

# **THE PROFESSIONAL HELPER**

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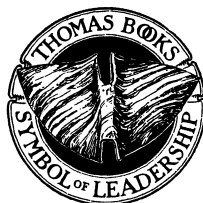
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# THE PROFESSIONAL HELPER

The Fundamentals of Being  
a Helping Professional

*By*

WILLIE V. BRYAN, Ed.D.



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*This book is dedicated to my wife Donnita C. Bryan,  
our daughter Deniece, our son Tony,  
and our granddaughter Donnita K. Bryan.*



## PREFACE

Helping or assisting other humans is perhaps the oldest and noblest of human acts. From the earliest point in human history, when humans began to recognize other humans as friend or foe, helping has been an essential part of human survival. Survival of the fittest is the major concept credited with human's existence and dominance of other animals. Certainly, being strong enough both physically and mentally to withstand challenges from animals, the elements, and, of course, other humans has played a major part in the survival of humankind. However, the one factor that has allowed humans to survive and become the dominate species on earth is their ability to cooperate and help each other meet the challenges that have confronted us.

As previously stated, helping is as old as human existence and is essential to human survival. Helping or assisting other humans meet their life goals and handle life situations is essential to the continued survival of our species. No one possesses every thing that is necessary to carry us through life's journeys. Stated in other terms, every human being needs help, and every human has the capacity to be a helper. Helping may be manifest in various forms. Help may be physical, mental, emotional, and/or inspirational. Help may be informal, such as assisting a friend move his household goods to a new location, or help can be professional, such as a social worker counseling a client on health care options. Regardless of formality or informality, helping is necessary for human survival as well as the maintenance of a civil and humane society.

Although this book primarily discusses helping from the standpoint of being a formal professional process, this should not be interpreted to mean that informal helping is less important than professional helping. The fact is that it takes both kinds for humans to survive.

W.V.B.





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# **THE PROFESSIONAL HELPER**



# Chapter 1

## THE PROFESSIONAL HELPER

### Chapter Outline

- Introduction
- Kinds of Helping Relationships
- Characteristics of an Effective Helper
  - Effective Communicator
  - Effective Listener
  - Integrity
  - Ethical
  - Motivator
  - Compassionate
  - Self-Awareness and Self-Confidence
  - Patient
  - Available
  - Awareness of Cultural Differences
  - Possesses Understanding of Human Behavior
  - Possesses Understanding of Resources
  - Possesses Understanding of Family Dynamics
- Summary
  - References

### Chapter Objectives

- Provide a basic understanding of various kinds of helping relationships
- Provide a basic understanding of the characteristics an effective helper must possess

## INTRODUCTION

One of the oldest human acts is helping or assisting other beings. Helping in the early stages of human existence was perhaps a purely selfish act – selfish in that it was a means of survival. Each individual within the group needed the help and support of the other members to meet their daily needs. Over the centuries, helping has remained a selfish act and at the same time has evolved into a benevolent act of assisting others with regard to functioning in sometimes complicated social environments. The act of helping has remained selfish in that virtually all helping, unless the helping is a forced act, still answers some psychological human needs, such as recognition, feelings of being needed, and meets some spiritual and/or social responsibilities, and the list could continue. Despite the self-serving aspect of helping, the act of assisting others remains essential to the survival of the human race. Without feelings of concern and compassion for the needs of other humans, one can easily understand that the world would have little, if any, order. There is no doubt that imbedded within the human spirit is the desire to survive; along with this need is the desire to share our lives with like-minded individuals. Given this connection of the human spirits, helping others to meet their survival needs becomes one of the basic human building blocks of an orderly society.

In this book, the terms *helper* and *counselor* are used interchangeably. Also, the term *helper* refers to numerous other helpers, such as social workers, case managers, and rehabilitation specialist, to mention only three. Likewise, the terms *helpee*, *client*, and *patient* are also used interchangeably.

## KINDS OF HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

Following the theme of an orderly society, we frequently classify helping as informal or formal. Informal implies a nonprofessional, nontherapeutic relationship, although this definition is not totally accurate. An act of helping one's friend rearrange furniture in her home, although not a professional helping relationship, can be therapeutic from the standpoint of helping relieve some of the friend's stress of putting some order to her immediate surroundings. Okun (2002)

identifies informal helping relationships as help occurring when the helping relationship is secondary to another relationship. Professor Okun continues her explanation of helping relationships by explaining that “formal helping situations are ones in which the helper/helpee roles are stated or implied by positions or contact and the specific reason for contact is known to be for the provision of some kind of help” (p. 30).

In an effort to further dissect the helping relationship, we can view the relationship from the perspective of whether it is a professional helping relationship or a nonprofessional relationship. A professional helping relationship is one in which a person is academically trained in the sciences of understanding human behavior, understanding one’s own motivations and psychological needs, as well as trained in the arts of effective communication and managing various complexities of human interaction, such as stress management and other personality disorders to mention only two. One could further dissect the helping relationship by identifying paraprofessionals and nonprofessional relationships. Paraprofessionals are generally considered as persons who have a lesser degree of training than professional helpers. Although they may not have the academic degrees, professional credentials, and/or the intensity of training as the professional helper, skillful paraprofessionals make significant contributions to the field of helping. Identifying the helper from the perspective of whether they are professional, paraprofessional, or nonprofessional is risky, in that there are several variables to consider when evaluating the type of service being performed. Offered as examples, if one views the service from the standpoint of academic credentials, the professional helper may have the academics but lack intensity and depth of training. Conversely, the person may not have the academic credentials but possess life experiences as well as years of practical experience in dealing with certain types of situations. Former substance abusers who become substance abuse counselors come to mind with regard to this example.

Although some texts attempt to classify helpers by certain professions and/or academic and license/certification (and they have the right to make those distinctions) this text is more concerned with identifying the qualities, both personal and professional, that the helper should have to be an effective helper. Stated in other terms, I am more concerned with identifying and discussing some of the fundamental