Brews and Field Instructor Blues (A) [[1]](#footnote-1)

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Five weeks after a remediation plan required Anthony Woods to complete all field hours on site at his field agency, off-site field instructor Phillip Thompson went to meet him there. Phillip arrived a few minutes before their scheduled 1:00 p.m. supervision session. Anthony was not there, and Phillip assumed he was on his way back from lunch. After waiting 20 minutes, Phillip called Anthony’s cell phone, “Hey, Anthony, where are you?”

“I’m at a coffee shop,” Anthony replied.

“We have supervision,” Phillip reminded.

“Oh, I’m sorry! I totally forgot.”

“Rather than you coming here, since you have transportation issues, I can come to you.”

“Um . . . Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“Um . . . Okay.”

“What coffee shop?” Phillip asked.

“I’m at GrillMarx downtown.”

*That doesn’t sound like a coffee shop,* Phillip thought as he headed out the door, *maybe it’s a panini place. But according to the remediation plan, he’s supposed to be at the agency “during all field hours”!*

United Way of West Alabama

United Way of West Alabama was a leader in fund-raising for a number of community service partner agencies in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Originally founded as Community Chest of Tuscaloosa in 1946, it had expanded to serve residents of the city and nine surrounding counties. The agency occupied a suite in a large office building that housed other service and health care providers. The building was located on a city street a couple of miles from the University of Alabama campus. The agency provided leadership among local community nonprofits to build coalitions and engage in fund-raising and grant-making to build community resources in the areas of health, education, and income stability. The agency also provided information and referral services to individuals to link them to appropriate resources A staff of eleven was headed by President and CEO Rick Watson, MPH.

Rick Watson

Rick Watson was a Caucasian man in his early 40s with a beard and medium length, wavy, brown hair. He typically wore khaki pants and polo shirts. Rick had served as a task supervisor to social work students in the School of Social Work for the past five years, three of which were at the United Way of West Alabama. He was described as easy-going and affable by those at the University who worked with him, but also, very serious, passionate, and enthusiastic about his work. Rick was recruited to be a task supervisor by faculty members who had collaborated with him on projects at a previous non-profit organization. In his current position, he managed a thirty-member board of directors and a staff of eleven and oversaw the programming of the agency and the work of approximately 800 volunteers. During the legislative session, Rick also did a great deal of lobbying at the state capital in Montgomery, which took him away from the office quite a bit.

As task supervisor, Rick was engaged with his students and very good at giving them specific learning tasks appropriate for their level of knowledge and skill. He did have some difficulty at times keeping up with reviewing and providing feedback on process recordings due to his many responsibilities.

University of Alabama School of Social Work

The University of Alabama School of Social Work provided field education to more than 600 students in MSW and BSW programs each year. More specifically, students in the foundation MSW year completed 450 hours of field placement along with an accompanying field seminar class. These hours were spread out evenly across the semester at the rate of 16-18 hours per week. However, before spring semester classes, students complete a “block week” in which they spend 40 hours in their field placements.

Susan Dibler

Dr. Susan Dibler was the Director of Field Education in the School of Social Work. She was a Caucasian woman in her early 50s with medium length straight, blond hair and a very inviting smile. She oversaw all placements of MSW/BSW students in their field internships, implementation of field seminar classes, the training and supervision of all the field instructors and field liaisons, as well as served on all relevant School of Social Work committees as a faculty member. She would also become directly involved in situations that reached the level of considering removal and/or failure of the student in field placement. Susan also served as a field liaison to 10-15 students who had off-site supervisors or diverged from the standard model of field education.

Phillip Thompson

Phillip Thompson was a 38-year-old Caucasian, British PhD candidate in social work at the University of Alabama. Classically handsome with greying blond hair and a stocky yet muscular build, Phillip had been in the United States for 14 years and was married to an American. He was a licensed social worker who had a BA in Theology from Queen’s University of Belfast and an MSW from San Diego State. He had years of practice experience in the social work field both prior to and following his graduate education. Phillip worked for six years as a program manager in an adolescent group home prior to earning his MSW and an additional two and a half years post-MSW in adolescent mental health and recovery.

Phillip’s research interests were positive youth development and substance use. As a PhD candidate, he had an office on campus and provided field instruction to a group of students and helped with observing and assessing students in the implementation of SBIRT, a supplemental requirement of all foundation-level MSW students.

In his first year providing field instruction for a student, Phillip took his field instructor role very seriously.

Anthony Woods

Anthony Woods was a 25-year-old Caucasian social work student intern at United Way of Western Alabama. He was of average height and thin with glasses and long mousey brown hair that he wore in a ponytail. He wore khakis and polos and often sported a fashion baseball cap. Phillip described him as mellow and reflective, but sometimes a little cocky and sarcastic.

Anthony had a BA in sociology with a minor in child advocacy from Auburn University. He had a clear vision of what he wanted to do with his MSW degree: work in mental health with adolescent males.

Field Placement

Anthony was admitted late to the MSW program. He had just graduated from his undergraduate program during the summer and moved from a more rural part of the state shortly before the beginning of classes. Despite this, Anthony started the placement on time and, by all reports, did well. He was assigned to United Way of Western Alabama under the task supervision of Rick Watson. Phillip Thompson was assigned as his field instructor.

In this field placement, Anthony’s main responsibilities were: assisting with event planning and staffing of fund-raising events, assisting with volunteer coordination, and gathering information from partner agencies and literature searches for grant applications. Anthony received task supervision from Rick on a regular basis. Anthony also met with Phillip on alternate weeks at the agency for one hour of supervision focused on Anthony’s learning and progress in field. In addition, Anthony often dropped by Phillip’s office to check in when he was on campus or called Phillip on the phone between supervision sessions. Phillip believed they had established a good supervisory relationship.

Phillip observed that Anthony’s group of friends in the MSW program were mostly conservative, middle-class white males. One regularly wore an NRA cap to school that Phillip thought seemed to “give other students the middle finger.” By late October, Phillip sensed that Anthony was struggling with the material in his course on diversity and difference, particularly with reconciling his perceived privilege as a white male in the social work profession. Phillip arranged for Anthony to meet him for supervision on campus.

“As a white male, it can be uncomfortable at times,” Phillip offered and paused. *It’s important that I give you room to sit with that.*

“Yeah, in diversity class, all the problems in the world are tied to us,” Anthony responded. “Sometimes I don’t know what to say, or how to say it.”

Phillip invited him to “stay in that tension” as they discussed it within the context of Anthony’s professional identity development.

“Stay with that tension, Anthony, that discomfort. What does it bring up for you?”

“Well, everybody acts like if you’re a white male, your life is a breeze. It ain’t been no piece of cake for me and my family, man.”

“Do you want to say more about that?” Phillip waited patiently.

Anthony sat quietly for a few moments, sighed, and then began. “Look, my Dad’s people were all farmers. It got harder and harder to make a living. When I was about 14, he went looking for one of those good-paying jobs on an oil rig. He got one but he was gone six months at a time. When he came back, he was drinkin’ hard. Mama was on his case real bad. ‘Damned if you do, and damned if you don’t,’ Daddy used to say. ‘Ain’t no pleasing her.’”

“Sounds like you were close to your Dad, if he was confiding in you,” Phillip responded.

“Yeah, I was. Nobody’s perfect. He was tryin’ hard to put food on the table and make a better life for us. Sometimes he’d let me go with him when he met up with his friends. Everybody loved him. Once in a while he’d let me take a drink with them. When he went back on the rig, one of his friends would slip me some beer from time to time. Then Mama found out and threw me out of the house. ‘You are not going to be a drunkard and live under my roof!’ It went downhill from there.”

*That’s a pretty strong response*, Phillip thought. “Did you see that coming?”

“Not at the time, but a lot of stuff was going on. My grades had slid. I was going to school when I felt like it. I was gettin’ into arguments with her and my sister all the time. I won’t bore you with all the details, but it took me a few years to get myself straight.” Anthony paused, then added, “I spent some time homeless, ended up in foster care for a year, and did some other things I don’t want to remember.

“Where was your Dad in all this?” Phillip explored.

“Off,” Anthony paused, “working on the rig while he could. He still needed to take care of my Mom and my sister. He ‘couldn’t do nothing with me,’ he said, when the social worker asked him about a plan for me.”

*So how did you get from there to here?* Phillip wondered. “Anthony, what do you think about your progress? You graduated college last year. Now you are in graduate school.

“It’s been a long road. When I was in foster care, I got diagnosed with ADD. That explained a lot about why I felt so stressed all the time. The older I got, the more things I had to organize.”

*Man, I know how that feels,* Phillip wandered off into his own thoughts. *When I was diagnosed with ADD, I was upset and relieved at the same time. I wonder if he has learned how to cope with it.*

“I stopped drinking while I was on the meds,” Anthony’s voice interrupted his thoughts. “I started doing better in school. Mom let me come back home. I graduated community college and then went to Auburn. I was doing good until I joined the fraternity. “Anthony faltered, then plunged ahead. “You know how it is. Sometimes we did some partying, and one night, we got a wild hair and decided to do some racing. It was the middle of the night. Nobody was on the road, so we thought we were good.”

“But you weren’t?” Phillip asked.

“Nope, Anthony confirmed, “flashing lights, sirens, cold handcuffs around my wrists. Nobody was hurt, thank God, but it was a wake-up call. I’m back in recovery now.”

So that’s it,” Phillip surmised, “the reason you weren’t able to be place in a micro setting this year?”

“Yep, you know I eventually want to work in a mental health setting with adolescent males,” Anthony offered. “I’ve pretty much ruined my chances of that unless I can convince a recovery setting to take me on as an intern next year.”

“So, Anthony, that’s real. Thanks for sharing that with me.” Phillip continued, “It really helps me to understand some of the challenges you have faced, and now I think I understand why you were triggered by the talk of ‘white male privilege.’”

“You got it.” With a sarcastic grin, Anthony mocked, “I don’t feel ‘privileged,’ never felt ‘privileged.’ Always had to scrap for everything I got, though I admit, sometimes I’ve been my own worst enemy.”

*I know I’m taking a chance here*, *but I think he’s up to it*. Phillip chanced, “So let’s use this. What can you glean from your own experience that can help you with your clients, especially those who, like you, haven’t all been able to start at the gate?”

“What do you mean?” Anthony sat forward in his chair. “Oh, I get it!” He was very still. “So, I didn’t start at the gate because we were poor, because my father drank too much, because he was gone, because I had ADD, because I now have SUD. And somebody else doesn’t start at the gate because she is female, or he is African American, or they are transgender, and others have put up barriers for them. They have been invisible to me. I didn’t see their pain because I didn’t live it. I’m a barrier myself. Man, that’s really sad.”

“Yes, it is,” Phillip spoke softly now, “but not as sad as not recognizing that at all.”

“So, it’s not whose pain is the worst, but I need to hear their pain,” Anthony paused, then added, “like you just heard my pain.”

“Exactly,” Phillip said. “That’s what we mean by ‘use of self.’ It’s part of our professional identity as social workers to be able to recognize, respect, empathize, and respond to the pain of others.

As he stood up to leave, Anthony offered Phillip a handshake. “Thanks for helping me with this, Phillip. I have overcome a lot and I’m still plugging. I’m still learning and that’s okay. For the first time I think I’m finally getting this ‘diversity and difference’ stuff.”

*He’s going to be okay*, Phillip thought as he watched Anthony head out the door. For the next several weeks, he was right.

End of Fall Semester Liaison Meeting

At the final liaison meeting of fall semester, Phillip and Anthony met with Rick to review Anthony’s performance.

“Overall, Anthony’s doing well,” Rick summarized, “but he has some trouble with organization, punctuality, and time management.”

“Yes,” Phillip agreed, “Anthony has owned some challenges keeping up with hours, coming in on time, and meeting deadlines.”

“Well,” Rick fixed his gaze on Anthony, “I’ve trusted him with the freedom to set his own schedule and work off-site if appropriate, because that’s what macro practitioners need to do.” Anthony shuffled in his seat and looked down.

*I’m not completely sure that’s a good idea,* Phillip mused. But out loud, he said, “Rick, tell us exactly what you need from Anthony going forward,” Phillip asked. “I’ll take notes.”

Still not taking his eyes off Anthony, Rick responded, ”During spring semester, I’m going to be out of the office a lot lobbying in Montgomery. I need you to be more of a self-starter. I need you to be more organized. 9 am is 9 am; it’s not 10:30. And close of business does not mean 8:57 pm.”

“Look, I’m confused. You told me to set my own schedule,” Anthony argued. “I did that.”

“You know, Anthony, if you make a 9 am appointment with an agency director to gather information for a grant that you show up at 9 am, not at 10:30. Same thing with phone conferences,” Rick insisted.

“You know I called him later to apologize and let him know why I was . . .”

“After I told you to do that,” Rick interrupted. “I need you to be where you are supposed to be, call when you are supposed to call, at the time you say you are going to do it. It’s important that we, as an agency, are dependable. Is that clear?”

“We already talked about this, and I told you I would do this,” Anthony was irritated.

“Rick, Anthony and I talked about some strategies to help with prioritizing and accomplishing time sensitive tasks,” Phillip offered. “Is there any additional information you want to offer here?”

Softening a bit, Rick explained, “So when Anthony completes a task, it is usually done well. But I have to start him, monitor his work, and sometimes push him to finish it.” Looking at Anthony again, he continues, “We’ve already talked about this. I don’t want to beat a dead horse, but I’m not going to have time second semester to hold your hand. I need you to set submission dates that will give me time to comment on your work. I need you to come to weekly meetings with me with questions or problems you might be having. I don’t want to find out about these a couple of days before the information is due. I don’t want a repeat of what happened on the last project.”

“What happened?” Phillip was puzzled.

“Do you want to tell him or do I?” Rick waited for Anthony.

“I gave him some information too late,” Anthony admitted.

“Specifically?” Rick prompted.

“I gave him information on our last fund-raiser on Friday night,” Anthony mumbled, clearly embarrassed.

Rick spoke to Phillip, “I said close of business Thursday, as I had planned to work on the report Friday for our board meeting Monday night. As it turns out, I had to complete it over the weekend. Like I said, I don’t want to beat a dead horse. I just want to be clear about what is going well and help Anthony make the changes he needs to make to be successful.”

Addressing both Rick and Anthony, Phillip offered, “It seems like you’ve been clear about what you need, Rick. And I appreciate, Anthony, that you brought this up to me on your own and asked for help. Is there anything else can I do to assist?”

“We’ve got this now, don’t you think?” Rick turned to Anthony who, looking relieved, gave him a thumbs up.

Phillip remained mildly concerned. *I know Anthony has a lot going on. More is going to be expected of him in the coming semester, and yet there is going to be more responsibility put on him to take control of his schedule, his work, and his learning.* *Yeah, he’s making it now,* Phillip thought, *but I am afraid this could be the straw that breaks the camel’s back.*

At their next supervision session, Phillip followed up with Anthony to express his concerns. Being the most direct he had ever been, Phillip said, “It’s really, really imperative that you are on it.”

“I know, Phillip,” Anthony responded, appearing confused, “Why are we talking about this again? I don’t know what else I can say.”

“Listen, Anthony, you know when we met in my office and you told me about being diagnosed with ADD? Well, I didn’t tell you at that time that I also have a diagnosis of ADD. And I can tell you, from my personal and professional experience, this type of arrangement as it pertains to task supervision, might not be enough structure for you. In my career, this has been hard at times. It has been a real growing edge for me.” Then Phillip added, “Deadlines are going to be looser, but there is more onus on you to deliver the products. Your role here is to complete the research tasks you are given.”

“Yeah, yeah” Anthony replied, “I understand.”

*I hope you heard me*, Phillip paused, *that wasn’t the enthusiastic response I hoped for.*  “You’re going to have to be organized,” Phillip tried again, “as it pertains to time and dates.” Phillip was earnest now. “You’re going to have to structure yourself. If you need any help with that, any additional tips, will you contact me?””

“Phillip, I get it!” Anthony said.

Later, as he drove away, Phillip reassured himself, *Rick has a good sense of what’s in Anthony’s wheelhouse and he said they’ve got it.* *These are good mezzo and macro opportunities for him.*

Second Semester/Illness and Missing Field

In January, Anthony called Phillip, “I’m really sick, man. I’m not going to make it to block week.”

“Are you all right? What’s wrong?” Phillip was genuinely concerned.

“I’ve been sick all Christmas. First, I thought it was just a cold; then I got a sore throat and started running a fever. I had a really bad cough and I couldn’t shake it. I didn’t want to go to the doctor; my funds are low this month. Finally, my Mom put her foot down and made me go to urgent care. She had to pay the bill. I had walking pneumonia! They put me on a ton of medicine. I’m slowly getting better, but I’m not back in Tuscaloosa yet.

“I’m sorry to hear that, but glad to hear you’re on the mend. Listen, Anthony, it’s a big deal to miss the whole block week. You will have to make up any missed hours, so get back as soon as you can. And make sure you let Rick know about this. Also, be forewarned, you might need to get a doctor’s note saying you should be excused from school for x number of days.”

“No problem,” Anthony responded. “I already emailed Rick.”

During the second week of field placement, Anthony emailed that he had made it into the office on Thursday of the block week for a few hours.

The third week, Anthony visited the agency for supervision. When he arrived, Rick called him into his office. “Look, I know Anthony was sick block week, but since he’s been back, he’s already been late two days and left early two days. I’ve got him tracking some legislation and doing some lit searches for a grant we might submit. I need you to communicate with Anthony that he needs to make these deadlines and show up. We can’t start this up again.”

“Sure, I’ll talk to him,” Phillip agreed.

When Phillip mentioned Rick’s concerns, Anthony responded, “Look, I was sick for three weeks and had been back for two full days before I started to come late and leave early.” Phillip noted that he seemed apologetic and uncomfortable.

“So, what’s this about, Anthony? If you’ve been released by your doctor to come back to school, why are you coming late and leaving early?” *I’m just about over this*, Phillip thought.

“I lost my ride, man,” Anthony threw his hands up and let them drop helplessly in his lap.

“So how will you solve this?” Phillip asked, to elicit solutions. Fifteen minutes later, Anthony had developed a plan to take the free campus connector and walk the remainder of the way. Alternatively, if the weather was bad, he would walk three blocks and catch the city bus for the remainder of the journey to the agency.

“I didn’t know where to start,” Anthony admitted. “I never took a city bus before.”

Two weeks later, Phillip went back to the agency. Rick was exuberant, “Whatever you did worked! Anthony’s been here on time, every day, all day!”

“And turning in work on time?” Phillip asked.

“So far, so good!” Rick cheered.

In his meeting with Anthony, Phillip asked, “How’s your transportation plan working?”

“Great,” Anthony replied. “The best part of it is I don’t have to be dependent on anybody else. I’m in control; that’s a huge relief.”

*So much time lost, so much stress for something so simple,* Phillip felt a twinge of sadness, *all because he was embarrassed to ask for help, to say what he didn’t know.* He continued, “Ready for the next challenge?”

Anthony nodded.

“You’re doing great, according to both you and Rick. But, you’re kind of in a hole here with the time you missed block week. Maybe you can make up some time on Fridays.” The two of them spent the next thirty minutes calendaring the time through the remainder of the semester and Anthony submitted it to Rick for his approval.

During their next session, Phillip combined supervision with an SBIRT observation that was part of the MSW foundation requirements. Anthony admitted, “I am so nervous; I haven’t had a lot of time with clients.”

“I know, Anthony,” Phillip reassured, “but I think you will do fine.”

Anthony did not perform to passing standards. *It was terrible*, Phillip admitted to himself. He told Anthony, “You’ll need to come back to do it again.” Phillip couldn’t bring himself to tell Anthony he “failed.”

That night, Phillip received an email from Anthony:

Phillip, I am really worried. I wasn’t fully honest in supervision. Rick is really pissed off at me. I have not been doing the work I am supposed to be doing. I have not been coming in this last couple of weeks. Rick wants us all to have a meeting next week. I am trying to figure out what to do about this. I am really worried. Please help me with this.

*What the heck?* Phillip thought. *I can’t believe this! He was doing so well! No calls from him; no calls from Rick. No wonder he failed the SBIRT observation.*

Phillip picked up the phone to call Anthony. After multiple rings, “You have reached Anthony Woods. Please leave a message . . .”

“Hey, Anthony, this is Phillip. Give me a call, so we can plan to meet.”

*Okay,* Phillip thought, *maybe he’ll see my email first.* He wrote:

Anthony, I got your email and tried to call you right away but just got your voicemail. Would it be possible us to meet on campus tomorrow at 9 am? If that is not good, I will be free again at 1 pm. Please call me back as soon as possible to confirm one of these times or to set a time to speak by phone.”

Five days later, Anthony responded via text: “Sorry. I was out of cell phone range. I was on a hiking trip on the Appalachian trail.”

Phillip texted back, “We have a meeting set with Rick at the usual time on Wednesday. I will meet with you first and the two of us will then meet with Rick.” He sent the same message via email.

When Phillip went to meet with Anthony and Rick on Wednesday, Rick intercepted him. “Hey, Phillip, Anthony has not been in, has not done his work, and I had to hire a temp this week to catch up on the work!”

“Rick, why didn’t you call me when this started again?” he asked.

“I was in Montgomery. I didn’t realize he was so far behind. I can’t babysit him anymore.” Rick turned on his heel to go back down the hall.

“Rick,” Phillip asked, “what are you telling me?”

“I’m done with him!” Rick said. “You and Susan deal with this.”

Then Phillip went to talk with Anthony. “Anthony, I need to get some facts from you first before we meet with, Rick.

“Rick is a hypocrite!” Anthony said.

Taken aback, Phillip responded, “Before we go there, help me with this timeline. I saw you last Wednesday for the observation. I had seen you and Rick just two weeks before. At that time, both of you told me you were pleased with your work. You were coming in on time, meeting deadlines, fulfilling all your hours. In fact, we calendared your make-up hours through the rest of the semester.”

Anthony nodded in agreement.

“But,” Phillip continued, “your email last week said that you had not been ‘fully honest’ with me, that you had stopped coming in regularly the last couple of weeks, stopped doing your work.”

Anthony again nodded his assent.

“Am I understanding this correctly then, that almost as soon as you were successful and even planned for your continued success, you . . .

“sabotaged myself,” Anthony interrupted.

“Sounds like that’s not a new concept for you.” Phillip cleared his throat, “Anyway, I’m glad you recognize that pattern, but we have a major problem here. Did you come in on time today?”

“Yes, I did. I was here at 9 am sharp. I thought I should make a fresh start,” Anthony offered, “but Rick read me the riot act. That’s what I’m trying to tell you. He’s a hypocrite. He is not here. He shows up when he wants to. He leaves when he wants to. He doesn’t answer my emails.”

Phillip said, “Can we discuss this with Rick?”

“No,” Anthony responded indignantly, “I am done with him. He is a fucking hypocrite!”

“That is not appropriate, Anthony,” Phillip winced. “You are not Rick. You do not know what he is doing. He is the director of the agency. I don’t think it’s helpful to compare yourself to him.”

Anthony glowered silently.

“So, what’s the plan now, Anthony?” Phillip asked. Did you and Rick talk about that?”

“He told me he hired a temp. She’s done all my work,” Anthony grumbled. “Now I don’t have anything to do!”

“Anthony, the bottom line is this: You’ve got to demonstrate that you can do the work and that’s not happening. Think about that and let me know if/when you are ready to meet with Rick.”

Phillip walked back into Rick’s office and said, “So I hear that you are done with him. I want to go back to talk to Susan about this. Is there anything else I should know?”

“I’m not sure what he’s doing,” Rick said. “I suspect that he’s drinking at night.”

“Drinking!” *Oh, no!* Phillip thought, *I’ve been putting all of this down to his ADD*. “Are you sure?”

“Of course, I can’t be sure,” Rick exclaimed. “I just know he’s late in the morning. He’s tired all the time. He’s disheveled.”

*What if Anthony has relapsed?* Phillip wondered as he drove to Susan’s office. *That would make sense . . . that would explain everything. Oh flip!* Phillip thought with a start*, Anthony has relapsed. He is using again.*

Seconds later, Phillip slammed his hands on the steering wheel. *I don’t have the skill to reconcile these two people. They are so shut off, so angry, and in different parts of the building. I have never seen Rick angry before. This is really over . . .*

At Susan’s office, Phillip burst through her doorway.

“Are you okay?” Susan startled.

Gasping for breath, Phillip replied, “Rick’s fired Anthony.”

“What? Why?” Susan asked.

“I think he’s relapsed,” Phillip explained. “He lied to everybody. Rick thinks he’s drinking at night. He said he shows up--if he shows up--late, tired and disheveled. All the work Anthony said he was doing . . . he has lied to everybody.”

“You don’t know that,” Susan replied. “You’re jumping to conclusions. You may be identifying with Anthony too much.”

“Whatever, Susan, he’s not doing the work.” Phillip was so frustrated, “when he’s on it, he does a really good job. But then he’s MIA, often with no warning. Every time I think we’ve made a breakthrough, he maintains about two weeks before he reverts back to his old ways. I don’t know if he’s using, derailed by his ADD, re-enacting what he experienced with his father, whatever. The bottom line is, I’m not able to help him, or Rick. I’ve tried everything I know. And I don’t want us to lose this placement for other students.”

“Let’s do this,” Susan suggested. “I think I should meet with them immediately. I’ll call them right now to make sure they’re both still there and let them know I’m on my way. I want to try to smooth the situation over both to salvage the relationship with the agency and get Anthony and Rick in the same room to discuss the conflict.

“That’s a good idea, Susan,” Phillip agreed. “Maybe a visit from the Director of Field will help Anthony to realize how serious this is. He’s about to fail field.”

Susan called Rick while Phillip was still there and set up a meeting with Rick and Anthony that afternoon. Phillip left with a glimmer of hope that Susan could help them both get back on track.

The next morning, Phillip dropped by Susan’s office to find what had transpired the day before.

“I went to the agency to meet with Rick and Anthony,” Susan began. ”Rick denied telling you that Anthony had relapsed. Anthony denied refusing to work with Rick, and Rick denied refusing to work with Anthony. I asked specifically if there was any issue with alcohol. Anthony said that he was in reduction. I resolved the situation and put a remediation plan in place, calendaring the rest of the year. As part of the plan, we required Anthony to be present at the agency for all field hours.

“I feel like an idiot,” Phillip responded when Susan finished her account. “They probably thought I overreacted.”

“Yeah, well, that’s easy to do when everyone’s so angry,” Susan reassured.

As they probed Phillip’s response, he acknowledged, “I own that I care for Anthony professionally. I see his strengths. Maybe I do identify with him. I was afraid he had relapsed.”

“Better that mistake than missing something altogether,” Susan assured.

*At the same time,* Phillip thought*, you threw me under the bus*. *At some level,* a*ll of you threw me under the bus. I know what I heard.* *I feel* *like a rank amateur. This is embarrassing*.

“So,” Phillip asked, gathering his thoughts, “what should I do next?”

At the next regularly scheduled supervision, Phillip checked in with Anthony about the situation. He reviewed the remediation plan with him.

“I can do it, Phillip,” Anthony was optimistic. “I did it before and I can do it again.”

*Been there, done that*, Phillip thought, but he kept his doubts to himself. “Anthony, I wish you had informed me of your concerns regarding Rick earlier. Sometimes you have to advocate for yourself with your task supervisor. This is a skill you will need in practice.” They contracted to work on this in future supervision sessions, using role-play to practice addressing his learning needs.

“Rick’s given me new tasks now that I know I will be able to do. I’m back on track,” Anthony said. And he was.

Pub Meeting

In April, Phillip went to the agency to meet with Anthony at their agreed-upon time, 1:00 pm. No one, including Anthony, was present at the agency. An administrative staff member returning from lunch told Phillip that Anthony had come in for about 10 minutes in the morning but left to go to work at the coffee shop. *The coffee shop*? Phillip puzzled but he waited. He assumed Anthony was coming back because they had confirmed the meeting the day before by email. *This is part of his endearing growing edge,* Phillip thought. After waiting 20 minutes, Phillip called Anthony’s cell phone, “Hey, where are you?”

“I’m at a coffee shop,” Anthony replied.

“We have supervision,” Phillip reminded.

“Oh, I’m sorry! I totally forgot.”

“Rather than you coming here, since you have transportation issues, I can come to you.”

“Um . . . Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“Um . . . Okay.”

“What coffee shop?” Phillip asked.

“I’m at GrillMarx downtown.”

*That doesn’t sound like a coffee shop,* Phillip thought, as he headed out the door, *maybe it’s a panini place. But according to the remediation plan, he’s supposed to be at the agency “during all field hours”!*

When Phillip arrived, he saw that it was an open-style burger and brew restaurant. He walked in to find Anthony sitting at the bar with his binder on one side and a pint of beer on the other.

*What?!* Phillip thought, *you invited me to meet you in a pub?! What were you thinking?*

1. This decision case was prepared solely to provide material for class discussion and not to suggest either effective or ineffective handling of the situation depicted. While based on field research regarding an actual situation, names and certain facts may have been disguised to protect confidentiality. The authors wish to thank the case reporter for cooperation in making this account available for the benefit of social work students and practitioners.

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