

# The interview

A semi-retired MBACP accredited counsellor and supervisor, trainer, teacher and Anglican priest, **John Towler** works as a private consultant. He has published in the area of workplace counselling, and in 2005 gained his PhD for a Grounded Theory study entitled 'The influence of the invisible client: an explanation of what happens in organisational supervision'



## **What has been your greatest personal or professional achievement and why?**

Gaining my doctorate as a 'late developer' – no A-levels and no first degree – so for those of you in the same boat, look on the bright side of life!

## **Why did you choose the workplace as your preferred therapeutic sector?**

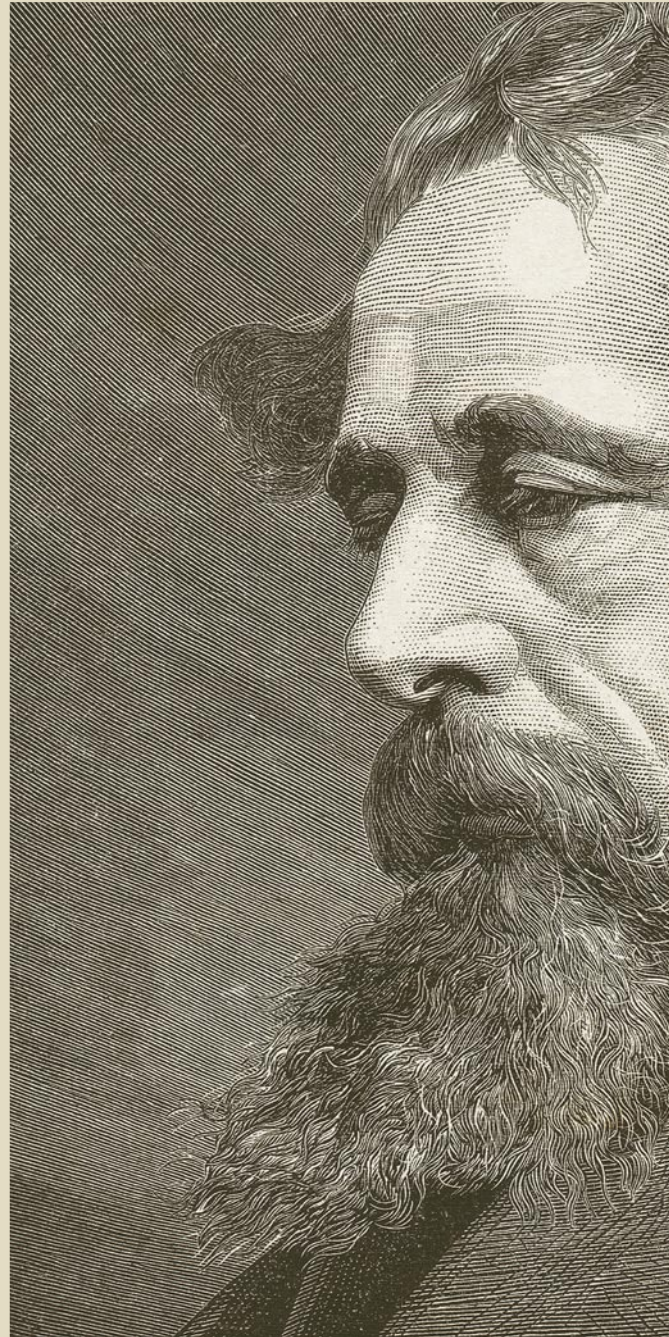
Dr Michael Carroll, my colleague and friend of many years' standing, introduced me to the Training and Consultancy Unit of Roehampton University, and to Humanitas, a human resource consultancy working mainly with city financial institutions. It was primarily with these two institutions and under the guidance of their managers (Eileen and Valerie) that I cut my teeth, and they provided me with opportunities for training, counselling and supervision, and developing my ideas about working with organisations and workplace counselling.

## **What advice would you give to trainee workplace counsellors?**

Always remember that you are never alone in the counselling room! The system of the organisation is always a hidden influence, enticing you as friend and foe. Such influences are worthy of serious attention in the service of your clients, the organisation and yourself!

## **How might you champion the cause for, or increase uptake of, workplace counselling?**

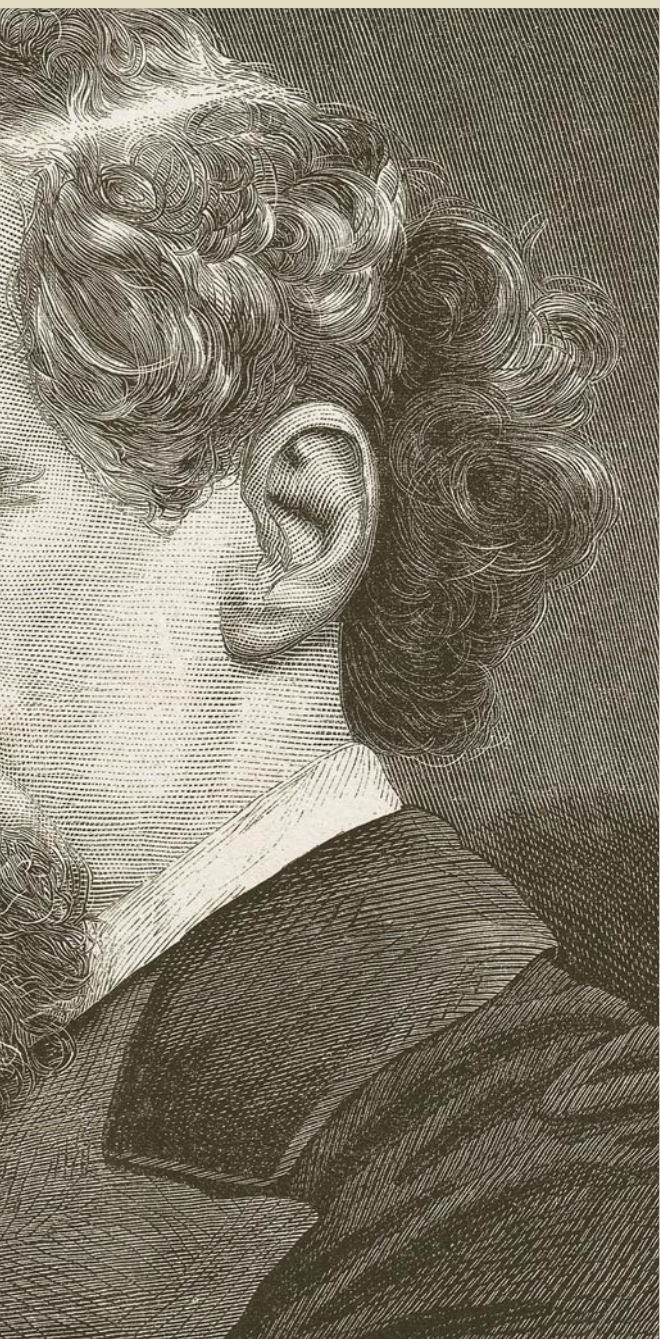
Strongly encourage all training providers of counselling to teach their students short-term intervention and the significance of context, with the flexibility and rigour this requires.



**‘Charles Dickens, one of the greatest socially informed writers of all time’**

## **What or who inspires you?**

I have a high regard for all pioneers and those who would follow in their footsteps, in pushing boundaries, in taking risks and daring to change the world – Gandhi, Desmond Tutu, Christ, Buddha, Jacob Bronowski...



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### **If you could make one new law, what would it be?**

It would be against the law for politicians not to take notice of, and act on, the advice of the professionals about whose service they were making decisions, eg educationalists about education, health professionals about health etc.

### **Who would be your ideal lunch guest and why?**

Camila Batmanghelidjh of Kids Company. Each time I hear her speak she does so with authority, humility, compassion, great practical sense and with an informed social and political sensibility.

### **What's the first thing you'd do if you won the lottery?**

Become excited, then anxious about discharging my responsibility in spending it wisely... and then, who knows!

### **Complete the sentence: 'I didn't get to where I am today without...'**

...the love, generosity, understanding and encouragement of my family, and so many colleagues in education, in the world of work and the Church. I like to think that these, along with music and the arts, are all contributors to my 'grow bag'!

### **What's your favourite book and why?**

I'm not sure I could say I have a favourite book. If I could choose a classical collection it is that of Charles Dickens, one of the greatest socially informed writers of all time. Recently I have been entertained by Ken Follet's mediaeval England with *Pillars of the Earth* and *World without End*; Khaled Hosseini's *Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*; and a remarkable book, *A Simplified Life*, by a modern hermit, Verena Schiller. These all help me in finding my way around life.

### **In the movie about you, who would play you?**

Jeremy Irons – what a voice and presence!

### **Who is the person you'd least like to be stuck with in a lift?**

Someone just like me – I might discover too many unpalatable truths!

### **What is your personal ambition for the future?**

Journeying on, living peaceably with myself, Christine (my wife) and others, having bags of fun, enjoying reading, music, drinking good wine, enjoying our haven in Italy, walking our three labs... and whatever excitement life offers...



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