



# *INTERPERSONAL LIVING*

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*A SKILLS/CONTRACT APPROACH  
TO HUMAN-RELATIONS TRAINING  
IN GROUPS*

*GERARD EGAN*

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to Human-Relations Training  
in Groups*

*GERARD EGAN*

*Loyola University of Chicago*

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**EXERCISES IN HELPING SKILLS**

*A Training Manual to Accompany The Skilled Helper*

# Preface

This book is meant for anyone who wishes to improve his or her interpersonal skills. It should be of use to anyone in a people-oriented occupation. It is especially relevant for those who want to improve their interpersonal skills or interactional style through some kind of group process. And, since the skills discussed in this book are basic interpersonal skills, this book may be used in courses designed to improve interpersonal communication, whether in one-to-one or group situations.

In a book I published with Brooks/Cole in 1970 (*Encounter: Group Processes for Interpersonal Growth*) I noted that, despite the fact that all sorts of group experiences designed to promote personal and interpersonal growth were being conducted, and that thousands of people were flocking to such groups, comparatively little had yet been written on these groups in terms of either theory or research. Since then, however, there has been an explosion of publications dealing with such groups. Today, therefore, not only is it bewildering to behold the different kinds of group experiences being offered, but it is an awesome task to stay abreast of the literature on these groups. You may well ask "Why, then, another book dealing with group processes?" The answer lies in two words—*skills* and *systematic*.

First, this book deals with *skills*. Much of the current literature on groups overlooks the fact that interacting in a group is a high-level communication experience requiring relatively sophisticated interpersonal-communication skills. Participants in various group experiences are often asked to engage in interactions requiring communication skills they simply don't possess. Therefore, this book takes a step backward, as it were, and deals with basics—that is, the kinds of basic interpersonal skills one needs to perform effectively in *all* interpersonal situations (and especially in groups). This book also deals with a group of basic skills that are *specific to groups*. These

group-specific communication skills are extremely important, but to the best of my knowledge they are not clearly identified and illustrated in the current group literature. It is my conviction that this ignoring of basic skills—whether interpersonal-communication skills or group-specific skills—has been detrimental to the use of groups to promote personal and interpersonal growth.

The second word is *systematic*. Many group processes expose the trainee to a variety of experiences, assuming that mere exposure will enable him or her to acquire an adequate level of interpersonal skills. For instance, it seems to be assumed that a participant in a group in which a great deal of confrontation goes on will pick up the skill of responsible confrontation. Research does not support this assumption. Systematic training in specific communication skills—training that includes cognitive input and practice—offers a more certain approach to acquiring these skills. This book emphasizes systematic training in both individual and group-specific communication skills. I don't suggest that systematic training in skills provides the complete answer to the problems of interpersonal living or of interpersonal growth, but it does provide the tools that make interpersonal growth possible and interpersonal living effective.

It is difficult to thank everyone specifically who has contributed to the fashioning of this book. I do want to thank my colleague Mike O'Brien for his constant support and express special gratitude to Maureen Bacchi, Kevin O'Keefe, and Jim Armstrong for their special assistance.

I would also like to thank the reviewers of the manuscript for their helpful suggestions: John C. Clem of New River Community College, Gloriann B. Koenig of DeKalb Community College, Jim Ludlow of Modesto Junior College, C. K. Simpson of The Cleveland State University, and Jerry Wesson of El Centro College.

Gerard Egan

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*PART 1*

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*Introduction  
and  
Overview*





*Introduction:  
The Basic Concepts of  
the Human-Relations-Training  
Laboratory*

*DEFINING THE  
HUMAN-RELATIONS-TRAINING EXPERIENCE*

Since there are at least dozens of different kinds of laboratory experiences that deal with human-relations training, the development of human potential, self-actualization, group dynamics, and the like, it is essential to give some kind of definition to the experience you are about to enter. Perhaps you have heard about “sensitivity training” or “encounter groups,” and perhaps you have even participated in one or two group experiences. “Sensitivity training” has come to mean so many different things that it means practically nothing today. And, although I have used the term “encounter group” in earlier writings (Egan, 1970, 1971b, 1973a), I have abandoned it because it, too, now has too many different connotations. Therefore, it seems more reasonable to try to define the human-relations-training experience simply as it is developed in this book, without trying to connect it historically to all of the group experiences and laboratories that have proliferated over the past ten years.

You may well be fearful of the prospect of entering a “human-relations-training” experience, but learning something about what awaits you may help to dispel some of this fear. Actually, “awaits you” is a poor phrase, for human-relations training is something you *do*, not something done to you. This chapter later offers an overview of precisely what you are to do during each of the three phases of this training program. The introductory sections leading up to this overview will define such terms as “human-relations training,” “laboratory experience,” and “interpersonal style” in order to make the overview as clear as possible. The more clearly you understand the experience before you embark upon it, the more intelligently you will be able to give yourself to it and the more valuable it will be to you.