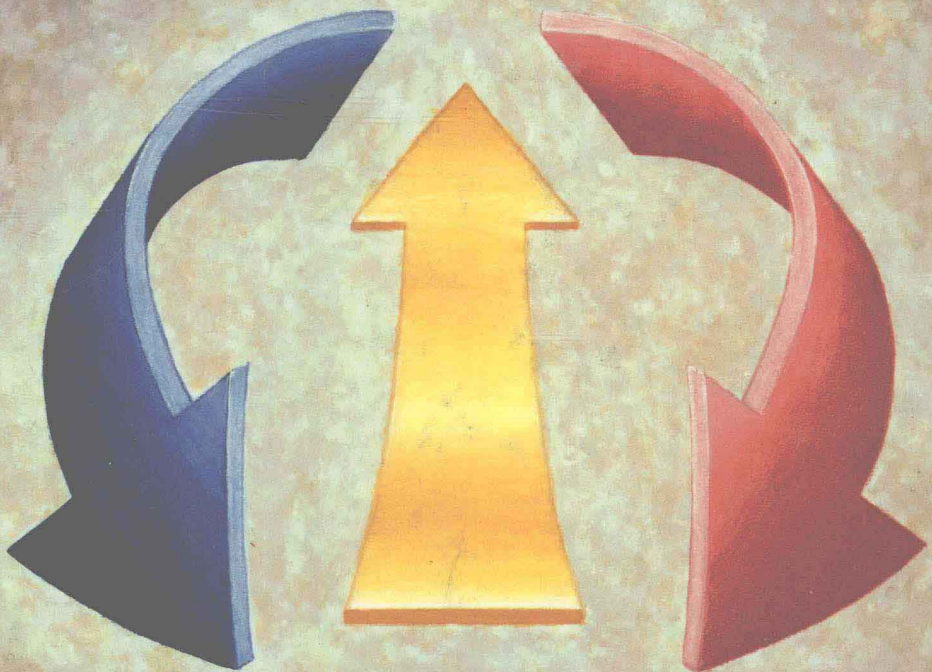


FOURTH EDITION

THE SKILLED HELPER

A Systematic Approach to Effective Helping

Gerard Egan



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Loyola University of Chicago



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A Systematic Approach to Effective Helping

About the Author

Gerard Egan, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology and Organizational Studies at Loyola University of Chicago, is Program Coordinator in the Center for Organization Development. He has written over a dozen books, including *The Skilled Helper*, *Interpersonal Living*, *People in Systems*, *Change Agent Skills in Helping and Human Service Settings*, *Change Agent Skills A: Designing and Assessing Excellence*, and *Change Agent Skills B: Managing Innovation and Change*. He currently writes and teaches in the areas of communication, counseling, counselor education, business and organization effectiveness, management development, leadership, and the management of innovation and change. He also conducts workshops in these areas both in the United States and abroad and consults to a variety of companies and institutions worldwide. In 1989 he received an award from University Associates for outstanding contributions to the field of Human Resource Development.

Preface

The Skilled Helper presents a three-stage problem-management model of helping and the methods and skills helpers need to make it work. It is, therefore, a basic text for counselor and therapist training programs. While the model it describes is a “stand alone” model, its principles and methods can also be incorporated into other approaches to helping. Further, ideally the model can be used, not just by helpers, but by clients themselves. Ultimately, no matter what school or approach to helping is used, clients need to manage their own lives more effectively. The effective helper not only helps clients manage problems and develop unused resources and opportunities but also, at least indirectly, helps clients learn a *process* for managing their concerns better. *The Skilled Helper* model is just such a process.

While the 1990 edition keeps the basic model, methods, and skills intact, there have been a number of changes. For instance, Steps B and C of Stage I have been reversed. The logic here is that counselors can help clients focus on key issues better if they first challenge the kinds of blind spots that keep clients mired down in their problems. However, as in previous editions, the emphasis continues to be on doing what a particular client's needs call for. The model provides helpers with a wide range of possible interventions. Client need determines precisely which set of interventions is actually used.

This edition focuses even more strongly than its predecessors on the issue of client action. I have become more and more convinced, both as a counselor and as a consultant, that the primary problem in helping is not the lack of good problem- and opportunity-focused analysis, goal setting, and strategy formulation. The cognitive part of helping is, in the main, healthy. But too little of what is planned gets translated into problem-managing and opportunity-developing action.

Two correctives are needed. First, we need to find more effective ways of helping clients own the helping process. Second, the tempo of client action, both covert cognitive or internal action and overt action in the everyday settings of life, needs to be raised. The cognitive part of helping helps

clients make sure that their actions will have direction and be prudent. But actions cannot have direction or be prudent if they do not take place.

In this edition further work has been done in the area of the values that underlie helping and the client–helper relationship. Novice counselors cannot wait for others to hand them the “correct” value list. Rather, they must actively determine the set of values that will guide them in their practice and then make sure that these are not just espoused values but values-in-use.

There are other new accents in this edition as well. Since the helping professions are in constant movement, new examples from different settings complement the old. The use of imagination in applying the helping model is stressed even more than previously because the “psychopathology of the average” (Maslow, 1968) afflicts not just individuals but also professions, including the helping professions. The social challenge of the helping professions is to get the kinds of skills discussed in these pages into the formal and informal education system of society. We still have not found effective ways of giving the best practice of psychology away (see Larson, 1984; Miller, 1969).

A new principle has emerged in these pages—or a new way of stating an old principle: The helping model, through its stages and steps, provides principles rather than formulas. These principles serve as guidelines for helper and client alike; the “right formula,” that is, the most effective application of these principles, must be found in the interactions with each client. Books like this one are not cookbooks. The older I get, the more I realize that the technology of helping needs to be rinsed through with the wisdom of helping. This is a lifelong task.

Although this edition of *The Skilled Helper* represents a significant revision, I have resisted the temptation to add too much to the text. Many of the things I am asked to add are what I would call case-management issues. Although a good text on case management would be a welcome addition to the literature, case-management issues are better dealt with in experiential training and in supervised practice. Furthermore, a text that tries to do justice both to a helping process and to case-management principles and practices would, in my view, become too bloated to be practical.

Finally, this edition relies a little more on the clinical instincts of its author and a bit less on microresearch. Research findings are often so tentative and contradictory that it is difficult to formulate a coherent approach to practice based on them. After reading the research, the discussions, and the summaries in the journals, you may well shake your head and repeat what Carl Rogers said in 1958: “[I have] never learned much from controlled studies of therapy” (quoted in Rubenstein & Parloff, 1959, p. 313). Research that is statistically significant but meaningless in terms of practice (Paquin, 1983) still plagues us. It will probably plague us till the end. Morrow-Bradley and Elliott (1986) put it succinctly:

With virtual unanimity, psychotherapy researchers have argued that (a) psychotherapy research should yield information useful to practicing therapists, (b) such research to date has not been done, and (c) this problem should be remedied. (p. 188)

Their study showed that therapists report low rates of psychotherapy research utilization and state that they get more useful information from colleagues. Fortunately, there are many excellent helpers in the field, willing to learn and to share their learnings with the rest of us.

The point is not that we should give up on research; Gendlin (1986) has come up with an 18-point plan to make psychotherapy research more effective and relevant. As you will note, there are many new citations in this edition. But wherever possible I have tried to blend research findings with clinical insight in the constant search for best practice. Since the needs of clients are urgent, the practice of both formal and informal helping will always move ahead of its empirical research base. In my mind the best helpers are also “translators” (Egan, 1984; Egan & Cowan, 1979), people who stay in touch with the best in current theory and research, who constantly update their practice through ongoing action research with their clients, and who then share their findings, formally or informally, with others.

For offering their comments and suggestions for this edition of *The Skilled Helper*, I would like to thank the following reviewers: Frank Asbury of the University of Georgia, John H. Childers of the University of Arkansas, Ursula C. Gerhart of Rutgers—The State University of New Jersey, Lizabeth Gray of Oregon State University, Michael A. Greenwald of the University of Pittsburgh, Robert Masson of West Virginia University, Peter Maynard of the University of Rhode Island, John M. McGuire of the University of Central Florida, Bruce Palmer of Washington State University, Charles Mack Porter of Slippery Rock University, Wade Rowatt of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Laurie Wilson, a student reviewer from Washington State University, and David J. Zinger of the University of Manitoba. Renewed thanks, as well, to all those who have contributed to previous editions of this work.

Gerard Egan

Contents

PART ONE INTRODUCTION 1

Chapter One Introduction 3

- Formal and Informal Helpers 4
- The Goal of Helping 4
 - Helping as an Education Process 6
 - Activity versus Outcomes 7
 - Helping—A Collaborative Enterprise 8
 - Customer Satisfaction 8
- Does Helping Help? 9
 - The Nay-Sayers and Yea-Sayers 10
 - The Caution Group: Helping CAN Help, BUT . . . 10
- Models of Helping: Richness or Clutter? 13
 - Systematic Eclecticism 13
 - Integration: Converging Themes in Helping 14
- A Problem-Management Approach to Helping 14
 - The Problem-Management Model as Organizer 16
 - An Open-Systems Model 16
- A Practical Curriculum for Helper Development 17
 - A Comprehensive, Client-Oriented Model of Helping 17
 - A Working Knowledge of Applied Psychology 18
 - A Basic Understanding of Health Principles 22
 - An Understanding of Clients in Context: A People-in-Systems Framework 23
 - An Understanding of the Helping Professions 24
 - Self-Knowledge 24
- What This Book Is—And What It Is Not 26

Chapter Two Overview of the Helping Model 28

- The Starting Point: Clients with Problem Situations and Unused Opportunities 29
 - Problem Situations 29
 - Missed Opportunities and Unused Potential 29

- The Stages of the Helping Process 30
 - Stage I: The Present Scenario 30
 - Stage II: The Preferred Scenario 31
 - Stage III: Getting There 31
 - Outcome-Producing Action: All Stages 31
- Stage I: Identifying and Clarifying Problem Situations and Unused Opportunities 32
 - Step I-A: The Story 32
 - Step I-B: Identifying and Challenging Blind Spots 34
 - Step I-C: The Search for Leverage 35
 - Client Action: The Heart of the Helping Process 37
- Stage II: Developing a Preferred Scenario 38
 - Step II-A: Preferred-Scenario Possibilities 39
 - Step II-B: Creating Viable Agendas 41
 - Step II-C: Choice and Commitment 43
 - Client Action in Stage II 44
- Stage III: Formulating Strategies and Plans 44
 - Step III-A: Brainstorming Strategies for Actions 45
 - Step III-B: Choosing the Best Strategies 46
 - Step III-C: Turning Strategies into a Plan 48
 - Client Action in Stage III 49
 - Action Revisited: Preparing and Supporting Clients 49
 - Ongoing Evaluation of the Helping Process 51
- Overcoming Awkwardness 52
- Flexibility in Applying the Model 53
 - Sequence and Overlap 54
 - The "Stage-Specific" Specialist 54
 - Principles, Not Formulas 55

Chapter Three Building the Helping Relationship: Values in Action 56

- The Steps of the Helping Model as Ways of Being with Clients 57
- The Working Alliance 58
 - The Relationship Itself 58
 - The Relationship as a Means to an End 59
 - Individual Differences 59
- Humanizing the Helping Process 60
- Values in Helping 61
 - Pragmatism 61
 - Competence 63
 - Respect 65
 - Genuineness 69
 - Client Self-Responsibility 72
 - Ethics 74

Helping as a Social-Influence Process	75
Current View of Social Influence in Counseling and Psychotherapy	76
Reconciling Self-Responsibility and Social Influence	77
The Client-Helper Contract	80
The Content of the Contract	81
Sharing the Helping Model with Clients as Part of the Contract	82

Chapter Four Action I: Helping Clients Act 84

Experiences, Actions, and Emotions	86
Experiences	86
Behaviors	87
Affect	88
The Many Faces of Action	89
External versus Internal Action	90
Actions within the Helping Sessions versus Actions Outside	91
Formal versus Informal Action	92
Influencing Realities versus Accommodating to Them	93
Actions and Outcomes	94
The Many Faces of Inertia	95
Passivity	96
Learned Helplessness	97
Disabling Self-Talk	97
Vicious Circles	97
Inertia as Staying Disorganized	98
Self-Efficacy	99
Self-Regulation	100
Self-Regulation Theory	100
Self-Regulation Practice: Helping Clients Become Problem Solvers	101
The Self-Help Movement	102
Self-Help Books	103
Self-Help Groups	103
Helpers as Agents	105

Chapter Five Communication Skills I: Attending and Listening 106

Attending: Actively Being with Clients	108
Level 1: Microskills	108
Level 2: Nonverbal Communication	110
Level 3: Social-Emotional Presence	110

Active Listening	111
1. Listening to and Understanding Nonverbal Behavior	112
2. Listening to and Understanding Verbal Messages	115
3. Listening to and Understanding Clients in Context	115
4. Tough-Minded Listening	116
Obstacles to Listening to and Understanding Clients	117
Inadequate Listening	117
Evaluative Listening	117
Filtered Listening	118
Learning as Filters	118
Fact-Centered Rather than Person-Centered Listening	119
Rehearsing	119
Sympathetic Listening	119
Interrupting	120
Listening to Oneself	120

Chapter Six Communication Skills II: Empathy and Probing 122

Empathy as a Way of Being	123
Empathic Relationships	125
Labels as a Perversion of Understanding	126
Empathy as a Communication Skill	26
The Three Dimensions of Communication Skills in the Helping Process	127
The Know-How of Empathy	128
Elements of Empathic Understanding and Responding	129
Experiences, Behaviors, Feelings	129
Core Messages	130
Listening to the Context, Not Just the Words	131
Selective Responding	132
Accurate Empathy: Staying on Track	133
The Uses of Empathy	135
Do's and Don'ts in Expressing Empathy	136
Some Things to Do	136
Some Things to Avoid Doing	137
A Caution on Empathy	140
The Art of Probing	141
Questions That Help Clients Talk More Freely and Concretely	141
Statements That Encourage Clients to Talk and Clarify	144
Interjections That Help Clients to Focus	145
Some Cautions in the the Use of Probes	146
The Limits of Communication Skills	147
Becoming Proficient at Communication Skills	148
Beyond Communication Skills: The Helping Process Itself	148

PART TWO THE STAGES AND STEPS OF THE HELPING MODEL 151

STAGE I: HELPING CLIENTS DEFINE AND CLARIFY PROBLEM SITUATIONS 153

Chapter Seven Step I-A: Helping Clients Tell Their Stories 155

- The Goals of Step I-A 156
- Helping Clients Tell Their Stories 156
- Clarity 161
 - Talking about the Past to Clarify the Present 161
 - The Overall Quality of a Client's Self-Disclosure 162
- Assessment and Learning 163
 - Initial Assessment 164
 - Assessing and Promoting Clients' Ability to Learn 166
 - Assessment as the Search for Resources 166
- The Relationship: Social-Emotional Reeducation 168
- Resistant and Reluctant Clients 168
 - Resistance 169
 - Reluctance 171
 - Managing Resistance and Reluctance 173
- Step I-A and Action 178
 - The Sufficiency of Step I-A for Some Clients 178
 - Action as a Means of Further Discovery 179
 - Action as a Precondition for Helping 180
 - Homework 180
- Ongoing Evaluation 181
- Evaluation Questions for Step I-A 182

Chapter Eight Step I-B: Challenging—New Perspectives at the Service of Action 183

- The Goals of Challenging 186
 - New Perspectives 186
 - New Perspectives Linked to Action 187
- What Needs to Be Challenged 187
 - Challenging Clients to Own Their Problems and Opportunities 188
 - Challenging Clients to State Problems as Solvable 189
 - Challenging Faulty Interpretations 191
 - Challenging Evasions and Distortions 194
 - Challenging Clients to Explore the Consequences of Their Behavior 202
 - Challenging Clients to Act 204

The Response of the Client Who is Challenged	205
Linking Challenge to Action	207
Reluctance to Challenge: The “Mum” Effect	208

Chapter Nine Communication Skills III: Skills and Guidelines for Effective Challenging 210

New Perspectives through Information	211
Advanced Empathy	214
Making the Implied Explicit	216
Identifying Themes	217
Connecting Islands	218
From the Less to the More	220
Helper Self-Disclosure	220
Immediacy: Direct, Mutual Talk	224
Types of Immediacy in Helping	224
Immediacy: A Complex Skill	227
Situations Calling for Direct, Mutual Communication	229
Asocial and Paradoxical Challenges	229
The Asocial Response	230
Paradoxical Interventions	230
Principles Underlying Effective Challenging	234
Some Caricatures of Challenging	240
Linking Challenge to Action	241
A Final Note	242
Evaluation Questions for Step I-B	243

Chapter Ten Step I-C: Leverage—Helping Clients Get the Most out of Helping 245

The Goals of Step I-C	246
Screening	246
The Search for Leverage	249
Helping Clients Focus on What Counts	256
Summarizing as a Way of Providing Focus	257
The Ins and Outs of Decision Making	260
Rational Decision Making	261
The Shadow Side of Decision Making: Choices in Everyday Life	262
Decision Making: Messy, Exciting, Human	264
A Final Note on Stage I	265
Evaluation Questions for Step I-C	267

STAGE II: DEVELOPING PREFERRED SCENARIOS 269

Chapter Eleven Step II-A: Helping Clients Construct the Future 273

- The Goal of Step II-A 274
- Helping Clients Develop New Scenarios 277
- Ask the Right Future-Oriented Questions 278
 - Help Clients Find Models 280
 - Review Better Times 281
 - Help Clients Discover Possibilities by Getting Involved in New Experiences 281
 - Use Writing Approaches to Develop Possibilities 282
 - Use Fantasy and Guided Imagery 283
- A Future-Centered Approach to Helping 284
- Step II-A: Links to Action 286
- Evaluation Questions for Step II-A

Chapter Twelve Step II-B: Helping Clients Craft Productive Agendas 289

- The Advantages of Goal Setting 290
- The Language of Goal Setting 291
- A Declaration of Intent 292
 - An Aim 292
 - Goals 293
- Crafting Useful Agendas 294
- A No-Formula Approach to Goal Setting 294
 - Helping Clients Shape Their Agendas 295
 - Flexibility in Helping Clients Set Goals 305
- Helping Clients Understand the Consequences of Their Choice of Goals 306
- Step II-B: Links to Action 307
- Evaluation Questions for Step II-B 309

Chapter Thirteen Step II-C: Helping Clients Commit to Agendas 310

- The Personal Politics of Commitment 311
- Helping Clients Make an Initial Commitment to Goals 312
1. Ownership 313
 2. Appeal 314
 3. Options 315
 4. Reduction of Crisis and Pain 315

- 5. Detailed Scenarios 316
- 6. Challenge 316
- 7. Managing Disincentives 317
- 8. Contracts 318
- 9. Action Strategies 319

Helping Clients Translate Commitment into Action 319
Evaluation Questions for Step II-C 321

STAGE III: LINKING PREFERRED SCENARIOS TO ACTION 323

**Chapter Fourteen Step III-A: Helping Clients Develop
Strategies for Action 325**

- The Development of Action Strategies 327
- Divergent Thinking and Creativity 330
 - Divergent Thinking 330
 - Creativity and Helping 331
- Brainstorming 333
- Evaluation Questions for Step III-A 341

**Chapter Fifteen Step III-B: Helping Clients Choose
Best-Fit Strategies 342**

- Criteria for Choosing Strategies 344
- The Balance-Sheet Method for Evaluating Strategies 348
 - The Balance-Sheet Methodology 348
 - An Example 350
 - Using the Balance Sheet 353
- Strategy Sampling 353
- Managing Risk in Selecting Strategies 354
 - Wishful Thinking 354
 - Playing It Safe 354
 - Avoiding the Worst 355
 - Striking a Balance 355
- Linking Step III-B to Action 355
- Evaluation Questions for Step III-B 357

**Chapter Sixteen Step III-C: Helping Clients
Formulate Plans 358**

- Some Reasons for Helping Clients Plan 361
- Shaping the Plan 363
 - Formulating Subgoals 363
 - Arranging Activities 365

Helping Clients Develop Contingency Plans	367
Linking Step III-C to Action	368
Evaluation Questions for Step III-C	369

Chapter Seventeen Action II: Helping Clients Put Strategies to Work 370

In Pursuit of Valued Outcomes	373
Follow-Through: Sustained Action	374
Entropy: The Enemy of Sustained Action	375
Helping Clients Become Effective Tacticians	377
Using Behavioral Principles to Encourage Sustained Action	377
Force-Field Analysis: Forewarned is Forearmed	380
Strategies for Initiating and Sustaining Action	383
"Check" or "Think" Steps	384
Action-Based Contracts	385
Helping Clients Find Social Support and Challenge	387
Helping Clients Get Feedback on Performance	389
Training: Helping Clients Acquire the Skills They Need to Act	391
Choosing Not to Change	392
In Summary	392
A Final Look at Evaluation	393
Evaluation Questions for Action II	394

Chapter Eighteen Time and Termination 395

Time: How Long Should Helping Take?	396
Time: What Actually Happens	396
The Current Focus on Brief Psychotherapy	397
Differentiating Helping from Learning, Growth, and Development Methods	398
Principles Related to the Length of the Formal Helping Process	399
Termination: Bringing the Formal Helping Relationship to a Close	401
The Role of Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation in Termination	402
Initiative in Terminating the Helping Process	402
A Client's Decision to Exit at Certain Steps or Stages of the Helping Process	403
Premature Termination	403
Choosing the Appropriate Time to Terminate	404
Principles of Effective Closure	405
Follow-up	407