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HELPING WORKBOOK

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

For fifteen years I have worked at helping--or at least trying to help--other people. Sometimes I have been successful and sometimes I have made mistakes and failed. Now I am preparing this workbook so that I can share with you what I have discovered about helping--both what I have found to be valuable and what I have found to be useless or even harmful.

I have made a promise to myself to be as clear and as simple as I can be--for that is exactly what I find helpful for myself. I have learned not to give myself nor others more than can be digested at one time. This promise is in keeping with my own goal in life --to grow clearer, firmer, simpler, quieter and warmer. I believe that in our efforts to help others we should help them grow in this same direction--clearer, firmer, simpler, quieter and warmer. When we aid another person to grow toward these goals we are truly HELPING him.

In preparing this workbook I have decided to include practical examples and short exercises right in the text. Longer exercises are added in separate sections at the back of the workbook. I have tried to keep the text

understandable and self-explanatory. The numbers refer to notes at the end of the text. The notes are not necessary to explain the ideas and exercises in the text. They do give further explanations and suggest other readings for you if you find yourself especially interested in a particular part of the workbook.

WHAT IS HELPING?

To help a person is to talk with him, listen to him, act toward him in ways which will increase his chances of being successful in his life and will increase his chances of feeling good about himself and about other people around him.

Every normal person likes to succeed in what he chooses to do, likes to have good feelings toward himself and others, likes to feel loved and to love others.

When a person doesn't have success, when he has negative feelings toward himself and toward others, and when he is without love-- these are the times when he can benefit by effective help.

Whether or not a person experiences success, good feelings and love will depend upon:

WHAT HE DOES FOR HIMSELF

WHAT OTHERS DO FOR HIM

WHAT HE DOES FOR OTHERS

FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE

Helping can be for better or for worse. In one way or another, true helping makes a person better able to help himself. Helping for worse is help which makes another person weaker, less able to help himself. In trying to "help" another, we may end by making a "baby" of him--end up keeping him dependent on us or on someone else when he could, in fact, learn to be self-helping. We must watch out for the attitude of "wanting to take care of another person" for this often means keeping the other person from growing up.

HELPING REQUIRES SKILLS

Whether we are able to help another effectively will depend upon the SKILLS which we have. There are real skills involved in helping others. For example, we must have skills of expressing ourselves understandably and of listening carefully and really paying attention to another person. As we go through the workbook we will examine these and other skills carefully and will do exercises to help ourselves learn and practice effective helping skills.

VALUES IN HELPING

Whether we are able to help others effectively will depend upon our attitudes and values. For example if we have an attitude of "I don't care or give a damn about you" then we are not going to be very helpful. On the other hand

if we truly value another person and have a deep respect for him and what he is capable of becoming, and if we communicate this attitude through our actions, then we will be helpful. As we go along in the WORKBOOK we will be discussing both positive and negative values and attitudes and will try to show how they play an important part in helping.

HELPING AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Whether we will be able to help others will depend upon our knowledge. If we have some psychological knowledge and insight into what makes different individuals do what they do, then we find it easier to understand them rather than just being puzzled, confused, or angry. Perhaps the most important knowledge which an effective helper can have is SELF-KNOWLEDGE. If we are clear about ourselves, then we are in a good position to be clear about others. However, if we are muddled about ourselves, and ignorant about our own behavior, then we are almost certain to hinder others rather than help them.

THIS WORKBOOK

This WORKBOOK is an attempt to help us learn the skills, attitudes, values, and knowledge which can lead to more effective helping. As you study the material in the Workbook, discuss it in class and with your friends, as you do the exercises and as you get ideas from your daily living, make notes in the right hand column which has been left blank for you to

write in. In this way, when we are finished with our course, you will not only have my ideas about helping but you will also have put down your reactions, your own ideas and observations, and may have put down important suggestions about helping from other students and from other things you have read or thought about.

HELPING: AN ART

There is no perfect way of helping--not even any single "best" technique. However, to be effective helpers, we do need to learn effective communicating and relating skills. And we do need to increase our self-knowledge. When we have grown in our skillfulness and in our self-knowledge, then we can become an artist in helping. We can creatively respond to others in a skillful way which--in the end--is uniquely our own.

A HEALTHY PERSON DEVELOPS

Healthy, effective individuals do not "just happen" or are not simply "born that way". They learn the skills, the values, the judgments and attitudes which make them healthy. Or we can say that a person develops. In helping, we are always trying to encourage a person to grow and develop toward maturity. We try to help him become able to do things well, feel good about himself, and help him achieve a clearer, more accurate view of himself, other people and of the world in which he lives.

CONSTRUCTIVE LIVING

However we go about helping another person, the final result should be that he CAN ACT CONSTRUCTIVELY IN HIS OWN LIFE. Not only that he can act constructively on his own behalf, but that he can act MORE constructively on his own behalf AFTER our help than he was able to do before our help. Another way of saying this is that a helping person should enable him to change--his behaviors, his attitudes, his perceptions--always we keep in mind that in helping we are after actual changes in behavior.

FIRST, EXPLORE!

In order for a person to change his behavior, judgments or his feelings, he first must EXPLORE himself and his life in those areas where he is not effective.

The first goal of a helper is to get the helpee to explore (look into, think and talk about) the area in his life where he is having difficulty. By exploring himself and his life, a person is trying to understand what his feelings are, what it is that he is having difficulty with. Exploring is the first step toward understanding. By listening to a person, by talking with him, by giving him our attention we can help him explore more deeply and more completely than he is able to do on his own.

AND, UNDERSTAND!!

As we said above, when the helper and helpee explore the helpee's puzzle together, they are taking the first step toward self-understanding. The more accurately, the more clearly, and the more completely a person understands himself, the more likely he is to take constructive action. Understanding is the result of active, mutual communicating with one another. The helper promotes understanding when he responds actively, when he initiates further discussion, and when he acts lively and responsibly toward the helpee.

ACTION!

The main purpose of understanding is to be able to take more effective action. Unless our exploration and our understanding lead to behaviors which bring us success, good feelings about ourselves, and more effective living, then we are not helping or being helped.

EXPLORING, UNDERSTANDING, ACTING

These three--exploring, understanding, acting, are all dependent upon one another. When we explore a problem, we get fuller understanding about it. This lets us take more sensitive action. When we take action, then more possibilities open up for us to explore, understand and take further action upon. And so the cycle goes, on and on. Often we experience understanding at the same time as we explore, or we may explore and understand right in the middle of taking action.

WHO HELPS?

One answer to the question. "Who helps?" is: any person who is interested in helping and who has learned the basic skills of helping. Some people have jobs which are called "helping" jobs: counsellors, child-care workers, foster- or group-home parents, and many others. One important thing to remember is that any adult who is willing to help, who takes the time to learn basic helping skills, and who will work to get a better understanding of himself can become an effective helper. Everyday people often make more effective helpers than highly trained professionals.

FACTORS IN HELPING

Imagine that you are going to meet another person in a few minutes. The reason for your meeting is that you have been asked to "help" him. He has a difficulty, a problem, a situation which is too much for him--you don't know at this point what the matter is--nor does he--you just know that you are going to meet him and hope that you will be able to do something which helps. We can go through a number of "helping" factors, which, if you are aware of them, may increase the chances that you will "help".

MEETING PLACE

To be helpful, you need a place to talk which is reasonably free of distractions. If other people are going in and out, if the

phone is constantly ringing, or if there is a great deal of noise, you will probably find it very difficult to give your helpee full attention.

SEATING ARRANGEMENT

We can be really surprised by the difference in communication that an arrangement of chairs and desk can make. For example, if we wish to be formal and keep another person "at a distance" we can do this by placing him on the other side of a desk, quite a distance away from us. On the other hand if we wish to personalize our conversation, we will not place other objects between ourselves and the helpee. Moreover, we will place the chairs facing each other, slightly at angles, we may even get rid of the desk altogether. When I work in an office, I slide the desk against the wall and place several chairs around an open space in the center of the room. Using a low table in the center of the room is helpful with chairs on all four sides so that there isn't any "boss's" chair to represent authority.

Generally, the closer together we sit, the more personal we feel. Of course some individuals are afraid of sitting close to another person and we must be attentive to their needs and not be pushy.

COMMUNICATION SPACE

Whatever kind of room or space a helper works in should have an atmosphere which encourages personal communication. You will have to judge what needs to be done to achieve the goal of good communication depending upon the limits and possibilities of your working space. People whom you are trying to help should feel accepted, reasonably comfortable, and should not feel out of place in the helping place.

For example, working people in working clothes usually feel out of place in a formal setting. On the other hand, a person who dresses quite formally and speaks formally will often be uncomfortable in an extremely casual place. The main point is to try to be aware that such things do make a difference in people's willingness to relate and communicate. You can not always arrange a space physically to suit each person. You can be aware of his (and your own) attitudes toward and perceptions of the space.

Before meeting with someone, we can always ask ourselves, "Is there anything I can do physically to our meeting place which will improve the chances of our having a productive and helpful meeting?"

LANGUAGE

One mistake that many helpers make is that they use complicated jargon with the person whom they are trying to help. The most effective language to use is everyday talk which both you and the helpee understand.

For example, "You think you can't do this as well as the others" is much better than "You are suffering from an inferiority complex".

Or, "I'm mad as hell" is much more understandable than, "I'm attempting to ventilate my gross feelings of anger and hostility."

Or, "What are you planning to do?" instead of "What alternative routes of action have you formulated?"

The ability to speak and listen on the same level of language which the helpee uses is a must for the effective helper.