

WORKING WITH PEOPLE: THE HELPING PROCESS, 8/e

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Understanding Ourselves

Why is self-awareness a particularly important characteristic of human service workers? What personal qualities contribute to it, and how can they be developed?

How does the dichotomy within the four major value systems in the Western world regarding people and their society affect the practice of human service?

How does knowledge of the process and use of the skills of assertiveness contribute to the effectiveness of people who work with people?

How can conflict lead to growth and change?

Richard Leakey, the eminent paleontologist, tells the story of excavating the grave of a Neanderthal man who, by radiocarbon techniques, was dated as being more than 60,000 years old. Analysis of pollen around the body revealed that it had been laid on a bed of oak, pine, juniper, and ash branches with green reeds and blue and white flowers arranged around it.

Such loving care of an individual body reveals that even among primitive peoples, long thought to be concerned simply with survival, there were, in spite of hard and often brutal lives, ideas of the importance of self and the uniqueness of the person. As cultures advanced, as languages were recorded first in symbols and later in letters, the burning ethical question asked by philosophers, religious leaders, and thinkers of all ages, as well as by ordinary individuals, concerned this self in relation to other people and to the natural world in which we live.

What kind of creature am I? Where do I come from, and where do I go? How can I understand and control myself, my own behavior, my relationships with others, my life, and my future?

As cultures became complex, responsibility for such matters was relegated to religious leaders, and it became dangerous for the rank and file to question established ideas or even to read the books of a society. But the free mind cannot be denied, and in spite of threats of death, of being forced to recant, of personal destruction in many forms, the search

for both questions and answers goes on, and knowledge about people and their world gradually accumulates.

Such development, exchange, and testing of ideas is of tremendous importance, particularly at this time in our history. We have reached heights of technological development that should enable us to provide a healthy, good life for all. We have attained sufficient self-awareness to realize that the major factor preventing us from approaching this ideal more closely is our lack of understanding of ourselves and a lack of motivation to develop a healthy interdependence based on such understanding. We stand at a crossroads, from which one direction can lead to a better life for all and one to the end of all life on the planet.

It is often difficult to see oneself realistically in relation to such global problems; it is equally difficult to know and to understand ourselves. This undertaking is one at which the best thinkers of all time have not been too successful, one at which we will spend our entire lives working. The paradox is that someone else, however knowledgeable, however well intentioned, cannot do this for us. Each must conduct this lifelong search, with help perhaps, but essentially alone. The first step is to provide ourselves with some ideas, some tools for thinking.

The Nature of Human Service

The unique factor in human service is that its delivery requires knowledgeable and disciplined use of the worker's self. Working with people is a transactional process in which there is inevitably both give and take between and among the people involved. The effectiveness of the best program can be minimized when the worker through whom it is channeled is unaware and cannot or will not deal with harmful aspects of self in relation to others or does not know how to capitalize on strengths.

A good example of the importance of this comes from research on the effect of the expectations of classroom teachers who believe that certain children are of less worth than others or cannot learn as well. When a teacher is handicapped by personal bias or a tendency to stereotype particular groups of students on the basis of race, creed, color, physical condition, social status, wealth, or poverty, his or her ability to teach and the students' capability to learn can be damaged. With more accepting teachers, such children may be able to learn, each according to his or her own innate capacity and to the opportunity provided.

People who aspire to use themselves effectively in a knowledgeable and disciplined manner in relationships with others must strive to develop a personal objectivity based on such qualities as:

- Awareness of self and personal needs, weaknesses, and strengths.
- Cognizance of and ability to deal with their own personality patterns, with the "garbage" from previous life experiences that cloud their ability to relate freely.
- Openness and freedom to perceive with clarity and relate with honesty—regardless of how different or similar others may be.
- Ability to perceive and evaluate values, attitudes, and patterns of behavior of the groups of which they consider themselves a part.
- Ability to differ and stand alone when necessary.

Learning to Know and to Use One's Self

There is an old definition of education, the origins of which are obscure, but which is nonetheless valid and applicable to the process of self-learning: "Education is the progression from freedom, through discipline, to greater freedom."

People are endowed with both the need and the capacity to relate meaningfully to others. There is little indication that this is not a free and open endowment with potential for development and effective use, provided the basic needs of the developing individual are met and inhibiting experiences are minimized. Unfortunately, few people develop under optimum conditions, and human service workers find themselves handicapped by how they meet their own needs as well as by ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that are not conducive to the creation of effective open relationships with others.

To free themselves to better use their innate capacity to relate, workers often face an experience in reeducation. Initially, they must be not only capable of accepting their own imperfections, but also motivated and convinced that they can change. Few people are so smug or so rigidly defended that they have not, at times, questioned their own contribution to relationships. However, it is one thing to recognize one's shortcomings and another to change them. We are often impelled to respond to others in undesirable ways for reasons that lie buried beyond recall in the past. Workers who are successful in liberating themselves from these influences can begin to enjoy and utilize their full capacity for human interaction.

Attitudes and behaviors are learned in response to a need to react to particular circumstances. They tend to become internalized and invested with an emotional component that may have little relationship to their true significance. The progression moves somewhat like this:

1. Situation that demands a reaction from the individual.
2. Response on a trial-and-error basis or on the basis of precept.
3. Learning that a particular response is effective.
4. Development of feeling that this is the "right" response because it works in this situation.
5. Reinforcement of this "right" response by support of significant others.
6. Development of feeling that people who respond differently are "wrong."

This learning process begins at birth, and by the time children are ready for school, they have a pretty good idea of what is "right" and what is "wrong" for them.



Mary was only 5 years old that summer when she sat on the back steps and watched her neighbor pressing clothes out on the terrace. After regarding the woman soberly for a while, she commented, "My mother irons indoors." The neighbor explained that she liked being out of doors on a nice day, and Mary listened patiently. But when the neighbor finished, Mary repeated with emphasis and finality, "My mother irons indoors." For her, at 5, there was already a right and a wrong way, and the person who deviated from her pattern was automatically wrong.

The Impact of Culture

Cultures dictate patterns or ways of behaving in response to a specific situation, and these patterns are imparted to the child through the family, the school, the church, other social institutions, and the peer group. In this process, the reasons for selecting a particular way of behaving may be lost. The behavior becomes invested with an almost ritualistic and emotional significance—the accepted way for that particular culture. The person who deviates from this norm is usually punished in some way by becoming an outcast, being designated as “strange” or “different,” becoming the subject of sanctions, or—in extreme cases—being killed. The form of the punishment is prescribed by the culture.

Cultures also define significant roles and set up expectations of the behaviors that accompany them. When these role definitions become rigid, they tend to be counterproductive, because both individuals and social groups are constantly in the process of change and adaptation to the differences that are part of life. For the young child, knowing what is expected can contribute markedly to feelings of security. However, if expectations are too rigid, it can also be inhibiting to growth and lock in the developing individual so that full use of potential for adaptation to change is impossible. We can see much rigidity operating in the sex-role definitions that have been so inhibiting to women’s use of their potential for achievement; we see these roles operating in families where the accepted expectations for husband-wife and parent-child roles may be such that individuals cannot adapt to people whose expectations differ from theirs.



The Nguyen family had only recently come to the United States from Vietnam, but with the help of relatives they found a home and both parents got jobs. Although language was a difficulty, the teenage daughter made friends and got along well in school. However, her brother, Cang, age 14, gravitated to an already formed gang whose membership requirement was shoplifting. He was picked up quickly and referred to juvenile court. The worker preparing the case met strong resistance to even discussing the problem. Although obviously frightened, Mr. Nguyen felt the worker’s presence to be an unnecessary intrusion on his role as head of the family.

The Impact of Personal Needs

Finally, attitudes and behavior develop in response to unconscious needs and drives for protection from pain, preservation of personal integrity, allowance for essential growth, and assistance in dealing with reality. Coping mechanisms—denial, projection, regression, fantasy, and so on—relate to their source of stimulus and may seem inappropriate to the observer. Selection of the particular mechanism used is strongly influenced by the culture and setting as, for example, a family that supports the use of humor to deal with painful feelings. People universally use these mechanisms, and they can be an effective part of the process of dealing with the demands of living. They can also be ineffective when used rigidly or unrealistically.



Beryl Chessman used denial and, to a certain extent, fantasy in reacting to her husband's physical abuse. Although this had been going on for many years, she not only denied the violence, but also took refuge in the fantasy that the behavior would improve. It was only when the abuse was extended to their 10-year-old daughter that she was able to overcome her fear, face the reality of her situation, and try to make use of help to end it.

Whatever the dynamics or origins of particular attitudes and behavior, human service workers must be aware of both their existence and the fact that one may not realize how deeply these attitudes can affect one's feelings toward oneself and one's behavior toward others.

We need to begin by accepting that what we are will affect what we can do and then striving to develop a self-awareness that will enable us to understand and, if possible, change attitudes and feelings and control our behavior in working relationships. Almost all of the human service professions provide some sort of education and training in awareness of self in relation to others, ranging from personal analysis to the encounter and sensitivity groups popular in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. These groups are designed to sensitize people to themselves and their own feelings and actions and to increase awareness and understanding of others and of the impact on each other of the two persons involved in transactions. Short of these formalized efforts, however, there are some concrete steps that workers can take to help them to deal with themselves in what is, after all, a very personal struggle. They can ask themselves some very basic questions:

- How do I think and feel about myself?
- How do I deal with my own fundamental needs?
- What is my value system, and how does it define my behavior and my relationships with other people?
- How do I relate to the society in which I live and work?
- What is my lifestyle?
- What is my basic philosophy?
- What do I present—and represent—to those with whom I work?

How Do I Think and Feel about Myself?

Probably the most important factor about all individuals is how they feel about themselves. A person may be physically or intellectually handicapped or whole; old, young, or middle-aged; wealthy or poor; fat or thin; of any color or race. Whatever the case may be, if one likes oneself, one can usually succeed in life and relate well to other people. A variety of factors contribute to the development of one's self-image, but it is principally a matter of how one feels about oneself. Though extraordinary sensitivity to and acceptance of one's

own strengths and needs may be a part of individual endowment, life experiences tend to determine people's attitudes toward themselves; within these experiences, the attitudes of other individuals and groups are of paramount importance.

During their development, it is important for children to be accepted as they are and not as people would like them to be. Unrealistic expectations can be destructive; realistic expectations are essential in promoting healthy growth. Early experiences that enable children to value and like themselves can form a firm foundation on which they can depend during subsequent crucial life stages, particularly adolescence and old age, when people tend to be most vulnerable to self-doubt.

A major value in modern society is success in athletics, but for every "winner" there are many "losers." The self-image of young children who are losers can be seriously damaged, particularly when parents buy into this situation. Such a child was Bobby, whose family valued participation and success in competitive sports highly. His physical coordination was not outstanding, and when pressure was exerted after a couple of failures in soccer he tended to give up and began to overeat and to gain weight. His father's anger, his mother's scarcely concealed disappointment, and his brother's scorn left him feeling a failure and was reflected in his growing inability to relate to other children and in failure in his school work. Recognition of the right to be a unique individual is essential to healthy development.

Just like other facets of personality, self-acceptance is not static. It is a matter of degree and is subject to change according to circumstances and situations. Adolescence, with its questioning and search for identity, is often a period of intense discomfort and self-deprecation. The child who was at 10 fairly comfortable and happy-go-lucky may at 14 find herself at odds with parents who are having trouble accepting her growing up; she may feel concerned and unhappy about herself as a person in a society that seems to frown on her, her ideas, and her feelings.

In old age, the negative social impact is often equally strong, because many of the adaptive mechanisms of aging lack status in modern society. Certainly the tendency to slow down, to be more conservative, and to narrow one's circle socially, economically, and physically are contrary to the values of the lively ones in our fast-moving technological society. The impact of this impatience and disapproval may help to intensify the older person's feeling that he or she lacks worth and importance.

- Thus the all-important ability to be comfortable with oneself is based on the following factors:
- The awareness of and ability to accept oneself as a fallible individual with strengths and weaknesses.
- The development of a flexible adaptive pattern that does not demand perfection of oneself and hence does not expect it of others.
- The capacity to recognize and deal with the impact of negative attitudes and behavior of significant individuals within the life experience, including social groups and the society as a whole.
- Acceptance of the fact that self-liking is not static or unchanging.

Self-acceptance and liking involve a continuous process of awareness, assessment, and flexibility.

How Do I Deal with My Own Fundamental Needs?

Certain fundamental human needs must be met if we are to survive; the way in which we meet them determines how healthy we are and how we develop and function as total persons. These needs can be considered in two overall categories: the need for security and the need to accommodate the drive toward growth. Each of these categories encompasses five subcategories of needs. A dynamic interrelationship exists in which each type of need is continuously affecting and being affected by the others, and there is no real and complete understanding of what is happening in one area without understanding what is happening in the others.

Emotional feelings are subjectively experienced and often difficult for the outside observer to give credence to. It is only within the past hundred years that we have even begun to understand the significance of the emotional part of an individual, particularly its effect on functioning in the other areas. Now we recognize the tremendous power of the emotions and are beginning to understand the part they play in determining the individual's ability to utilize other capacities.

The *physical*, or material structures of the body and its organic processes, is easier to study because of its manifest nature, but much is yet unknown, particularly about the way physical factors affect and are affected by other aspects of the individual.

The field of holistic health stresses the importance of focusing on health rather than illness, prevention rather than cure, good nutrition, and a wholesome life in its total aspect. Research in areas such as nutrition and behavior, exercise and well-being, and the impact of stress on the protective mechanisms of the body, as well as exciting findings in human genetic research are bringing new insights about the physical aspects of functioning and also the totality of good living.

The *intellectual* refers to the capacity for rational and intelligent thought, the power of knowing, and relates to the ability to develop, understand, and master knowledge and skill. One of the vital and as yet incompletely answered questions in this area is how people learn and how they can utilize this capacity to its maximum extent.

Social pertains to the need and capacity for relationships with other people. Survival of the newborn infant is impossible without an initial relationship with caring people. The capacity for relating meaningfully with others is a developing thing in a healthy person and, while subject always to individual variation, maturation brings expansion of the boundaries in which such relationships occur. The loner who is lacking in them is often a very disturbed person. The word "people," however, is a limiting one. We are more and more aware that we must also exist in a state of ecological balance with other vital elements in nature. The attitudes and feelings that arise out of respect for self and other people also involve regard for the integrity of nonhuman forms of life.

Spiritual pertains to the animating or vital principle that gives life to physical organisms. As such, the origin, function, and expression of spiritual needs are not totally understood. It is obvious that people are more than a conglomerate of physical, social, intellectual, and emotional needs and drives and that there is a spiritual component of each of these areas. Over the centuries, organized religion has attempted to provide a medium for expressing these spiritual needs, but unfortunately, particularly in its sectarian aspects, it has tended to compartmentalize rather than unify. To ignore or deny spiritual needs because we do not completely understand them is to deny the totality of the individual.

The Basic Human Needs. Security, the first category of basic human needs (Figure 2.1) runs the gamut from the material needs to sustain life—food, clothing, and shelter—to less concrete needs for loving and being loved, for meaningful association with others, for a milieu that provides acceptance of ideas and feelings regardless of whether they conform to the cultural norms, and for reward for risk. Healthy security provides the firm floor on which individuals can stand with confidence and assurance as they grow. They can depend on this essential base and can move from it to try new ways; they can return to it when faced with failure, to regroup and start again. This can be simply illustrated by observing children who are learning to walk—they pull themselves up, try, fall, weep with frustration over failure, try again, and eventually totter a few steps for the first time. How much simpler this task if the child has a solid surface on which to experiment, together with encouraging, supporting parents to provide a focus for these efforts. How much more difficult if the floor is slick or unsteady, or the parents hostile, indifferent, or over-protective.

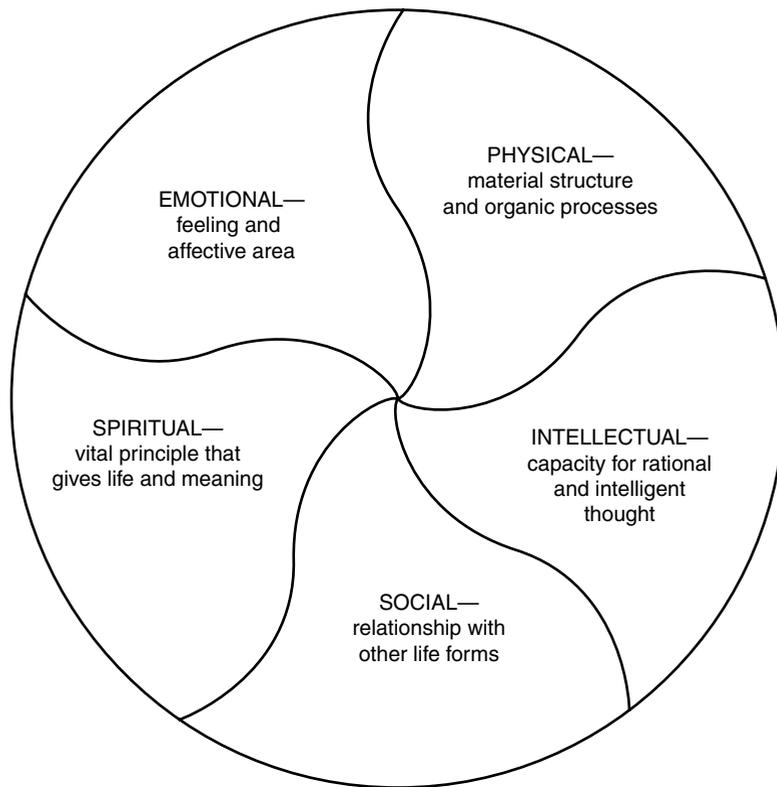


FIGURE 2.1 The development of the individual rests upon fulfillment of basic needs

Growth is a continuous and essential concomitant of the life process. All individuals are endowed at conception with a maximum potential for growing and developing in every area of self and, throughout their lifetimes, mature toward the point that is their maximum capacity. Because genetic endowments and maximum potentials differ greatly from individual to individual, the idea of equality has caused some problems. For our purpose here, equality lies simply in the fact that each of us possesses the drive to grow. To illustrate this concept in its most apparent form, one individual may possess much greater potential than another for developing physical dexterity. Though capacity for development in all areas may not be at equal levels, there is some evidence that the exceptionally well-functioning person tends to operate well as a total individual. Normally, however, individuals develop one area to its highest peak—perhaps at the expense of the others.

In a sense, one's potential lies dormant until it is stimulated by the interaction of internal impulses for normal growth and development with external experiences that are taking place in the environment. We must remember that environment begins at conception and that what happens to the developing infant within the mother's body has a major impact on present and future development.

People require stimulation to trigger development in all life areas, but it must be in a good balance, determined by their needs at a particular time. Overstimulation, which is so often present in young families attempting to move upward on the economic and social scale, can be as inhibiting as understimulation can be stultifying. Timing is of great importance. There is some evidence, for example, that the child who is not stimulated during the time when early coordination is developing to use muscles and nerves in even so simple a task as catching a ball will be unable, even with subsequent exercise, to achieve the peak potential for physical development. Growth and development take place in accordance with an internal timetable that follows a general pattern but is unique to the individual.

There are many roadblocks in this process of developing potential, and the relationship between security and growth in any individual is seldom completely understood. Occasionally, we see someone who flowers in conditions of adversity that are totally destructive to others, but such a person is the exception. The sad statistics on mental retardation in our enlightened society lend credence to this statement. Nine percent of all children in the United States are considered retarded, but only five percent are born that way—the others achieve this state by age 13 as a result of their life experience. Three-fourths of these children come from poverty areas.

In general, we could say that in the physical area we need a basic minimum of material supplies, stimulation, opportunity for physical development at crucial points in the developmental timetable, and basic health services that are one of the benefits of our modern society. In the area of intellectual development, we need stimulation and the opportunity to acquire and master knowledge, each according to his or her own capacity. In the area of emotional development, we need fulfilling relationships with significant other people and the ability to accept and be at peace with ourselves. In the area of social growth, we need the opportunity to become socialized on an increasingly wider scale with an expanding capacity to relate meaningfully and effectively with people who are different from ourselves. In the area of spiritual development, we need the stimulation and opportunity to find a

meaning in life that transcends the mere satisfaction of needs and gives purpose and direction to the total experience.

In summary, we can say that in looking at ourselves, our own basic needs, and the ways in which we meet them, workers in the human services must keep in mind the following factors:

- Everyone has a need for security and dependency.
- Everyone also has a need for growth and independence.
- Everyone is a unique individual and has a unique potential for development in each of the living areas.
- The varying aspects of an individual's potential exist in a dynamic interrelationship that constitutes the whole, and no one aspect can be considered as separate from the others.

Workers who are aware of the existence of these needs within themselves can then look at ways in which to meet them—for meet them they must. The drive for growth and expression will not be denied, and if it cannot be channeled in a positive and healthy direction, it will take an undesirable course. One's purpose in considering one's own needs is to avoid utilizing working relationships to meet those needs rather than those of the clients. While helping relationships can be a source of personal satisfaction that is normal and useful, human service workers whose personal lives do not fulfill their own needs may find themselves manipulating those with whom they are working, making them overly dependent, using them to satisfy needs for power, prestige, or self-fulfillment. This does not mean that workers get no satisfaction from their successes, no pleasure—and frustration!—from their working relationships. Rather, it means that the satisfaction derives from the client's freedom to develop and be successful as a person apart from the worker.

What Is My Value System, and How Does It Define My Behavior and My Relationships with Other People?

Cultural groups tend to establish certain values and standards of behavior as significant and binding for their members. These values and standards are internalized and emotion laden, and they have become so much a part of one's attitudes, feelings, thinking, and behaving that one is often unaware of their existence. Effective workers must learn to avoid judging their clients' attitudes and behavior according to their own personal value system.

In Western society, dominant philosophical values regarding people and society can be traced to four different sources:

1. *Judeo-Christian doctrine*, with its concept of the integral worth of the individual and one's responsibility for one's neighbor.
2. *Democratic ideals*, which emphasize the equality of all and the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."
3. *The Puritan ethic*, which says that character is all, circumstance nothing, that the moral person is the one who works and is independent, and that pleasure is sinful.
4. *The tenets of social Darwinism*, which emphasizes that the fittest survive and the weak perish in a natural evolutionary process that produces the strong individual and society.

Even the casual reader will see that a dichotomy exists within this value system. We hold that people are equal, but that those who do not work are less equal. In his novel, *Animal Farm*, George Orwell says sardonically, "All animals are created equal, but some are more equal than others," and certainly this applies here. We hold that the individual life has worth, but that only the fit should survive. We believe that we are responsible for each other, but that those who depend on others for their living are of lesser worth.

This dichotomy affects both workers and clients in their attitudes about themselves and each other and in their capacity to relate. We see physicians struggling to retain life while stating that both the individual and the society would be better off if the patient were dead. We see workers in public assistance programs administering financial aid to needy people with the grim conviction that their clients should not be supported if they cannot sustain themselves. We see legislators drafting legislation and voting funds to be used for programs to sustain the lives and serve the needs of people whom they are convinced are undeserving. We see teachers working with children whom they feel are unteachable. This dichotomy is particularly significant in helping relationships because, of necessity, there exist elements of dependence and independence, implications of superiority and inferiority, a need to give and a need to receive. Recognition and reconciliation of this value conflict is one of the primary personal tasks of the worker.

While the four value sources listed previously constitute the major origins of values in our society, there are other significant sources. The development of this country from rural to urban (which has taken place with almost unbelievable swiftness within the past fifty years), along with the corresponding moves from agriculture to industrialization to computerized technology, has resulted in changes in the basic institutions and structure of society. Old values and standards are questioned and discarded; new ones are not yet fully defined. For example, at the end of the Russian Revolution, group daycare centers were established for children of working mothers, contrary to the cultural pattern of U.S. society, which dictated that mothers should remain in the home and care for their children.

Today, eighty years later, daycare is booming in the United States. Mothers seek employment outside the home in increasing numbers, as economic and social pressures force them to leave their children and go to work with curtailed consideration of whether this is the best solution in the individual situation.

An even greater, more significant, and more widespread social change is taking place that will have major impact on our definition of the value of the individual—the growing scarcity of resources. Food and energy are increasingly in demand with an expanded population and, we realize fully for perhaps the first time, are finite. The world's wealth is unevenly divided, and those possessing the larger part of it are unwilling to share. Already we see evidence of the impact of scarcity in discussions concerning who shall be kept alive, our ability to afford to keep a Social Security system in this country, and who shall be accorded expensive medical procedures.

To complicate matters still further, there is no uniform pattern of values throughout the country, although developments such as mass production of clothing, books, movies, and so on tend to push toward such conformity. A value that is generally accepted and lived by in the urban ghetto may be completely intolerable in the neighboring suburbs or in the isolated, rural communities of the West and South. Differences in race, religion, education,

economic standards, and the definition of necessities for survival all work toward development of differences in values and behavioral norms.

Recently, concern over social conditions and crime have resulted in renewed efforts to define common values that can govern behavior that will contribute to a more stable society, but this is no easy task. Behaviors about which greatest concern is voiced have to do with work, irresponsible sexual behavior, lack of respect for differences among people, and violence as a means of gaining ends or relating to each other. But different peoples define the values in these areas differently for many reasons, and change will not come easily.

People who help, in general, are of middle-class origin. Although in recent years people from all walks of life have been encouraged to enter human services work, studies indicate that most of these jobs are still filled from the middle class. This situation has given rise to the frequently heard accusation that workers tend to impose their own middle-class values on their clients, values generally related to cleanliness, conformity, hard work, and sexual behavior.

Part of the responsibility of workers is to help their clients to be effective in the society in which they must live. This calls for a certain degree of adaptation to the dominant value system, even while possibly working to change it.

Sometimes, in order to survive, those whose values run contrary to those of the larger society need to adopt a different way of living. The effective worker, however, cannot force or impose these changes. Society imposes the need for them—the worker's role is to help the client assess the nature of this imposition and decide how to adapt to it in a way that is not self-destructive.

A simple example of this is the value that our entire industrial system characteristically attaches to time, punctuality, and regular, consistent effort. When concerted effort is made to include people from the hard-core poverty culture as employees, it is often necessary to make special provisions for getting them to work regularly and on time. Anglos often complain of the lack of time sense in African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans, without recognizing the differing cultures and value systems within these minority groups.

The worker must have sufficient self-awareness to be able to differentiate between value changes that are essential for good social functioning, those that are dictated by a personal value system, and those that are so internalized that the individual is often unconscious of the reasons for adopting and using them as a basis for judging effectiveness of behavior. We see, for instance, the worker who believes that drinking is wrong saying of the man who stops for a beer on the way home from work, "He drinks!" Old social agency records are filled with notations of home visits in the morning where the mother is "still in her nightgown with the breakfast dishes unwashed, is drinking coffee, smoking, and watching television"—ergo, she is sloppy, dirty, and a poor mother.

Thus, effective workers must

- Be aware that they are a walking system of values that is so much a part of them that they are scarcely aware of its existence even though they have considerable feeling about the rightness of it.
- Use all means possible to become conscious of what their biases are. One of the most useful tools in this struggle is becoming sensitive to one's use of the paranoid "they." "They" always wear bright colors and talk too loudly; "they" do not mow their lawns;

“they” do not support their families; “they” cheat on their income tax; “they” get pregnant out of wedlock—and so on ad infinitum. Workers who are aware of doing this have taken the first step toward overcoming their biases when they recognize their own “theys.”

- Strive to evaluate themselves and their values objectively and rationally, look at the origins of their values and the purpose they serve, and try to think about whether they will also serve this purpose for others.
- Strive to change those values that, on the basis of this evaluation, need changing; try to differentiate between those that dictate personal style of living and those that leave clients “free to step to the tune of a different drummer,” if such meets their needs and is not destructive.

How do workers accomplish these objectives? If they are comfortable with themselves and have sound, healthy resources for meeting their own basic needs, they will probably not find it too difficult to respect other people’s differences. They might begin by getting their own houses in order. They might try to create and live within a climate of openness and honesty where questions and differences are not only tolerated but are an integral part of the richness of life. They might begin to know and appreciate, through literature, art, music, and personal experience, as many different kinds of people as possible and to understand and value the various approaches to life among them.

In *Understanding Human Values*, Milton Rokeach (1979) proposes two classes of human values: terminal (those related to desired end states) and instrumental (those related to desired ways of reaching desired end states). He postulates that there are a limited number of basic values, and he reports a study that tends to substantiate the theory that people can and do change values as they perceive the dichotomy between what they profess and what they do in terms of implementing values. The importance of this kind of knowledge for human service workers is great, for both their own personal equipment and the kind of personal and social changes they are attempting to implement. The role of values in human functioning is paramount.

Whitney Young, one of the great African American leaders of the twentieth century, commented that children who grow up without knowledge of and ability to relate to and work with people different from themselves are handicapped. Many of us grow up bearing this handicap, but it does not necessarily mean that we must carry it with us throughout our lives.

There is no substitute for personal contact in learning to relate to people who are different from yourself—as all people are to a certain extent. Such opportunity should be available to all children and young adults, who are usually more open to differences and not yet handicapped by preconceived ideas or by conscious and unconscious biases and fears. However, older people can also learn to see others differently.



Margaret, a 60-year-old social worker, tells the story of attending a Quaker meeting where a young man identified himself as a practicing homosexual and asked for support for a newly formed gay group. Margaret had been troubled for some time about her own feelings about the gay people who came to her groups. The product of an orthodox religious background and a fairly conservative midwestern

family, she had never known a person who was openly homosexual on a personal basis, and she was uncomfortable being with gays.

She liked the openness of the speaker and at the end of the meeting talked with him. She wondered how he might feel about her and on impulse asked how he felt about women. He laughed and put an arm around her shoulders and said, “Would you have me abandon half the human race?” In being comfortable with him, she was able to begin to look at her fears and her stereotypes and to more comfortably relate to gay people she knew, from the young men and women who flaunted their differences to the troubled middle-aged person with a spouse and children just becoming aware of self.

How Do I Relate to the Society in Which I Live and Work?

Human service workers, like all other people, hold membership not only in diverse small groups, but also in the larger society. Group participation and social relationships have a profound influence not only on the way we see ourselves as individuals, but also on how we see ourselves in relationship with other people. Workers must be conscious of the positions they occupy in society and in the groups of which they are members. What roles do they fill, and what statuses do these roles carry? With what particular subgroups do they identify? How do they relate to the power structure within the group and the society? How do they relate to people in general at levels different from their own? Do they relate as effectively to people who are higher on the scale as to those who are lower?

Society tends to relegate individuals to certain positions, to exert pressure for conformity, and to punish members who deviate from group standards and norms. How do workers—whose task is essentially to act as a change agent when social pressures become destructive to people—deal with these pressures in their own lives? Can they, if necessary, tolerate and deal with social disapproval in order to attain important objectives?

What Is My Lifestyle?

In the process of living, each of us develops his or her own style, tempo and rhythm, way of thinking, feeling, and behaving, set of personal values, and sense of personal identity—in other words, own way of life. Individual differences set us apart from each other and create a gap that must be bridged. In part these differences arise from the fact that every person is endowed with a developmental pattern and a biological rhythm that is unique. And in part they are the result of those life experiences that establish certain ways of behaving and reacting.

Not only does the worker react to each client’s unique totality, but clients also react to it in the worker. The incompatibility between worker and client that can result from this uniqueness derives from two sources: the difficulty we have in understanding and accepting people who are different from ourselves, and the transference of attitudes and feelings from previous experiences with persons who have displayed similar personality patterns. The person who brings to a helping relationship memory of a happy experience with a blunt, outspoken, dominating, but warm and loving parent may have no difficulty in relating to another person with similar personality patterns, whereas someone else might shrink from such assertiveness and never perceive the worker’s underlying warmth. Similarly, one helping person might have trouble working with a questioning, querulous, complaining old

lady if his or her childhood had been scarred by such a grandmother. Another with a similar background may have carried over the memory of ways of relating to such a person that would help in the new relationship. The worker must be aware of both the assets and the liabilities that arise from personality and from prior experience, and he or she must learn to assess their effects on other people.

Human service workers must also learn to assess the impact of their personal lifestyle on others and weigh its importance against that of the objectives they wish to achieve. Workers must develop a way of living that leaves them free to use themselves with others. Sometimes it will be necessary to modify lifestyle in order to simply survive. Many long-accepted standards in areas of life to which deep emotions are attached, such as sex, the family, religion, and even personal appearance, are being challenged. Workers who opt to be personally in the forefront of these movements for change will need to consider the possible impact on their professional effectiveness. In an isolated community, workers who flaunt accepted patterns of living will probably be unable to function.

What Are My Feelings about Conflict? Conflicts are an inevitable part of life—personally, professionally, nationally, globally. This is especially true in the human services, where conflicts are a normative by-product of helping people with problems and working to create change on the personal, societal, and political levels.

Yet, a major problem for many workers is their inability to disagree, to present differing points of view, to refuse a request, to discuss an emotionally loaded issue, or to say “no” in ways that are constructive. In part this arises from early training in the home, the school, and the church, which may emphasize not discussing painful issues, not questioning points of view or authority, or not confronting differences honestly and openly. Because of these feelings workers may handle loaded situations with evasion, with attack, or with false passivity. However, as discussed earlier, conflict is a normative occurrence. It is therefore crucial for workers to honestly ask themselves: “Am I comfortable with conflict? Do I know how to handle conflict in constructive ways that can lead to change and growth?”

Because of their involvement with conflict, human service workers often take on a mediator’s role, which facilitates reconciliation, settlement, compromise, or understanding among two or more conflicting parties. Mediation is a problem-based process that focuses on problem solving—not behavior or personality issues. Personal changes are a secondary outcome of agreement seeking (Fisher & Ury, 1991).

A suggested framework for mediation interventions by human service workers is as follows (Parsons, Jorgensen, & Hernandez, 1998):

- Separate the people from the problems.
- Focus on interests instead of positions.
- Create options that satisfy interests of the participants.
- Select criteria for choosing alternatives.

Mediation is seen as helping clients make use of available resources and influencing organizations to provide responsive services. Mediation is empowering for clients because they are encouraged to use available adaptive and coping resources of their social and physical environments. Mediation is also empowering because agreements are voluntary and reached by the conflicting parties through consensus (Cloke, 1994).

Negotiating Conflicts across Cultural Boundaries. Given our multicultural society, human service workers also need to increase their awareness about the role of cultural differences in how conflict is perceived and handled. Successfully negotiating conflicts with people of diverse backgrounds starts with an honest appraisal by the worker of any prejudices or misinformation he or she might have about other cultures.

Geert Hofstede, a Dutch sociologist, has developed a theory called individualism–collectivism, which helps illuminate the role of cultural differences in social behaviors such as conflict (Hofstede, 2000). This theory states that some cultures are strongly individualist and others are strongly collectivist. Individualist cultures, found in most northern and western regions of Europe and North America, are those where individuals place their goals ahead of the goals of any group of people with which they may be associated. Collectivism can be characterized as individual people holding their goals as secondary to those of a group of people to which they belong. Cultures in which a collectivist orientation predominates are found in Asia, South America, and the Pacific (Ady, 1998).

When thinking about conflict resolution and culture, it is critical to understand whether the conflicting parties' cultures have an individualist or collectivist orientation. This will greatly impact how the conflict is expressed and what type of resolution will be acceptable. For example, a person from an individualist culture who is extremely unhappy in her marriage find divorce to be an acceptable solution because this best meets this person's individual needs. Conversely, a person from a collectivist culture may never get divorced—even if living in a strife-ridden marriage—because he believes keeping the family together is more important than his individual happiness.

Assertiveness Training. Assertiveness training is another tool workers can use to develop the ability to deal with conflict and constructively express their points of view. Its thesis is that individuals have a right to be different, to express and defend different ideas and points of view, and that they have the right to be heard.

In assertiveness training, differentiation is made among these three traits:

1. *Nonassertiveness*, in which people deny the right to be assertive and do not express their own thinking and feeling, which contributes nothing to enhancing the situation and can destroy self-confidence and self-respect.
2. *Assertiveness*, in which people express their feelings and thinking in ways that show respect for the right to personal worth and to equal self-expression for those with whom they are interacting; this can be constructive to both participants.
3. *Aggressiveness*, in which people exercise their right to express their own feelings and thinking, but in a way that attacks those with whom they are interacting; this mobilizes aggression in others.

A young couple comes to the door, introduces themselves as members of a religious sect, asks to leave literature, and solicits contributions. The householder, who does not support the group and thinks their beliefs are contrary to the beliefs of a free society, might respond:

1. Nonassertive: “Oh, all right, I’ll take the literature and here’s a dollar.”
2. Assertive: “I don’t agree with the aims of your movement and don’t want to support it in any way, but I’d be glad to explain my reasons for this stand if you wish.”

3. Aggressive: “You people have got a nerve coming around here knocking on people’s doors with that trashy literature. I’ve got my own church.”

Because assertiveness does not attack others and does express respect for their right, too, to be different, it does not mobilize hostility but creates an open climate in which differences can be discussed and compromises reached.

What Is My Basic Philosophy?

The nature of the human service worker’s beliefs about life, the individual, society, and their interrelationships forms a vital part of the capacity to work effectively with people. It provides the rationale and motivating force for the worker’s efforts and gives the worker a personal significance—what we believe strongly we tend to try to put into practice. Figure 2.2 shows a sample “Bill of Rights.”

A Bill of Rights

1. You have the right to refuse requests from others without feeling selfish or guilty.
2. You have the right to feel and express anger and other emotions.
3. You have the right to feel healthy competitiveness.
4. You have the right to use your judgment in deciding your own needs.
5. You have the right to make mistakes.
6. You have the right to have your opinions and ideas given the same respect and considerations others have.
7. You have the right to ask for consideration, help, and/or affection from others.
8. You have the right to be treated as an adult.
9. You have the right to tell others what your needs are.
10. You have the right on some occasions to make demands on others.
11. You have the right to ask others to change their behavior.
12. You have the right to be treated as a capable adult and not be patronized.
13. You have the right to not automatically be assumed wrong.
14. You have the right to take time to sort out your reactions—to use your time space rather than others’ time space.
15. You have the right not to have others impose their values on you.

FIGURE 2.2 A Bill of Rights (based on material taken from a workshop on assertiveness training by Patricia Jakubowski-Spector, July 1974, University of Maryland). There are almost as many bills of rights as there are people working in this area, each with its own particular emphasis. All emphasize the right of the individual to be oneself, to be different, to self-expression, to respect and consideration. Most of them emphasize an equally basic essential, the responsibility to extend the same rights to others. This old bill covers these fundamentals and is still relevant today.

The overall philosophical base of the human services lies in these beliefs:

- The individual is a social animal.
- The individual exists in interrelationship with other people and with all other life forms. This relationship may be defined as one of mutual rights and responsibilities.
- The welfare of the individual and of the group cannot be considered apart from each other.
- Each person and all living things possess intrinsic worth.
- Each person and all living things are characterized by a need to grow and develop toward the realization of a unique potential.
- The individual and the society can be understood.
- The individual and the society possess the capacity for change as a part of their intrinsic natures.

Workers who are committed to this philosophical base with a personal conviction that is both ethically and pragmatically sound will not only be motivated to search for ways to make it operational, but will also get maximum satisfaction from their efforts and in so doing greatly increase their capacity to achieve.

The personality of the worker in human services is probably the single most significant factor in determining effectiveness in dealing with other people. Workers who can feel genuine warmth and concern for others and therefore can empathize with them, who are honest, open, and loving, who can face the reality of living comfortably, and who are at peace with themselves will tend to be effective in enabling people to use the strengths they possess for living well.

What Do I Present—and Represent—to Those with Whom I Work?

We must not only know ourselves; we also need to know what we present to others with whom we work. We must be aware that we may be perceived differently from the way we are in reality. This has particular significance in initial contacts, but it must also be kept in mind in ongoing work with clients. We are constantly giving verbal and nonverbal cues to what we are and what we represent, and these cues may be misread. We need to be sensitive to the reactions of others and get feedback from them as to what is getting across. Essentially, we present ourselves initially as a set of latent characteristics (such as a particular race, age, sex, and appearance) to which people will often react, unfortunately, on the basis of preconceived attitudes.

We give hints by our behavior as to the all-important self-image we carry with us, and we set ourselves up for reactions from others by communicating our self-image to them—people react by attacking when we communicate helplessness; they resent us when we communicate indifference, lack of sensitivity, or actual hostility; we are treated contemptuously when we communicate inefficiency or dishonesty.

The values and attitudes we present embody what we think is important: for example, respect or lack of respect for other people and their ideas, commitment to implementing

change or retaining the status quo, and so forth. We are often judged by the reference groups—social, religious, and fraternal—with which we are identified, each of which exposes certain values.

Finally, we present ourselves as representatives of a professional or work group. All professions and many occupations have codes of ethics to serve as guidelines in working situations both with clients and with colleagues. When such codes are flouted, as by the worker who makes sexual advances to a client or uses racial slurs, the members of the entire group will be judged thereby. When a profession is perceived as punitive or self-serving, its representatives are perceived in the same way.

We need first to be sensitive to and aware of what we present and represent to others in our working situations; we need to be able to evaluate these qualities realistically in terms of their validity and importance; we need, as far as is possible, to correct the misconceptions and establish ourselves as we are. This can be accomplished much more effectively by deeds than by words, although each has its place.



No longer able to continue her part-time work, Rachel Ullman applied for funds to supplement her income, although she hated “going on welfare.” After a visit from a student worker, she called the supervisor and complained about his “sending a worker dressed in mink and driving a Cadillac.”

The coat “never was very good rabbit,” and the Cadillac was a used car, as “my husband thinks they are the best buy.” When the worker discussed this undensively with her client, it opened the door for needed expression of feelings by this independent woman about her increasing dependency and her having to ask for help.

Summary

Self-understanding can never be complete, but in human service work, where we are making use of ourselves in helping relationships with others, we need to strive for as much clarity and honesty with ourselves—and with others—as possible. We need to become sensitive to personal patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that hamper our ability to work effectively with others. While outsiders can help to change such patterns, basic responsibility for dealing with them rests with the individual worker.

SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Divide students into four groups and assign to each one of the listed values that constitute the philosophical base of human service:
 - a. The worth of the individual
 - b. The right of self-determination
 - c. The right to share the benefits of society
 - d. The mutual rights/responsibility relationship of people and their society

Each group will designate a reporter and spend 15 minutes or so discussing the meaning and significance of this value. The reporter will then summarize group's findings and questions for discussion with class.

2. Assign a culture paper in which students examine their personal attitudes and values with regard to deviance from generally accepted social norms—about such things as divorce, child abuse, dependency, crime, homosexuality, house husbands, and so forth. Try to relate them to students' ability or inability to relate to people with different attitudes and lifestyles.
3. Assign pairs of students to role-play critical situations from their own experiences where assertiveness, nonassertiveness, or aggressiveness were involved. Have students change roles. The class will observe and critique.
4. Have the instructor go around to each student in the class and ask him or her to share the first word that comes to mind when hearing the word "conflict." The instructor writes these words on the blackboard as the students speak. After all the students have shared their word associations, the instructor facilitates a discussion about them; that is, how many of the words had positive connotations, how many have negative connotations, the students' thoughts about how conflict can lead to change and growth, and so on.
5. Have students interview people from the same and different culture groups regarding how they would handle conflict at work and in their personal lives. Relate these different approaches to the theory of individualism–collectivism.

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SELECTED RELATED WEBSITES

Conflict Research Consortium—Providing a Comprehensive Gateway to Information on More Constructive Approaches to Difficult Conflicts

<http://www.colorado.edu/conflicts/>

Institute of Conflict Resolution, Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/depts/ICR/>

Washington State University Web Page on World Cultures

<http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/>

U. S. Institute for Peace

<http://www.usip.org/library.html>

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