

R O B E R T A. B A R R O N

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN RELATIONS

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO PEOPLE AT WORK



*UNDERSTANDING
HUMAN RELATIONS:
A practical guide to people
at work*

ROBERT A. BARON

Purdue University

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*A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR:
When a little knowledge is a
necessary thing*

Once I had a friend who was a chemist. He was a brilliant scientist with an international reputation. He held a faculty position at a prestigious university, but he also spent a great deal of time serving as a highly paid consultant to many companies eager to profit from his knowledge. Despite all his accomplishments, though, my friend still suffered from his share of problems, and many of these centered around people. Since he knew that human behavior was my specialty, he sometimes brought these to me for a sage word of advice. One went something like this.

For quite some time, my friend had been experiencing severe difficulties with his department's copy facilities. No matter what message of urgency he sent down with his secretary, the people there rarely finished his rush jobs on time. Since my friend often waited until the last minute to complete various projects, the same situation arose over and over again. In fact, it was a continuing sore spot in his busy life. One day, he complained bitterly about this problem over lunch.

"How well do you know the people down there?" I asked, after he had spent several minutes cataloging the faults of the copy room.

"Know them?" he replied, "Why, I've never even seen them."

"Well, how about going down there and introducing yourself the next time you have a rush job," I suggested. "Try to impress upon them just how important it is. Then, if they come even close to getting it done on time give them a call and thank them personally."

"Why would that help?" he asked, clearly puzzled.

"Just try it, Sam," I answered. "And let me know what happens."

"O.K., I'll do it, but I can't see what difference it'll make."

A few weeks went by. Then one day, my phone rang. It was my friend with a progress report. "I sure have to hand it to you, Bob. Your system really worked. I haven't had a problem since the day I went down there and introduced myself. In fact, now they always seem to do my jobs first, ahead of everyone else's. It's making some people around here downright jealous! And you know, they're really a nice bunch—I never would have guessed how reasonable they are. But now, tell me, what gives? Why did a visit and a few phone calls make such a difference?"

"It's simple, Sam," I replied. "By going in and meeting them, you put your relationship on a personal basis. Before that, you were just another name to them, like everyone else. Afterwards, they knew who you were and that in itself gave you an edge. Second, by bringing in a job yourself you convinced them that your work really *was* important. After all, why would a big honcho like you come down there if it

wasn't practically a matter of life and death? Then, by calling them to say "thanks," you showed that working hard for you wasn't wasted effort. How many other professors do you think call them like that?"

"None, I guess," Sam murmured.

"Right. So you're the only one who seems to appreciate them. No wonder they put out extra for you."

"Gee," Sam exclaimed. "So that's it! It sure sounds simple when you explain it. But you know, I would never have thought about it that way by myself."

What is my purpose in presenting this story? Certainly *not* that of convincing you that people problems are simple—many aren't. Nor is it that of suggesting that I (or anyone else) have all the answers—we don't. Rather it is simply to illustrate the following basic point: *Many individuals who are highly skilled in their own fields don't seem to know much about dealing effectively with others.* Like my friend Sam, they don't understand what motivates people, how to communicate with them, or how to win their cooperation. Thus, while they have a great deal of expertise in their own area, they know little about establishing or maintaining effective human relations.

This is unfortunate—and downright wasteful—for three major reasons. First, such knowledge is crucial in many work settings. In fact, without it, it may be all but impossible to attain high levels of productivity, efficiency, or personal satisfaction within an organization. (It is for this reason that the word "necessary" is included in the title of this preface.) Second, a great deal of knowledge about human relations already exists and is available for current use. Third, you don't have to be a highly trained expert to benefit from it; even a modest amount of information about human relations can be of value. (This is where the words "a little knowledge" enter into the picture.)

In sum, I believe that many persons lack a basic grasp of human relations and that such knowledge would be helpful to them in many contexts. Together, these beliefs served as the impetus for this book. Stated simply, it is designed to provide you, its reader, with increased understanding of many aspects of human relations, plus concrete techniques for putting this knowledge to use in your own life and career. Of course, stating this goal is one thing; as I soon learned, attaining it is quite another. Over the years, a tremendous amount of information concerning human relations has been acquired. Thus, fitting even a small portion of this knowledge between the covers of a single book is a difficult task. In order to make this text as interesting and useful as possible, therefore, I quickly decided to follow three basic principles in preparing it. These are described below.

Principle 1: Provide broad and up-to-date coverage of knowledge about human relations. Since I hope many people will actually use the information contained in this text, it seemed important that it be as broad in

scope and as up-to-date in content as possible. In order to assure adequate breadth, I prepared a brief questionnaire dealing with a large range of topics that could be included in such a text. This was mailed to more than 800 colleagues; over 350 kindly responded. It was on the basis of their replies that specific topics were chosen for inclusion. As a result, I am confident that the book does in fact offer broad coverage of our field.

Turning to currency of content, I have made a major effort to present recent facts, findings, and theories as well as "classic" materials. This is reflected in the fact that more than 35 percent of all the sources cited were published in the 1980s.

Principle 2: Provide a good balance between application and basic knowledge. Human relations strives, consistently, for application of the knowledge it obtains. Reflecting this central fact, application is also a key feature of this text. I firmly believe, however, that application without a solid foundation in knowledge is skating on very thin ice. For this reason, I have sought to maintain a balance between these two key elements throughout the text. On the basic knowledge side, research findings, and even a few specific investigations, are described where appropriate. Further, Chapter 1 contains a brief description of basic research methods in the study of human relations. My reason for including such materials is this: I feel it is important for students to know not simply facts, but also something about how they were acquired. On the applications side, I have consistently attempted to show how the knowledge and principles described can be applied to various problems and issues in actual work settings. The result, I feel, is a reasonable balance between these two central aspects of our field.

Principle 3: Attain a high level of appeal and comprehensibility to readers. If I have learned one thing from my eighteen years of college teaching, it is this: books that are hard to understand (or boring!) will simply not be read. Since I believe that the information in this text is of considerable practical value, I do not want it to be missed for this reason. Thus, I have attempted to make the book as appealing as I know how. To accomplish this goal, I have taken several concrete steps.

First, the book is written in an *informal style*—one in which I often address readers directly. Many students have told me they like this approach, so I have adopted it here.

Second, the text contains *three distinct types of special sections*, all designed to enhance reader involvement. The first of these is labeled "Human Relations in Action." These contain brief exercises readers can perform to gain first-hand experience with the facts or principles described. The second type of section is labeled "Case in Point." These present short cases designed to illustrate specific points made in the text. The third type is titled "Voice of Experience." These special sections contain comments contributed by experienced managers and executives on a wide range of human relations problems. While these individuals by

no means have all the answers, the fact that they are all highly successful indicates that they do possess important insights about human relations. For this reason, I feel that their comments will be of interest to many readers. (All special sections, by the way, are carefully cited in the text, so that readers will know just when to consult them.)

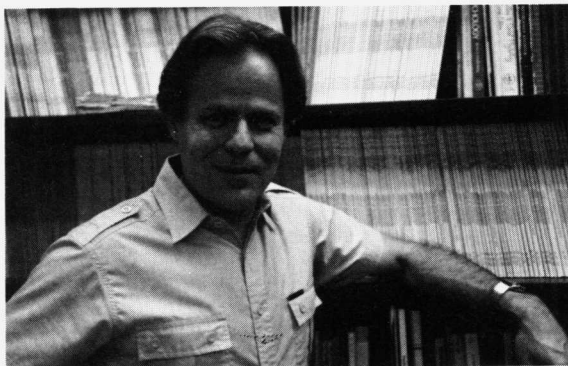
Third, the text contains a wide range of *illustrative materials*—tables, word diagrams, photos, cartoons. These are not mere window dressing. On the contrary, all were specially prepared or carefully chosen to emphasize and clarify points made in the text. They are as clear, simple and to the point as I could make them, and all are closely related to the text itself.

Finally, each chapter contains a number of special *in-text aids*. Each begins with an outline of major topics included, plus specific learning objectives. The text starts with a short case designed to capture reader attention and to set the stage for what follows. All chapters end with a summary, a glossary, and reference notes. Additional cases and exercises follow each chapter, too.

Together, I believe that these features enhance the appeal of the text and, perhaps more important, increase its usefulness to readers.

A concluding comment—And a request for help

These, then, are the key guidelines I've tried to follow. Please recall that all were selected to help me attain my major goal: providing you with a better grasp of many aspects of human relations. Looking back, I can honestly state that I have worked very hard to attain this objective. I realize, though, that there is still probably much room for improvement. In closing, then, I sincerely invite your comments and suggestions. Throughout my career, I have learned a great deal from my colleagues and students, and would like to continue doing so in the years ahead. So, please don't hesitate; send me your comments and views whenever and in whatever form you prefer. Believe me, they will *not* be ignored!



Robert A. Baron

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part I

HUMAN RELATIONS:

Who, what, how?

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- (1) Define human relations and describe its major goals
- (2) Understand the beginnings of human relations in the scientific management approach
- (3) Describe the famous Hawthorne studies and understand the insights they provided
- (4) Describe some major features of human relations in the 1980s
- (5) Explain how human relations “imports” and adapts knowledge from other fields
- (6) Explain how human relations adds to our knowledge of behavior in work settings through original research

1 UNDERSTANDING HUMAN RELATIONS

HUMAN RELATIONS: A working definition

Human relations: Myth versus reality

HUMAN RELATIONS: A capsule memoir

Scientific management: The beginnings Human relations
emerges: Work settings as social systems Human relations
in the 1980s: Some major features

HUMAN RELATIONS and the quest for knowledge

Human relations as consumer: Knowledge from other
fields Human relations as producer: Knowledge from
applied research

USING THIS BOOK: A displaced (but not misplaced) preface

Special Sections HUMAN RELATIONS IN ACTION:

Common sense: An unreliable guide to human
behavior APPLYING WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED:
Additional cases and exercises