

important to me when considering how to spend my time. I am able now to extend the range of contexts for this training approach, work on applications of the ideas to higher levels of system, such as groups and organisations, and also give more time to other aspects of me such as music and writing. My own core process is 'Lighting Fires' and I like to have a lot of different ones burning at the same time!

**Kenneth Gray**

## **WORKING WITH COUNSELLING**

Trained counsellors already work with employees in commercial and industrial enterprises, institutes of education, hospitals, prisons and other organisations. Many other people, particularly personnel managers, use counselling methods and skills as part of their job, frequently unrecognised by their employers and often unaware of it themselves. In addition, there are not a few organisations and individuals offering counselling of various kinds, some are quite specialised, for example, providing redundancy counselling for the manager and professional executive, others with a broader base such as general career development counselling. Everyone at work should be developing their awareness of agencies offering these services as well as extending their own personal skills in the field. However, consulting, particularly with managers frequently shows up a lack of understanding of what counselling actually is and it seems difficult for them to penetrate the mystique which sometimes seems to surround counselling and to learn its language; perhaps counsellors and humanistic educators are a little defensive about our role and skills but it really is time to come into the light of day. Counselling is too valuable to be hidden under a bushel, accessible only to the privileged few in universities and colleges.

The definition of counselling proposed by the British Association for Counselling (B.A.C.) and drawn up largely by its Standards and Ethics Committee, of which the author is a member, suggests that counselling takes place when . . . . .

"a person, occupying regularly or temporarily the role of 'counsellor' offers or agrees explicitly to give time, attention and respect to another person, temporarily in the role of 'client'"

and goes on to explain the task of counselling as giving the client *"an opportunity to explore, define and discover ways of living more satisfyingly and resourcefully within the social groupings with which he identifies."* This definition embraces both counselling which is aimed at helping people handle their problems - crisis counselling - and counselling which is preventive and developmental; it's rather like being a doctor treating illness **and** a teacher promoting wellness (Ardell, 1978): most of us think in terms of problems and illness and assume that the absence of problems or symptoms indicates wellness and good all round functioning. See Fig.1. This is not so: the point at which there is no clear indication of problems is merely the crossover point to positive development, not the end of the graph. Counselling seeks to assist people leave the negative end of the diagram and move as far as possible to the plus side. One further assumption made by most people who have been trained to **think** about their problems is that thinking is the only way out of a difficulty. The plain fact is that what people **feel** about themselves, about other people and the work environment is frequently neglected, ignored or dismissed. And yet, feelings are a way of processing the data of living which often take precedence over thought; and from a *"rational"* point of view, other people's behaviour can then become inexplicable and very worrying. In counselling we help the individual to use and develop all his mental resources.

People's personal problems do feed into the work situation and materially reduce productivity and effectiveness. Conversely the demands of the working environment, be it a Lowry-like factory, a vast typing pool, or a Whitehall department create stresses for the employee. Counselling skills can effectively help people to manage and reduce these stresses and to release energy and creativity. In the Counselling at Work Division of the British Association for Counselling we are convinced that there is personal and organisational pay-off in having counselling capacity available at work and we wish to develop qualitatively the counselling process specifically as it is relevant to the work setting. By providing a forum for the exchange of information for people whose work involves counselling, and also for interested organisations, it is C.A.W.'s aim to foster appropriate forms of training and support for work counsellors, as well as to establish and review standards of training and selection. Discussion is now taking place

on implementing an accreditation scheme for training courses; this follows recently introduced similar schemes in other counselling specialisms within the British Association for Counselling. It is very important for industry and public services alike that high levels of competence and ethical operation are established and maintained; some specialisms such as redundancy, life crisis and appraisal counselling particularly involve working closely with people who are potentially very vulnerable and this requires scrupulously maintained standards. Counselling employees about stress and frustration at work, about career and training options, and personal troubles such as bereavement and marital breakdown are no less sensitive areas and need training and the continual development of skill, as well as quite detailed knowledge and understanding of large chunks of background material. For example, in counselling people in the mid-life crisis, not only does the counsellor need detailed knowledge of the process of change in the middle years, so amply documented by Levinson, but also familiarity with a large number of options available to the individual client.

But this does not mean that only full time professional counsellors are fit and proper people to undertake this work. Many employees can certainly learn and use these skills, increasing their awareness of what is meant by counselling, as distinct from "*advice giving*" or offering guidance, and by learning to recognise those problems which can effectively be dealt with at source and other difficulties which really call for referral to more specialised expertise. A lot of people at work are in positions which are virtually automatic counselling roles; for instance the Personnel Manager, the Line Manager, the Shop Steward and the Supervisor, as well as staff in training roles. Of course, the implications of trusting someone else in the organisation may be immense, especially where such matters as promotion or discipline are concerned, and status differences may make the establishment of a satisfactory counselling relationship difficult. In some cases, consulting an external counsellor with a guarantee of confidentiality is likely to be necessary.

Counselling can also be of benefit from a staff training and development angle; it is an unfortunate fact that staff are frequently sent on training courses, in-company or external, without any attempt at orientation before they go or indeed afterwards. Although the organisation may have provided training to meet organisational needs, individuals are often unaware of the implications of such a decision and frequently have false or distorted expectations of the training. Pre-course counselling can do much to construct clear expectations, allow fears

to be expressed and dealt with, and build a learning set for the individual. Similarly, a post-course session can help people clarify what they have learnt, often provide useful feedback for trainers on the course itself, and provide for some exploration of what individuals can do with their newly acquired knowledge and skills. This kind of work is sadly underdeveloped although some progressive organisations are making systematic attempts to introduce it in relation to staff appraisal and review; the author recently trained several middle managers in pre and post course counselling for a large company in the computer industry and it's likely that other organisations will be taking up this type of training as well.

Of course, as with any new professional service, there is resistance to accept its value, and it is right that people should ask about its cost-benefit; unfortunately the resistance is often couched in terms of "we never needed it in the past"; this overlooks the issue that what was good enough in the past is more often than not simply not good enough in the present, and certainly not in the future. Regrettably, a few people will not themselves have completed enough of their personal development to be able to review this subject with enough detachment to see the relevance of counselling but many people at work will quickly spot the advantages: this is all the more reason to establish adequate standards with some speed.

### **Reading**

- D.B. Ardell: *"John Travis: Doctor of Wellness"* in *The holistic Health Handbook*, (ed.) Berkeley Holistic Health Centre, U.S.A.: And/Or Press.
- British Association for Counselling, *"A Definition of Counselling"*, Rugby, 1979 (pamphlet).
- D.J. Levinson: *"The Seasons of a Man's Life"*, New York: Knopf, 1978.
- A.G. Watts (Ed.) *"Counselling at Work"*, National Council for Social Service, London, 1977.

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