Assessing Motives For Helping

This training design was adapted from "Understanding Your Needs to be a Helper," Stage I of the six-stage workbook, Helping Skills: A Basic Training Program, *developed by Steven J. Danish and Allen L. Hauer, and published in 1973. Permission to reprint portions of the program was granted by the publisher, Behavioral Publications, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011.*

DR. STEVEN J. DANISH, Assistant Professor of Human Development, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa.

Many student volunteers — perhaps most of them — are involved with people in "helping relationships." These associations can be aimed at helping individuals cope with personal problems, or simply at establishing interpersonal relationships with people whose opportunities for contacts are limited. Helping relationships can assume many forms, including corrections counseling, big brother/big sister programs, companionship for the elderly, and tutoring.

Before entering into these activities, it is important to understand one's own needs, because those needs will affect the helping process. Inevitably, the helper's expectations for the relationship will influence what happens. For example, if a volunteer needs to be depended upon, he might seek gratification by extending the helping relationship longer than necessary.

The following design can be used to begin training volunteers as people-helpers.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To help volunteers become aware of their needs for helping.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. At the end of the session (approximately 2 hours) each volunteer will be able to identify and candidly discuss with another volunteer at least three needs he has for helping.

2. In discussing these three needs the volunteer will be able to focus on his present needs and motives for helping, rather than a discussion of who he is and what he does ("name, rank, and serial number"), or a discussion of past experiences and events which influenced his decision to be a helper ("Ever since I had Mrs. Jones in third grade I've always wanted to help people").

Physical Setting

Consider the following factors in choosing a setting for your training session:

The chairs should be easily movable, since the trainees are asked to move around in the course of the training procedures.

The room should be large enough to provide some privacy when the trainees are working in small groups. If such a room is not available, try to secure an additional room or two so that small group procedures are not impaired. If more than one room is used, remember that you may have to increase the amount of time allotted for the procedural steps to accommodate movement between rooms.

Goal Agreement

Early in the training session, you will want to gain the volunteer's commitment. A training module such as this can easily be disrupted by passive resistance. Clarity about the procedures to be followed encourages commitment. It may be useful to provide each volunteer with a copy of your objectives and training procedures. Since you will be using a skill model in this design, you might want to clarify your approach by saying something like:

"Remember that this is a skill. If you think of other skills, such as driving a car or learning how to dance, and remember how you learned those skills, you will see why this learning method has been chosen.

"For example, try to remember when you started driving a car; how you first had to learn the parts of the car and what each part does, how you were hesitant when you first started the car, and how you drove down the street for the first time. If you think about how you now drive a car—probably automatically, without consciously making sure you turn or brake properly, and how the skill has become integrated into your style so that you can listen to the radio and talk to someone else while you drive—you will realize how far you have progressed. It is that kind of process that is comparable to understanding one's needs. For a while the process will be rough and halting. You may be very aware of

yourself and what you are doing and will probably feel uncomfortable. But as you get into it, as you practice, the process will become part of understanding."

Some reasons commonly given by volunteers who wish to become helpers are:

"I never met a person I didn't like."

"I love the world and want to help everyone."

Be suspicious of such statements. That is not to say that these people are misrepresenting their true feelings. They simply may not be totally aware of their motives. One can be helpful to people in many ways, some of which are more direct than being a volunteer. For example, our society needs sanitation workers and nurses' aides. Why not help people by functioning in one of those positions?

This discussion is not an attempt to discourage the desire to help others. However, a volunteer should be sensitive to his own motives. A volunteer should ask himself who he is and why he wants to help people. This knowledge influences what happens in a helping relationship.

A common reaction to this rationale, especially among college students, is the feeling that volunteers are so familiar with their needs that the procedure is unnecessary. A common attitude is, "If we didn't know what our needs were, we wouldn't be here today." But the fact is that many volunteers are not aware of their underlying needs. Moreover, they may be afraid to examine them. At this point, then, the volunteer may be anxious and defensive about self-examination and talking about himself.

Anticipating Initial Problems

Since negative feelings often show up at this stage, be prepared to deal with them directly, rather than bypassing or dismissing them. Here are some alternative strategies to employ if you are confronted with negative reactions:

1. You might try reflecting trainees' negative feelings back to them, rather than focusing on the issues arising from the feelings. For example, you might say, "You're not sure whether this will be helpful."

2. Try expressing your own needs.

3. Try expressing your own feelings about the importance of being aware of one's needs.

Obviously, there are other strategies for confronting these situations. Adopt those that suit your personal training style.

Training Session Techniques

1. As a group, discuss the implications of talking about oneself. For example, "How do you react to talking about yourself?" (15 minutes).

At this point, if the trainees are forced to talk about themselves, they may experience some anxiety. But because it is important in this step to be able to talk about oneself, these anxieties must quickly be overcome. One

way to help overcome this hesitation is to hold a group discussion on "talking about oneself." You can stimulate this by asking such questions as, "What do you think about talking about yourself?" You might even talk about your own hesitation when you were asked to talk about yourself. This will also give the trainee a chance to combat those anxieties because the discussion content is focused elsewhere.

2. Have the trainees pair off and discuss each other's reasons for wanting to be a helper (5-10 minutes).

Sometimes it is difficult to get trainees to move into pairs. They often tend to stay in larger groups or just shuffle around. It is important to direct them into pairs, preferably with someone they don't know well.

Move around and listen to one or two of the pairs. While it would be valuable to observe all of the discussions, trainees often feel intruded upon if the trainer stays for only one or two minutes and then leaves. Act only as an observer and do not allow the trainees to direct their conversations toward you.

3. Have the trainees examine their conversation. Was it characterized by a discussion of:

(a) who they are and what they do

(b) past experiences and events that influenced their decisions to become helpers.

(c) their present motives for helping? (5 minutes).

This step usually goes smoothly. For some groups you may need to explain examples (a), (b), and (c). Note that the three discussion types progress in difficulty from (a) to (c).

You should be aware that at this point many trainees tend to overrate their skill, but most trainees will learn to evaluate themselves accurately after they have repeated this discussion and examined the differences among the conversations.

4. Observe live models who discuss, at low skill levels, their needs to be helpers. (5 minutes).

You and a trainee should do the modeling. Since the model represents a level of sophistication characterized by a lack of introspection and self-assessment skills, you can and should focus on type (a) responses and naive statements such as, "I never met a person I didn't like." For effect, you may want to overact this role.

5. Using these unsophisticated methods, discuss in the same pairs why you wish to become a helper. (5 minutes).

In general, the same suggestions and cautions that applied to Step 3, apply here. In addition, emphasize that this step involves only direct and unsophisticated behavior. Many trainees have a tendency to attempt more complex analyses after a short period of required role-playing. But oversimplification is useful because many people learn by contrasting. Seeing and analyzing bad examples may help trainees identify and recognize good examples.

6. Observe models who use highly-developed skills to discuss their motives. Following the discussion, they take turns summarizing their understanding of their partners' needs and motives for helping.

One might say something like:

"I have the knack of projecting a warmth that is helpful to others who are shy. I enjoy doing that, and maybe I enjoy doing something better than most of my associates." Or, *"It pleases me to have people tell me, 'You're a good friend, always there when I need you,' or, 'You're always willing to help.' Also, I have to admit that helping makes me feel a little superior. Deep down, maybe I want people to feel indebted to me, or maybe I'd like to exert control or power over others. I don't know for sure. But I do think it's useful to explore one's motives honestly."*

In this step, the model's partner summarizes his understanding of the model's needs and motives for helping. The model criticizes the summary, refining it until his needs are clearly identified. Then the two then reverse roles. It is important that you, the trainer, carefully consider your needs before modeling. Your ability to present an effective model is critical in the process. (5 to 10 minutes).

7. In the same pairs, have the trainees discuss their reasons for wanting to be a helper. Focus on their reasons for wanting to help people and the personal needs that are met by being a helper. Following the discussion, repeat the process demonstrated by the models.

Listening to another's comments about being a helper, and then summarizing those comments, is valuable not only in identifying one's own needs and motives, but also as an exercise in learning to listen. Indicating one's own feelings about being a people-helper, and having another person summarize those statements, are positive steps in learning how to speak clearly and effectively. (10 to 15 minutes).

You often will find it necessary to prod the trainees to examine their needs more closely. This step should not end until each trainee has identified his needs more specifically than "I get a kick out of helping others."

Evaluation Accomplishments

Compare the first conversation (Step 2) with this last interaction (Step 7). Did they differ? If so, how? Then have the trainees return to the large group and discuss what differences occurred, if any, as a total group (15 minutes). The trainees will probably be eager to return to the large group and talk about what they did in pairs. As in Step 1, the trainer acts as group facilitator. You may wish to have one pair of trainees discuss their differences to stimulate discussion.

Most trainees will evaluate their performance in this step as being more developed than their performance in Step 2. You can then reinforce the trainees' experience and note how skill levels increase with practice. Any trainees who have not reached the specific objectives should be asked to repeat the task, working with a volunteer who has achieved the objectives.