselors have to be educated at universities. In most of Europe and in some other places in the world, counselors are prepared in private schools outside university settings, as indicated in *Counseling Around the World: An International Handbook* (Hohenshil, Amundson, & Niles, 2013). But requiring university degrees in the United States to become counselors was not enough. We had counseling master's degree programs long before

CACREP was established, but most programs were weak in that many required only 30 to 36 credits; there was no standardized curriculum, and clinical practica and internships were rare. CACREP has led the profession in establishing minimum standards for counselor preparation. Today in the United States, when a counselor graduates from a CACREP-accredited program, employers and the general public know the counselor is well-prepared to provide counseling services to clients. I am proud that my graduate advisor and mentor, Dr. Robert Stripling at the University of Florida, was a major leader in establishing CACREP for the benefit of the counseling profession.

The third major accomplishment of the counseling profession is the success of the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC, 2015). NBCC was created in 1982 when counselor education programs varied in quality and only a few states had licensure laws that provided a credential that demonstrated a counselor was well-educated and knowledgeable. Now that state licensure for counselors has been accomplished in all states, NBCC has developed into a major force in the continued development of the counseling profession. When the American Counseling Association is mired down by an impossible division-based governance structure and is pondering whether ACA can take a stand on important issues, NBCC, with its small board that has a strong commitment to advancing the counseling profession, has provided lobbying in Washington, DC, and throughout the United States to ensure counselors have the right to practice their profession and have access to jobs for which they are qualified. NBCC also has led the profession in supporting the development of the counseling profession throughout the world. By administering federal scholarships and creating their own scholarships, NBCC has supported the continued growth of the profession and encourages entry into needed areas in counseling (e.g., rural, minority services, military).

**2. Which of the major accomplishments that you listed above was the most difficult to achieve for the counseling profession, and why?**

Achieving counselor licensure in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico was the most difficult accomplishment. Counselors had to organize separately in 52 political jurisdictions, work together cooperatively and settle differences among themselves, overcome external resistance, particularly from psychologists and social workers, and often go year after year to state legislatures in order to get a state counselor licensure bill passed. Accomplishing such a monumental and difficult task in only 33 years still amazes me.

There was tremendous resistance to counselor licensure from many organizations, including state legislatures, psychologists, social workers and special interest groups. Ironically, the psychology profession actually started the counselor licensure movement by default because counselors were forced to seek licensure (or state regulation) when they started being accused by psychologists of practicing psychology without a license.

Generally, states do not favor regulating professions. In order to convince legislators that the counseling profession needed to be regulated, counselors argued that the general public cannot distinguish a qualified counselor from one who is not qualified and that unregulated counselors have the potential of doing significant harm to the public. State regulation of a profession defies the concept of free enterprise and has the potential of keeping qualified individuals from practicing a profession for which they have been prepared. Once a state starts regulating a profession, the process is quite expensive and must be monitored by legislatures to ensure that applicants and licensees are being treated fairly. Paradoxically, counselors who consider themselves helpers had to present arguments to legislators that some counselors had the potential of inflicting substantial harm upon members of the public who did not have the capacity to determine whether a particular counselor was competent.

Providing examples of counselor incompetence to legislators was a painful but necessary task that was required to convince state lawmakers that regulation of the counseling profession was needed to protect the public.

In order to get counselor licensure bills passed, we also argued that counseling was a unique profession that was distinct and different from psychology and other helping professions. In Virginia, after the counselor licensure law was passed and implemented, we went back to the state legislature to argue that counseling was quite similar to the profession of psychology in that counselors had the proper training to diagnose and treat mental disorders, in order to be qualified to receive third party insurance company payments for services. Interestingly, legislative processes and politics often require compromise and even making seemingly contradictory arguments from time to time.

When state counselor licensure bills were being considered, psychologists, supported financially by the American Psychological Association (APA) and state psychological associations, argued before state legislators that counselors did not have adequate education to provide counseling services. Social workers essentially agreed with psychologists. Of course it was to the advantage of psychologists and social workers to keep counselors out of the job market so that counselors could not compete for professional positions and clients in private practices.

But psychologists and social workers were not the only groups who opposed counselor licensure—some counselors opposed it as well. Counselors who did not meet the minimum requirements state licensure bills established to become licensed argued that counselor licensure would take away their ability to practice in their respective states. As a result, almost all states grandfathered in the counselors who were already practicing, whether or not they met the minimum licensure requirements. While many counselors at the time were distressed that unqualified counselors were allowed to be licensed, this was one of the many compromises that had to be reached in order for counselor licensure bills to be passed.

Other compromises included the number of credits required for a counseling master's degree (which ranged from 30 to more than 60), the required post-degree supervised experience (which ranged from none to 3 years), and the type of exam required (which varied from state to state). The result of such compromises was counselor licensure laws varying widely from one state to another. The differences in state counselor licensure laws is currently having an adverse effect on counselors who move from one state to another and also confuses the public because of the lack of standardization regarding the requirements for practicing the profession of counseling. It would be possible to rewrite state statutes to align with one another, but that would need to be accomplished state by state over time.

### **3. What do you consider to be your major contribution to the development of the counseling profession and why?**

While I was Executive Director of the American Counseling Association (between the years 1990 and 1994), I wrote a column in the ACA newsletter called *Guidepost*, in which I listed the elements of professional counselor identity. That column has been quoted often and the statements of professional counselor identity being published today look very similar to what I wrote about more than 20 years ago. In my opinion, these are the four critical elements of professional counselor identity: (a) counselors approach mental health from a wellness (rather than an illness) perspective, (b) counselors believe that most mental health problems are related to a person's developmental stage in life and therefore are transitory in nature, (c) counselors value prevention of mental health

problems and early intervention when possible, and (d) counselors strive to empower clients to live independently and help them avoid becoming reliant on counseling services. After consultation with my colleagues in rehabilitation counseling, I added the fourth empowerment component of my counselor identity statement.

Counselors-in-training and counselors who interact with the public at large have to be able to articulate in a positive manner who counselors are and what we believe. We should never say that counseling is similar to psychology or social work, but instead should focus on statements that define our philosophy of helping others. When we fully explain our beliefs about helping, we are able to assist the members of the public to choose practitioners who are best suited to address their mental health needs. By providing counselors the four areas listed above that define our beliefs about counseling, I believe I have helped to advance the counseling profession and I am pleased I was able to publish that statement.

#### **4. What three challenges to the counseling profession as it exists today concern you most?**

*The American Counseling Association's (ACA) Ineffectiveness.* ACA officers and staff members are dedicated and capable professionals who are not able to be effective in advancing the counseling profession because of the flawed structure of the organization. Our national counseling professional association has an organizational structure ineffective in moving the counseling profession forward; this is arguably the most significant challenge to the profession today. The major divisions of ACA have created very successful independent specialization organizations at the expense of the success of ACA. Unfortunately, we have the impossible situation in which specialty associations are actually in control of ACA, and whose interests likely include maintaining a weak national counseling association. Currently, divisions are allowed to include members who are not members of ACA, which increases their membership at the expense of ACA membership numbers. Divisions can operate independently of ACA, holding their own revenue-generating conferences and being involved with other activities that directly compete with similar ACA revenue-generating activities. This independence of divisions allows them to reap the benefits of being under the ACA umbrella without having any responsibilities and enables them to compete directly with ACA for members and revenue. Our professional association should have the ability to stand firm on professional issues that affect the livelihood of all professional counselors and should not be limited and held back by those who appear to want ACA to be a weak organization so that specialization organizations can prosper.

Unfortunately, the governing body of ACA is made up primarily of division representatives whose first allegiance is to promote their specialization organizations, not to promote the counseling profession as a whole. The unfortunate governance structure of ACA that allows divisions the power to make decisions for ACA as a whole is the result of the history of ACA, an umbrella association that was created as a federation of independent counseling associations. Although the profession of counseling has moved beyond the specialties controlling the overall counseling profession, ACA is stuck in the past with a governance structure that allows specialty divisions to make decisions for ACA. The profession of counseling currently lacks one singular, strong professional association presence. ACA should provide the united voice for all counselors and not allow special interest viewpoints to keep the profession from moving forward. We have worked hard to create the recognized and viable profession of counseling. CACREP and NBCC have done an excellent job of strengthening the counseling profession as a whole. However, the fact that the specialization divisions of ACA have separate administrators, offices, conferences and programs that compete directly with ACA threatens the future of the counseling profession. For each professional issue affecting counselors, for ACA to take a position, all specializations have to agree, which is almost

impossible to accomplish. ACA as an organization is paralyzed and must be restructured or replaced with an effective association for all counselors if the counseling profession is to continue to prosper.

*Failure to Standardize.* A second concern is the inability of the counseling profession to standardize. CACREP has provided a model for preparing capable counselors and now the CACREP standards need to become the standard for state licensure. CACREP has already been adopted by NBCC as the standard for future national certification (NBCC, 2014). A lack of standardization has led to current issues and problems, including portability of counseling licenses from state to state, that in turn keep the profession from agreeing upon a strong professional identity, which in turn confuses the general public. If we want the public to embrace the counseling profession, we must standardize the profession and agree upon what is required to be a professional counselor.

The current attention given to complaints from psychologists about excluding them from holding faculty positions in counselor education programs and the response of some leaders trying to accommodate these complaints is a symptom of the counseling profession not having the ability or courage to take the steps necessary to standardize. Of course, as the counseling profession becomes stronger, there will be individuals who are dissatisfied. But those who are not supportive of strengthening the counseling profession should not be given the power to limit the counseling profession from moving forward. All counselors should be supportive of CACREP and NBCC, and those who are not supportive should refrain from negatively affecting the future of the counseling profession.

*Job Categories.* A third concern is that there continue to be many governmental agencies at all levels (federal, state and local) that lack job categories for counselors. As a result, counselors are sometimes not eligible for jobs they are qualified to perform where such positions are filled only by psychologists, social workers, or other non-counselors. In some agencies, counselors take jobs that include titles such as *psychological technician*, *psychological assistant*, *social assistant*, or even *psychologist* or *social worker*. With such inappropriate job titles, counselors often have no opportunity for advancement and their professional identity as counselors is compromised. We have made some progress in getting job categories for counselors established in some agencies, but there is much more work to be done in this arena.

##### **5. What needs to change in the counseling profession for these three concerns to be successfully resolved?**

*ACA's Ineffectiveness.* Unfortunately, ACA is a dysfunctional association that has been paralyzed by its governance structure. The specialization divisions have control over the association that should be representing *all* counselors. The only solution, in my opinion, would be to restructure ACA so that the association would be governed by a small board of directors that is elected from the general membership and is responsive to the counseling profession, instead of being controlled by specializations within the profession. Interestingly, the *TPC* editor discussed this point at the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision conference 20 years ago (Hinkle & Kline, 1996), yet ACA continues to have an ineffective governance structure. Those in control of ACA should have a commitment to the best interests of the counseling profession as a whole. Currently, individuals whose main allegiance is to counseling specializations are in control of ACA. In order for the ACA governance to be restructured, the current ACA Governing Council members, who represent counseling specializations, would have to vote to give up their power over ACA, which I doubt they would consider. In my opinion, the division representatives who hold ACA Governing Council seats do not represent the view of the vast majority of ACA members who want ACA to be a strong

association that promotes the overall counseling profession. If ACA cannot restructure so that it represents the counseling profession as a whole, then perhaps a new association that is not controlled by specializations should be formed that would replace ACA.

*Failure to Standardize.* State counseling licensure boards need to work together to achieve standardization in licensure laws and rules. The current movement to require that those licensed hold master's degrees from CACREP-accredited programs is the best way to achieve standardization. NBCC has already announced that in the future only graduates of CACREP-accredited programs will be eligible for national counselor certification. The American Association of State Counseling Boards (AASCB; 2015) is encouraging state licensure boards to standardize counselor licensure requirements and to recognize counselor licenses from state to state. When AASCB was formed in 1986, a major goal of the new association was to standardize state counseling statutes, but obviously it is a difficult task since 30 years later that goal has not been accomplished.

*Job Categories.* In order to create job categories for counselors, each federal, state, and local agency and all private companies that hire mental health professionals must be lobbied individually. A massive effort to create job categories should be supported by NBCC and all counseling professional associations, and that effort should become a top priority.

**6. Assuming some challenges will get resolved and others will not, what do you think the counseling profession will look like 20 years from now?**

In 20 years, if the current challenges I have identified can be met and resolved successfully, I believe the public will have a better understanding of who counselors are, what their training is, and what services they are capable of delivering. Counselors will be the preferred mental health providers of the public because counselors are better prepared than other mental health professionals to deliver high quality counseling services. If the current challenges for the counseling profession are not resolved, in 20 years we will be where we are today, stalled on the road to establishing counseling as a strong profession in American society and being left behind in the arena of public recognition compared to other mental health professions.

**7. If you were advising current counseling leaders, what advice would you give them about moving the counseling profession forward?**

I see several contemporary leaders in the counseling profession already providing strong positive leadership. So I would say to other counselors that they should follow the lead of counselors who are arguing that ACA should be restructured so that it represents the counseling profession as a whole, who are advocating that state licensure boards adopt CACREP-accredited master's degrees as the standard for licensure, and who are strongly and continually urging ACA to recognize that CACREP is the only legitimate organization that accredits counseling graduate programs. At the state level, counselor leaders should work toward getting counselor licensure board members appointed by governors who support adopting CACREP-accredited master's degrees as the minimum standard for state counselor licensure. I appreciate the courageous leaders in counseling today who are willing to take the steps necessary to advance the counseling profession even when they lack the support they deserve.

*This concludes the initial interview for the annual Lifetime Achievement in Counseling Series. TPC is grateful to Dr. Neal Gray and Lindsay Kozak for providing this interview. Neal D. Gray is an Associate Professor at Lenoir-Rhyne University. Lindsay Kozak is a counselor at Crossroads Counseling Center. Correspondence can*

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