



Second
Edition

THE PROFESSIONAL HELPER

The Fundamentals of Being a Helping Professional

WILLIE V. BRYAN, Ed.D.

THE PROFESSIONAL HELPER

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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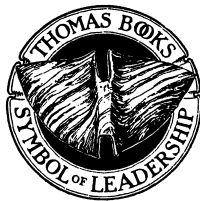
Second Edition

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The Fundamentals of Being
a Helping Professional

By

WILLIE V. BRYAN, ED.D.



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*This book is dedicated to the many students I have taught and will teach;
they keep me motivated.*

PREFACE

The first edition of *The Professional Helper* discussed characteristics of an effective helper which included understanding self as well as understanding various components of a client's life that can have impacts upon the helping professional's ability to be successful in assisting the client. In the second edition, I have added information with regard to some of the major issues the United States has encountered, and to some degree successfully overcome with the involvement of the helping professional. Additionally, this second edition projects into the future of the United States' human relations with regard to some of the issues the nation will encounter and need the assistance of helping professionals.

The second edition of *The Professional Helper* is divided into three parts. Part I covers personal skills that a helper should possess. Additionally, Part I discusses some of the understandings one must have in order to be an effective helper.

Part II of the second edition discusses some of the human relations evolutions the United States has gone through and the impact these have had on American society. Stated in other terms, the United States has attempted, and in many situations, has been successful in making progress toward being a more inclusive nation. Considerable credit for the improvement in human relationships can be credited to helping professionals' advocacy for more equal opportunities and fairness in the American society. Additionally, Part II discusses future evolutions that are needed, and the role helping professionals can play in achieving success in making the United States a more inclusive nation.

Part III of the second edition provides information with regard to psychological theories of several individual and family therapies. This information is provided to help professional helpers understand several theories and therapies that if understood and utilized will increase their chances of being successful in assisting clients better understand their issues thus leading to acceptable resolution to those issues. Additionally, the discussions of the theo-

ries are provided to assist the helpers to develop their own professional approaches to helping clients.

W.V.B.

CONTENTS

| | <i>Page</i> |
|----------------------|-------------|
| <i>Preface</i> | vii |

Chapter

PART I—ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1. The Professional Helper | 5 |
| 2. The Helping Relationship | 24 |
| 3. Understanding Self | 47 |
| 4. Understanding Human Behavior | 65 |
| 5. Understanding Cultural Differences | 86 |
| 6. Understanding Disabilities | 106 |
| 7. Understanding Religions | 138 |
| 8. Understanding Resources | 168 |

PART II—CULTURAL EVOLUTIONS AND THE HELPING PROFESSIONAL

| | |
|---|-----|
| 9. Helping Professional's Roles in Cultural Evolution | 191 |
| 10. Future Challenges for Helpers | 216 |

PART III—UNDERSTANDING PSYCHOSOCIAL DYNAMICS OF HELPING

| | |
|---|-----|
| 11. Analysis of a Professional Helping Relationship | 249 |
|---|-----|

| | |
|---|-----|
| 12. Understanding Individual Counseling | 275 |
| 13. Understanding Family Counseling | 301 |
| 14. Conclusion | 333 |
| <i>Name Index</i> | 337 |
| <i>Subject Index</i> | 341 |

THE PROFESSIONAL HELPER

Part I

**ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING FOR
HELPING PROFESSIONALS**

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 also 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 specialists, to mention only three. Likewise, the terms *helped*, *client*, and *patient* are also used interchangeably.

As previously stated, helping is as old as human existence; everyone needs help, and, to some extent, everyone provides assistance to others. Therefore, there are various forms of helping, including informal and formal, as well as nonprofessional and professional. What has primarily been discussed in this text is professional helping.

As professional helpers, we have to be cognizant of the importance of our work and the impact our work can have on the lives of those, whom for whatever reason, engage us as helpers. Some helpes go to professional helpers because their situations, from their viewpoint, have gone beyond their abilities to control. They may have sought the

advice of family and friends, but find that the situation has not significantly improved. They may have engaged in a variety of activities attempting to eliminate the worry involved in their life situation, but have not received the desired relief. Generally speaking, they are emotionally hurting and/or experiencing emotional stress and are expecting some relief. The point being made is that when helpees come to a professional helper, whether as self-referrals or otherwise, they need help.

As patients or clients seek help from a medical or legal professional, they look to him or her as professionals qualified to meet their needs. These types of expectations are no less true when a helpee seeks, or is referred to a professional helper. Therefore, it is incumbent on the professional helper to be prepared to meet the reasonable expectations of the helpee or those who have referred the person. This does not mean that the professional helper has to be a miracle worker and be able to solve any and all types of problems that helpees present. Obviously, this is unrealistic. However, the helper must be prepared to provide the best professional and ethical services possible. Consequently, this means that, as a professional helper, you must prepare yourself first by understanding yourself—understanding your emotions, your motivations, your attitudes and prejudices, and your attitudes about various life situations that helpees bring to the helping relationship. Second, as a helping professional, you must have a sound understanding of human behavior—to be more specific, you must have an understanding of the various ways that human behavior is motivated. Third, you must have some theoretical understanding of how to conduct the helping relationship from the standpoint of process, establishment of goals and objectives, and implementation of the same. Finally, incorporated in all of the steps and process has to be adherence to ethical standards that protect the rights of the helpee.

The helper must have prepared him or herself for this most important profession because a great deal is at stake. The results of most professional helping relationships go beyond easing or eliminating the emotional stress of the helpee—in many cases, the results impact family relationships and the ability to adequately interact with friends, coworkers, and other acquaintances. Certainly, the impacts go far beyond the immediate moments.

The helping professional has to view him or herself as one who is helping the helpee meet his or her potentials as a human being, thus

being able to make positive contributions to the society in which he or she lives. There can be no more noble cause than this.

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