

"IF WE ARE TRULY 'DEDICATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN POTENTIAL,' THEN ADVISING AND COUNSELING CAN BECOME THE HUMAN PROCESS IN REALIZING THAT POTENTIAL."

ADVISING AND COUNSELING AS AN HRD ACTIVITY

BY STEPHEN
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"If only there were someone in this organization that I could talk to about this problem!" "Why doesn't someone hear me!" "I could solve this problem if only my supervisor would really listen and HEAR what I have to say!"

These and other concerns probably contributed most to human resource development professionals indicating *advising and counseling* as a prime activity area in describing what they do. (ASTD, Professional Development Survey, 1978.) The intent of this article is to discuss the advising and counseling process in terms of its growing importance in organizations, its successes and failures, the state of the art, and finally . . . how one can develop the skill.

Challenged by the notion that business and industry were "humanizing" to the extent that human resource development professionals were viewing "counseling" as a primary activity, I welcomed the opportunity to better articulate counseling as a process



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that has been occurring in education for eons and is now making its presence felt in all kinds of organizational activities in business, industry and government.

Of the "big three" human prob-

lems confronting all organizations . . . human communication, human relations, and identifying and effectively utilizing human talent . . . probably the *ability to relate well with others* looms above the other two as a means of effectively solving problems and developing the organization.

The seventies have seen a surge in the importance of individuals and their relationships to organizations. Previous attitudes sought to develop the organization *at the expense* of the individual, with personal and social relationship problems shuffled under the carpet with excuses such as "*too expensive to deal with*" or "*too time-consuming*." Consequently, drugs, alcohol, family crisis, personal situations, and marital conflicts were left to the individual to deal with and "get straightened out" without organizational intervention.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) as a common personnel function to improve employee morale, attitude and productivity have evolved to the extent that counseling and advising skills are impor-

tant in the training of human resource development practitioners. Several organizations employ professionally trained counselors to rehabilitate employees and serve as change agents, as well as human relations specialists to train others in the art of helping. This trend resulted from the realization by most organizations that: (1) the individual, with his or her skills, is critical to the successful operation of the organization regardless of their personal problems; (2) it is less expensive to "help" a person with personal or social problems than it is to fire the person and train another to replace him or her; and (3) no one ever really taught us *how* to be human.

Consequently, most of us suffer from the common human error of "not relating well" or "not really" hearing another person." As Ralph Nichols so succinctly pointed out over 20 years ago . . . of the four communication skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening), the most critical for successful human relations, *listening*, received the minimal amount of training in our educational system (Nichols, 1957). What is sad about this fact is that the same condition exists today.

The need for successful human-relations skills in organizations was recently demonstrated by a group of public-school teachers who desired to design a master's-degree program in cooperation with a local university. When asked about the content of the program, the teachers responded that they were well-rounded in their subject-matter area (i.e., chemistry, physics, social science, etc.); but what was really needed were strategies, techniques, methods and training on "how to relate" with students, parents, peers, supervisors and community members! In short, they needed to learn how to be *human*. They needed skills to counsel with others experiencing stressful situations such as divorce, death, drugs, abuse, and a myriad of other problems and concerns that confront students and adults alike.

In addition, they needed to be trained in organizational development skills to include process consultation, conflict resolution, team-building, and techniques designed to facilitate the identification of potential in school children and utilize that potential to benefit organizations . . . both in schools and in places of future employment.

Counseling in educational systems has been and continues to be an essential function. It is becoming increasingly apparent that counseling has found a permanent home in business, industry and government, expressing itself in new and creative ways. As a human relations intervention strategy, it is providing skills to personnel and training professionals to help them (1) make appropriate human responses to employees in stressful situations (whether an in-house relationship problem or a more personal "outside the workplace" situation); (2) explore various alternatives to help the person

choose an appropriate response or behavior to deal with that stressful situation; and (3) represent the organization as a caring and helpful entity with a concern for human welfare and safety.

Creative Conflict and the Change Process

Counseling, in the business environment, has to be *action-oriented*. It cannot exist as a long-term therapeutic activity, nor can it survive in business where there is risk of malpractice or misdirection.

To survive, it must view *conflict* as a prime motivator for human behavior. Conflict must be perceived as a creative and healthy human condition. After all, without conflict, the counselor is not in business! In recent years, organizational development practitioners have viewed conflict not as an unhealthy condition to avoid at all costs, but as a way to lead to innovation and change. Even to the point of stating that conflict resolution leads not only to a search for



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change, but it makes change more acceptable and desirable (Litterer, 1966). It is this view of conflict that has led to the recent surge in books, programs and workshops on conflict resolution.

Viewing conflict creatively requires the human resource development specialist (as counselor) to assist another person in identifying the sources of conflict, alternative ways to deal with conflict, and then designing action plans to implement a change strategy. The equation becomes: *Human interaction . . . begets . . . conflict . . . which results in change*. The change can create additional conflict and the process is repeated. The counselor plays the role of the facilitator in dealing with the process. The change experienced by the individual is to begin responding to their peers, supervisor or families in different ways or experience a change in self-concept.

Most common among the counseling approaches in work settings is the application of *behavioral* counseling concepts. Behavior

modification, behavior therapy or action counseling are all designed to focus on specific behaviors or goal-directed behaviors. The counselor helps the individual gain new learnings via reinforcement and stressing of specific, appropriate behaviors. Examples of this are transactional analysis techniques, assertiveness training, and other "pop-psych" trends such as stress management and conflict resolution. The action or goal, then, becomes a statement in concrete terms indicating the kinds of problematic behaviors the person wishes to change (Corey, 1977).

To summarize, the counselor is a person skilled in "helping relationships." A helper is one who listens well and, through a variety of counseling skills, helps the individual accept responsibility for their behaviors and feelings. The goal, in the workplace, becomes one of helping the individual see the sources of conflict, gain self-insight and self-understanding as to his or her role in the creation of the conflict, and to leave the relationship with a better ability to cope with the frustrations and anxieties of everyday human interactions. The success of this process is not grounded in the counseling method or technique as much as it is in the person's ability to relate well to the person seeking assistance.

Potential Risks

However, there are potential risks in this process! Counselors cannot always be successful in dealing with the frailties of human nature. There are risks in counseling for both the individual and the organization. In other words, *change* is not always positive. Although counselors may perceive themselves as "do-gooders," some outcomes are negative. For example . . . self-understanding may scare the individual. He or she may discover things about themselves they don't like! Or . . . an assertive encounter with a supervisor may result in the person coming across too aggressively and being fired or negatively evaluated during a performance review! The situation in this case is not that the individual chose to take responsibility . . . rather, he or she expressed the

assertiveness incorrectly. Although change did occur (being fired), the ultimate result was negative for both the individual and the organization.

Remember, the individual must be motivated to seek change. There must be a price paid, or pain, or conflict within the individual to come and seek assistance. People should never be forced to change or required to enter a counseling relationship.

Despite the risks, the goal is to open lines of communication, reduce barriers to effective communication (such as values, self-serving interests, attitudes, biases, or power plays), and restore the individual to a positive self-esteem and worthiness. In most cases, a human being responding in a human way to another human being will result in positive outcomes. Developing an improved self-concept in an employee or helping that person learn new ways to creatively interact with peers are two positive outcomes of counseling that can benefit any organization.

Developing Counseling Skills

How do you train someone to be human? A challenging question that confronts most counselor educators. Why certain people are successful at helping and others not is another perplexing question. It has been the experience of most counselor educators that success at helping others is based on personality development and the ways successful helpers evolved into effective listeners, communicators, and human relaters. The manner in which they were raised, loved, developed, and their concept of self appears to have a significant impact on their success as counselors.

Most persons can be trained in the art of helping. Just like a counselor can teach a client new ways of responding, a human resource development practitioner can be trained to conduct a counseling interview. As previously indicated, the goal of any human relations training is to have the helper reduce or eliminate barriers to communication and create an open, genuine, and honest relationship with the helpee.

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Counseling skills and techniques can be derived from a variety of books, manuals, simulation games, and programs. Formal training can occur at the university level or via in-house human relations training. An important point to remember is that no one can tell you if you are an effective counselor or could become effective. Because each relationship is different, *you* are the only person who can judge your effectiveness to relate well. Clients can provide feedback as to their perception of your relationship skills; however, the ultimate decision as to counselor effectiveness is yours.

This article has provided a cursory view of the advising and counseling function as a primary activity for the human resource development practitioner. The article has stressed the importance of counseling, its current state of the art, its success and failures, and ways to become proficient at the process.

As its importance grows, the counseling function will open

unique and creative ways of implementation in the work setting. The importance of dealing with common, everyday human concerns will manifest itself in wider and more common acceptance of counseling as a major function.

As previously indicated, the ability to relate well with others, counsel in a helping way, and assist another human in coping with organizational change and pressures has obvious benefits for both the individual and the organization. If we are truly "dedicated to the development of human potential," then advising and counseling can become the human process in realizing that potential.

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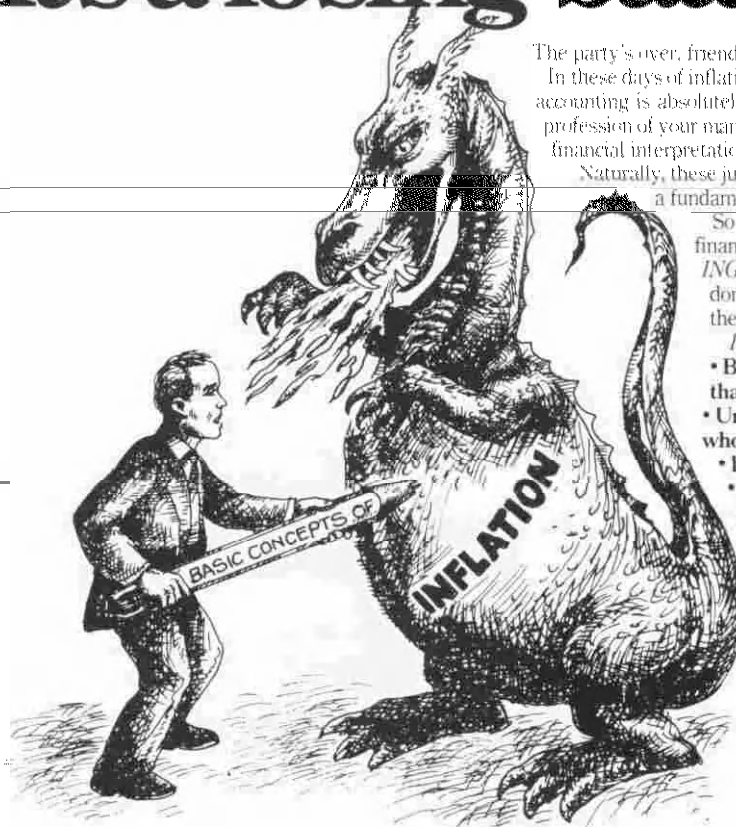
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