

Counseling Professional Personnel

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No two people are exactly alike. Each person sees and understands his own world as he perceives it. This is a basic concept of counseling which Extension administrators and educators must accept if they are to better understand staff members and clientele. This article explores some of the principles of counseling as a basis for understanding human behavior in the area of Extension administration and improving the professional skills of Extension personnel. These ideas are suggested as having potential influence on and as a means of examining and better understanding aspects of the climate created by administrative and supervisory practices.

AN ADMINISTRATOR who willingly listens to a staff member and makes an honest effort to understand him is following one of the most basic principles of counseling. Counseling has been used effectively with emotionally disturbed people. It is challenging to think about what the results might be if Extension leaders were to adopt some of these same principles of counseling.

This paper will explore some of the ideas of counseling to see if they could be adopted by Extension administrators at all levels and result in greater professional growth of Extension personnel. If these ideas do apply between administrators and staff, it is suspected that they will also apply between the professional and lay leaders and between these people and the clientele.

COUNSELING IS AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND

To try sincerely to understand another person is to accept him as a worthwhile and respected person. This acceptance is one of the greatest compliments one person can pay another. An Extension staff member who feels that he is respected, understood, and accepted by his administrator has the emotional security to become

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both productive and creative in his relationships with other people.

Why are counseling principles not more often used in the administrative person-to-person relationship? Proff proposes four causes for this lack of action:¹

1. *We are afraid of people:* We fear the reaction and responses others may make to us. Other people threaten us and our personal security unless we feel we can predict some of their behavior.
2. *We do not spend time with people:* We get so busy that we have no time to listen to other people's problems. We do not try to understand their emotional conflicts. We are victims of our own tight schedule, with no leisure time to share.
3. *We are afraid of our own reactions:* We fear the consequences that might arise if we were to act in our own individual way. We constantly fear being rejected because of something we do.
4. *We choose to ignore personal problems:* We often ignore our own problems or those of other people. We seek temporary comfort by pretending that the problems do not exist. Each of us, in varying degrees, wants to be out of touch with reality.

How is an administrator alerted to the fact that one of his staff may need personal counseling? Obviously the administrator is alerted when a staff member asks permission to talk about a problem that is bothering him. A person may also communicate his emotional feelings by his choice of words and actions.

Peculiar mannerisms and actions can indicate emotional stress. For example, a person may say the wrong thing at the most inappropriate time, or he may not be able to get along with co-workers. He may always try to blame someone for his own mistakes and shortcomings. He may often show lack of genuine respect for others by choosing words that reflect his true feelings of disrespect.

In trying to understand another person we should keep in mind that whatever a person does, no matter how strange or "out of tune" it seems, there is always a reason or cause. It may be unreasonable behavior as viewed by the administrator, but still seem reasonable to the person concerned. This is a counseling concept—no two people see exactly the same world. An administrator may need to explore the significance of individual differences in perception.

PERCEPTION IS PERSONAL

As Rogers and his co-workers studied people in therapy situa-

¹Fred Proff, "Some Basic Principles of Counseling," ideas presented in a talk given at the Extension Youth Camping Workshop, Allerton House, University of Illinois, February 28, 1961.

tions, he developed insightful concepts to explain human behavior.² Two of these observations seem useful ideas for administrators:

1. Every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he is the center.
2. The organism reacts to the field as it is experienced and perceived.

This perceptual field is, for the individual, "reality."

To a "practical-minded" administrator, these two propositions mean that each person, in a very literal sense, lives in his private world of personal reality. Every person is first an individual and second a social being. Men become social beings to the extent that two or more persons can identify similar values and purposes, and thus feel that they have some things in common. An administrator faces the problem of building a team from people who do not perceive things exactly as he sees them or as others do.

A counselor calls this phenomenon "individuality of perception." In counseling, he encourages a person to express his feelings and values. In group counseling he helps people explore possible reasons for their different ways of interpreting a situation. As people begin to understand how others feel and perceive, communication at a meaningful level increases. Is this not the goal of Extension administrators in working with staff? And of staff in working with clientele? If so, is there a technique here that might be useful to all Extension personnel?

Working Together

People work together to the extent that each perceives himself as having needs, purposes, goals, and values in common with the others. An Extension administrator must develop a team of people who can and will work together to achieve common purposes or goals. This means that people must perceive in their working situations things they feel are shared in common with co-workers and which have a personal value to all concerned. An administrator, from his own point of view, is trying to establish an emotional climate that will stimulate and encourage individual growth and intellectual development, as well as higher production on the job. But an Extension worker responds to his own perception of the situation in which he lives and works. His perceptions may agree reasonably well with others or be widely different. Whatever they may be, they are starting points for future intellectual and emotional

² Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1951), pp. 482-83.

growth. This is a fundamental concept in counseling which an administrator should keep in mind if he is to successfully guide a staff member in professional growth.

COUNSELING IN ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

Leadership skill in a person-to-person situation is shown by what the leader *does* and *says* while conversing with another person. A strong Extension team, like any strong team, must be built upon mutual respect and trust. Since an administrator usually is the most powerful member of a team, and since people tend to fear power, the initiative for forming and holding this bond of trust rests with him. Trust arises when an administrator sincerely tries to understand the feelings of another person on the team. A sincere desire to see things from another's point of view is basic to both good counseling and administration.

Kimball Wiles, writing about administration and supervision in schools, makes some observations that seem applicable to Extension education and administration:

If it is recognized that leadership is any contribution to the establishment and achievement of goals by a group, it is easy to see that official leadership must be concerned with the fullest possible cultivation of the leadership potential of each member of the group. . . . The development of leadership in group members involves getting them to assume responsibility for the planning and development of a program; it also involves creating the type of atmosphere in which they are encouraged and stimulated to exert their full native ability. Through helping staff members achieve leadership, the supervisor releases the full power of the group. Each member makes his maximum contribution as he has the opportunity to lead, and he grows in strength and ability through the experience.³

At a National Administrative Workshop for Cooperative Extension Administration, Cyril Houle stated that: "Facts and skills must be taught, but we are coming to believe that we should not aim directly at them but at what lies behind them: insight, attitude, and appreciation."⁴ This statement by a famous adult educator reflects his deep insight into the psychological processes of man.

³ Kimball Wiles, *Supervision for Better Schools* (2nd ed.; Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955), p. 76. © 1955, reprinted by permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc.

⁴ Cyril Houle, "Some Essentials in Program Development," *Cooperative Extension Administration—Report of Fifth National Administrative Workshop* (Madison, Wisconsin: National Agricultural Extension Center for Advanced Study, University of Wisconsin, 1956), p. 35.

An Extension administrator who uses counseling concepts in his administrative leadership helps staff members express their thoughts and feelings. He accepts them as able persons, worthy of his respect. This does not necessarily mean that he agrees with all their statements. It does mean that he will listen and attempt to understand what they are trying to say. He may help them clarify their feelings and meanings. If an administrator listens intently to his staff members, it is also expected that staff members will listen to him. When the administrator has set the proper climate, this exchange of ideas and concepts usually does occur.

In *Supervision in the Cooperative Extension Service*, Rogers and Olmsted have much to say about the use of counseling and interviewing techniques in Extension administration:

Situations calling for the use of interviewing and counseling skills occupy a large part of the time of the Extension supervisor. In fact, so much of his work is done through the individual conference that he is inclined to treat all such conferences as routine, thus minimizing their potential for increasing agent effectiveness. The Extension supervisor will improve his ability to guide agents if he acquires a better understanding of the techniques of interviewing and counseling. . . . Counseling and interviewing can be most valuable tools in accomplishing the supervisor's objective of building sound human relations.

Face-to-face conversation has, throughout human history, been extremely important in the development of human understanding. It will, undoubtedly, continue to be the surest method of achieving these understandings. The face-to-face conversation provides an opportunity to use all the senses. We talk, we see, and we interpret! Our conversational partner can use the same means in presenting his ideas. Voices, gestures, facial expressions, attitudes and the flow of ideas are all integral parts of the face-to-face conversations.⁵

SUMMARY

The purpose of counseling is to provide a face-to-face exchange of ideas, opinions, and feelings in a friendly climate that will permit human growth and intellectual development. This same goal—personnel development—is one of the goals of Extension administration. Adoption of some of the counseling techniques that have been demonstrated to work so well in both school counseling and industrial counseling have implications for administrators at all levels of the Cooperative Extension Service.

⁵ F. E. Rogers and Ann G. Olmsted (eds.), *Supervision in the Cooperative Extension Service* (Madison, Wisconsin: National Agricultural Extension Center for Advanced Study, University of Wisconsin, 1957), p. 83.