



Yellowfire Press

The People Approach Handbook @

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CHAPTER ONE

Definition, Departure Points, and Preview @

"People Approach attitudes are at work anytime an imaginative leader of volunteers creates a needed job around the motivations and abilities a person or group brings to a situation, or anytime a sensitive interviewer of prospective volunteers listens to their hopes, concerns, interests, rather than telling them what they ought to want to do. These relatively unselfconscious applications of People Approach are warmly applauded here. But the main agenda has been development of self-conscious, systematic methods and strategies derived rigorously from the People Approach Principle. . . " MINI-MAX" and "Need-Overlap Analysis in Helping (NOAH)"

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"People Approach" As A Kind Of Common Sense

Suppose someone told you that you could have lots of fun helping other people. Would you be surprised? A little shocked perhaps? Or would you readily agree that helping can be enjoyable and maybe should be, more of the time? This last belief has the backing of a body of principles and methods called "People Approach." These concepts and strategies began to evolve about a decade ago, based on assumptions of rather startling simplicity: if you want people to work for you as volunteers without pay and of their own free choice, it makes sense to stay as close as possible to their natural motivations and abilities in the work you ask them to do. By "natural," is meant the experiences, values, talents, preferences, and aversions we find existing now, in people we approach the. Primarily, motivation is something we discover rather than create. To act as if we could create basically new motivations in the adult person is a dangerous

conceit. Far better if we respect people enough to believe we can take them as they are and get important helping accomplished on that basis.

The Contrast to "Job Approach"

People Approach can also be understood by contrasting it to "Job Approach." In Job Approach we come to potential volunteers with a job in mind; we need to fit this or that slot – library aide, Big Sister, fund-raiser, etc. If you don't happen to fit this mold, your services are lost to the organization. Job Approach first defines the work, then expects people to adjust to the job description; job first, people second. Conversely, a People Approach emphasis puts people first and jobs second. First, we find out what you like to do that you can do pretty well. Only then do we try to find a place where your natural interests, abilities, and experience can be used. We may negotiate gentle deflections of your natural interest and abilities, the better to fit needs we wish to serve. But we always stop short of attempting to persuade you to do something you are not.

A Job Approach emphasis is almost inevitable in the world of paid employment. Suppose your youth-service program has an opening for a bookkeeper. If someone walks in who can't add or subtract, but is wonderful rapping with kids, you can't use her/him for that because you can't pay her/him for that. In a volunteer work system People Approach might find a place for this person's motivated skills; we might create a meaningful job to suit the person and the people served; we don't have to find a budget line or salary money for it first. In other words, the volunteer way of getting work done permits far greater flexibility in shaping work around a volunteer's existing motivations and talents. If we're looking for companions for one-parent children, and an optometrist who loves swimming walks in to volunteer, the possibilities are there to engage her/his services in eye-testing, if that's useful to the children, or as a swimming instructor. People Approach attitudes are at work any time an imaginative leader of volunteers creates a needed job around the motivations and abilities a person or group brings to a situation, or any time a sensitive interviewer of prospective volunteers *listens* to their hopes, concern, interest, rather than telling them what they ought to want to do. These relatively unselfconscious applications of People Approach are warmly applauded here. But the main agenda has been development of self-conscious, systematic methods or strategies, derived rigorously from the People Approach principles.

An Attempt to Take Common Sense Seriously

To begin with, the concept itself needs to be communicated more precisely. The statement which has been developed for that purpose is:

Make the minimum difference in what a person wants to do and can do which has the maximum positive effect on other people.

The question then becomes: what would volunteer job-design, recruiting, screening, placing, etc., look like if we concentrated on the above statement as a serious, consistent basis for strategy and tactics?

Four such strategies evolved during the early and mid 1970's. (1) Two of these four have so far failed to show substantial promise in terms of practitioner interest, application and feedback. These two methods are therefore not covered in this handbook." (2) Instead we concentrated on the other two strategies which have been widely and successfully applied in the real world: MINI-MAX and Need-Overlap Analysis in Helping (NOAH) Since the last general update on People Approach, in 1977, (3) significant refinements and variations have developed in these two methods.

(1) These four were first published in *People Approach: Nine New Strategies for Citizen Volunteer Involvement*, by Ivan Scheier, the National Information Center on Volunteerism, Boulder, Colorado, 1977. In addition to the four strategies there were two raw speculations on which no more than a few pages were ever published, to my knowledge. These were Need Broadcasting and Dyads (Signaling).

(2) The two methods were Self-Help and Helping (SHAH), and Community Linkage Process

(3) *People Approach*, 1977. Several excellent publications since then focus on one method or area of application, and they will be referred to in the text.



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