

What I Wish I Knew About Social Work

I have been a social worker for 23 years this year. I have been a licensed social worker for 15 years and a clinical social worker for over a decade. I don't have a plan B. I love social work. There's a statistic that states that the average burnout rate for social workers post masters is 5 years, due to the harsh realities of this work, and yet I am still passionate about this profession. Lately I have been reflecting on what I wish I knew as a younger social worker. As someone who is currently supervising over 2 dozen up and coming social workers towards clinical practice, I am often called upon to give career advice, life advice. The advice is always welcomed, and the recipient always seems to be grateful. So, as I am watching the advice, I have given someone about a job change or a lifestyle upgrade come to fruition and manifest as a blessing in their life, I often wish I had a me back then, maybe my life, my career path would have been much smoother. But even as I reflect on the regret, I am grateful that I went through every experience because it made me the social worker that I am today with the ability to share with you what I wish I had known about social work in the hopes that it makes your journey a bit easier.

I used to have this saying "I have never met a social worker I did not like". Most social workers are known for wearing their hearts on their sleeves, being compassionate, skilled at empathy and I like being around those kinds of people. So, for years I would say that I had never met a social worker I did not like until I met a social worker I did not like. And that is when I realized that people are people no matter what the profession. As a teacher in the profession, I would often hear that one of the main reasons a person came into the social work profession was because of some hurt or obstacle they had experienced in the past and now they want to help others who are experiencing similar hurts or obstacles. But what is the adage "Hurt people, hurt people"? So there are hurt people in the social work profession who came with good intentions of giving back but what did we already say, "hurt people, hurt people". They do not hurt their clients, they desire to help the client, that's when Savior Complex kicks in, but that is another topic for another day. No, these hurt people hurt their colleagues, peers and the people close to them by projecting, controlling, manipulating in the workplace to mask their hurt. So, what I wish I had known about social work is that to not be the hurt person in this field hurting others, you will always be doing "the work". Self-reflection, introspection, therapy. Whatever the work means to you. Additionally, you can only take your client as far as you are willing to go and if you are hurting, how far can you really take your client?

What I wish I had known about social work – that it would be my first love. As stated earlier, there is a statistic that states that the average burnout rate for a social worker post masters is 5 years. When you pick a profession, it is like getting married. If I had known the contrition rate was that low, I wonder if I would have jumped the broom, so to speak. Oh, but I am glad I did. Social work gets a bad rap in media, television, and news stories because it is often the social worker who most people associate with taking children out of the home and other child welfare atrocities. But social work is so much more than that. Social work is sitting with a family member who just learned their loved one is on hospice, social work is providing mental health services to those who may not have access so they can lead better quality lives, social work is holding the hand of a newly diagnosed HIV patient who thinks no one will ever touch them again. Social work is sitting quietly with that cancer patient as she receives her first chemo treatment because there is nothing to say. Social work is making impactful change within the communities we serve by advocating for policy and

legislature changes. Social work is what Jesus did. He fed the hungry and healed the sick. He was with the least of these. That is what social work is. So, what I wish I had known about social work is that sure it can be tough, grimy sometimes even scary work, but the rewards of seeing your clients win, is so totally worth it. I hope I get another 20 years of doing what I love in the profession that I love.

What I know to be true about social work is that it is a calling, for some it's a ministry, for others it is much more than a profession and that it takes a special kind of person to do this work. I am glad I took up the call.