

WORKING WITH OTHERS

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Man can not function only as an individual, he is an objective projection of society in an individual form, and thus, must function as a part of society. Indeed, man is a whole but at the same time he is a part of a whole. It does not require a great deal of research and statistical computation to determine that man's own decisions, even though they are his own free choice, are influenced by external forces and factors stemming from his environment.

Human qualities do not develop apart from human influences. Most other animals are much more capable at birth than the human being. These other animals are characterized by a short infancy period. The human being, on the other hand, has a very lengthy infancy period, and his ability to care for himself develops after birth.

In Peters and Farwell's publication, Guidance A Developmental Approach, one finds the following discussion which tends to support the preceding statements.

One of the prime reasons for the logic of procedural activities through groups is based on the sociability of the human being. . . .The child acquires his human characteristics from those about him: children learn their language, manners, values, preferences, biases, and prejudices, beliefs and attitudes from the groups (composed of individuals) with which they associate. Characteristic human behavior is learned. Nature provides the human being with his potentialities for development, but the actualities are developed through association and learning from other humans--the family groups, the community group, the school group, and so on. . . .

All distinctively human behavior is social and involves other people. The human activities such as valuing, aspiring, and planning are influenced and developed in consideration of others. The human child, because of his great development after birth, becomes more and more the creation of those with whom he comes in contact as he matures. (S:214-215)

One may conclude from Peters and Farwell that the human being is the sum total of all his experiences, and that these are a direct result of his environment. That is to say that one's environment will provide the experiences that will in turn become a part of the human being. There are those who would question this idea and ask why then, are there so many human beings with such strikingly different characteristics coming out of the seemingly same environment?

To answer this one only has to refer back to the statement that "nature provides human beings with his potentialities for development." Since all human beings do not have the same potentialities they can not be influenced the same by the same set of circumstances. This is one of the reasons why the courts of the land have so much difficulty with different opinions of witnesses who have observed the same performance.

It is not intended to imply that human behavior is solely dependent upon one's environment. Most psychologists believe that environment very definitely plays an important role, but one reacts to his environmental experiences according to his inherited potentialities. Thus, the results and retention of the experience is dependent upon one's inheritance.

Since the human being is developed as part of society, and since society has offered the experiences that make up the human, it is difficult to imagine him trying to seclude himself from society and trying to live alone. Some psychologists say that those who do are something less than normal. Even though he may be dissatisfied with some of the actions, problems, and responsibilities of his society he must demonstrate a certain amount of conformity.

Indeed, it is important that human beings learn to work together. As the individual reaches maturity and takes on the responsibility of formulating, organizing, and implementing the activities of his society he begins to feel, more and more, the importance of working with his fellowman. This may be called cooperative procedure, group processes, or simply working with others. It seems to make little difference what the procedure is called--the meaning is the same and requires the same effort on the part of its participants. With this in mind these terms will be used synonymously throughout the remainder of this discourse.

Kimball Wiles in Supervision for Better Schools, makes the following statement. "Persons grow as they share with others. Learning takes place through the reconstruction of experiences, and experiences are reconstructed as they are brought into contact with the ideas and experiences of others. A staff grows as its members have opportunities to think, plan, and work together." (8:15)

What Wiles is saying seems to support the previous thinking that man is the sum total of all his experiences adjusted by inherited potentialities.

Assuming this to be true, it seems natural for man to seek fellowship rather than loneliness. In other words, it seems natural for man to be inclined to cluster or work in close association with his fellowman. In doing so, however, it has been demonstrated over and over again that problems will develop and discord will arise. This can be expected since all men have different potentialities and therefore have different levels of intelligence, different values, different attitudes etc. Yet man must work together in a harmonious climate if possible. This is demanded by his society.

In What Every Supervisor Should Know by Lester R. Bittel one finds a very interesting statement concerning individual differences. Mr. Bittle states:

Each person is a distinct individual. In detail, his reactions will be different from anyone else's. But to understand human relations one must know first why people do things before one can predict what they will do.

The important tool in dealing with people is the recognition that although what they do is likely to differ, the underlying reasons for their doing any thing are very similar. These reasons, incidentally, are called motives or needs. (1:14)

Mr. Bittle lists five basic needs of individuals as set forth by Dr. A. H. Maslow, a very famous psychologist. It is felt that to list these five basic needs and discuss them briefly will help one to understand better those with whom he is associated, and will consequently lead to a more harmonious working relationship.

Dr. Maslow outlines the basic needs this way:

We want to be alive and stay alive. One needs to breathe, eat, sleep, reproduce, see, hear, and feel. But in America these needs rarely dominate us. True according to Kinsey, most of us men don't get all the sex we need. But all in all our no. 1 needs are satisfied. Only an occasional experience--a couple of days without sleep, a day on a diet without food, a frantic 30 seconds under water--reminds us that these basic needs are still with us.

We want to feel safe--from accident or pain, from competitors and criminals, from an uncertain future or a changing today. None of us ever feel completely safe. Yet most of us feel reasonably safe. After all we have laws, police, insurance, social security, union contracts, and the like to protect us.

We want to be social. From the beginning of time, we have lived together in tribes and family groups. We marry, join lodges, and even do our praying in groups. Social needs vary widely from person to person--just as other needs do. Few of us want to be hermits. Not too many people are capable of frank and deep relationships, even with their wives or husbands and close friends. But to a greater or lesser degree this social need operates in all of us.

We need to feel worthy and respected. When we talk about our self-respect or our dignity, this is the need we are expressing. When a person isn't completely adjusted to life, this need may show itself as undue pride in his achievements, self-importance, boastfulness--a swelled head.

But so many of our other needs are so easily satisfied in America that this need often becomes one of the most demanding. Look what we go through to maintain the need to think well of ourselves--and have others do likewise. When your wife insists you wear a tie to a party, she's expressing this need. When we buy a new car even though the old one is in good shape, we're giving way to our desire to show ourselves off.

We even modify our personalities to get esteem of others. No doubt you've put on your company manners when out visiting. Its natural, we say, to act more refined in public than at home--or to cover up our less acceptable traits.

We need to do the work we like. This is why many people who don't like their jobs turn to hobbies for expression, and why so many other people can get wrapped up in their work. We all know the men who enjoy the hard burden of laboring--or the machinist who hurries home from work to run his own lathe. This need rarely is the be-all and end-all of our lives. But there are very few of us who aren't influenced by it. (1:15-16)

It is not difficult to conclude from these five basic needs that man's basic motivations are similar. The thing that differs and causes all the confusion and problems when working together is each individual's ideas on how to satisfy these needs. In other words, man, being a distinct individual, has his own idea as to the most satisfying ways to accomplish his basic needs. Therefore, as a member of the group one must study all other members in an effort to determine their emotions, attitudes, and ideas. This is especially true when close association is necessary.

When working with others it is an asset to be able to make predictions as to the way an individual will react to a certain stimulus. This knowledge and skill will in many cases, avoid problems and confusion that will slow down the progress of the group. The school administrator will prosper greatly with this ability. This asset only comes with experience and acquaintance. One must work with a group for some time before he can expect to make these predictions with any degree of accuracy. He must have some training in psychology and be able to make intelligent observations of human behavior before he can expect to show any great degree of proficiency.

Even when one has developed the knowledge and skills necessary for analyzing his co-worker and drawing fairly accurate conclusions as to his probable behavior, he has only half the job done. The other half, which is just as important or even more important, is being able to analyze himself and determine how he will react in certain situations. It must be remembered that working with others is a two way situation. Too often it seems, one feels he is always right and can't understand why those with whom he works are continuously showing their ill nature and animal instincts. This of course, is the results of one not really understanding himself.

In the Nations Business Magazine, February 1963 issue, Stanley Schuler has an article entitled, "You Can Get Ahead Faster," in which he gave several suggestions on analyzing one's self as a prerequisite for getting ahead on the job. One of his soul-searching proposals is as follows.

What are my personal qualifications? Analyzing these is one of the most difficult parts of your soul-searching. Although psychologists say most men see themselves pretty clearly, it is difficult not to overrate or underrate yourself.

These are some of the things you should look for when analyzing your personal qualifications.

1) Your health, vitality, principles and policies, appearance, manners, etc.

2) Personal characteristics--adaptability, perseverance, self-reliance, initiative, loyalty, sense of humor, imagination, enthusiasm, tact, etc.

3) Your ability to analyze keenly, speak effectively, write clearly, originate ideas, listen, etc.

4) Your job--Do you understand it, know how to execute it, enjoy?

5) Your working habits--punctuality, accuracy, neatness, thoroughness, follow-through.

6) Your motivation--Does your satisfaction come from economic reward, personal recognition, or service to others?

7) Your executive potential--How do you train others? Do you delegate authority? Do you lead rather than drive? Do you organize well?

8) Your human relations--What do your peers and associates think of you? Are you friendly, cooperative, and courteous? Do you inspire confidence? Do people feel comfortable in your company? (6:77)

Schuler seems to have covered the field quite well. There are probably many other lists of questions available that could be used to analyze one's self as well, but one could hardly disagree that frank and conscientious answers to these questions will do a pretty thorough job of acquainting one with himself. As was previously stated, this is absolutely necessary if one expects a harmonious atmosphere to exist within his group or among his associates.

Hutchinson has prepared a publication entitled Suggestions For Orienting Vocational Agriculture Students To Employment Opportunities In Farm Based Businesses and Agencies, in which he points out the importance of working with others in the business world.

The business world is a world of people. It is run by people to satisfy their wants, and those of others. It is important that you learn to get along in your daily contacts with many types of people. A self-fish person is never a success in any sense of the word.

Much joy is to be found in sharing. Sometimes that sharing takes the form of giving material possessions. At other times, it merely consists in sharing happy experiences by narrating them or listening to others. At still other times it consists of sharing opportunities by assisting others to climb the ladder of success. There is plenty of room at the top. It is never necessary to climb alone. (3:70)

These fine qualities of a person must be continually weighed and adjusted if one expects to "get along" with his co-workers. If one keeps this in mind at all times, he will have no trouble getting along with his associates or making his way to the top of the ladder.

Congeniality--your co-workers should be "going your way." If you want others to enjoy your company, work with them not against them. It is only then that harmony prevails. You can not always have your own way. Learn to give in to the wishes of your co-workers and they, in turn will learn to give in to you. This will bring the sunlight not only into your own life, but also into the life of your companions. . . . There is real satisfaction in it provided you do not go to the other extreme and become a "yes" man.

Honesty--any list of worthwhile characteristics in a person's make-up will include honesty. Honesty influences many of our actions. If you develop the habit of being honest in your relations with others now, you will have a decided advantage when you grow older. Be straightforward. Do not play a part but be your own true self at all times. Be just and fair in your dealings with others as you expect them to be with you. If someone else is a better friend to you than you are to him, you are not being honest.

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Be honest in giving your full measure of time to the task. Do more than is expected of you. Put in an extra ounce of enthusiasm in all you do for others. Constantly ask, "Am I worth what I am paid?" Then no one can label you a shirker. Be honest in the use you make of materials--yours, your family's, your school's, your employer's. Then no one can label you a waster. Be loyal to a confidence. Associates confide in you because they trust you. Be honest with them. Do not betray that trust. Then no one can label you a "stooge."

Tact--some people excuse their own lack of tact by a mistaken idea, that in the name of frankness, they can say anything. There is no need to be so honest or frank with your associates that you make them unhappy.

A bit of advice can be offered tactfully or it can be thrust out heartlessly. Learn to be gentle, and kind, not brutal and hard. Know when to be silent, and when to speak. When you speak know what to say, and how to say it. Some people say "no" more delightfully and pleasantly than others who say "yes."

How can one be tactful? By not disagreeing bluntly with the suggestions or opinions of others. By being ready and eager to accept apologies. By avoiding subjects and discussions that may lead to unpleasant arguments or hurt someone's feelings. By expressing approval when it is earned by others. By getting the other persons point of view and respecting it even if disagreeing with it. By avoiding sarcasm, and by emphasizing a person's good points rather than his shortcomings. It is natural for people to show their best side to one who appreciates it.

Self-control--Take stock to see if you ever spoil others good times by being unreasonable, pouty, surly, or sulky. It takes real skill to be equal to all occasions. If you are attending a group meeting or conference where the activities are not to your liking, try to hide your disappointment and disapproval, and become interested in what is going on. Go along with others' desires and plans rather than upset them. You will need an oversupply of self-control and a measure of generosity to accomplish this. Learn to compromise. If you can not climb straight up a mountain, try climbing around it. The important thing is to reach the top.

Reliability--It is so comfortable to be associated with someone who is absolutely true to his work--someone who is reliable.

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How can you be that someone? Never promise more than you can possibly do. When you make promises--keep them. Do not let the importance of an appointment influence your keeping it. Keep all appointments. Return borrowed articles within a reasonable time and in their original condition. Be on time for classes, duties, and work. Discharge assignments on time. When on committees, do the work assigned you. Complete what you start. See it through. Be a good starter and a good finisher. (3:70-73)

After careful study of Hutchinson's comments one can readily comprehend their importance as guidelines for working with others. These guidelines were presented for the business world of work, but it is felt they are very adaptable to education, which is, after all, a very important business affair.

In the final analysis one may conclude that working with others has as many nuisances and combinations of experiences as there are individuals with whom he is working. There is a specific purpose for which people join themselves together. There is a felt need on the part of the individual to attach himself to others. There is no indication that a person loses his identity as a self when he joins a group. Rather than making him submerge himself as an individual, the group interaction may be a major factor in developing his individuality, meeting his needs, and providing a situation in which he may develop and find a better adjusted self, as well as assisting him in becoming a worthy member of the group.

One may further conclude that there are two important principles or concepts involved in the process of working with others. First, one must make a special effort to become familiar with the interests, attitudes, abilities, experiences, personal qualities, etc. of those with whom he works. Second, he must become thoroughly acquainted with himself. After mastering these two principles he must then make all necessary adjustments within his power. Of course, there are some shortcomings of both the individual and his fellow workers of which he has no control, but even in these cases some adjustments may be made that will insure better relations.

We in the field of education and with the responsibility for the preparation of teachers and of assisting them in maintaining proficiency in their chosen field of endeavor have to work closely with many individuals and groups. To a great extent, our success is closely tied to our ability to work harmoniously with and through people.

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