

FOURTH EDITION

EXERCISES IN HELPING SKILLS

A Training Manual to Accompany *The Skilled Helper*

Gerard Egan



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Gerard Egan

Loyola University of Chicago



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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

The exercises in this manual are meant to accompany the revised edition of **THE SKILLED HELPER** by Gerard Egan (Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, Pacific Grove, California, 1990). These exercises serve a number of purposes:

1. They can help you develop a **behavioral** rather than merely a cognitive grasp of the principles, skills, and methods that turn helping models into useful tools.
2. They can be used to help you explore your own strengths and weaknesses as a helper. That is, they provide a way of having you apply the helping model to **yourself** first before trying it out on others. As such, they can help you confirm strengths that enable you to be with clients effectively and manage weaknesses that would stand in the way of helping clients manage problem situations.
3. You can help **clients** use these exercises selectively to explore and manage their own problems in living more effectively. These exercises provide one way of promoting client participation in the helping process.
4. You can help clients use these exercises to learn the **skills of problem management** themselves. Training in problem-management skills encourages self-responsibility in clients and helps make them less dependent on others in managing their lives.

A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR HELPERS

The following are standard steps in a skills-training program:

1. First, develop a **cognitive understanding** of a particular helping method or the skill of delivering it. You can do this by reading the text and listening to lectures.
2. **Clarify** what you have read or heard. This can be done through instructor-led questioning and discussion.

The objective of Steps 1 and 2 is **cognitive clarity**.

3. Watch experienced instructors **model** the skill or method in question. This can be done "live" or through films and videotapes.

4. **Use** the skill or method you have read about and seen demonstrated. The first "use" of a skill may be doing an exercise in this manual. The purpose of this initial use of the method or skill is to demonstrate to yourself that you understand the helping method or skill enough to begin to practice it.

The objective of Steps 3 and 4 is **behavioral clarity**.

5. Move into smaller groups to **practice** the skill or method in question with your fellow trainees.

6. During these practice sessions evaluate your own performance and get **feedback** from a trainer and from your fellow trainees. This feedback serves to confirm what you are doing right and to correct what you are doing wrong. The use of video to provide feedback is most helpful.

The objective of Steps 5 and 6 is **initial competence** in using the model and the skills that make it work.

7. Finally, from time to time stop and reflect on the training process itself. Take the opportunity to express how you feel about the training process and how you feel about your own progress. While Steps 1 through 6 deal with the task of learning the helping model and the methods and skills that make it work, Step 7 deals with group maintenance, that is, managing the needs of individual trainees. Doing this kind of group maintenance work helps establish a learning community.

The exercises in this manual can be used as a way of practicing the skills and methods "in private" before practicing them with your fellow trainees. They provide a behavioral link between the introduction to a skill or method that takes place in the first four steps of this training format and actual practice in a group.

THE STAGES AND STEPS OF THE HELPING PROCESS

For the most part the exercises presented here are grouped around and follow the order of the three stages and nine steps of the helping process. Here is an outline of the skilled-helper model.

STAGE I: EXPLORING THE PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

Clients can neither manage problem situations nor develop unused opportunities unless they identify and understand them. Exploration and clarification of problems and opportunities take place in Stage I. This stage deals with the current state of affairs, that is, the problem situations or unused opportunities that prompt clients to come for help. This stage includes the following steps:

1. **Help clients tell their stories.** First of all, clients need to tell their stories. Some do so easily, others with a great deal of difficulty. You need to develop a set of attitudes and communication skills that will enable you to help clients reveal problems in living and unused potential. This means helping clients find out what's going wrong and what's going right in their lives. Successful assessment helps clients identify both problems and resources.

2. **Help clients develop new perspectives.** This means helping clients manage **blind spots**, that is, helping them see themselves, their concerns, and the contexts of their concerns more objectively. This enables clients to see more clearly not only their problems and unused opportunities, but also ways in which they want their lives to be different. Your ability to challenge clients humanely and effectively throughout the helping process is extremely important.

3. **Help clients focus on significant concerns.** This means helping clients identify their most important concerns, especially if they have a number of problems. Effective counselors help clients work on high-leverage issues, that is, issues that will make a difference in clients' lives. They also help clients spell out problem situations in terms of specific experiences, behaviors, and feelings.

STAGE II: DEVELOPING A PREFERRED SCENARIO

Once clients understand either problem situations or opportunities for development more clearly, they often need help in determining what they would like to see different. They need to develop a preferred scenario, that is, see a picture of a better future, choose specific goals to work on, and commit themselves to them. For instance, at this stage a troubled married couple could be helped to picture what a better marital relationship might look like.

1. **Help clients develop a range of possibilities for a better future.** If a client's current state of affairs is problematic and unacceptable, then he or she needs to be helped to conceptualize or envision a new state of affairs, that is, alternate, more acceptable possibilities. A new scenario is not a wild-eyed, idealistic state of affairs, but rather a conceptualization or a picture of what the problem situation would be like if improvements were made. For instance, for a couple whose marriage is coming apart and who fight constantly, one of the elements of the new scenario might be fewer and fairer fights. Other possible elements of this better marriage might be greater mutual respect, more openness, more effectively managed conflicts, a more equitable distribution of household tasks, and so forth. Separation or even divorce might be considered if differences are irreconcilable and if the couple's values system permits such a solution.

2. **Help clients translate preferred-scenario possibilities into goals.** Once a variety of preferred-scenario possibilities--which constitute possible goals or desired outcomes of the helping process--have been generated, it is time to help clients choose the possibilities that make the most sense and turn them into an agenda, that is, a goal or a "package" of goals to be accomplished. The agenda put together by the client needs to be viable, that is, capable of being translated into action. It is viable to the degree that it is stated in terms of clear and specific outcomes and is substantive or adequate, realistic, in keeping with the client's values, and capable of being accomplished within a reasonable time frame.

3. **Help clients commit themselves to the goals they choose.** Problem-managing goals are useless if they are not actively pursued by the client. Incentives for commitment to these goals must be discovered. The search for incentives is especially important when the choices are hard. How are truants with poor home situations to commit themselves to returning to school? What are the incentives for such a choice? Most clients struggle with commitment.

STAGE III: GETTING THERE--FORMULATING STRATEGIES AND PLANS

Discussing and evaluating preferred-scenario possibilities and choosing goals-- the work of Stage II--determine **what** must be accomplished by clients in order to manage their lives more effectively. Stage III deals with **how** goals are to be accomplished. Some clients know what they want to accomplish, but need help in determining how to do it. Throughout the counseling process rusty client imaginations need stimulating.

1. **Help clients brainstorm a range of strategies for accomplishing their goals.** In this step clients are helped to discover a number of different way of achieving their goals. The principle is simple: Action strategies tend to be more effective when chosen from among a number of possibilities. Some clients, when they decide what they want, leap into action, implementing the first strategy that comes to mind. While such a bias toward action may be laudable, the strategy may be ineffective, inefficient, imprudent, or a combination of all three.

2. **Help clients choose action strategies that best fit their resources.** If you do a good job in the first step of Stage III, that is, if you help clients identify a number of different ways of achieving their goals, then clients will face the task of choosing the best set. In this step your job is to help them choose the strategy or "package" of strategies that best fits their preferences and resources. This

tailoring of action strategies is important. One client might want to improve her interpersonal skills by taking a course at a college while another might prefer to work individually with a counselor.

3. **Help clients formulate a plan.** Once clients are helped to choose strategies that best fit their styles, resources, and environments, they need to assemble these strategies into a **plan**, a step-by-step process for accomplishing a goal. If a client has a number of goals, then the plan indicates the order in which they are to be pursued. Clients are more likely to act if they know what they need to do and the order they do it in. Plans help clients develop discipline and also keep them from being overwhelmed by the work they need to do.

CLIENT ACTION: THE HEART OF THE HELPING PROCESS

Help clients act both within and outside the counseling sessions. Helping is ultimately about problem-managing and opportunity-developing action. Discussions, analysis, goal setting, strategy formulation, and planning all make sense only to the degree that they help clients to act prudently and with direction. There is nothing magic about change; it is work. If clients do not act on their own behalf, nothing happens.

Two kinds of client action are important here: First, actions within the counseling sessions themselves. The nine steps described above are not things that helpers do to clients, rather they are things that clients are helped to do. Clients must take ownership of the helping process. Second, clients must act "out there" in their real day-to-day worlds. Problem-managing and opportunity-developing action is ultimately the name of the game. The stages and steps of the helping process, illustrated on the next page in Figure 1, make sense to the degree that they drive prudent client action.

Since all the stages and steps of the helping process can be drivers of client action, action themes will be woven into each set of exercises. This will reinforce the principle that discussion and action go hand in hand.

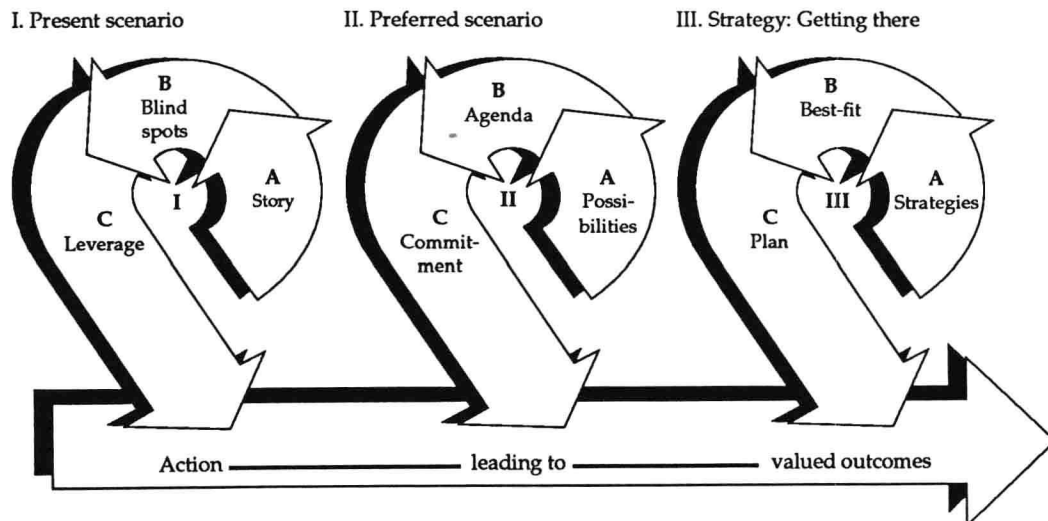


Figure 1. The Stages and Steps of the Helping Process

A NONLINEAR APPROACH TO HELPING

Helping usually does not take place in the neat, step-by-step fashion suggested by the stages and steps of the helping model. Effective helpers start wherever there is a client need. For instance, if a client needs support and challenge to commit himself or herself to realistic goals that have already been chosen, then the counselor tries to be helpful at this point. The nine steps of the helping model are active ways of **being with** clients in their attempts to manage problems in living and develop unused potential. You can be with clients in both supportive and challenging ways as they attempt to:

- * tell their stories,
- * deal with blind spots and develop new perspectives,
- * choose issues to work on that will make a difference,
- * develop a range of alternate scenarios,
- * set realistic goals and agendas,
- * commit themselves to these goals,
- * develop a range of strategies for accomplishing goals,
- * choose strategies that best fit their preferences and resources, and
- * turn strategies into realistic action plans.

The needs of your clients and not the logic of a helping model should determine your interactions with them. One of the overriding needs of clients, of course, is to turn discussion and analysis of problem situations into problem-managing action. If you can help clients do this, you are worth your weight in gold.

YOUR ROLE AS TRAINEE: DEALING WITH REAL CONCERNS

One way of learning the stages and steps of this helping model is to apply them to your own problems and concerns first. This means placing yourself in the role of a client. There are two ways of doing this. You can pretend to be a client or you can really become a client. Since this distinction is important, let us look at it more carefully.

Role-playing versus dealing with real concerns. As a trainee, you are going to be asked to act both as helper and as client in practice sessions. In the written exercises in this manual, you are asked at one time or another to play each of these roles. There are two ways of playing the role of the client:

1. you can **role-play**, that is, pretend to have certain problems, or
2. you can discuss your own **real** problems and concerns.

Role-playing, while not easy, is still less personally demanding than discussing your own real concerns in practice sessions. Although some role-playing might be useful at the beginning of the training process (since it is less threatening and allows you to ease yourself into the role of client), I suggest that you eventually use the training process to look at some of the real problems or concerns in your own life, **especially issues that relate to your effectiveness as a helper**. For instance, if you tend to be an impatient person—one who places unreasonable demands on others—you will have to examine and change this behavior if you want to become an effective helper. Or, if you are very nonassertive, this may assist you in helping clients challenge themselves.

Learning what it means to be a client. Another reason for using real problems or concerns when you take the role of the client is that it gives you some experience of **being** a client. Then, when you face real clients, you can appreciate some of the misgivings they might have in talking to a relative stranger about the intimate details of their lives. Other things being equal, I would personally prefer going to a helper who has had some experience in being a client.

The safe and productive training group. Dealing with personal concerns in the training sessions will be both safe and productive if you have a competent trainer who provides adequate

supervision, if the training group becomes a learning community that provides both support and reasonable challenge for its members, and if you are willing to discuss personal concerns. Self-disclosure will be counterproductive if you let others extort it from you or if you attempt to extort it from others. Your self-disclosure should always remain appropriate to the goals of the training group. Extortion, "secret-dropping," and dramatic self-disclosure are counterproductive.

Preparing for self-disclosure. If you are to talk about yourself during the practice sessions, you should take some care in choosing what you are going to reveal about yourself. Making some preparation for what you are going to say can prevent you from revealing things about yourself that you would rather not. The exercises relating to Step I-A of the skilled-helper model will help you discover and explore the concerns that you can safely deal with in the training group.

SOME CAUTIONS IN USING THIS MANUAL

First, it is important to note that the exercises suggested in this manual are means, not ends in themselves. They are useful to the degree that they help you develop a working knowledge of the helping model and acquire the kinds of skills that will make you an effective helper. Other exercises can be added and the ones outlined here can be modified in order to achieve this goal more effectively.

Second, these exercises have been written as an adjunct to the text. They usually presuppose information in the text that is not repeated in the exercises.

Third, the length of training programs differs from setting to setting. In shorter programs there will not be time to do all these exercises. Nor is it necessary to do all of them. However, in shorter training programs, I suggest that you do at least one exercise from each of the sections on communication skills, one from each of the nine steps of the helping process, and one from the sections on action. This will help you develop a behavioral feeling for the **entire** helping model and not just the communication skills part of it. You will not know which parts of the helping model any given client will need until you sit down with him or her. If the entire focus of the training program is on the communication skills that serve the helping process, you should understand that your training is incomplete. Further training in the helping model itself is needed.

Fourth, these exercises achieve their full effect only if you share them with the members of your training group and receive **feedback** on how well you are learning the model and the skills that make it work. Your instructor will set up the structure needed to do this. Since time limitations are always an issue, learning how to give brief, concise, behavioral feedback in a humane, caring way is most important. Exercises on giving feedback are found in the communication skills section.

LEARNING JOURNAL

In many of the exercises you will be asked to jot down what you have learned about yourself, yourself in the role of helper, and yourself in the role of client. Many people find it very useful to jot these learnings down in a journal, which can be reviewed from time to time. It is one way of committing yourself to your own development as a human being and as a helper.

PART TWO

VALUES AND ACTION

Part Two deals with two areas of the helping process: The values that should permeate your interactions with your clients and the action orientation needed by clients in order to participate as fully as possible in the helping process and to manage the problems and opportunities of their lives more effectively.

I. Values. First, it is important for you to take initiative in determining the kinds of values you want to pervade the helping process and relationship. Too often such values are afterthoughts. The position taken in Chapter Three of the text is that values should provide guidance for everything you do in your interactions with clients.

II. Action Orientation. Second, since the skilled-helper model is action-oriented, it is important for you to understand the place of "getting things done" in your own life. If you are to be a catalyst for problem-managing and opportunity-developing action on the part of clients, then reviewing your own track record in this regard is important.

I. VALUES IN HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

As indicated in the text, the values that are to permeate your helping relationships and practice must be owned by you. Learning about values from others is very important, but mindless adoption of the values promoted by the helping profession without reflection inhibits your owning and practicing them. You need to wrestle with your values a bit to make them your own. Second, your values must actually make a difference in your interactions with clients. That is, they must be values-in-use and not merely espoused values. Your clients will get a feeling for your values, not from what you say, but from what you do.

EXERCISE 1: ADOPTING VALUES THAT BENEFIT CLIENTS

1. Put yourself in the shoes of the client. Without thinking of values, simply ask yourself: "What do I want to get out of seeing a helper? How do I want to be treated?" Then list what you want, using simple words and phrases rather than sentences.

2. Read the section on values in the text. See how many of the things you would want as a client fall under the values categories outlined in Chapter Three. List them under the following headings.

Helper Competence	Helping Pragmatism	Respect for Client

Helper Genuineness	Client Self-Responsibility

-
-
-
3. Star those words or phrases that you consider to represent key values in the helping process and relationship.
 4. What do you need to do to make sure that the values you have starred actually permeate your interactions with clients?

EXERCISE 2: SHARING KEY HELPING VALUES WITH CO-LEARNERS

1. Make copies of the values you have highlighted for yourself in the previous exercise. Share them with the other members of your small group.
2. Through discussion and debate, work together to produce a "Key Helping Values" list for your group.
3. Finally, in an open session, share your group's list with the other groups.
4. Discuss the differences among the groups and the implications for helping. What value themes emerge? Are there significant differences among the groups? What do you learn from these themes and these differences?

Obviously Chapter Three and these two exercises do not take care of your education on values in helping relationships. They are meant to help you start the long-term process of seeing helping from a values perspective. Values at their most pragmatic are criteria that help you make decisions. Throughout the training program values issues will arise. Your instructor will help you work through these.

II. ACTION ORIENTATION

Unfortunately, helping often suffers from too much talking and not enough doing. Research shows that helpers are sometimes more interested in getting clients to develop new insights than in acting on them. Part of this stems from the fact that not all of us are as proactive in managing the problems and opportunities of our own lives as we might be. Inertia and procrastination plague most of us. The exercises in this section are designed to help you explore your own orientation toward action so that you may become a more effective stimulus to action for your clients.

EXERCISE 3: EXPLORING YOUR ACTION ORIENTATION

1. Read Chapter Four in the text, which deals with blocks to action.
2. Identify one way in which you chronically put off action.
3. Identify one project that you have been putting off.

Example

Dahlia, 55, whose children are now grown, has returned to school in order to become a counselor. She has this to say about her action orientation.

Chronic Procrastination Scenario

"My husband is in business for himself. I take care of a lot of the routine correspondence for the business and our household. Often I let it pile up. The more it piles up the more I hate to face it. On occasion, an important business letter gets lost in the shuffle. This annoys my husband a great deal. Then with a great deal of flurry, I do it all and for a while keep current. But then I slide back into my old ways. I also notice that when I let it pile up I waste a lot of time reading junk mail--catalogs of things I'm not going to buy, things like that."

A Project Being Put Off

"I have an older sister who is a widow. She has one autistic child, nearly 20 now, who is at home. He goes to a school for autistic citizens--it's not just kids--and is gone several hours every week day. Lately, he is becoming more difficult to manage. He has temper outbursts and things like that. This puts a great deal of stress on my sister. She's much more timid than I am. The day will come when she can no longer take care of him. I have told her that I would help her in the whole process of placing him in an institution of some kind. I know she can use my help. If I don't do anything, things will just get worse. One of my major concerns is ending up doing something for my sister. I have to do whatever I'm going to do with her. I've been putting off doing anything about it because I know it will be extremely difficult for her. It's not my favorite project. I think about it at least once a day, then I put it out of my mind."

4. Sit down with a partner and help one another answer the question: What's going on here? What can I learn about myself as a helper by reviewing the ways I avoid action in my own life?
5. In the full group, share one or two of your key learnings. Jot the key learnings down in your journal.

EXERCISE 4: WAYS OF IMPROVING YOUR ACTION ORIENTATION

Exercise 3 is about awareness. This exercise is about helping yourself become more proactive. It is about problem-managing action itself.

1. Take two sheets of paper. At the top of one write the words "Chronic Procrastination Scenario." At the top of the other, write "Delayed Project." Now that your awareness of both of these has been increased, write down as many actions as possible that you could take to manage each of these issues. Note that in the first you will be writing down patterns of behavior that need to be put in place and kept in place if you are to avoid chronic procrastination in that area of life. In the second you will be writing down specific actions you can take to move the project along.
2. Review both lists and star the items that you think would be most helpful in managing the problem.
3. Get a partner and share the actions you have come up with to manage the chronic procrastination problem. Indicate why you have starred certain actions. Allow your partner to ask questions to clarify what you are saying.
4. Reverse the process and have your partner do the same thing.
5. Change partners and deal with the delayed-project problem in the same way.
6. At home reflect on what you have learned about yourself in terms of action orientation and the need for action in managing problems and developing opportunities.

Example

Here are some of the action possibilities that Dahlia includes in her chronic-procrastination list: