



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Jorge Sierralta (Highlight)



Role:	Staff Psychologist
Country of Origin:	Peru
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Interviewer:	Lisa P. Nathan Donald J. Horowitz
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Interpreter:	None

In this highlight, Jorge Sierralta speaks on...
psychologists learning how to work in different
cultures and belief systems

The transcript of the highlight begins on the following page.

- 00:00 I've been trained to provide counseling sessions, therapy and I remember the first time when I started in with people from different cultures trying to apply some of this western style. It didn't work well and it upset even the client. So I've been very sensitive. I try to center myself on what the client wants, how the person perceive, what is the belief system in that culture.
- 00:36 So I will normally ask the person, so, "In a similar problem, how in your culture this problem might be solved?" So I try always to, to change the approach, yeah, to be more client center then. So I think that is a very important factor to start with when you deal with people from different cultures also. And since the belief system is very powerful, just use the belief system of, of, of people.
- 01:07 So if somebody comes to me telling me, "Oh, somebody has done something bad to me," and the person has a very strong belief system that somebody put something on his glass of water and then things are not going well, so most probably I will tell the person, "Okay, I have an antidote that will going to help you." And, and it works.
- 01:32 It works because I don't try to change the belief. It will take me more time if I try to change the belief system of the person, so I work with this belief system. So I think it's something – also of course, sometimes because the person, English is not the mother tongue, English is not my mother tongue. If the person speaks French, it's okay, or Russian or – but it creates a lot of difficulty sometimes.
- 02:01 Sometimes, but you know, very often there we built a trust and the trust is built. Even the word are not very important, very often because my job is to listen to them, to assist them. So yeah, this is how, yeah, probably – but it's a very challenging, yeah, to, because people have, yeah, come from different background, different culture, different education so sometimes I need to make it simple, to explain in, in a way that they will understand.
- 02:34 It's, it's challenging because it's like talking about a legal issue to a child so you need – or talking to somebody from a different culture who is not even that, that is not in their language. I was talking, I was providing a, a session on homosexuality and I asked participants so, "It's this word in your language?" About six, seven of them were telling me that that word of homosexual is not even in their own language.
- 03:10 So you know, things, yeah, we need to be very careful with the – so it applies. So yeah, to use, explain them, to repeat, to make sure that they understand.